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Some chapters start with illustrations. In the original book those illustrations are not named. Here they are named after their chapters.

The Latin numbers (i, ii, etc.) behind some words or expressions refer to the transcriber's notes at the end of this e-book.

"Time has spared the epitaph on Adrian's horse,—confounded that of himself."

"Sir Thomas Browne."

TRADITIONS

OF

LANCASHIRE.

by

JOHN ROBY, M.R.S.L.

ILLUSTRATED BY ENGRAVINGS ON STEEL AND WOOD.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

Fifth Edition.

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[Pg 1]

THE FAIRIES' CHAPEL.

Farewell, rewards and fairies!
Good housewives now may say;
For now foule sluts in dairies,
Doe fare as well as they:
And though they sweepe their hearths no less
Than mayds were wont to doe,
Yet who of late, for cleaneliness,
Finds sixe-pence in her shoe?"

—*Percy's Reliques.*

The ancient mansion of Healey Hall was a cumbrous inconvenient dwelling of timber; but the spirit of improvement having gone forth in the reign of Elizabeth, an ordinary hall-house of stone was erected, about the year 1620, by Oliver Chadwick. On the south front was a projecting wing and three gables, with a large hall-window. The north front had two gables only, with a projecting barn. The north entrance, covered by a porch, was a thorough passage, answering to the screens of a college, having on one side the hall and parlour beyond; on the other were the kitchen, buttery, &c. On the river below was a corn-mill; this and a huge barn being necessary appendages to the hospitable mansions and plentiful boards of our forefathers. Over the front door was this inscription—

C. C. DOC. T: R. C: I. C. A. C: R. B.
ANO. DOM'I. 1168.

About the year 1756 the east wall gave way, and a considerable fishure appeared on the outside. This event was considered by many as the usual foretokening that its owner, Charles Chadwick, of Healey and Ridware, would speedily be removed by death from the seat of his ancestors; and so it proved, for in the course of a few months he died at Lichfield, *aged eighty-two*. His great age, though, will be thought the more probable token, the surer presage of approaching dissolution.

On a stone near the top of the building, on the north side, a human head was rudely carved in relief, which tradition affirms to have been a memorial of one of the workmen, accidentally killed while the house was building.

In 1773, the existing edifice was built, on the ancient site, by John Chadwick, grandfather to the present owner [Pg 2]

In Corry's *Lancashire* is the following document, furnished by the recent possessor, Charles Chadwick, Esq. It relates to the foregoing John Chadwick, his father—

"In 1745, at the rebellion, when the Pretender's son and his Highlanders reached Manchester, having obtained a list of the loyal subscribers, they began (of course) to enforce the payment of the money for their own use. An officer of the belted plaid, of the second division, came to the house of Mr C., in King Street, whilst the master of it was with his father at Ridware, and, on being told that he was from home, and his lady ill in bed, he went up-stairs, and opening the chamber-door, where she was then lying-in, beckoned her sister to come to him on the stairs, where he told her (in a mild but decided tone) that the money before mentioned must be paid quickly for the use of 'the prince (who lodged at the house in Market Street, now called the Palace Inn), or the house would be burnt down.' In this dilemma, the man-midwife calling first, and afterwards the physician, were both consulted by the ladies; when the former (a Tory) advised to send the money after them, whilst the latter (a Whig) thought it better to keep it till called for; consequently, never being called for in their hasty retreat, the money was not paid. It may be proper to add, Captain Lachlan MacLachlan, of the first division (afterwards one of the proscribed), being quartered in the same house, behaved with the greatest civility and politeness. On a party of horse coming to the door for quarters, he called for a lanthorn, and, though he had a cold (for which white wine whey was offered him, which he called 'varra good stuff'), walked as far as Salford, and there quartered them; two of his Highlanders, in the meantime, were dancing reels in the kitchen, and in the morning gave each of the maids sixpence at parting."

The name Healey Dene denotes a valley or dale, *convallis*, enclosed on both sides with steep hills; *dene* being a Saxon word, signifying a narrow valley, with woods and streams of water convenient for the feeding of cattle. Here the river Spodden, which now keeps many fulling-mills and engines at work, formerly turned one solitary corn-mill only. It was built in the narrow dingle below the hall, for the supply of the hamlet. The feudal owners of most mansions usually erected corn-mills (where practicable) within their own demesnes. After the family had removed to the more mild and temperate climate of Mavesyn-Ridware, in Staffordshire, about the year 1636, Healey Mill was converted into a fulling-mill, so that one of the principal features in our story no longer exists.

About two miles north from Rochdale lies the hamlet of Healey, a high tract of land, as its Saxon derivation seems to imply, heaȝe, *high*, and leaȝ *a pasture*, signifying the "*high pasture*."

Our Saxon ancestors chiefly occupied their lands for grazing purposes; hence the many [Pg 3]

terminations in ley, or leaȝ. Pasturage is still called a "ley" for cattle in these parts.

In this remote hamlet dwelt a family, probably of Saxon origin, whose name, De Heley, from their place of residence, had, in all likelihood, been assumed soon after the Norman conquest. Their descendants, of the same name, continued to reside here until the reign of Edward III., holding their lands as abbey lands, under the abbot of Stanlaw, soon after the year 1172, in the reign of Henry II., and subsequently under the abbot of Whalley, from the year 1296.[1] In 1483, John Chadwyke, or (*Ceddevyc*, from the common appellation *Cedde*, and *vyc*, a mansion or vill, signifying Cedde's fort, peel, or fortified mansion) married Alice, eldest daughter and co-heir of Adam Okeden of Heley; and in her right settled at the mansion of Heley (or Healey) Hall, then a huge unsightly structure of wood and plaster, built according to the fashion of those days. An ancestor of Adam Okeden having married "*Hawise, heir of Thomas de Heley*," in the reign of Edward III., became possessed of this inheritance.

The origin of surnames would be an interesting inquiry. In the present instance it seems clear that the name and hamlet of Chadwick are derived from Cedde's vyc, or Chad's vyc. This mansion, situated on the southern extremity of Spotland, or Spoddenland, bounded on the east by that stream, and southward by the Roche, was built on a bold eminence above the river, where Cedde and his descendants dwelt, like the Jewish patriarchs, occupied in the breeding of sheep and other cattle.

"But though this hamlet had been named *Ceddevic*, from its subordinate Saxon chief, he himself could not have adopted it for his own surname; because surnames were then scarcely, if at all, known here. He must have continued, therefore, to use his simple Saxon name of *Cedde* only, and his successors likewise, with the addition of Saxon *patronymics* even down to the Norman conquest, when the Norman fashion of local names or surnames was first introduced into England."

But though the Norman addition of surnames "became general amongst the barons, knights, and gentry, soon after the Conquest, yet Saxon patronymics long continued in use amongst the common people, and are still not unusual here. Thus, instead of John Ashworth and Robert Butterworth, we hear of Robin o' Ben's and John o'Johnny's,"—meaning Robert the son of [Pg 4] Benjamin, and John the son of John, "similar to the Norman Fitz, the Welsh Ap', the Scotch Mac, and the Irish O'; and this ancient mode of describing an individual sometimes includes several generations, as Thomas O'Dick's, O'Ned's, O'Sam's," &c.

But besides patronymics, nicknames (the Norman soubriquets) have been used in all ages and by all nations, and are still common here; some of them coarse and ludicrous enough: the real surname being seldom noticed, but the nickname sometimes introduced, with an alias, even in a law instrument. And why are not Poden, Muz, Listing, &c., as good as "the Bald," "the Fat," "the Simple," &c., of the French kings; or "the Unready," "the Bastard," "Lackland," "Longshanks," &c., of our own? A lad named Edmund, some generations back, attended his master's sons to Rochdale school, who latinised his name into "Edmundus;" then it was contracted into "Mundus," by which name his descendants are best known to this day: some probably knowing "Tom Mundus" well who are ignorant of his real surname. Within late years individuals have been puzzled on hearing themselves inquired after by their own surname. At Whitworth you might have asked in vain for the house of "Susannah Taylor," though any child would have taken you straight to the door of "Susy O'Yem's, O' Fair-off's at top o' th' rake." [2]

Another derivation of the surname De Heley, not at all improbable, has been suggested—viz., that Hely Dene may have been an early corruption of Holy Dene, having formerly belonged to the Church, and possibly, in remote ages, dedicated to the religious rites of the Druids. A clear rock-spring, in a gloomy dell below the Hall, is still called "the Spaw," and often frequented by youths and maidens on May mornings. Hence some have imagined that this Dene and its Spaw may have given to the river running through it the name of Spodden, or Spaw-Dene. Another spring, higher up, is called Robin Hood's Well, from that celebrated outlaw, who seems to have been the favourite champion of these parts, and who, according to some authorities, lies buried at Kirklaw, in the West Riding of York. [3]

Such holy wells were, in more superstitious if not happier ages, the supposed haunts of elves, [Pg 5] fairies, and other such beings, not unaptly denominated the rabble of mythology.

A warm sequestered dingle here conducts the Spodden through a scene of wild, woodland, and picturesque beauty. Drayton, in his *Polyolbion*, has thus immortalised it:—

> "First Roche, a dainty rill, which Spodden from her springs,
> A petty rivulet, as her attendant, brings."

From the mansion of Healey, built on an elevated slope above the dell, opens out an extensive prospect. Limepark in Cheshire, Cloud End in Staffordshire, with the Derbyshire hills, may be distinctly seen. Over the smoke of Manchester, the banks of the Mersey are visible; and upon the horizon rises up the barn-like ridge of Hellsby Tor,[4] in the forest of Delamere. Towards the west may be seen, far out, like a vast barrier, the Welsh mountains, *Moel Famma* (mother of mountains), with the vale of Clwyd, like a narrow cleft in the blue hills, which extend until the chain of Penmaenmawr and the Isle of Anglesey abruptly terminate in the sea. Few situations, without the toil of a laborious ascent, show so commanding a prospect; while under the very eye of the spectator, nature assumes an aspect of more than ordinary beauty.

One wild scene, the subject of our legend, the pencil, not the pen, must describe. It would be

impossible, in any other manner, to convey an adequate idea of its extreme loveliness and grandeur. It is here known by its Saxon appellation, "the Thrutch," or Thrust, signifying a narrow, but deep and rugged channel in the rocks. Through this cleft the Spodden bursts with great force, forming several picturesque falls, which, though of mean height, yet, combined with the surrounding scenery, few behold without an expression of both wonder and delight.

The ancient corn-mill was here situated, just below the mansion. From the "Grist Yate," by the main road to Rochdale, a winding horse-way, paved with stones set on edge, led down the steep bank and pointed to the sequestered spot where for ages the clack of the hopper and the plash of the mill-wheel had usurped a noisy and undisputed possession.

In the reign of our fourth Edward—we know not the precise year—an occurrence, forming the basis of the following legend, is supposed to have taken place,—when fraud and feud were [Pg 6] unredressed; when bigotry and superstition had their "perfect work;" when barbaric cruelty, and high and heroic deeds, had their origin in one corrupt and common source, the passions of man being let loose, in wild uproar, throughout the land; when the wars of the Roses had almost desolated the realm, and England's best blood flowed like a torrent. Such was the aspect of the time to which the following events relate.

It was in the beginning of the year, at the close of an unusually severe winter. The miller's craft was nigh useless, the current of the rivulet was almost still. Everything seemed so hard and frost-bound, that nature looked as though her fetters were rivetted for ever. But the dark and sterile aspect she displayed was bedizened with such beauteous frost-work, that light and glory rested upon all, and winter itself lost half its terrors.

Ralph Miller often looked out from his dusty, dreary tabernacle, watching the icicles that accumulated on his wheel, and the scanty current beneath, the hard surface of the brook scarcely dribbling out a sufficient supply for his daily wants.

Every succeeding morn saw the liquid element becoming less, and the unhappy miller bethought him that he would shut up the mill altogether, until the reign of the frozen king should expire.

A seven-weeks' frost was rapidly trenching on the fair proportions of an eighth of these hebdomadal inconveniences, and still continued the same hard, ringing sound and appearance, as if the sky itself o' nights had been frozen too—fixed and impervious—and the darkness had become already palpable. Yet the moon looked out so calm, so pure and beautiful, and the stars so spark-like and piercing, that it was a holy and a heavenly rapture to gaze upon their glorious forms, and to behold them, fresh and undimmed, as when first launched from the hands of their Creator.

Want of occupation breeds mischief, idleness being a thriftless carle that leaves the house empty, and the door open to the next comer—an opportunity of which the enemy is sure to avail himself. The miller felt the hours hang heavily, and he became listless and ill-humoured.

"'Tis an ill-natured and cankered disposition this," said he one night, when sitting by the ingle with his drowsy helpmate, watching the sputtering billets devoured, one after another, by the [Pg 7] ravening flame: "'Tis an ill-natured disposition that is abroad, I say, that will neither let a man go about his own business, nor grant him a few honest junkets these moonlight nights. I might have throttled a hare or so, or a brace of rabbits; or what dost think, dame, of a couple of moor-cocks or a cushat for a pie?"

"Thy liquorish tooth will lead thee into some snare, goodman, ere it ha' done watering. What did Master Chadwyck say, who is to wed Mistress Alice, our master's daughter, if nought forefend? What did he promise thee but a week agone, should he catch thee at thy old trade again?"

"A murrain light on the snivelling bully! Let him stay at his own homestead, and not take mastership here, to trouble us with his humours ere the portion be his. His younger brother Oliver is worth a whole pack of such down-looked, smooth-faced hypocrites. Oliver Chadwyck is the boy for a snug quarrel. His fingers itch for a drubbing, and he scents a feud as a crow scents out carrion. The other—mercy on me!—is fit for nought but to be bed-ridden and priest-ridden like his father and his mother to boot."

"Hush, Ralph," said the cautious dame; "let thine hard speeches fall more gently on thy master's son, that is to be. His own parents too—methinks the son of Jordan and Eleanor Chadwyck should earn a kinder word and a lighter judgment from thy tongue."

"Whew! my courteous dame. How now! and so because they are become part of the movables of Holy Church, I trow, they must be handled softly, forsooth! Tut, tut, beldame, they are—let me see, so it runs; the old clerk of St Chad's rang the nomine in my ears long enough, and I am not like to forget it. They be 'Trinitarians,' said he, 'of the house of St Robert near Knaresborough, admitted by Brother Robert, the minister of the Holy Trinity, for the redemption of captives imprisoned by the pagans, for the faith of Jesus Christ.' Gramercy, what a bead-roll of hard words! They say we are like to have a '*Holy War*' again, when we have settled our own reckonings; and the blood and groats of old England are again to be spent for the purchase of '*Holy Land*.' O' my halidome, wench, but I would let all the priests and friars fight for it. Cunning rogues! they set us together by the ears, and then run away with the pudding." [Pg 8]

No doubt this profane speech rendered him easier of access to the tempter, and the powers of evil; who, ever watchful for the slips of silly mortals, report such unholy words at head-quarters,

where Satan and his crew are assembled in full council.

The dame groaned deeply at this reply from her graceless husband.

"Some time or another," said she, "thou wilt rue these wicked speeches; and who knows whether these very words of thine may not have been heard i' the Fairies' Chapel, or whispered away beyond the forest to the witches' tryst!"

"I care not for all the imps and warlocks i' th' parish, hags and old women to boot. Let them come face to face. Here am I, honest Ralph the miller, who never took toll from an empty sack, nor e'er missed the mouth of a full one. Tol-de-rol."

Here he stood, with arms akimbo, as if daring the whole fellowship of Satan, with their abettors and allies. This speech, too, was doubtless reported at the Fairies' Chapel hard by; for the dame vowed ever after that she heard, as it were, an echo, or a low sooning sound, ending with an eldritch laugh, amongst the rocks in that direction. This well-known haunt of the elves and fays, ere they had fled before the march of science and civilisation, was but a good bowshot from the mill, and would have terrified many a stouter heart, had not familiarity lulled their apprehensions, and habit blunted the edge of their fears. Strangers often wondered that any human being dared to sojourn so near the haunts of the "good people," and were sure that, sooner or later, the inhabitants would rue so dangerous a proximity.

A few evenings after this foolhardy challenge Ralph had been scrambling away, far up the dingle, for a supply of firewood. The same keen tinkling air was abroad, but the sky, where the sun had thrown his long coronal of rays, was streaked across with a mottled and hazy light, probably the forerunner of a change. Ralph was labouring down the steep with his load, crashing through the boughs, and shaking off their hoary burdens in his progress. Suddenly he heard the shrill and well-known shriek of a hare struggling in the toils. At this joyful and refreshing sound the miller's appetite was wonderfully stimulated; his darling propensities were immediately called forth; he threw down his burden, and, rushing through the brake, he saw, or thought he saw, in the soft twilight, an unfortunate puss in the noose. He threw himself hastily forward expecting to grasp [Pg 9] the prize, when lo! up started the timid animal, and limping away, as if hurt, kept the liquorish poacher at her heels, every minute supposing he was sure of his prey. Rueful was the pilgrimage of the unfortunate hunter. The hare doubled, and sprang aside whenever he came within striking distance, then hirpling onward as before. Ralph made a full pause where a wide gap displayed the scanty waterfall, just glimmering through the mist below him. The moon, then riding out brightly in the opposite direction, sparkled on the restless current, tipped with foam. It was the nearest cut to the "Fairies' Chapel," which lies behind, and higher towards the source of the waterfall. The unlucky hare paused too for a moment, as though afraid to leap; but she looked back at her pursuer so bewitchingly that his heart was in his mouth, and, fearless of consequences, he rushed towards her; but he slipped, and fell down the crumbling bank. When sufficiently recovered from the shock, he saw the animal stealing off, between the edge of the stream and the low copsewood by the brink, towards the Fairies' Chapel. He made one desperate effort to lay hold of her before she set foot upon enchanted ground.

He seized her, luckily as he thought, by the scut; when lo! up started something black and "uncanny," with glaring eyes, making mouths, and grinning at him, as though in mockery. He felt stupefied and bewildered. Fascinated by terror, he could not refrain from following this horrible appearance, which, as if delighted to have ensnared him, frisked away with uncouth and fiendish gambols, to the very centre of the Fairies' Chapel.

Ralph, puissant and valorous upon his own hearthstone, felt his courage fast oozing out at elbows when he saw the cold moonlight streaming through the branches above him, and their crawling shadows on the grotesque rocks at his side.

He was now alone, shivering from cold and fright. He felt as though undergoing the unpleasant process of being frozen to the spot, consciously metamorphosing into stone, peradventure a sort of ornamental fixture for the fairies' apartment. His great hoofs were already immovable; he felt his hair congealing; his locks hung like icicles; and his whole body seemed like one solid lump of ice, through which the blood crept with a gradually decreasing current. Suddenly he heard a loud [Pg 10] yelping, as though the hounds were in full cry. The sound passed right through the midst of the Fairies' Hall, and almost close to his ear; but there was no visible sign of their presence, except a slight movement, and then a shiver amongst the frost-bitten boughs above the rocks. He had not power to bethink him of his Paternosters and Ave Marias, which, doubtless, would have dissolved the impious charm. Ralph had so neglected these ordinances that his tongue refused to repeat the usual nostrums for protection against evil spirits. His creed was nigh forgotten, and his "*salve*" was not heard. Whilst he was pondering on this occurrence, there started through a crevice a single light, like a glow-worm's lantern. Then a tiny thing came forth, clad in white, like a miniature of the human form, and, peeping about cautiously, ran back on beholding the unfortunate miller bolt upright in the narrow glen.

Ralph now saw plainly that he had been enticed hither by some evil being for no good. It might be for the malicious purpose of drawing down upon him the puny but fearful vengeance of those irritable creatures the fairies; and soon he saw a whole troop of them issuing out of the crevice. As they came nearer he heard the short sharp tread of this tiny host. One of them mounted the little pillar called the "Fairies' Chair," round which multitudes gathered, as if waiting for the fiat of their king. It was evident that their purpose was to inflict a signal chastisement on him for his intrusion.

Ralph watched their movements with a deplorable look. Horrible indeed were his anticipations. The elf on the pillar, a little wrinkled being with a long nose, bottle-green eyes, and shrivelled yellowish-green face, in a shrill squeaking tone, addressed him courteously, though with an ill-suppressed sneer, inquiring his business in these regions. But Ralph was too terrified to reply.

"How lucky!" said the old fairy: "we have a mortal here, just in the nick of time. He will do our bidding rarely, for 'tis the stout miller hard by, who fears neither fiend nor fairy, man nor witch, by his own confession. We'll put his courage to the proof."

Ralph was now thawing through terror.

"We would have punished this thine impertinent curiosity, had we not other business for thee, friend," said the malicious little devilkin. "Place thy fingers on thy thigh, and swear by Hecate, Merlin, and the Fairies' Hall, that within three days thou wilt fulfil our behest." [Pg 11]

Ralph assented, with a hideous grimace, glad upon any terms to escape.

The whole company disappeared, but a faint, sulphur-like flame hovered for a while over the spot they had left.

Soon he heard the following words, in a voice of ravishing sweetness:—

Mortal I must cease to be,
If no maiden, honestly,
Plight her virgin troth to me,
By yon cold moon's silver shower,
In the chill and mystic hour,
When the arrowy moonbeams fall
In the fairies' festive hall.
Twice her light shall o'er me pass,
Then I am what once I was,
Should no maid, betrothed, but free,
Plight her virgin vow to me."

The music ceased for a short space; then a voice, like the soft whisper of the summer winds, chanted the following lines in a sort of monotonous recitation:—

Mortal, take this unstained token,
Unpledged vows were never broken;
Lay it where a Byron's hand
This message finds from fairy-land,—
Fair Eleanor, the love-sick maid,
Who sighs unto her own soft shade:—
Bid her on this tablet write
What lover's wish would e'er indite;
Then give it to the faithful stream
(As bright and pure as love's first dream)
That murmurs by,—'twill bring to me
The messenger I give to thee.

"But the maiden thou must bring
Hither, to our elfin king,
Ere three days are come and gone,
When the moon hath kissed the stone
By our fairy monarch's throne.
Shouldst thou fail, or she refuse,
Death is thine; or thou may'st choose
With us to chase the moonbeams bright,
Around the busy world. Good night!"

He now felt something slipped into his hand.

"Remember," said the voice, "when that shadow is on the pillar, thou must return."

Immediately his bodily organs resumed their office, and the astonished miller was not long in regaining his own threshold. [Pg 12]

But he was a moody and an altered man. The dame could not help shuddering as she saw his ashen visage, and his eyes fixed and almost starting from their sockets. His cheeks were sunken, his head was bare, and his locks covered with rime, and with fragments from the boughs that intercepted his path.

"Mercy on me!" cried she, lifting up her hands, "what terrible thing has happened? O Ralph, Ralph, thy silly gostering speeches, I do fear me, have had a sting in their tail thou hast little dreamed of!"

Here she crossed herself with much fervour and solemnity. She then turned to gaze on the doomed wretch, who, groaning heavily, seated himself on the old settle without speaking.

"He has seen the fairies or the black dog!" said the dame in great terror. "I will not upbraid thee with thy foolish speeches, yet would I thou hadst not spoken so lightly of the good people. But take courage, goodman; thou art never the worse yet for thy mishap, I trow; so tell me what has befallen thee, and ha' done snoring there, like an owl in a barn riggin'."

A long time elapsed ere the affrighted miller could reveal the nature and extent of his misfortunes. But woman's wits are more fertile in expedients, and therefore more adroit for plots and counterplots than our own. The dame was greatly terrified at the recital, yet not so as to prevent her from being able to counsel her husband as to the plan he should pursue.

We now leave our honest miller for a space, while we introduce another personage of great importance to the further development of our story.

Oliver Chadwyck was the second son of Jordan Chadwyck before-named, then residing at their fort or peel of the same name, nearly two miles from Healey. Oliver had, from his youth, been betrothed to Eleanor Byron, a young and noble dame of great beauty, residing with her uncle, Sir Nicholas Byron, at his mansion, two or three miles distant. Oliver was a hot-brained, amorous youth, fitted for all weathers, ready either for brotherhood or blows, and would have won his "ladye love" at the lance's point or by onslaught and hard knocks.

Eleanor seemed to suffer his addresses for lack of other occupation. She looked upon him as her future husband; but she would rather have been wooed to be won. The agonies of doubt and suspense, the pangs of jealousy and apprehension, would have been bliss compared to the dull [Pg 13] monotony of the "betrothed." The lazy current would have sparkled if a few pebbles had been cast into the stream. Her sensitive spirit, likewise, shrank from contact with this fiery and impetuous youth; her heart yearned for some deep and hallowed affection. Strongly imbued with the witcheries of romance, she would rather have been sought by blandishments than blows, which, from his known prowess in the latter accomplishment, the youthful aspirant had no necessity to detail in the ears of his mistress. She liked not the coarse blunt manner of her gallant, nor the hard gripe and iron tramp for which he was sufficiently distinguished.

Yet was Oliver Chadwyck reckoned the best-looking cavalier in the neighbourhood, and, moreover, an adherent to the "Red Rose," under whose banner he had fought, and, even when very young, had gained distinction for his bravery—no mean recommendation, truly, in those days, when courage was reckoned a sure passport to a lady's favour, the which, it might seem, whoever held out longest and stuck the hardest was sure to win.

One evening, about the time of the miller's adventure in the Fairies' Chapel, Eleanor was looking through her casement listlessly, perhaps unconsciously. She sighed for occupation. The glorious hues of sunset were gone; the moon was rising, and she watched its course from the horizon of long dark hills up to the bare boughs of the sycamores by the banks of the little stream below. Again she sighed, and so heavily that it seemed to be re-echoed from the walls of her chamber. She almost expected the grim panels to start aside as she looked round, half-wishing, half-afraid that she might discover the intruder.

Disappointed, she turned again to the casement, through which the moonbeams, now partially intercepted by the branches, lay in chequered light and darkness on the floor.

"I thought thou wert here. Alas! I am unhappy, and I know not why." While she spoke a tear trembled on her dark eyelashes, and as the moonlight shone upon it, the reflection glanced back to the eye-ball, and a radiant form apparently glided through the chamber. But the spectre vanished as the eyelid passed over, and swept away the illusion. She leaned her glowing cheek upon a hand white and exquisitely formed as the purest statuary: an image of more perfect loveliness never glanced through a lady's lattice. She carelessly took up her cithern. A few wild [Pg 14] chords flew from her touch. She bent her head towards the instrument, as if wooing its melody—the vibrations that crept to her heart. She hummed a low and plaintive descant, mournful and tender as her own thoughts. The tone and feeling of the ballad we attempt to preserve in the following shape:—

SONG.

1.

"It is the stream,
Singing to the cold moon with babbling tongue;
Yet, ah! not half so wildly as the song
Of my heart's dream.
Is not my love most beautiful, thou moon?
Though pale as hope delayed;
Methought, beneath his feet the wild-flowers played
Like living hearts in tune.

2.

"We stood alone:
Then, as he drew the dark curls from my sight,
Through his transparent hand and arm of light,
The far skies shone.
List! 'twas the dove.
It seemed the echo of his own fond tone;
Sweet as the hymn of seraphs round the throne
Of hope and love!"

But the moon was not the object of her love. Ladies are little apt to become enamoured of such a fit emblem of their own fickle and capricious humours; and yet, somebody she loved, but he was invisible! Probably her wild and fervid imagination had created a form—pictured it to the mind, and endowed it with her own notions of excellence and perfection: precisely the same as love in

the ordinary mode, with this difference only—to wit, the object is a living and breathing substance, around which these haloes of the imagination are thrown; whereas, in the case of which we are speaking, the lady's ideal image was transferred to a being she had never seen.

It was but a short period before the commencement of our narrative that Eleanor Byron was really in love, and for the first time; for though her cousin Oliver, as she usually called him, had stormed, and perchance carried the outworks, yet the citadel was impregnable and unapproached. But she knew not that it was love. A soft and pleasing impression stole insensibly upon her, then dejection and melancholy. Her heart was vacant, and she sighed for an object, and [Pg 15] for its possession. It was a silly wish, but so it was, gentle reader; and beware thou fall not in love with thine own dreams, for sure enough it was but a vision, bright, mysterious, and bewitching, that enthralled her. Love weaves his chains of the gossamer's web, as well as of the unyielding adamant; and both are alike binding and inextricable. She saw neither form nor face in her visions, and yet the impalpable and glowing impression stole upon her senses like an odour, or a strain of soft and soul-thrilling music. Her heart was wrapped in a delirium of such voluptuous melody, that she chided the morning when she awoke, and longed for night and her own forgetfulness. Night after night the vision was repeated; and when her lover came, it was as though some chord of feeling had jarred, some tie were broken, some delicious dream were interrupted, and she turned from him with vexation and regret. He chided her caprice, which he endured impatiently, and with little show of forbearance. This did not restore him to her favour, nor render him more winning and attractive; so that the invisible gallant, a rival he little dreamt of, was silently occupying the heart once destined for his own.

One evening, Ralph, in pursuance of the commands he had received, arrayed in his best doublet, his brown hose, and a huge waist or undercoat, beneath which lay a heavy and foreboding heart, made his appearance at the house of Sir Nicholas Byron, an irregular and ugly structure of lath and plaster, well ribbed with stout timber, situated in a sheltered nook near the edge of the Beil, a brook running below Belfield, once an establishment of the renowned knights of St John of Jerusalem, or Knights Templars.

Ralph was ushered into the lady's chamber; and she, as if expecting some more distinguished visitant, looked with an eye of disappointment and impatience upon the intruder as he made his homely salutation.

"Thine errand?" inquired she.

"Verily, a fool's, lady," replied Ralph, "and a thriftless one, I fear me, into the bargain."

"Stay thy tongue. Yet I bethink me now," said she, looking earnestly at him, "thou art from my cousin: a messenger from him, I trow."

"Nay," said the ambiguous hind, "'tis from other guess folk, belike; but—who—I—Like enough [Pg 16] that the Lady Eleanor will go a fortune-hunting with such a simpleton as I am."

"Go with thee?" said the lady in amazement.

"Why, ay—I was bid to bring you to the Fairies' Chapel, beyond the waterfall in the wood by Healey, and that ere to-morrow night. But I am a doomed and a dying man, for how should the Lady Eleanor Byron obey this message?"

Here the unhappy miller began to weep; but the lady was dumb with astonishment.

"Forgive me, lady, in this matter; but I was in a manner bound to accomplish mine errand."

"And what if I should accompany thee? Wouldest thou be my champion, my protector from onslaught and evil?"

Here he opened his huge grey eyes to such an alarming extent that Eleanor had much ado to refrain from smiling.

"If you will go, lady, I shall be a living man; and you"—a dead woman, probably he would have said; but the denunciation did not escape his lips, and the joy and surprise of the wary miller were beyond utterance.

"But whence thy message, friend?" said the deluded maiden, eyeing him suspiciously.

"Why; the message was whispered in my ear. A stranger brought it together with a dismal threat should I not bring you at the time appointed."

Here the miller again became uneasy and alarmed. A cold shudder crept over him, and he looked imploringly upon her.

"But they say, my trusty miller, that this chapel of the fairies may not be visited, forbidden as it is to all catholic and devout Christians, after nightfall."

At this intimation the peccant miller displayed his broad thumbs, and looked so dolorous and apprehensive, sprawling out his large ungainly proportions, that Eleanor, though not prone to the indulgence of mirth, was mightily moved thereto by the cowardly and dismal aspect he betrayed.

"Nay, lady, I beseech you," he stammered out. "I am a dead dog—a piece of useless and unappropriated carrion, if you go not. Ha' pity on your poor knave, and deliver me from my tormentors!"

"Then to-morrow I will deliver thee," said the maiden, "and break thine enchantment. But the hour?"

"Ere the moonbeam touches the pillar in the Fairies' Hall." [Pg 17]

"Agreed, knave. So begone. Yet—and answer truly for thy life—was no pledge, no token, sent with this message?"

Ralph unwillingly drew forth the token from his belt. Fearful that it might divulge more than he wished, the treacherous messenger had kept back the tablets entrusted to him. He suspected that should she be aware it was the good people who were a-wanting her, he would have but a slender chance of success.

She glanced hastily, anxiously, over the page, though with great surprise.

"How now?" said she, thoughtfully. "Here is a pretty love-billet truly. The page is fair and unspotted—fit emblem of a lover's thoughts."

"You are to write thereon, lady, your lover's wish, and throw it into the brook here, hard by. The stream, a trusty messenger will carry it back to its owner."

Ralph delivered his message with great reluctance, fearful lest she might be alarmed and retract her promise.

To his great joy, however, she placed the mystic token in her bosom, and bade him attend on the morrow.

This he promised faithfully; and with a light heart he returned to his abode.

Eleanor watched his departure with impatience. She took the tablets from her bosom. Horror seemed to fold his icy fingers round her heart. She remembered the injunction. Her mind misgave her, and as she drew towards the lamp it shot forth a tremulous blaze and expired. Yet with desperate haste, bent, it might seem, on her own destruction, she hastily approached the window. The moonbeam shone full upon the page as she scrawled with great trepidation the word "Thine." To her unspeakable horror the letters became a track of fire, but as she gazed a drop of dark blood fell on them and obliterated the writing.

"Must the compact be in blood?" said she, evidently shrinking from this unhallowed pledge. "Nay then, farewell! Thou art not of yon bright heaven. My hopes are yet there, whatever be thy doom! If thou art aught within the pale of mercy I am thine, but not in blood."

Again, but on another page, she wrote the word "Thine." Again the blood-drop effaced the letters.

"Never, though I love thee! Why urge this compact?" With a trembling hand she retraced her pledge, and the omen was not repeated. She had dared much; but her hope of mercy was yet [Pg 18] dearer than her heart's deep and overwhelming passion. With joy she saw the writing was unchanged.

Throwing on her hood and kerchief, she stole forth to the brook, and in the rivulet, where it was yet dark and unfrozen, she threw the mystic tablet.

The following night she watched the moon, as it rose above the huge crags, breaking the long undulating horizon of Blackstone Edge, called "Robin Hood's Bed," or "Robin Hood's Chair."[5]

One jagged peak, projected upon the moon's limb, looked like some huge spectre issuing from her bright pavilion. She rose, red and angry, from her dark couch. Afterwards a thin haze partially obscured her brightness; her pale, wan beam seemed struggling through a wide and attenuated veil. The wind, too, began to impart that peculiar chill so well understood as the forerunner of a change. A loud sough came shuddering through the frozen bushes, moaning in the grass that rustled by her path. Muffled and alone, she took her adventurous journey to the mill, where she arrived in about an hour from her departure. Ralph was anxiously expecting her, together with his dame.

"Good e'en, lady," said the latter, with great alacrity, as Eleanor crossed the threshold. She returned the salutation; but her features were lighted up with a wild and deceptive brightness, and her glowing eye betrayed the fierce and raging conflict within.

"The shadow will soon point to the hour, and we must be gone," said the impatient miller.

"Lead on," replied the courageous maiden; and he shrank from her gaze, conscious of his own treachery and her danger.

The hard and ice-bound waters were dissolving, and might be heard to gurgle in their deep recesses; drops began to trickle from the trees, the bushes to relax their hold, and shake off their [Pg 19] icy trammels. Towards the south-west lay a dense range of clouds, their fleecy tops telling with what message they were charged. Still the moon cast a subdued and lingering light over the scene, from which she was shortly destined to be shut out.

Ralph led the way silently and with great caution through the slippery ravine. The moonlight flickered through the leafless branches on the heights above them, their path winding through the shadows by the stream.

"We must hasten," said her guide, "or we may miss the signal. We shall soon take leave of the

moonlight, and perhaps lose our labour thereby."

They crept onwards until they saw the dark rocks in the Fairies' Chapel. The miller pointed to a long withered bough that flung out its giant arms far over the gulph from a great height. The moon threw down the shadow quite across to the bank on the other side, marking its rude outline on the crags.

"The signal," said Ralph; "and by your favour, lady, I must depart. I have redeemed my pledge."

"Stay, I prithee, but within hearing," said Eleanor. "I like not the aspect of this place. If I call, hasten instantly to my succour."

The miller promised, but with a secret determination not to risk his carcase again for all the bright-eyed dames in Christendom.

She listened to his departing footsteps, and her heart seemed to lose its support. An indescribable feeling crept upon her—a consciousness that another was present in this solitude. She was evidently under the control of some invisible agent; the very freedom of her thoughts oppressed and overruled by a power superior to her own. She strove to escape this thraldom, but in vain. She threw round an apprehensive glance, but all was still—the dripping boughs alone breaking the almost insupportable silence that surrounded her. Suddenly she heard a sigh, and a rustling at her ear; and she felt an icy chillness breathing on her. Then a voice, musical but sad, whispered—

"Thou hast rejected my suit. Another holds thy pledge."

"Another! Who art thou?" said the maiden, forgetting her fears in the first emotion of surprise.

"Thou hast been conscious of my presence in thy dreams!" replied the mysterious visitor. She felt her terrors dissipated, for the being whom she loved was the guardian of her safety. [Pg 20]

"I have loved thee, maiden," said the voice; "I have hovered round thee when thou slept, and thou hast answered my every thought. Wherefore hast thou not obeyed? Why not seal thy compact and our happiness together?"

"Because it was unhallowed," replied she firmly, though her bosom trembled like the leaf fluttering from its stem.

"Another has taken thy pledge. Yet is it not too late. Renew the contract, even with thy blood, and I am thine! Refuse, and thou art his. If this hour pass, I am lost to thee for ever!"

"To whom," inquired Eleanor, "has it been conveyed?"

"To thy first, thy betrothed lover. He found the pledge that I would not receive."

The maiden hesitated. Her eternal hopes might be compromised by this compliance. But she dreaded the loss of her insidious destroyer.

"Who art thou? I fear me for the tempter!"

"And what boots it, lady? But, listen. These elves be my slaves; and yet I am not immortal. My term is nigh run out, though it may be renewed if, before the last hour be past, a maiden plight her hopes, her happiness to me! Ere that shadow creeps on the fairy pillar thou art irrevocably mine, or his whom thou dreadest."

Eleanor groaned aloud. She felt a cold hand creeping on her brow. She screamed involuntarily. On a sudden the boughs bent with a loud crash above her head, and a form, rushing down the height, stood before her. This unexpected deliverer was Oliver Chadwyck. Alarmed by the cries of a female, as he was returning from the chase, he interposed at the very moment when his mistress was ensnared by the wiles of her seducer.

"Rash fool, thou hast earned thy doom. The blood be on thine own head. Thou art the sacrifice!"

This was said in a voice of terrible and fiendish malignity. A loud tramp, as of a mighty host, was heard passing away, and Oliver now beheld the form of his betrothed.

"Eleanor! Here! In this unholy place!" cried her lover. But the maiden was unable to answer.

"There's blood upon my hand!" said he, holding it up in the now clear and unclouded moonlight. "Art thou wounded, lady?" [Pg 21]

"I know not," she replied; "I was alone. Yet I felt as though some living thing were nigh—some unseen form, of terrible and appalling attributes! Was it not a dream?"

"Nay," said Oliver, pensively; "methought another was beside thee!"

"I saw him not."

"How camest thou hither?"

"Let us be gone," said she, trembling; "I will tell thee all."

She laid her head on his shoulder. It throbbed heavily. "I am now free. The accursed links are broken. I feel as though newly wakened from some horrible dream! Thou hast saved me, Oliver. But if thine own life is the price!"

"Fear not; I defy their devilish subtilty—in their very den too: and thus, and thus, I renounce the devil and all his works!"

He spat thrice upon the ground, to show his loathing and contempt.

"Oh! say not so," cried Eleanor, looking round in great alarm.

Oliver bore her in his arms from that fearful spot. He accompanied her home; and it was near break of day when, exhausted and alone, she again retired to her chamber. By the way Oliver told her that he had found a mysterious tablet on the edge of the brook the same morning. He had luckily hidden it in his bosom, and he felt as though a talisman or charm had protected him from the spells in the "Fairies' Chapel."

Spring-tide was past, and great was the stir and bustle for the approaching nuptials between Oliver Chadwyck and the Lady Eleanor. All the yeomanry, inhabitants of the hamlets of Honorsfield, Butterworth, and Healey, were invited to the wedding. Dancers and mummers were provided; wrestlers and cudgel-players, with games and pastimes of all sorts, were appointed. The feasts were to be holden for three days, and masks, motions, and other rare devices, were expected to surpass and eclipse every preceding attempt of the like nature.

Eleanor sat in her lonely bower. It was the night before the bridal. To-morrow would see her depart in pageantry and pomp—an envied bride! Yet was her heart heavy, and she could not refrain from weeping.

She sought rest; but sleep was denied. The owl hooted at her window; the bat flapped his leathern wings; the taper burned red and heavily, and its rays were tinged as though with blood; the fire flung out its tiny coffin; the wind sobbed aloud at every cranny, and wailed piteously about the dwelling. [Pg 22]

"Would that I might read my destiny," thought she. Her natural inclination to forbidden practices was too powerful to withstand.

Now there was formerly an ancient superstition, that if, on the night before marriage, a taper were burned, made from the fat of a young sow, and anointed with the blood of the inquirer, after sundry diabolical and cabalistical rites at midnight, a spirit would appear, and pronounce the good or evil destiny of the querent.

Eleanor had prepared the incantation ere she laid her throbbing head on the pillow. Whether or not she slept, is more than we can divulge. Such, in all probability, was the case; dreams being the echo only of our waking anticipations.

She thought there came a rushing wind. The door flapped to and fro, the curtains shook, and the pictures glared horribly from the wall. Suddenly—starting from the panel, with eyes lighted up like bale-fires, and a malignant scowl on her visage—stalked down one of the family portraits. It was that of a female—a maiden aunt of the house of Byron, painted by one of the court artists, whom the king had brought from France, and patronised at a heavy cost. This venerable dame appeared to gaze at the spectator from whatsoever situation she was beholden. The eyes even seemed to follow you when passing across the chamber. A natural consequence though, and only marvelled at by the ignorant and illiterate.

This ancient personage now advanced from her hanging-place, and standing at the foot of the bed, opened out a fiery scroll with these ominous words:—

"Maid, wife, and widow, in one day,
This shall be thy destiny."

Eleanor struggled hard, but was unable to move. She laboured for utterance, but could not speak. At length, with one desperate effort, a loud cry escaped her, and the vision disappeared. She slept no more, but morning disclosed her haggard cheek and sunken eye, intimating that neither hope nor enjoyment could have been the companion of her slumbers.

It was a bright morning in June. The sun rode high and clear in the blue heavens. The birds had "sung their matins blythe" ere the bridegroom arrived with his attendants. Merrily did the village choristers acquit themselves in their vocation, while those that were appointed strewed flowers in the way. The bells of St Chad trolled out their merry notes when the ceremony was over, and the bride, on her snow-white palfrey, passed on, escorted by her husband, at the head of the procession. Gay cavaliers on horseback, and maidens prancing by their side, made the welkin ring with loud and mirthful discourse. The elder Byron rode on his charger by the side of Jordan Chadwyck and his eldest son, with whom rode the vicar, Richard Salley, nothing loath to contribute his folly to the festival. [Pg 23]

As the procession drew nigh to the hall, a messenger rode forward in great haste, whispering to Byron, who, with angry and disordered looks, shouted aloud to Oliver—

"Away—away! The cowardly Traffords are at our threshold. They have skulked out, like traitors as they be, knowing our absence at the feast. 'Tis an old feud, and a bloody one. Who is for Byron? Down with the Traffords!"

The old man here put spurs to his horse, and galloped off with his attendants.

"A Byron—a Byron!" shouted Oliver, as he followed in full cry, first leaving his wife under a

suitable and safe escort. Soon they routed the enemy, but the prediction was complete; for Eleanor became

"Maid, wife, and widow, in one day!"

her husband being slain during the battle.

The blood of man was held of little account in those days, if we may judge by the following award on the occasion:—

"In virtue of a writ of appeal of death, sued out against Sir John Trafford, Knight, his tenants and servants, the sum of sixty pounds was deemed to be paid by Trafford to Biroun, to be distributed amongst the cousins and friends of the late Oliver C., in the parish church of Manchester, on the award of Sir Thomas Stanley, Knight, *Lord Stanley*—viz. ten marks at the nativity of John the Baptist, and ten marks at St Martyn, yearly, until the whole was paid, and all parties to be fully friends. Dated London, 24th March, 20 Edward IV. 4018."

[Pg 24]

View larger image

THE LUCK OF MUNCASTER.

K. Hen.—"From Scotland am I stolen, even of pure love,
To greet mine own land with my wishful sight."

King Henry VI.

It shall bless thy bed, it shall bless thy board,
They shall prosper by this token;
In Muncaster Castle good luck shall be,
Till the charmed cup is broken."

Gamel de Pennington is the first ancestor of the family of whom there is any recorded account; he was a person of great note and property at the time of the Conquest, and the family, having quitted their original seat of Pennington in Lancashire (where the foundation of a square building called the Castle is still visible), he fixed his residence at Mealcastre, now called Muncaster. It is said that the family originally resided nearer the sea, at a place not far from the town of Ravenglass, where at present are the ruins of an old Roman castle, called Walls Castle. The old tower of the present mansion-house at Muncaster was built by the Romans, to guard the ford called St Michael's Ford, over the river Esk, when Agricola went to the north, and to watch also the great passes into the country over the fells, and over Hard Knot, where is the site of another fortress constructed by them, apparent from the traces existing to this day.

Muncaster and the manor of Muncaster have long been enjoyed by the Penningtons, who appear to have possessed it about forty years before the Conquest, and ever since, sometimes collaterally, but for the most part in lineal descent by their issue male, to this very time. [Pg 25]

There is a room in Muncaster Castle which still goes by the name of Henry the Sixth's room, from the circumstance of his having been concealed in it at the time he was flying from his enemies in 1461, when Sir John Pennington, the then possessor of Muncaster, gave him a secret reception.

The posts of the bed in which he slept, which are of handsome carved oak, are also in the same room in good preservation.

When the period for the king's departure arrived, before he proceeded on his journey, he addressed Sir John with many kind and courteous acknowledgments for his loyal reception, lamenting, at the same time, that he had nothing of more value to present him with, as a testimony of his good-will, than the cup out of which he crossed himself. He then gave it into the hands of Sir John, accompanying the present with the following

blessing:—"The family shall prosper as long as they preserve it unbroken;" which the superstition of those times imagined would carry good fortune to his descendants. Hence it is called "*The Luck of Muncaster*." It is a curiously-wrought glass cup, studded with gold and white enamel spots. The benediction attached to its security being then uppermost in the recollection of the family, it was considered essential to the prosperity of the house at the time of the usurpation that the Luck of Muncaster should be deposited in a safe place; it was consequently buried till the cessation of hostilities had rendered all further care and concealment unnecessary. Unfortunately, however, the person commissioned to disinter this precious jewel let the box fall in which it was locked up, which so alarmed the then existing members of the family, that they could not muster courage enough to satisfy their apprehensions. It therefore (according to the traditionary story still preserved in the family) remained unopened for more than forty years, at the expiration of which period a Pennington, more hardy or more courageous than his predecessors, unlocked the casket, and exultingly proclaimed the safety of the Luck of Muncaster.

When John, Lord Muncaster (the first of the family who obtained a peerage), entered into possession of Muncaster Castle, after his elevation in 1793, he found it still surrounded with a moat, and defended by a strong portcullis. The family having of late years entirely resided upon their estate of Wartee in Yorkshire, the house was in so very dilapidated a state that Lord Muncaster was obliged to rebuild it almost entirely, with the exception of Agricola's Tower, the walls of which are nine feet thick. The elevation of the new part is in unison with that of the Roman tower, and forms altogether a handsome castellated building. The situation is eminently striking, and was well chosen for commanding the different passes over the mountains. It is surrounded with mountain scenery on the north, south, and east; while extensive plantations, a rich and cultivated country, with the sea in the distance, makes a combination of scenery than which it is scarcely possible to imagine anything more beautiful or more picturesque. [Pg 26]

We are tempted to conclude this description with the words of John, Lord Muncaster, who himself so greatly contributed to its renovation. Upon being requested to give an outline of its beauties, he replied that it consisted of "wood, park, lawn, valley, river, sea, and mountain."

The reason or excuse we give for introducing within our Lancashire series this tradition, of which the occurrences took place in a neighbouring county, is, that the family was originally native to our own. By the village of Pennington, situated about midway between Dalton and Ulverstone, is the Castle Hill, the residence of this family before the Conquest. The area of the castle-yard appears to have been an octagon or a square, with obtuse angles, about forty-five yards in diameter. The south and east sides have been defended by a ditch about ten yards wide, and by a vallum of earth, still visible. There are no vestiges of the ancient building. It stood apparently on the verge of a precipice, at the foot of which flows a brook with great rapidity. The side commands an extensive view of the sea-coast and beacons, and was excellently situated for assembling the dependants in cases of emergency. The name is diversely written in ancient writings, as Penyngton, Penington, Pennington, and in Doomsday Book *Pennegetun*, perhaps from *Pennaig*, in British "a prince or great personage," to which the Saxon termination *tun* being added, forms Pennegetun, since smoothed into Pennington.

PART FIRST.

"Come hither, Sir John de Pennington,
Come hither, and hearken to me;
Nor silver, nor gold, nor ladye-love,
Nor broad lands I give unto thee."

"I care not for silver, I care not for gold,
Nor for broad lands, nor fair ladye;
But my honour and troth, and my good broadsword,
Are the king's eternally."

"Come hither, Sir John, thou art loyal and brave,"
Again the monarch spake;
"In my trouble and thrall, in the hour of pain,
Thou pity didst on me take.

"The white rose withers on every bough,
And the red rose rears its thorn;
But many a maid our strife shall rue,
And the babe that is yet unborn.

[Pg 27]

"I've charged in the battle with horse and lance,
But I've doffed the warrior now;
And never again may helmet of steel
Bind this burning, aching brow!

"Oh, had I been born of a simple churl,
And a serving-wench for my mate,
I had whistled as blithe as yon knave that sits
By Muncaster's Castle gate!

"Would that my crown were a bonnet of blue,
And my sceptre yon shepherd's crook,
I would honour, dominion, and power eschew,
In this holy and quiet nook.

"For England's crown is a girdle of blood,
A traitor is every gem;
And a murderer's eye each jewel that lurks

In that kingly diadem!

"Hunt on! hunt on, thou blood-hound keen;
I'd rather an outcast be,
Than wade through all that thou hast done,
To pluck that crown from thee!"

"Then tarry, my liege," Sir John replied,
"In Muncaster's Castle gate;
No foeman shall enter, while sheltered here
From Edward's pride and hate."

"I may not tarry, thou trusty knight,
Nor longer with thee abide;
Ere to-morrow shall rise on these lordly towers,
From that gate shall a monarch ride.

"For a vision came to my lonely bed,
And that vision bade me flee;
And I must away, ere break of day,
O'er the hills to the south countrie.

"But take this cup,—'tis a hallowed thing,
Which holy men have blessed;
In the church of the Holy Sepulchre
This crystal once did rest;

[Pg 28]

"And many a martyr, and many a saint,
Around its brim have sate;
No water that e'er its lips have touched
But is hallowed and consecrate.

"'Tis thine, Sir John; not an empire's worth,
Nor wealth of Ind could buy
The like, for never was jewel seen
Of such wondrous potency.

"It shall bless thy bed, it shall bless thy board,
They shall prosper by this token;
In Muncaster Castle good luck shall be,
Till the charmed cup is broken!"

Sir John he bent him on his knee,
And the king's word ne'er did err,
For the cup is called, to this blessed hour,
"The Luck of Muncaster."

PART SECOND.

"Oh haste, Sir William of Liddislee
My kinsman good at need,
Ere the Esk's dark ford thou hast passed by,
In Muncaster rest thy steed;

"And say to my love and my lady bright,
In Carlisle I must stay,
For the foe is come forth from the misty north,
And I cannot hence away;

"But I must keep watch on Carlisle's towers
With the banner of Cumberland;
Then bid her beware of the rebel host,
Lest they come with sword and brand.

"But bid her, rather than house or land,
Take heed of that cup of grace,
Which King Henry gave to our ancestor,
The 'Luck' of our noble race.

[Pg 29]

"Bid her bury it deep at dead of night,
That no eye its hiding see.
Now do mine errand, Sir William,
As thou wouldst prosperous be!"

Sir William stayed nor for cloud nor shrine,

He stayed not for rest nor bait,
Till he saw the far gleam on Esk's broad stream,
And Muncaster's Castle gate.

"From whence art thou in such fearful haste?"
The warder wondering said;
"Hast thou 'scaped alone from the bloody fight,
And the field of the gory dead?"

"I am not from the bloody fight,
Nor a craven flight I flee;
But I am come to my lady's bower,
Sir William of Liddislee."

The knight to the lady's bower is gone:
"A boon I crave from thee,
Deny me not, thou lady bright,"
And he bent him on his knee.

"I grant thee a boon," the lady said,
"If it from my husband be;"
"There's a cup of grace," cried the suppliant knight,
"Which thou must give to me."

"Now foul befa' thee, fause traitor,
That with guile would our treasure win;
For ne'er from Sir John of Pennington
Had such traitrous message been."

"I crave your guerdon, fair lady,
'Twas but your faith to try,
That we might know if the 'Luck' of this house
Were safe in such custody.

"The message was thus, thy husband sent;
He hath looked out from Carlisle wa',
And he is aware of John Highlandman
Come trooping down the snaw;

[Pg 30]

"And should this kilted papistry
Spread hither upon their way,
They'll carry hence that cup of grace,
Though thou shouldst say them nay.

"And thy lord must wait for the traitor foe
By the walls of merry Carlisle;
Else he would hie to his lady's help,
And his lady's fears beguile.

"Thy lord would rather his house were brent,
His goods and his cattle harried,
Than the cup should be broken,—that cup of grace,
Or from Muncaster's house be carried."

The kinsman smiled on that fond lady,
And his traitor suit he plied:
"Give me the cup," the false knight said,
"From these foemen fierce to hide."

The lady of Muncaster oped the box
Where lay this wondrous thing;
Sir William saw its beauteous form,
All bright and glistering.

The kinsman smiled on that fond lady,
And he viewed it o'er and o'er.
"'Tis a jewel of price," said that traitor then,
"And worthy a prince's dower.

"We'll bury the treasure where ne'er from the sun
One ray of gladness shone,
Where darkness and light, and day and night,
And summer and spring are one:

"Beneath the moat we'll bury it straight,

In its box of the good oak-tree;
And the cankered carle, John Highlandman,
Shall never that jewel see."

The kinsman took the casket up,
And the lady looked over the wall:
"If thou break that cup of grace, beware,
The pride of our house shall fall!"

[Pg 31]

The kinsman smiled as he looked above,
And to the lady cried,
"I'll show thee where thy luck shall be,
And the lord of Muncaster's pride."

The lady watched this kinsman false,
And he lifted the casket high:
"Oh! look not so, Sir William,"
And bitterly she did cry.

But the traitor knight dashed the casket down
To the ground, that blessèd token;
"Lie there," then said that false one now,
"Proud Muncaster's charm is broken!"

The lady shrieked, the lady wailed,
While the false knight fled amain:
But never durst Muncaster's lord, I trow,
Ope that blessèd shrine again!

PART THIRD.

The knight of Muncaster went to woo,
And he rode with the whirlwind's speed,
For the lady was coy, and the lover was proud,
And he hotly spurred his steed.

He stayed not for bog, he stayed not for briar,
Nor stayed he for flood or fell;
Nor ever he slackened his courser's rein,
Till he stood by the Lowthers' well.

Beside that well was a castle fair,
In that castle a fair lady;
In that lady's breast was a heart of stone,
Nor might it softened be.

"Now smooth that brow of scorn, fair maid,
And to my suit give ear;
There's never a dame in Cumberland,
Such a look of scorn doth wear."

[Pg 32]

"Haste, haste thee back," the lady cried,
"For a doomed man art thou;
I wed not the heir of Muncaster,
Thy '*Luck*' is broken now!"

"Oh say not so, for on my sire
Th' unerring doom was spent;
I heir not his ill-luck, I trow,
Nor with his dool am shent."

"The doom is thine, as thou art his,
And to his curse, the heir;
But never a luckless babe of mine
That fearful curse shall bear!"

A moody man was the lover then;
But homeward as he hied,
Beside the well at Lord Lowther's gate,
An ugly dwarf he spied.

"Out of my sight, thou fearsome thing;
Out of my sight, I say:
Or I will fling thine ugly bones
To the crows this blessèd day."

But the elfin dwarf he skipped and ran
Beside the lover's steed,
And ever as Muncaster's lord spurred on,
The dwarf held equal speed.

The lover he slackened his pace again,
And to the goblin cried:
"What ho, Sir Page, what luckless chance
Hath buckled thee to my side?"

Up spake then first that shrivelled thing,
And he shook his locks of grey:
"Why lowers the cloud on Muncaster's brow,
And the foam tracks his troubled way?"

"There's a lady, the fairest in all this land,"
The haughty chief replied;
"But that lady's love in vain I've sought,
And I'll woo none other bride."

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"And is there not beauty in other lands,
And locks of raven hue,
That thou must pine for a maiden cold,
Whose bosom love ne'er knew?"

"Oh, there is beauty in every land,"
The sorrowing knight replied;
"But I'd rather Margaret of Lonsdale wed,
Than the fairest dame beside."

"And thou shalt the Lady Margaret wed,"
Said that loathly dwarf again;
"There's a key in Muncaster Castle can break
That maiden's heart in twain!"

"Oh never, oh never, thou lying elf,
That maiden's word is spoken:
The cup of grace left a traitor's hand,
Proud Muncaster's '*Luck*' is broken."

Then scornfully grinned that elfin dwarf,
And aloud he laughed again:
"There's a key in thy castle, Sir Knight, can break
That maiden's heart in twain!"

The knight he turned him on his steed,
And he looked over hill and stream;
But he saw not that elfin dwarf again,
He had vanished as a dream!

The knight came back to his castle hall,
And stabled his good grey steed;
And he is to his chamber gone,
With wild and angry speed.

And he saw the oaken casket, where
Lay hid that cup of grace,
Since that fearful day, when the traitor foe
Wrought ruin on his race.

"Thou cursed thing," he cried in scorn,
"That ever such 'Luck' should be;
From Muncaster's house, ill-boding fiend,
Thou shalt vanish eternally."

[Pg 34]

He kicked the casket o'er and o'er
With rage and contumely;
When, lo! a tinkling sound was heard—
Down dropped a glittering key!

He remembered well the wondrous speech
Of the spectre dwarf again,
"There's a key in Muncaster Castle can break
A maiden's heart in twain!"

He took the key, and he turned the lock,
And he opened the casket wide;
When the cause of all his agony
The lover now espied.

The holy cup lay glistering there,
And he kissed that blessèd token,
For its matchless form unharmèd lay,
The "Luck" had ne'er been broken!

The loud halls rung, and the minstrels sung,
And glad rolled the Esk's bonny tide,
When Lonsdale's Lady Margaret
Was Muncaster's winsome bride!

Now prosper long that baron bold,
And that bright and blessèd token:
For Muncaster's Luck is constant yet,
And the crystal charm unbroken!

[Pg 35]


View larger image

THE PILE OF FOULDREY.[i]
Drawn by G. Pickering.
Engraved by Edw^{d} Finden.

THE PEEL OF FOULDREY.

"True, treason never prospers; what's the reason?
"When treason prospers, 'tis no longer treason!"

The ancient castle of Peel of Fouldrey, the island of fowls, stands a little beyond the southern extremity of the isle of Walney. The castle and its site belong to the ladies of the liberty of Furness.

The ruins, seen from the heights above Rampside, are beautifully picturesque. Though the sea has wasted part of the outworks, yet the remains exhibit a complete specimen of the principles and plan upon which these ancient defences were usually constructed. It may not be thought out of place to give the reader some account of its present appearance. West, in his *Antiquities of Furness*, inserts the following account of his visit to this delightful spot; and as it is detailed with a good deal of graphic simplicity, if not elegance of style, we prefer it to our own record of an expedition to this place.

"Choosing a proper time of the tide," says he, "for our excursion, we set out from Dalton, early on a pleasant summer's morning, and having crossed the sands in Walney channel, we followed the eastern shore of the isle of Walney from the small village of Northscale, by the chapel, to Bigger. Leaving this hamlet, and crossing over a small neck of land by a narrow lane winding amongst well-cultivated fields, smiling with the prospect of a plenteous harvest of excellent grain, but principally of wheat, which the land in Walney generally produces of a superior quality, we again came to the shore, and having a pretty distinct view of several parts of the ruinous fabric which was the object of our excursion, we took the distant castle for our guide, and entered upon a trackless sand, which, by the route we pursued, is about two miles and a half over. It is soft and disagreeable travelling in many places; but there is no quicksand. Those, however, who are unacquainted with the road to the Peel of Fouldrey should take a guide from Bigger.

"About half-way over the sand, the mouldering castle, with its extensive shattered walls and ruinated towers, makes a solemn, majestic appearance. Having arrived on the island, which is destitute of tree or shrub, except a few blasted thorns and briers, we left our horses at a lonely public-house, situated close by the side of the eastern shore, and proceeded to inspect the ruins of the castle. The main tower has been defended by two

moats, two walls, and several small towers. We crossed the exterior fosse or ditch, and entered the outer bayle or yard, through a ruinous guard-tower, overleaning a steep precipice formed by the surges of the sea. The ancient pass, where the drawbridge over the outer ditch was fixed, has been long washed away. The greater part of the outer wall is also demolished, for in those places which are out of the reach of the tide the stones have been removed for various purposes. [Pg 36]

"The drawbridge over the exterior ditch of these castles used commonly to be defended by a fortification consisting of a strong high wall with turrets, called the barbacan or antemural; the great gate or entrance into the outer bayle or yard was often fortified by a tower on each side, and by a room over the intermediate passage; and the thick folding-doors of oak, by which the entrance was closed, were often strengthened with iron, and faced by an iron portcullis or grate, sliding down a groove from the higher part of the building.

"A chapel commonly stood in the outer bayle: accordingly, just at our entrance into that part we saw the ruins of a building which is said to have been the chapel belonging to this castle.

"At the inside of the yard we came to the inner fosse, moat, or ditch, and arriving at the place where the drawbridge had been fixed, we entered the inner bayle or court by the ancient passage through the interior wall, the entrance whereof had evidently been secured by a portcullis, and defended by a room over the passage.

"We now proceeded to the entrance into the main tower or keep; but the doorway into the porch, which precedes it, being walled up, we were obliged to creep into the edifice by a narrow aperture. The entrance has been secured by a portcullis. The main tower has consisted of three storeys, each divided into three oblong apartments by two interior side walls being carried from bottom to top.

"The rooms on the ground-floor have been very low, and lighted by long apertures, extremely narrow, at the outside of the walls, but a considerable width in the inside, perhaps so constructed for the use of the bow. The apartments have communicated with each other; and there has been a winding staircase leading from one of them to the rooms above, and to the top of the castle. Under the ground-floor of these ancient castles used commonly to be dark and dismal apartments, or dungeons, for the reception of prisoners, but nothing of the kind is known to be here. The porch is called the dungeon.

"The second floor has been on a level with the first landing at the principal entrance. The rooms have been lofty, and lighted by small pointed windows, and many of them have had fireplaces. The apartments on the third floor have been apparently similar to those on the second. The side apartments have been lighted by several small pointed windows, but those in the middle have been very dark and gloomy.

"The great door of the castle opens into one of these intermediate apartments. On the left-hand side of the entrance has been a spiral staircase, leading to the rooms above and to the top of the castle, which has had a flat roof, surrounded by a parapet and several turrets. The walls of this tower are very strong and firm; a deep buttress is placed at each corner, and one against the middle of each side wall. A small square tower has stood at the southern corner, but the greater part of it has been thrown down by the sea. The foundation of one side wall is also undermined the whole of its length, and as it in some places overhangs the precipice formed by the waste of the sea, and as the castle is not situated upon a rock, but upon hard loamy soil, this side must inevitably fall in a few years. [Pg 37]

"Many huge fragments of the wasted walls are scattered upon the shore, under the cliff from whence they have fallen; and notwithstanding the concussion they have received in falling from a great height, and the frequent surges of the sea, they are as firm as ever, and in many places exhibit the shape of the edifice.

"The corners and doorcases of the guard-towers, the buttresses, window-frames, and several parts of the main tower, are constructed with red freestone; but all the other parts of the walls which in general are about six or seven feet in thickness, are formed of round stones collected from the adjacent shores. The inside of the walls has been constructed with small stones, and plenty of fluid mortar to fill the interstices.

"To this mode of construction, to the excellent binding quality of the stones, and to the slow drying of the grout-work in the inside, may be attributed the great tenacity of the walls of this fabric, more than to any uncommon or unknown method of composing the mortar.

"The roofs of the numerous guard-houses in the surrounding walls of this castle have apparently been flat. Upon these, and along the walls, which in most castles were topped by a parapet and a kind of embrasure called crennels, the defenders of the castle were stationed during a siege, and from thence discharged arrows, darts, stones, and every kind of annoyance they could procure, upon their enemies.

"There were often subterraneous passages leading from the lowest part of the main tower to a great distance; and by these the besieged could make their escape in time of imminent danger, when the outworks were carried by storm.

"On the north-east side of the outworks of this castle has been a large pond or reservoir for supplying the ditches with water in cases of sudden emergency. There has also been a fish-pond on the north-west side.

"Though many variations were made in the structure of castles, as the plan was often modified by the architect according to the site occupied by the edifice, yet the most perfect and magnificent were generally constructed with all the different parts we have mentioned.

"The walls contain no decorations of art, and are equally destitute of all natural embellishments; the rugged outlines of dilapidation, associating with the appearance of past magnificence, are the qualities which chiefly interest the imagination, while comparing the settled tranquillity of the present with the turbulent ages that are past, and contemplating the view of this mouldering fabric. [Pg 38]

"The island of Fouldrey has certainly been much larger at the erection of the castle than it is at present; but the sea, having reduced it to its present small compass, has abated the rapid career of its destruction. It now wastes the western shore of Walney, and forms a new tract out of the ruins, which proves a barrier to its progress upon the Peel of Fouldrey, and at some future period may be an accession to this island, in place of the land which it has lost."

The period when it was reduced to ruins is not well ascertained, but it is probable that this was one of the fortresses which fell under the dismantling orders of the Commonwealth.

The port is very large and commodious, and would float a first-rate ship of war at low water.

In 1789 a body of commissioners and trustees, appointed to improve the navigation of the river Lune, built a lighthouse on the south-east end of the isle of Walney. It is an octagonal column, placed upon a circular foundation of a little more than twenty feet in diameter. At the plinth, its diameter is eighteen feet, and diminishes gradually with the elevation through fifty-seven feet to fourteen. The ascent from the bottom to the lantern is by a staircase, consisting of ninety-one steps, winding up the inside of the pillar. The whole height is about sixty-eight feet. At the base of the column there is a small dwelling for the keeper and his family.

It was in the "merry month of May," in the year 1487, scarcely two years after Richard's overthrow at Bosworth, and Earl Richmond's usurpation of the English crown by the title of King Henry the Seventh, that a great armament, landing on the barren island of Fouldrey, took possession of the castle, a fortress of great strength commanding the entrance to the bay of Morecambe, and a position of considerable importance to the invaders. It occupied, with the outworks and defences, nearly the whole area of the island (a few acres only), two or three fishermen's huts at that time being irregularly scattered on the beach below. Built by the monks of Furness in the first year of Edward III., as a retreat from the ravages of the Scots, and a formidable barrier against their approaches by sea, it was now unexpectedly wrested from its owners, becoming a point of resistance from whence the formidable power of Henry might be withstood, and in the end successfully opposed. [Pg 39]

A royal banner floated from the battlements: the fortress had been formally taken into possession by the invaders in the name of their king, previously proclaimed at Dublin by the title of Edward the Sixth. The youth was crowned there with a diadem taken from an image of the Virgin, priests and nobles espousing his cause with more than ordinary enthusiasm; and Henry, in the second year of his reign, was threatened, from a source as unexpected as it was deemed contemptible, with the loss of his ill-gotten sovereignty.

Lambert Simnel, according to some historians, was the real name of this "pretender;" but there be others who scruple not to assert, that he was in reality the unfortunate Earl of Warwick, son to Clarence, elder brother of Richard III., and that he had made his escape from the Tower, where he long suffered an ignominious confinement by the cruel policy of Henry. The prior claims of this young prince to the English crown could not be doubted, and Margaret, the "bold" Duchess of Burgundy, sister to Edward IV., had furnished the invaders with a body of two thousand chosen Flemish troops, commanded by Martin Swartz, a brave and experienced officer. With them came the Earl of Lincoln, related to Edward IV. by intermarriage with Elizabeth, the king's eldest sister.

This nobleman had long entertained ambitious views towards the crown; his uncle Richard, it is said, in default of issue to himself, having expressed the intention of declaring Lincoln his successor. The Lord Lovel, too, a bitter enemy of the reigning prince, who had fled to the court of Burgundy beforetime for protection, was entrusted with a command in the expedition. To these were joined the Earl of Kildare, the king's deputy for Ireland, with several others of the nobility from the sister kingdom. The countenance thus unexpectedly given to the rebellion by persons of the highest rank, and the great accession of military force from abroad, raised the courage and exultation of the Irish to such a pitch that they threatened to overrun England, nothing doubting but their restless and disaffected spirit would be fully met by a similar disposition on the part of those whom they invaded. In supposing that the inhabitants in the north of England, and especially in Lancashire, would immediately join their standard, they had not calculated wisely. The king, in crushing the hopes of the Yorkists, had made himself, at that period, too popular in the county; the reluctance, too, which it may be supposed that Englishmen would feel in [Pg 40] identifying themselves with a troop of foreign adventurers, as well as their general animosity against the Irish, to whom the "northerns" never bore any good-will, being too near neighbours to agree,—these circumstances taken into account, the ultimate failure of the expedition might have been easily prognosticated. Sir Thomas Broughton, a gentleman of some note in Furness, was the only person of weight and influence in the county who joined their standard, and he soon found himself a loser by his defection.

This brief preliminary statement we have thought essential to the right understanding and development of our plot.

The evening was dark and lowering, the sky broken into wild irregular masses of red and angry clouds. The sun, after throwing one fierce look over the broad and troubled sea, had sunk behind a hard, huge battlement of cloud, on the round waving edges of which ran a bright burning rim, that looked like a train of fire ignited by the glowing luminary behind.

The beach round the little island of Fouldrey is mostly covered with pebbles thrown up by the tide, occasionally intermingled with rock and patches of dark verdure. A few boats may be seen with their equipments, and two or three straggling nets upon the shore. A distant sail occasionally glides across the horizon; but the usual aspect is that of solitude, still and uninterrupted, the abode of sterility and sadness. Now, the narrow bay by the island was glittering with gallant streamers. Ships of war, in all their pride and panoply, majestically reposed upon its bosom. All was bustle and impatience. The trumpet-note of war brayed fiercely from the battlements. Incessant was the march of troops in various directions. Tents were pitched before the castle. Guards were appointed; and this hitherto peaceful and solitary spot resounded with the din of arms, and the hoarse clang of preparation for the approaching strife.

Messengers were constantly passing to and from the mainland. The insignia of royalty were ostentatiously displayed, and the captains and leaders within the fortress fulfilled the duties of this mimic and motley court in honour of their anticipated sovereign.

Under a steep cliff, washed by the sea at high water, but of no great height, and above which the higher walls of the castle or keep might be discovered, sat two fishermen, the owners, or rather occupiers, of one of the cottages built under the very walls of the fortress, where these peaceful inhabitants had placed their little nests, protected and covered by the wing of their loftier but more exposed and dangerous neighbour. [Pg 41]

The place they had chosen for their conference was secluded from general observation, and their low and heavy speech was concealed from the prying sentinels above by the hoarse and impetuous voice of the retiring waves. Not many paces distant was the inlet to a subterraneous passage, supposed to lead under the deepest foundations of the castle; but its termination was now a mystery, at any rate, to the present occupiers and inhabitants of the place. Many strange and horrible stories were told and believed, of its uses and destination in times past. Being burdened with a bad name—"some uncleansed murder stuck to it"—the place ran little risk of disturbance or intruders. When the tides ran high this outlet was inaccessible, being partly flooded by the sea. From neglect and disuse an accumulation of sand and pebbles, washed by the violence of the waves into the cavity, was deposited there, so that the entrance, which, according to tradition was once wide and sufficiently lofty for a person to walk upright, was now dwindled into a narrow and insignificant-looking hole, scarcely big enough to admit an urchin.

"Thee hasna seen it thysel', then?" said one of the fishermen to his companion.

"Nea; I waur it' hoose man when it cam'; but"—the speaker looked wistfully towards the dark entrance we have named,—"but I'se sure Dick wouldna seay sae if"——

"Dick's a starin' gowk, and a coward too. I'se warrant there waur plenty o' room 'twixt his carcase and the wa'. That I'd bin there i'stead! There shouldn't ha' bin room to cram a herrin' tail atween me an' the ghost's substance. I would ha' hedged him up thus, an' then master ghost, taken aback, says, 'Friend, by yere sweet leave I would pass;' but I make out elbows, and arms this'n, facing till him so. Help! murder!"

This sudden change in the voice and attitude of the speaker, this sudden exhalation of his courage, unfortunately arose from the parties having, in the heat and interest of the discourse, turned their backs to the haunted entrance, and, so intent was Davy in accommodating the action to the valiant tenor of his speech, that it was only on turning round, for the purpose of showing to his companion the way in which he would have disputed a passage with the ghost, that he was aware for the first time of the presence of that terrible thing, and within a very few inches too of his own person. They stayed not for any further exemplification of this theory of ghost-laying, but in an instant were beyond observation, bounding over the beach, nor once looking behind them until safe in their little hut, and the door fastened against the fearful intruder. Davy, being foremost in the race, sat down, followed by his companion George, who, maugre his great apprehensions, could not forbear laughing heartily at the sudden melting away of the big-mouthed valour of this cowardly boaster. [Pg 42]

"Praised be our lady of Furness," said the merry taunter, with many interruptions from laughter and want of breath; "thy heels are as glib as thy tongue: for which—oh, oh! I am breathed—blown—dispossessed of my birthright, free quaffing o' the air. Ha, ha! I cannot laugh. Oh! what a mouth didst thou make at old blacksleeves. Gaping so, I wonder he mistook not thy muzzle for one of the vents into his old quarters. A pretty gull thee be'st, to swallow yon black porpoise."

"I tell thee, messmate," returned the other, gravely, "thou hast miss'd thy tack. It waur but a slip, maybe a kin' of a sudden start which took me, as they say, by the nape. I jumped back, I own—a foul accident, by which he took advantage. He comes behind me, thou sees, and with a skip 'at would have seated him upo' the topmost perch o' the castle, he lights whack, thump, fair upo' my shoulders. I ran but to shake the whoreson black slug fro' my carcase. Saints ha' mercy, but his legs waur colder than a wet sheet. I soon unshipp'd my cargo, though—I tumbled him into the sea, made a present of old blacksleeves to the fishes!"

"Thou lying chub," said George, angrily, "did not I watch thee? Why, thou cub, thou cormorant, thou maker of long lies and quick legs, didst not o'ershoot me, ay, by some fathoms? I followed hard i' thy wake, but I see'd nought of all this bull-scuddering of thine. Faith, but thou didst ply thy courses with a wet sail!"

"Go to, Geordie—go to; a juggle, I tell thee; sheer malice of the enemy, fow' an' fause as he be." Here he spat on the floor to show his detestation and contempt; but George, either too ignorant or too idle to reply, took down a dried fluke from the chimney, and warming it on the glowing turf for a few minutes, was soon occupied in disposing of this dainty and favourite repast. Their hut was of the rudest construction. The walls were of boulder stones from the beach, loosely set up with mud and slime, and in several places decidedly deviating from the perpendicular. The roof was thatched with rushes, and shaped like unto a fish's back, having a marvellous big hump in the middle, upon which grew a fair tuft of long lank herbage, while bunches of the biting yellow stone-crop clung in irregular patches of bright green verdure about the extremities. The interior was lighted by a single casement, showing an assemblage of forms the most homely and primitive in their construction. The floor, paved with blue pebbles; the fireplace, a huge hearth-flag merely, on which lay a heap of glowing turf, an iron pot depending from a crook above. The smoke, curling lazily through a raft of fish drying a few feet above the flame, and acquiring the requisite flavour, with considerable difficulty reached a hole in the roof, where the adverse and refractory wind not unfrequently disputed its passage, and drove it down again, to assist the colds and rheums by its stimulating propensities. A broken chair, a three-legged stool, and a table with no [Pg 43]

greater number of supporters, a truckle-bed, and an accumulation of nets, oars, and broken implements of the like nature, were the usual deposits about the chamber. The two fishermen were partners in their gainful trade, and not having tasted the bliss of conjugal comforts, enjoyed a sort of negative good from the absence of evil, and lived a tolerably quiet and harmonious life in these outskirts of creation.

The few simple and primitive inhabitants of the island had been so bewildered and confounded by the turmoil and disorder consequent upon the invasion of their hitherto peaceful and quiet resting-place, that some half-dozen of them, for the first time in their lives, had quitted their homes; others, secure from their poverty and insignificance, still remained, though much disturbed with wonder and silly surmises, and ready to catch at any stray marvels that fell in their way. The subterraneous and half-concealed passage in the rock, or rather shale, on which the castle stands, always under the ban of some vague and silly apprehension, had been reported of late as manifesting more than equivocal symptoms of supernatural possession. Dick Empson, [Pg 44] or long-nebbed Dick, a sort of shrewd, half-witted incarnation, it might be, of the goblin or elfin species, a runner of errands from the abbey of Furness to the castle, and a being whose pranks and propensities to mischief were well known in the neighbourhood, had affirmed, but a few hours before, that he saw a black figure on the previous night issuing from the hole; and that there was no connection or understanding between this ghostly appearance and the present occupiers of the castle, was evident from the mystery and secrecy that attended its movements. This was doubtless the phantom or goblin that, from time immemorial, had been the cause of such sinister dispositions towards the "haunted passage." Davy and his friend had unexpectedly stumbled upon its track, for they had not calculated on its appearance, at any rate before midnight.

In the Castle, Peel, or Pile of Fouldrey, on that night too, there was a mighty disturbance, not unaccompanied with vexation and alarm. It was soon after the first watch. The new-made monarch was asleep in his chamber—an ill-furnished apartment on the second floor of the main tower or keep, looking out by a narrow window towards the sea. The next, or middle chamber, was on a level, and communicating with the first landing, or principal entrance. The latter apartment, in which were the guards and others immediately about the king's person, served the purposes of an ante-room to the presence-chamber.

The room opposite—for there were three divisions on each floor—was subdivided into several parts, and occupied by the Earl of Lincoln and his attendants; the rooms above being devoted to Swartz, Lovel, and Fitzgerald, with their trains. Below were the guard-rooms and offices assigned to the staff, with the war stores and munitions belonging to the expedition.

In the same chamber with the king lay his confessor and chief adviser, one Simon, a wily and ambitious priest, who was the prime agent, if not mover, in this attempt to overturn the reigning power. No other individual was suffered to remain through the night in the king's apartment.

It was about the first watch, as before mentioned, when the guards and attendants were alarmed by loud cries from the royal chamber. They hastened to the door, but it was bolted, and their apprehensions for that time were allayed by the voice of the priest assuring them that the king [Pg 45] was safe, but that an ugly dream had awakened him. Lincoln, whom this tumult had quickly brought to the spot, retired grumbling at so unseasonable a disturbance. Scarcely had an hour elapsed ere the cries were repeated. Unsheathing his sword, the proud Earl of Lincoln marched angrily to the door, and swore a loud broad oath that he would see the king or burst open the barrier. With him came others from the rooms overhead, so that the priest was forced, however unwillingly, to open the door, and Lincoln, accompanied by his friends, beheld the young pretender in bed, pale, and with a rueful countenance, still retaining the traces of some deadly horror.

"What hath disturbed your highness? We would fain know the cause of this alarm, and punish, ay punish home, the traitor!" said Lincoln, darting a furious look at the confessor, to whom he bore no good-will.

"Nay, friends, I shall—I shall be well presently. I beseech you be not disturbed. 'Tis a dream,—a vision that hath troubled me. I thought I was in the Tower—in my prison chamber—and the tyrant came and grasped me by the throat. With that I jumped up, and as Heaven is my witness, I saw a dark figure slip through the floor by yon grim buttress, behind which is the private staircase to the summit."

Every eye was turned towards the corner of the chamber near the bed, on the outside of which a winding staircase ran up from below, but they were ignorant of any communication from these stairs into the king's chamber. Lincoln examined the buttress with his sword, and Swartz, the Fleming, with his fingers, but there was no apparent opening or crevice that could betoken any outlet or concealment. The floor was examined, and with the same result; so that they were fain to depart, little doubting that the whole was the effect of some mental disturbance.

With the morning dawn came Sir Thomas Broughton. A grand council was appointed for that day, in which the final arrangement of their plans was to be discussed. A royal banquet was prepared, and the Flemish gunners were to give a specimen of their craft from the battlements.

The forenoon came on chill and squally, with a low scud driving rapidly from the west. A drizzling rain was the result, which increased with the coming tide. [Pg 46]

The little island was covered with tents, forming an encampment of no mean extent and

appearance.

Sir Thomas, with a few attendants, after being ferried over the channel which separates the island of Fouldrey from the mainland, was conducted through avenues of tents and armed men. The Flemish soldiers, fierce and almost motionless, looked like an array of grim statues. The Irish levies, in a state of more lax discipline, were collected in merry groups, whiling away the time in thriftless and noisy discourse.

Sir Thomas Broughton, descended from an Anglo-Saxon family of great antiquity, was by virtue of this hereditary and aboriginal descent, of a proud and pompous bearing. Being allied to most of the principal families in these parts, he was won over by solicitation from the Duchess of Burgundy, as one of the confederates in her attempt to restore the line of York to the English crown. Fond of show, and careful as to his own personal appearance, he was clad in a steel coat of great beauty; this ponderous form of defence having been brought to great perfection in the preceding reign. His sword-belt was so disposed that the weapon remained in front, while a dagger was attached to the right hip. Over his armour he wore a scarlet cloak, and as he strode proudly up the avenues to the gate, he looked as though he felt that on his fiat alone depended the very existence of those he beheld. After he had passed the first drawbridge into the outer court or bayle, a band of archers, drawn up in full array, opened their ranks to receive this puissant chieftain. These were the most efficient of the troops, and partly English, having been brought from Ireland by the deputy. They were clad in shirts of chain mail, with wide sleeves, over which was a small vest of red cloth, laced in front. They had tight hose on their legs, and braces on their left arms. Behind them, and on each side, were part of the infantry, consisting of billmen and halberdiers; but the most formidable-looking soldiers were the Flemish gunners, or harquebusiers, so named from the barbarous Latin word *arcusbusus*, evidently derived from the Italian *arcabouza—i.e.*, a bow with a tube or hole. It was made with a stock and trigger, in imitation of the crossbow. The match, no longer applied by the hand to the touchhole, was fixed into a cock, which was brought down to the pan by the motion of the trigger. This being at the time a recent invention, excited no little curiosity and admiration. [Pg 47]

At the inner court, and near the main entrance to the keep, Sir Thomas was received in great state by the Earl of Lincoln, whose high, but easy and pleasant bearing, bespoke him to have been long the inmate and follower of courts, while the stiff attitudes and formal demeanour of Sir Thomas were rendered more apparent by the contrast.

"Welcome, Sir Thomas, to our court in this fair haven. Your presence, like your fidelity, hath a goodly savour in it, being always before and better than our expectation or our fears. How faireth our cousin, and our pretty dames in Furness?"

"My lord, I thank you for your good word. My poor services are repaid tenfold in their acceptance by the king," said Sir Thomas, bending, but with an ill grace, by reason of little use in that excellent art.

"Into our council-chamber, Sir Thomas, where you shall render homage to the king in person."

This council-chamber was none other than the king's bedroom, whither, with great ceremony, Sir Thomas was conducted. In this mimic court there was a marvellous show of ceremony, and a great observance of, and attention to, forms and royal usages—ridiculous enough where a few acres formed the whole of the monarch's territory, and an ugly ill-contrived castle his palace. But his followers behaved as though England's sovereignty were theirs, being well inclined to content themselves with the shadow, having little hold or enjoyment of the substance.

Before a long narrow table, near the bed, and on a high-backed oaken chair, sat the young pretender. He was dressed in a richly-embroidered gown, the sleeves wide, and hanging down from the wrists like lappets. On his head was a low cap surmounted by long waving feathers, and his manners and appearance were not devoid of grace and gentility. He displayed considerable self-possession, and wore his kingly honours with great assurance. He was of a fair and sanguine complexion, pale rather than clear, and his hair clustered in heavy ringlets on his shoulders. A rapid and somewhat uncertain motion of the eye, and his mouth not well closed, showed that although he might have been schooled to the exhibition, and could wear the outward show of firmness and decision, yet in the hour of emergency, and in the day of trial, his fortitude would in all likelihood forsake him.

At his right hand sat the priest in a white cassock and scapulary. A black hood, thrown back upon [Pg 48] his shoulders, exhibited the form and disposition of his head to great advantage. His features were large, expressive, and commanding. The fire of a brilliant grey eye was scarcely tempered by his overhanging brows, though at times the spirit seemed to retire behind their grim shadows, to survey more securely and unobservedly the aspect and appearances without.

Swartz, the Flemish general, a blunt military chieftain, was at his side. A black bushy beard, some inches in advance of his honest good-humoured face, was placed in strong contrast with the wary, pale, and somewhat dubious aspect of the priest.

Kildare, the Irish deputy, and Lovel, with several of the senior officers and captains, were assembled round the table.

The room was lofty, lighted by a small pointed window, and contained the luxury of a fireplace, in which lay some blazing embers; a grateful and refreshing sight in that chill and ungenial atmosphere.

The needful ceremonies being gone through, Sir Thomas was honoured with a place at the board near to where it rested against the buttress before mentioned, the priest addressing him as follows:—

"My Lord Abbot of Furness, Sir Thomas, what news of him? Hath he yet signified his adherence to our cause? We hope you bring tidings of such auspicious import."

"He doth yet procrastinate, I hear, until he have news from the court," replied Sir Thomas; "yet I trust his want of zeal and obedience will not hinder our march."

"And the proud nobles of Lancashire, how stand they affected towards our good prospering?"

"Truly, they are, as one may say, neither cold nor hot; but of a moderate temperature, midway, it would seem"——

"Which is an indication of neither zeal nor obedience," said Swartz, suddenly cutting short the tedious verbosity of Sir Thomas's intended harangue. "Open enemies before lukewarm friends!"

"Prithee, general," said the priest, with a placid smile, during which his eyes seemed to shrink within their dim sockets, "be not over-hasty. We cannot reasonably hope that they should flock to our standard almost ere we unfurl it for their gathering."

"Your speech hath a reasonable property in it," replied Sir Thomas, "and, as we may say, savoureth of great judgment, which, being of an excellent nature in itself, doth thereby control and exercise, in its own capacity, the nature and excellence of all others." [Pg 49]

This formidable issue of words was delivered with much earnestness of enunciation; but of its use or meaning, probably, the speaker was fully as ignorant as his hearers. Even at the fountain-head his ideas were sufficiently obscure, but when fairly rolling forth from the spring, they sometimes begat such a froth and turbidity in their course, that no reasonable discernment could fathom their depth or bearing.

A short silence was the result, which none, for a while, cared to disturb, lest he should betray his lack of understanding in dark sentences.

"We know your loyalty," said the king, "which hath a sufficient impress on it to pass current without scrutiny. Your example, Sir Thomas, will be of competent weight, without the casting or imposition of vain words into the scale. We acknowledge your ready zeal in our just cause."

"Your highness' grace, my liege," said Lincoln, ere Sir Thomas could gather words for a fitting reply, "doth honey your confections well. Men swallow them without wincing or wry faces."

Sir Thomas would not thus be deprived of his right to a reply; and was just commencing with a suitable attitude for the purpose, when lo! the trenchant knight, who sat on a small stool beside the corner buttress, with a loud cry, suddenly disappeared, and a gaping cavity in the floor sufficiently accounted for the precipitate mode of his departure. Uprising on the ruins of Sir Thomas, started forth a grotesque figure from the chasm, clad in coarse attire, a ludicrous solemnity on his strange and uncouth visage, as, with a shrill and squeaking tone, he cried—

"Ay, ay, masters; but my master will gi'e me a blessing for the finding o' this mouse-nest; and a priest's blessin' is worth a king's curse any time; and so good-morrow, knaves."

"Stay," said Lincoln, seizing the intruder, none other than our light-witted acquaintance, "lang-nebbit Dick," whose prying propensities were notorious, and who had taken upon himself, that morning, the arduous task of exploring the subterraneous passage into which he had seen the mysterious figure insinuate itself. After many perils and impediments, he had come to a flight of [Pg 50] steps, ascending which, his progress was interrupted by a trap-door overhead. He soon discovered a wooden bolt, the unloosing of which led to the precipitation of Sir Thomas through the aperture. Dick's light was struck from his hand; escaping himself, however, he left Sir Thomas to his fate, and emerged, as we have seen, into the council-chamber. They were much alarmed by this unexpected disturbance, and, looking down, they beheld a narrow flight of steps, at the bottom of which lay the unfortunate knight, sore bruised by his fall.

"If the abbot catch ye here," said Dick, with a vacant grin, "he'll gi'e every one o' ye a taste o' the gyves, and so pray ye gang awa', and let me gang too. As for that calf beastie, that baas so at the bottom, gi'e me a groat, and I'll gather him up again sune."

Here Dick held out a paw that would not have disgraced the extremities of a bruin for size and colour.

"Holloa, guards," cried Lincoln, "take this knave to the dungeon by the porch, and keep him safe until we have need of him."

The prying vagabond was removed without ceremony, kicking all the way, and bellowing out threats and vengeance against his enemies, while Sir Thomas and his bruises were brought to light.

"'Tis the good hand of Providence that hath revealed to us, through the means of this crack-brained intruder, so dangerous an outlet by which our sovereign's life might have been brought into jeopardy. To show unto us that He works not by might nor by strength, does Heaven employ the feeblest instruments for our ruin or our deliverance." The priest, after this profane speech, resumed his station at the board, whence the king, with a proper and becoming dignity, had not

arisen. But the council did not proceed in their deliberations after this interruption. Contenting themselves with devising precautions against another surprise, they separated, hoping that to-morrow would bring them despatches from abroad, for which they began to feel somewhat anxious and impatient.

The sun was now some hours past meridian. The broad sea and the breakers were foaming on. A wide and impetuous phalanx of waves appeared upon the horizon. Gouts of muddy foam were [Pg 51] beginning to froth among the blue pebbles on the beach. The tide was rapidly filling the channels, and patches of dark sand were vanishing beneath the waves, when the two fishermen, launching their little boat into a narrow bay between the rocks, prepared for their daily toil.

"Lords o' the court they be," said David, to some inquiry from his more ignorant companion, as he generally affected to consider him. Indeed, with but little wit and less valour, he wished to foist himself upon one possessing both, as a being of extraordinary wisdom and fortitude. And truly, if loud words and big lies could have done this, he would have had no lack either of courage or discretion.

"Didst never see a lord to his shirt?" continued this indomitable boaster.

"Nea, marry, but I've seen 'em to their shifts, for one of 'em couldna loup owre t' stones here without help."

"Help thy silly face, thou be'st hardly company fit for they 'at have seen knowledge, as 't waur, to its verra nakedness. I tell thee I've looked on lords' flesh; an' no more like thine than thee be'st like fish."

"Some of 'em will cudgel thy leesing out o' thee, I hope. Thou could'stna speak truth to save thy neck fro' the rope. Didst get any o' the crumbs at the dinner to-day? for I ken thou throw'd up thy greasy cap, and cried out 'Hurrah for the king.' Thy tongue would ever wag faster at a feast than thy fist at a fray."

"I tell thee, George, 'ware thy gibes an' gallimaufreys. A man can but bear what he can, thee knows; an' so stop thy din. Let me see, I heard as I cam' doon that this same ghost 'at frightened thee sae appeared to the king an' the lords at the feast; an' they waur fain to run for it, as thee did last night, thee knows, for verra fearsomeness, an'"——

Here he looked round, as though fearing a visit of the like nature.

"They say he came an' gobbled up more nor his share; an' he sent the guests a-packing like a bream of short-sized kippers from a creel. We looked for our share of the victuals, but they told me old bl—bl"——Again he hesitated, evidently afraid that some "unsonsy" thing was behind him. His voice sunk down to a tremulous whisper. "They said that old split-feet brought a whole bevy of little devilkins with him that cleared decks in the twinkling of a bowsprit." [Pg 52]

"And yet thou durst not say him nay, though thy craw were as empty as my basket. Come, bear a hand, or we shall lose the tide; it is already on the rocks."

The invading fleet were still moored in the harbour, yet the fishermen shot past unheeded by these leviathans of the deep. As they came nearer to the opposite shore, they saw an individual making signals, as though he would be taken across. His monkish garb was a passport to their obedience; and the friar was received on board with great reverence and respect. With a sullen air he demanded, rather than requested, to be conveyed to the castle, which the simple fishermen undertook with great alacrity and good humour. Left to the care of the guards below the ramparts, he was speedily forwarded through ranks of iron men, and the barriers flew open at his presence; an embassage from the abbot of Furness was not to be lightly entreated.

Again was there a summons that the council should assemble, and the chiefs, already risen from the banquet, prepared to give him audience. With a proud and firm step he approached the table; and though, from habit, he repressed the natural feelings and bias of the temper, yet there was an evident expression of hostility against the intruders, accompanied with a glance of unequivocal meaning towards their sovereign.

Simon, rising to receive this ambassador from the abbot, watched his demeanour with a cautious and keen observance, though betraying little of that really intense interest with which his presence was regarded.

"Thrice welcome!" he cried; "we hail your presence as an omen of good import. How fareth my lord abbot, whom we hope to number with our friends in this glorious cause?"

"The abbot of Furness hath no message of that similitude. He doth ask by what right, privity, or pretence, ye appear within his castle or stronghold upon this island? upon whose advice or incitement ye have thus taken possession? and furthermore, under whose authority ye do these things?"

This short address, uttered in a firm voice, and in a tone of menace rather than inquiry, daunted the hearers, who had hoped for a more propitious message from the abbey of Furness. Simon, however, without betraying his chagrin, unhesitatingly replied—

"The right by which we hold this fortress is the will of our king, and our authority is from him." [Pg 53]

"I crave your honest regards," returned the monk, looking round with a glance of conscious

power and superiority; "this good inheritance is ours, and whosoever disporteth himself here must answer for it to the lord of Furness, whose delegate and representative I am."

Choler was rising in the assembly; but Simon, with that intuitive and inexplicable control which superior minds possess, almost unknowingly, over their associates, quelled the outburst of the flame by a single glance. Another look was directed to the royal pupil at his side, when the latter spoke as follows:—

"Our presence here, it should seem, is a sufficient answer to the questions of our lord abbot. Being lawful heir to the English crown, we might command the allegiance, if not the homage, of your head; but we would rather win with fair entreaty than command our unwilling subjects, and to this end have we sent messengers to the superior of your house, urging his help and submission."

This reply was given with a dignity and an assurance denoting that either he was the individual he personated, or that he had been well schooled in his craft.

A murmur of applause was heard through the assembly, but the monk was unmoved to any show of recognition or even respect. Waiting until he could be heard, the envoy again inquired—

"And who art thou? and by what pretence claimest thou this right?"

"By hereditary descent. Knowest thou Edward, Earl of Warwick, now thy king?"

"I have heard of him," continued the monk in the same dubious and inflexible tone; "but his bodily appearance hath not been vouchsafed unto me."

"See him here!" said the royal claimant, rising with great majesty and condescension. But the churchman neither did homage, nor in any way testified his loyalty to, or apprehension of, so exalted a personage.

"Truly it is a marvellous thing," replied he, "that the Earl of Warwick should so order his appearance, at one and the same time, both in London and at our good fortress here in Fouldrey!" A slight curl of the lip was visible as he spoke.

"The Earl of Warwick," said Simon, "cannot now be abiding where thou sayest, insomuch as the bodily tabernacle, his dwelling in the flesh, is before thee." [Pg 54]

"But we have a messenger from thence, even with a writing from the hands of the holy prior of St Alban's, who sendeth us the news, lest we should be beguiled. Father Anselm hath seen the earl, who was brought forth from the Tower by command of the king, being conducted publicly through the principal thoroughfares of the city, that the people should behold, and not in any wise be led astray through the evil reports and machinations of the king's enemies."

Here he paused, folding his arms with a haughty and reserved look; but Simon, no wise disconcerted by this terrible, unexpected, and apparently fatal exposure of their plot, replied with a smile of the most intrepid assurance—

"We knew of this, and were prepared for the wiles of the usurper. Know then, that, through the agency and good offices of that renowned princess, Margaret, Duchess of Burgundy, the king's escape from the Tower was accomplished; but not by might, nor by human power nor device, but by faith and prayer, was the work wrought out, which holy communion her enemies do maliciously report as the practice of sorcery and the forbidden art. Howbeit the king hath escaped, as thou seest, the fangs of the executioner. Stay, I perceive what thou wouldest urge in reply, but listen for a short space. In order to deter them from pursuit on finding his escape, and with a view likewise to lull them into vain confidence and carnal security, another was left in his place, whom they, of necessity, imagine to be their captive; but it is not a real thing of flesh and blood, though to them it may so appear. When his time shall be accomplished, the form will vanish, to the downfall and confusion of the usurper and the utter overthrow of our enemies."

Here the assembly gave a loud and unanimous token of their exultation by shouts and exclamations of loyalty and obedience.

After a short reverie, the monk replied—

"We know of a surety that the Princess Margaret, as well as her royal brother, Edward the Fourth, did use to practise in forbidden arts; but we must have testimony indisputable to the truth of your claim, ere it be that we render our belief. Surely the power that wrought thy deliverance would not, if need were, leave thee without the means of proving thine identity. How know we that thou art he whom thou hast represented, and not the impostor Simnel, as thine enemies do not scruple openly to affirm?" [Pg 55]

"We are not without either the means or the power to prove and to assert our right," said the priest, rising. He drew a phial from his bosom.

"One drop of this precious elixir," continued he, "if it touch the form of yon changeling, will dissolve the charm: on the real person of the king it becomes harmless."

"Truly, 'tis a proof not to be gainsaid; but over-long i' the making, and too far for the fetching," replied the monk scornfully.

"'Tis bootless to attempt the salvation of those who will not believe: nevertheless, they shall

perish through their own devices, and be caught in their own snares."

Simon threw a threatening glance at the monk, which he received with a cool and undaunted aspect.

"Verily, your blood be on your own heads," cried Simon, with a loud voice, "and your reward in your right hand. Behold, thou scourner, and tremble; for your destruction cometh as a whirlwind, and he in whom you trust shall be as the stubble which the fire devoureth."

The enthusiast, as he spoke, struck a heavy blow on the floor with his foot, when there came a low rumbling sound like the roar of the wind through some subterraneous abyss, or the distant moan of the sea, driven on by the rushing tempest. The whole assembly stood aghast, save the king and the two disputants.

"Shall I strike once more?"

"Do as seemeth to thee good," said the monk deliberately; "but think not to intimidate me with thy fooleries."

"Then beware. I obey, but it is with awe and reluctance."

It is said that Simon's heart failed him as he gave the blow, or the effects would have been more terrific. But the castle shook as with an earthquake; even the incredulous monk looked amazed and confounded.

"Shall I repeat the stroke?" said Simon, when the disturbance had in some measure subsided. "But remember, I will not answer for the result. Only in cases of the greatest difficulty and trial it was that the duchess made me resort to so dangerous a resource." [Pg 56]

Most of his hearers besought him to desist. Simon yielded at once to their entreaties, and the uplifted foot fell softly on the floor. Soft and noiseless though it was, yet they saw a lurid mist roll upward; and a form, apparently of gigantic size, was faintly visible in the dark vapour, as it swept slowly through the apartment. Even Simon and his royal pupil showed symptoms of agitation and alarm.

The assembly was suddenly dissolved. The proud ambassador of a prouder prelate was astonished and bewildered, and hastily took his leave to report these occurrences to his master.

The whole of these proceedings, in all probability, were but the artful contrivance of an ambitious priest; and yet, connected as they were with a female whose well-known predilection for the occult sciences, and herself no mean adept therein, they assumed in those ages of credulity and superstition more the character of miraculous events than as happening in the common course and established order of nature. The alarm of the king, too, evidently at the appearance of the figure, caused some to say that it was the arch-enemy himself to whom these conspirators had sold themselves.

In the meantime, Dick, having been delivered over to the tormentors, was transferred to the prison or dungeon by the porch. He bore his mishap with wondrous fortitude and equanimity. Many a strange inquiry and silly speech did he make as he heard the sound of footsteps pass the door, through which a few chinks admitted a doubtful glimmer into his cell.

"I seay—hears to me, lad?" shouted he to a gruff Fleming, as he passed to and fro before the entrance to his prison-house; but the guard heeded him not. Dick listened; then, repeating his demand, muttered certain conventional expressions, not over-nice either in their form or application. He then began to sing, performing a series of *cantabile* movements in the most ludicrous manner possible; sometimes chanting a *Miserere* or an *Ave*, then breaking into some wild northern ballad or roundelay of unintelligible import. It was in the midst of a cadence which he was terminating with great earnestness and effect that the first deep rumble, the result of Simon's appeal to the truth and justice of their cause, interrupted Dick's vocal dispositions for a while; but when the second concussion took place, shaking the very stones in their sockets and [Pg 57] the hard floor under his feet, Dick ran whooping and bellowing round his den as though he had been possessed, laughing, amid the wild uproar, like some demon sporting fearlessly in the fierce turmoil of the troubled elements. The sentinel ran, terrified, from the door, and the whole camp and garrison were flying to arms, in fear and consternation. Dick, drumming with his fist, found the door yield to his efforts, and he marched forth without let or molestation. His besetting sin was curiosity, which oftentimes led him into difficulties and mishaps. Though just now a prisoner, and escaping by means little less than miraculous, yet, instead of making the best use of this opportunity for escape, he commenced a sort of prying adventure on his own account—a temptation he could not resist—by walking, or rather shuffling, into the guard-room, where his own peculiar crab-like sinuosities were particularly available. A number of soldiers were jabbering some unintelligible jargon, too much occupied with their own clamour to notice Dick's proceedings.

Through a confused jumble of warlike implements, intermingled with camp-kettles and cooking utensils, some steaming with savoury preparations for the evening's repast, and others nearly ready for the service, Dick insinuated himself, until he came to a little door in the corner, the entrance to a staircase communicating with the leads above. Through this door marched the incorrigible intruder—the sentry from the summit having just issued therefrom, fearful lest the castle should tumble about his ears. Dick's course was therefore unimpeded; and after sundry gyrations and stoppages, now and then, to peep through the loopholes, he emerged into broad

daylight on the roof of the tower. Here he paused for some time, entranced with the sudden change he beheld. The bustle and animation around and below him; the vessels, with their brave and gallant equipments, anchored in the bay;—all this amused Dick vastly for a while. But the most heart-ravishing delights end ultimately in satiety and disgust, greater, and probably more keenly felt, the more they have been relished and enjoyed. Dick began to feel listless and tired with his day's work. He laid his head upon a groove or niche in the battlements, and fell fast asleep. It seems the sentinel did not return; for Dick remained undisturbed, and when he awoke it was completely dark, save that there was a wan gleam from a dull watery moon, just dipping [Pg 58] into a stratum of dark clouds over the sea. His ideas, not over-lucid in broad daylight, would necessarily be still more hazy and obscure in his present situation. Unable to extricate them, he rubbed his eyes and made faces; yawned and groped about for his usual dormitory, in a little cell behind the kitchen at the abbey. But the vision of the moon—which, by reason of the confined glen wherein the abbey was built, rarely blessed the sight of a night-watcher—was a wondrous and puzzling appearance. He had some confused recollection that he had mounted a flight of steps, and that, by contrary motion, descending would be the next consequent movement. To this end he diligently sought an opening, and, naturally enough, took the first that presented itself. Creeping round the angle of a turret, he came to a flight of steps, which he descended. It was not long ere he perceived a faint light through an aperture or chink in the wall. He pressed against the side cautiously, when the wall itself appeared to give way, and he entered, through a narrow door, into a large room, lighted by a few turf embers, that flickered dimly on the hearth. A tester bed was near him, whose grim shadow concealed the objects under its huge canopy. It was the king's chamber; but so softly and cautiously was the entrance effected that Dick's footsteps did not awake him. He was heard, nevertheless, by the priest Simon, who, being concealed by the curtains on the other side, was not seen by the intruder. Dick stood still, on being addressed in a low and suppressed voice as follows:—

"Thou art early, Maurice; but thy despatches are ready. They are on the chair at thy right hand. Thou hast had thy instructions. Be speedy and discreet. On the third day, ere sunset, we look for thy return."

Dick put out his hand and laid hold of a sealed packet, which he took with becoming gravity, and luckily in silence.

"The same password, 'Warwick,' will convey thee hence; a boat is in waiting, and so God speed," said the priest.

Dick returned by the way he came, and descending the turret staircase, found a sentry standing at the outlet into the guard-chamber. It was dark, and Dick's person was not recognised. With a sort of blundering instinct he gave the word and passed on. This magic sound conveyed him safely through bars, bolts, and all other impediments. The drawbridge was lowered, and Dick, in [Pg 59] a little time, found himself again upon the beach, where a boat was waiting to carry him to the opposite shore.

"Who goes there?" inquired a gruff voice from the skiff.

"Why Dick—Warwick," cried the blundering knave, nigh mistaking his cue.

"Hang thee," said the ferryman, "what art' ganging o' this gait for? If I'd ken'd it waur thee 'at I'd orders to lie by in shore for, thou might ha' waited a wee for aught 'at I'd ha' brought."

"Hush!" said Dick, full of importance from his newly-acquired diplomatic functions; "I'm message to the king yonder."

"Ill betides him that has need o' thee," said the boatman, surlily;—"come, jump in. They'd need of a hawk, marry, to catch a buzzard."

Just as Dick was preparing to step in, a low, slight-made figure passed by whom the boatman immediately challenged.

"Warwick!" said he, and would have passed on.

"Nay, nay," said Dick; "I'm Warwick, ma lad; there's no twa on us; they gied me that name i' the castle yon, just now. I'se butter'd if thou shall ha't too." Dick was a powerful fellow, and he collared the other in a twinkling. "Thou'rt a rogue, I tell thee, an' about no good; an' I've orders from the governor yonder to tak' thee. Bear a hand, boatie, and in wi' him. There—there."

Spite of his struggles and imprecations, the stranger was impounded in the boat, and Dick soon forced him to be quiet. They pushed off, and in a short time gained the other shore. Here Dick, with that almost instinctive sagacity which sometimes accompanies a disturbed state of the intellects, would not allow his prisoner either to go back to the island or remain in the boatman's custody, but secured him to his own person, setting off at a brisk pace towards the abbey. In vain the stranger told him that he had business of great moment at the castle; that he was a page of the court, and on the eve of a secret mission from the priest, who was now waiting for him with the despatches. Dick resolved, with his usual cunning it seems, to conceal his possession of these documents, and, at the same time, to prevent the real messenger from revealing the deception by his appearance at the castle.

It was past midnight; yet the abbot and several of the brethren were still assembled in close [Pg 60] council. The importance of the events that were unfolding, and in which their own line of conduct was to be firmly marked out and adhered to, necessarily involving much deliberation and

discussion, had kept them beyond their usual hour of retirement.

A bell rung at the outer gate, and shortly afterwards one of the brotherhood in waiting announced that two men were without, craving audience, and that one of them, when asked his name, answered "Warwick."

"Ah!" said the bewildered abbot, with a sudden gleam of wonder and gladness on his countenance—"does he come hither? then is our deliverance nearer than we hoped for, even from the special favour and interference of Heaven. Admit them instantly."

But in a little while the messenger came back in great dudgeon to say that the knave who had demanded admittance with such a peremptory message was none other than Dick Empson, the errand boy to the abbey. "What can possess him," continued the monk, "I greatly marvel; for he still persists in demanding audience, saying that he is 'Warwick.' He refers to some message from the castle with which he is charged, but he refuses to deliver it save into the hands of the reverend abbot himself. Furthermore, he has brought a prisoner, he sayeth, and will have him taken into safe custody."

"Why, bring him hither," said the abbot; "there's little harm can come by it. He has a shrewd and quick apprehension at times, under that silly mask, which I have thought he wears but for purposes of knavery and concealment."

The monk folded his hands and retired. Returning, he was followed by Dick, who assumed a very grave and solemn demeanour before this august and reverend assembly.

"Why art thou abroad in these evil times, and at such improper hours too? To the meanest of our servants it is not permitted. Speak. Thine errand?"

The abbot looked towards the offender with an air of displeasure; but Dick, hitching up his hosen with prodigious fervour, gave a loud and expressive grunt.

"Dick is a fool," said he; "but he ne'er begged benison of an abbot, a bone from a starved dog, or a tithe-pig from a parson." [Pg 61]

"What is the message wherewith thou hast presumed upon our audience?"

"If ye rear your back to a door, see to it that it be greatly tyned, or ye may get a broken head for trust."

"And is this thy message, sirrah? Hark ye, let this fool be put i' the stocks, and well whipped."

"And who'll be the fule body then?" said Dick, leering. "I ken ye be readier wi' a taste o' the gyves than oatmeal bannocks; an' sae I'se gang awa' to my mither."

"Thou shalt go to the whipping-post first."

"Haud off," shouted Dick, who flung aside the person that would have seized him with the most consummate ease, at the same time placing himself in the attitude of defence; "haud off, as ye are true men," said he; "I'm cousin to the king, and I charge ye with high treason!"

"Enough," said the abbot; "we may pity his infirmity; but let him be sent to the mill for punishment. Now to business, which I fear me hath suffered by this untimely interruption."

"Happen you'll let me be one of the guests," said the incorrigible Dick, thrusting himself forward, even to the abbot's chair, which so discomposed his reverence that he cried in a loud and authoritative tone—

"Will none of ye rid me of this pestilence? By the beard of St Cuthbert, I will dispose of him, and that presently!"

Seizing him by the shoulder, the abbot would have thrust him forth, but Dick slipped dexterously aside. Taking out the packet, he broke open the seals, and immediately began to tumble about the contents, seating himself at the same time in the vacant chair of the abbot, with great solemnity, and an air of marvellous profundity in his demeanour. It was the work of a few moments only; a pause of silent astonishment ensued, when the abbot's eye, catching, from their appearance, something of the nature of the documents, he started forward with great eagerness and surprise. He snatched them from the hands of their crack-brained possessor, and soon all other matters were forgotten. The abbot in breathless haste ran through the contents. The assembly was all eye and ear, and some were absolutely paralysed with wonder. There was not an indifferent observer but Dick, who, with a chuckling laugh, rubbed his hands, and fidgeted about in the chair with a look of almost infantile delight. [Pg 62]

"I've done it brawly, ha'n't I? Dick wi' the lang neb! an' I'll hae two messes o' parritch an' sour milk, an' a barley-cake; I'm waesome hungry i' the waum here."

The abbot was too deeply involved in the subject before him to heed a craving appetite. Dick's stomach, however, was not to be silenced by diplomatic food; not having tasted anything for a considerable time, his wants immediately assumed the language of inquiry.

"Old dad, ha' ye any bones to pick? I'd like to have a lick at the trencher."

The abbot made signals that he should not be disturbed; but Dick was not to be put off or convinced by such unsubstantial arguments, and they were fain to rid themselves from further

annoyance by ordering him into the kitchen, where he was speedily absorbed in devouring a pan of browis, left there for morning use—the breakfast of the labourers about the abbey.

During this interval matters of the deepest importance were discussed, the contents of the packet having furnished abundant materials for deliberation. When the bearer was effectually replenished, he was led into the council-chamber again, where the abbot, in a tone of deep and serious thought, thus addressed him:—

"Who gave thee these despatches? It is plain they were not meant for our eyes; but Heaven, by the weakest instrument, often works the mightiest and most important events. Where and how came they into thy keeping?"

Dick looked cunningly round the apartment ere he replied, surveying the floor, the walls, and the ceiling; even the groinings of the roof did not escape a minute and accurate examination; whether to give time for the contriving of a suitable reply, or merely to gratify his own peevish humour, is of little consequence that we should inquire. After a long and anxious silence on the part of his auditors, he replied—

"I told ye when ye spiered afore." Another pause. The abbot was fearful that Dick's ideas, if not carefully handled, might get so entangled and confused that he would be unable to give any intelligible account of the matter. He therefore addressed him coaxingly as follows—

"Nay, nay, Dickon, thou hast not; answer me now, and thou shalt have the fat from the roast to-morrow, and a sop to season it withal." [Pg 63]

Dick leered again at this prospective dainty, as he replied—

"I tou'd ye, and ye heeded not, belike; and who's the fool now? Come, I'll set you my riddle again. If ye set your back to a door, see that it be tyned, or ye may get a broken head, and then"——

Here he paused, and looked round with a vacant eye; but they wisely forbore to interrupt the current of his ideas, hoping that ere long they might trickle into the right channel.

"There was a big room, and a bed in it," he continued, "and a priest, which the fule body has cheated. A fule's wit is worth more nor a wise man's folly."

A vague apprehension of the truth crossed the abbot's mind. Being now on the right scent, he no longer forbore to follow up the chase, but endeavoured to hasten the development by a gentle stimulating of his pace in the required direction.

"The priest yonder at the castle gave it thee?" said the abbot carelessly.

"Well, and if he did," replied Dick sharply, "he didna ken I was a-peeping into his chamber, as I've done many an unlucky time here in the abbey, and gotten a good licking for my pains."

"To whom was it sent?"

"Ask the bairn yon', that I ha' brought by th' scut o' th' neck. He woudna come bout tugging for."

"Was he the messenger?" asked Roger, the abbot's secretary and prime agent.

"Help thine ignorant face, father!—I was peeping about, you see, in the dark. The priest thought it waur the laddy yonder, a-comin' for his bag; so he gied it me, and tou'd me to carry it safe, but forgot to grease my pate forbye wi' the direction. I ken'd ye could read aught at the abbey here, and so ye may e'en run wi' it to the right owner for yere pains."

The cunning knave glossed over his treachery with this excuse; for he evidently knew better, and had a notion that he should serve his masters by this piece of diplomatic craft.

"Thou mayest depart, and ere morrow we will give thee a largess for thy dexterity."

Dick did not care to be long a-snuffing the chill air of the vaults and passages after his dismissal, but in a warm cell near the kitchen fire he was soon wrapped in the delights of oblivion. Such, however, was the importance of the documents he had so strangely intercepted, that a messenger was immediately despatched to London with a packet for the Privy Council. [Pg 64]

The same morning, with the early dawn, the abbot and his secretary were together in the cloisters. It was a fitting place and opportunity either for intrigue or devotion, and many a masterstroke of church policy has issued from those dim and sepulchral arches in "the Glen of the deadly Nightshade."

"Craft is needful, yea laudable," said the abbot, "when we would cope with worldly adversaries, unless we could work miracles for our deliverance. But since in these degenerate ages of the church they have, I fear me, ceased, we must e'en employ the means that Heaven has put into our hands: and if I mistake not, this envoy of ours will be a skilful craftsman for the purpose. Under that garb of silly speech there's a cunning and a wary spirit. Thou didst note well his ready-witted contrivance last night."

"Yea, and the skill too with which he compassed his expedients, and the ingenuity that prevented the disclosure of his treachery, in arresting the real messenger, and thus keeping them in the dark at the castle yonder until we have had time to countervail their plots. Could he be made to play his part according to our instructions, an agent like him were worth having. Besides he knows every chink and cranny about the castle, so that he could jump on them unawares."

"I am not much given to implicit credence in supernatural devices," said the abbot, "or visible manifestations of the arch-enemy; yet have our chronicles not scrupled to give their testimony to the truth of such appearances; and it is, moreover, plain, from the papers we have read, that the conspirators themselves believe in the existence of some supernatural presence amongst them, by which they are holpen."

He drew a billet from his bosom:—"I have kept this writing alone, as thou knowest," continued the abbot, "for our guidance. Listen again to the confessions of yonder rebellious and it may be credulous priest:—

"We are sure of success. The noble Margaret hath, by her wondrous art, together with the exercise of prayer and fasting, fenced us about as with a triple barrier, that no earthly might shall overcome. A power attends us that will magnify our cause, and lay our foes prostrate. 'Tis a mystery even to us, but a being appears unexpectedly at times, and by his counsels we are [Pg 65] guided. We know not whence he comes, nor whither he goes; but his path is with us, and his presence, though generally invisible, not without terror, even to ourselves."

"'Tis a strange delusion this, if it be one; for it is plain they have been ably counselled. Whilst they retain the castle their position may be reckoned as impregnable. It is a powerful support, on which they have placed the lever of their rebellion."

"And in what way purpose you to entice them from it? Methinks it were in vain to make the attempt, if guarded and counselled by supernatural advisers."

"I believe in no such improbabilities. Listen. We have heard, as thou knowest, that a strange figure, muffled in close garments, steals forth, at times, by the southern cliff into the passage there, under the foundations. This, doubtless, will be the emissary referred to in the despatch. 'Tis of a surety some person about the camp, concealed, in all likelihood, even from the leaders themselves; but employed by yonder ambitious restless woman, to control and direct their operations by a pretendedly miraculous and supernatural influence. It is the way in which the vulgar and the superstitious are most easily led. Fanaticism is a powerful engine wherewith to combine and wield the scattered energies of the multitude. Besides, their plans are well laid, as we have seen by the despatches, and many and powerful are the helps by which they hope to accomplish their designs. Should they succeed, our destruction is certain. Yet could we draw them forth from our fortress, we might look to the issue undisturbed. The king will then dispose of them, and few will dare to interrupt us in the quiet possession of our privileges."

"How purpose you to entice them forth?" again inquired the secretary.

"If properly tutored, our messenger from the kitchen, Dick Empson, will doubtless be a fitting agent for this deed. He must be well furnished with means and appliances against discovery."

"Leave him to my care. I can work with untoward tools, and make them useful too upon occasion."

"The prisoner, whom he so craftily seized and brought hither, is yet safe in the dungeon?"

"He is, my lord." [Pg 66]

"There he must lie, at any rate, until our plans be accomplished."

"We know not yet unto whom these communications were to have been conveyed."

"No; but doubtless, from their tenor, to some person of great note. It may have been to one even about the person of royalty itself, for this treason hath deep root, and its branches are widely spread throughout the land."

"Shall we put him to the question?"

"Nay, let present difficulties be brought to issue first; afterwards we shall be able to inquire, and with more certainty, as to the line of examination we should pursue."

The speakers separated, one to communicate with Dick Empson, and prepare him for the important functions he would have to perform; the other to his lodgings, where he might ruminate undisturbed on the events then about to transpire, and of which he hoped, finally, to reap the advantage.

It was past midnight, and the flickering embers threw a doubtful and uncertain gleam, at intervals, through the royal chamber, as it was then called, in the Castle of Fouldrey. All around was so still that the tramp of the sentry sounded like the tread of an armed host; sounds being magnified to a degree almost terrific, in the absence of others by which their intensity may be compared. Even the dash of the waves below the walls was heard in the deep and awful stillness of that portentous night.

Simon started from the pallet whereon he lay, beside the couch of his master, at times looking wildly round, as though just rousing from some unquiet slumber, expecting, yet fearful of alarm. He lay down again with a deep sigh, muttering an Ave or a Paternoster as he closed his eyes. Again he raised his head, and a dark figure stood before him.

"What wouldest thou?" inquired he, with great awe and reverence.

"Ye must depart!" said a voice, deep and sepulchral.

"Depart!" repeated the priest, with an expression of doubt and alarm.

"Yes," said the mysterious figure; "wherefore dost thou inquire?"

"Our only resting-place, our point of support, our sustenance and our refuge! Are we to leave this, and buffet with the winds and waves of misfortune, without a haven or a hiding-place? [Pg 67] Surely"——

"I have said it, and to-morrow ye must depart!"

"Whither?" inquired the priest; his opinion evidently controlled by the belief that a being of a superior nature was before him.

"Beyond the Abbey of Furness. Choose a fitting place for your encampment, and there abide until I come."

"It doth appear to my weak and unassisted sense," said the priest, in great agony of spirit, arising from his doubt and unbelief, "that it were the very utmost of madness and folly to give up this strong and almost impregnable position for one where our little army may be outflanked, and even surrounded by superior strength and numbers."

"Disobey, and thy life, and all that are with thee, shall be cut off!"

"And to-morrow! Ere we have news from our partisans in the south? Maurice will be here the third day at the latest."

"I have said it," replied the figure, peremptorily; when suddenly, and, as it were, formed immediately at his side, appeared another figure, similar to the first, assuming nearly the same attitude and manner, save that the latter looked something taller and more majestic.

"St Mary's grace and the abbot's, there 's twa of us!" cried the first figure, no less a personage than Dick Empson, who had been daring enough to adopt this disguise, according to the instructions he had received at the abbey. He uttered the words in a tone of thrilling and horrible apprehension, like the last shriek of the victim writhing in the fangs of his destroyer.

The terrible apparition cried out to his surreptitious representative—"Nay, miscreant; but one. This thou shalt know, and feel too. Fool and impostor, thy last hour is come!"

As he spake he seized on the miserable wretch in their presence, swinging him round by the waist like an infant, and bore him off, up the turret stairs, to the summit. Ere he disappeared he uttered this terrible denunciation—

"Your ruin is at hand. Flee! This fool hath betrayed ye, and I return no more!"

Darting up the staircase, the shrieks of Dick Empson were heard, as if rapidly ascending to the summit. A wilder and more desperate struggle—then a heavy plunge, and the waters closed over [Pg 68] their prey!

Dick's body was cast up by the waves, but the terrible unknown did not return; nor was he ever seen or heard of again, save, it is said, that when the priest received his death-wound, soon afterwards, on the field of battle, this awful form appeared to rise up before him, and with scoff and taunt upbraided him as the cause of his own ruin, and the downfall of his hopes.

The next day, from whatever cause, the troops began to move from their post. Ere the second evening, they had completely evacuated the castle and the island, which the wary Abbot of Furness soon turned to his own advantage, occupying the place with some of his armed vassals. The rebels, proved to be such by their ill success, took up a tolerably advantageous position upon Swartz Moor, in the neighbourhood of Ulverstone, where, waiting in vain for the expected reinforcements, they found themselves obliged to move forward, or be utterly without the means either of subsistence or defence. Sir Thomas Broughton, and a few more of little note, accompanied them to Stokeford, near Newark, where, engaging the king's forces on the 6th of June 1487, they maintained an obstinate and bloody engagement, disputed with more bravery than could have been expected from the inequality of their forces. The leaders were resolved to conquer or to perish, and their troops were animated with the same resolution. The Flemings, too, being veteran and experienced soldiers, kept the event long doubtful; and even the Irish, though ill-armed and almost defenceless, showed themselves not deficient in spirit and bravery. The king's victory was purchased with great loss, but was entirely decisive. Lincoln, Swartz, and, according to some accounts, Sir Thomas Broughton, perished on the field of battle, with four thousand of their followers. As Lovel was never more heard of, he was supposed to have undergone the same fate. Simnel, apart from his followers, was too contemptible to be an object either of apprehension or resentment on the part of the king. He was pardoned, and, it is said, made a scullion in the royal kitchen, from which menial office he was afterwards advanced to the rank of falconer.

Thus ended this strange rebellion, which only served to seat Henry more securely on his throne, extinguishing, finally, the intrigues and anticipations of the house of York.

View larger image

BEWSEY, NEAR WARRINGTO
Drawn by G. Pickering.
Engraved by Edw^{d} Finden.

A LEGEND OF BEWSEY.

"Yestreen I dreamed a doleful dream,
I fear there will be sorrow!
I dreamed I pu'd the heather green
With my true love on Yarrow.

"She kissed his cheek, she kaimed his hair,
She searched his wounds all thorough,
She kissed them till her lips grew red,
On the dowie howms of Yarrow."

Warrington is described by Camden as remarkable for its lords, surnamed Butler, or Boteler, of Bewsey. This name was derived from their office, Robert le Pincerna having discharged the duties of that station under Ranulph, Earl of Chester, in 1158, hence taking the surname. Almeric Butler, his descendant, having married Beatrice, daughter and co-heir of Matthew Villiers, Lord of Warrington, became possessed of the barony.

A MS. in the Bodleian Library gives the following statement, which, though manifestly incorrect in respect of names and particulars, may yet be relied on with regard to the main facts, corroborated by tradition, which still preserves the memory of this horrible event.

"Sir John Butler, Knt., was slaine in his bedde by the procurement of the Lord Standley, Sir Piers Leigh and Mister William Savage joining with him in that action (corrupting his servants), his porter setting a light in a window to give knowledge upon the water that was about his house at Bewsey (where your way to ... comes). They came over the moate in lether boats, and so to his chamber, where one of his servants, named Houlcrofte, was slaine, being his chamberlaine; the other basely betrayed his master;—they payed him a great reward, and so coming away with him, they hanged him at a tree in Bewsey Parke;—after this Sir John Butler's lady prosecuted those that slew her husband, and ... £20 for that suite, but, being married to Lord Grey, he made her suite voyd, for which reason she parted from her husband and came into Lancashire, saying, If my lord will not let me have my will of my husband's enemies, yet shall my body be buried by him; and she caused a tomb of alabaster to be made, where she lyeth on the ... hand of her husband, Sir John Butler.

It is further stated in the MS. that the occasion of this murder was because of a request from Earl Derby that Sir John would make one of the train which followed him on his going to meet King Henry VII., and which request was discourteously refused.

The following extract from Froissart may not be deemed uninteresting, as a record of one of our Lancashire worthies, Sir John Butler of Bewsey, relating how he was rescued from the hands of those who sought his life at the siege of Hennebon:—

"The Lord Lewis of Spain came one day into the tent of Lord Charles of Blois, where were numbers of the French nobility, and requested of him a boon for all the services done to him, and as a recompense for them the Lord Charles promised to grant whatever he should ask, as he held himself under many obligations to him. Upon which the Lord Lewis desired that the two prisoners, Sir John Boteler and Sir Mw. Trelawney, who were in prison of the Castle of Faouet, might be sent for, and delivered up to him, to do with them as should please him best.

"'This is the boon I ask, for they have discomfited, pursued, and wounded me; have also slain the Lord Alphonso, my nephew, and I have no other way to be revenged on them than to have them beheaded in sight of their friends who are shut up in Hennebon.'

"The Lord Charles was much amazed at this request, and replied, 'I will certainly give you the prisoners since you have asked for them; but you will be very cruel, and much to blame, if you put to death two such valiant men; and our enemies will have an equal right to do the same to any of our friends whom they may capture, for we are not clear what may happen to any one of us every day. I therefore entreat, dear sir and sweet cousin, that you would be better advised.'

"Lord Lewis said that if he did not keep his promise he would quit the army, and never serve or love him as long as he lived.

"When the Lord Charles saw that he must comply, he sent off messengers to the Castle of Faouet, who returned with the two prisoners, and carried them to the tent of Lord Charles.

"Neither tears nor entreaties could prevail on Lord Lewis to desist from his purpose of having them beheaded after dinner, so much was he enraged against them.

"All the conversation, and everything that passed between the Lord Charles and Lord Lewis, relative to these two prisoners, was told to Sir Walter Manny and Sir Amauri de Clisson, by friends and spies, who represented the danger in which the two knights were. They bethought themselves what was best to be done, but after considering schemes, could fix on none. At last Sir Walter said, 'Gentlemen, it would do us great honour if we could rescue these two knights. If we should adventure it and should fail, King Edward would himself be obliged to us, and all wise men who may hear of it in times to come will thank us, and say we had done our duty. I will tell you my plan, and you are able to undertake it, for I think we are bound to risk our lives in [Pg 71] endeavouring to save those of two such gallant knights. I propose, therefore, if it be agreeable to you, that we arm immediately, and form ourselves into two divisions,—one shall set off, as soon after dinner as possible, by this gate, and draw up near the ditch, to skirmish with and alarm the enemy, who, you may believe, will soon muster to that part, and, if you please, you, Sir Amauri de Clisson, shall have the command of it, and shall take with you 1000 good archers to make those that may come to you retreat back again, and 300 men-at-arms. I will have with me 100 of my companions, and 500 archers, and will sally out at the postern on the opposite side, privately, and coming behind them will fall upon their camp, which we shall find unguarded. I will take with me those who are acquainted with the road to Lord Charles's tent, where the two prisoners are, and will make for that part of the camp. I can assure you that I and my companions will do everything in our power to bring back in safety these two knights, if it please God.'

"This proposal was agreeable to all, and they directly separated to arm and prepare themselves. About an hour after dinner Sir Amauri and his party set off; and having had the principal gate of Hennebon opened for them, which led to the road that went straight to the army of Lord Charles, they rushed forward, making great cries and noise, to the tents and huts, which they cut down, and killed all that came in their way. The enemy was much alarmed, and putting themselves in motion, got armed as quickly as possible, and advanced towards the English and Bretons, who received them very warmly. The skirmish was sharp, and many on each side were slain.

"When Sir Amauri perceived that almost the whole of the army was in motion and drawn out, he retreated very handsomely, fighting all the time, to the barriers of the town, when he suddenly halted: then the archers, who had been posted on each side of the ditch beforehand, made such good use of their bows that the engagement was very hot, and all the army of the enemy ran thither except the servants.

"During this time Sir Walter Manny, with his company, issued out privily by the postern, and, making a circuit, came upon the rear of the enemy's camp. They were not perceived by any one, for all were gone to the skirmish upon the ditch. Sir Walter made straight for the tent of Lord Charles, where he found the two knights, Sir John Boteler and Sir Mw. Trelawney, whom he immediately mounted on two coursers which he had ordered to be brought for them, and retiring as fast as possible, entered Hennebon by the same way as he sallied forth. The Countess of Montfort came to see them, and received them with great joy."—*Froissart*, by Col. Johnes, vol. ii. p. 9.

The Butlers continued to occupy Bewsey till the year 1603, when Edward Butler sold this estate to the Irelands of Hale. It then passed from the Irelands to the Athertons, and is now enjoyed by Thomas Powis, Lord Lilford, of Lilford, Northamptonshire, in virtue of the marriage of his father, in the year 1797, with Henrietta Maria, [Pg 72] daughter and heiress of Robert Vernon Atherton, of Atherton Hall, Esq.—*Vide* Baines's *Lancashire*.

Oh listen to my roundelay,
Oh listen a while to me,
And I'll tell ye of a deadly feud
That fell out in the north countrie.

The summer leaves were fresh and green
When Earl Derby forth would ride;
For King Henry and his company
To Lathom briskly hied.

A bridge he had builded fair and strong,
With wondrous cost and pain,
O'er Mersey's stream, by Warrington,
For to meet that royal train.[6]

And lord, and knight, and baron bold,
That dwelt in this fair countrie,
With the Derby train a-riding were,
Save Sir John of proud Bewsey.

"Now foul befa' that scornfu' knight,"
Cried Stanley in his pride;
"For he hath my just and honest suit
Discourteously denied:

"Such hatred of our high estate,
This traitor sore shall rue;
I'll be avenged, or this good sword
Shall rot the scabbard through!"

He swore a furious oath, I trow,
And clenched his iron hand,
As he rode forth to meet his son,
The monarch of merry England.

The summer leaves were over and gone,
But the ivy and yew were green,
When to Bewsey hall came a jovial crew [Pg 73]
On the merry Christmas e'en.

It was mirth and feasting in hall and bower
On that blessed and holy tide,
But ere the morning light arose,
There was darkness on all their pride!

Dark wonne the night, and the revellers gay
From the laughing halls are gone;
The clock from the turret, old and grey,
With solemn tongue tolled one.

The blast was moaning down the glen,
Through the pitch-like gloom it came,
Like a spirit borne upon demon wings
To the pit of gnawing flame!

But Sir John was at rest, with his lady love,
In a pleasant sleep they lay;
Nor felt the sooning, shuddering wind
Round the grim, wide welkin play.

Their little babe, unconscious now,
Lay slumbering hard by;
And he smiled as the loud, loud tempest rocked
His cradle wondrously.

There comes a gleam on the billowy moat
Like a death-light on its wave,
It streams from the ivied lattice, where
Sits a grim false-hearted knave.

He saw it on the soft white snow,
And across the moat it passed:
"'Tis well," said that false and grim porter,
And a fearsome look he cast.

A look he cast so wild and grim,
And he uttered a deadly vow;
"For thy dool and thy doom this light shall be,
Thy foes are hastening now!
[Pg 74]

"Sleep on, sleep on, thou art weary, Sir John;
Thy last sleep shall it be:
Sleep on, sleep on, with thy next good sleep
Thou shalt rest eternally!"

The traitor watched the waters dance,
In the taper's treacherous gleam;
And they hissed, and they rose, by the tempest tossed
Through that pale and lonely beam.

What hideous thing comes swift and dark
Athwart that flickering wave?
A spectre boat there seems to glide,
With many an uplift glaive.

The bolts are unslid by that grim porter,
And a gladsome man was he,
When three foemen fierce strode up the stair,
All trim and cautiously.

"Now who be ye," cried the chamberlain,
"That come with stealth and staur?"
"We come to bid thy lord good den,
So open to us the door."

"Ere I will open to thieves like ye,
My limbs ye shall hew and hack.
Awake, Sir John! awake and flee;
These blood-hounds are on thy track!"

"We'll stop thy crowing, pretty bird!
Now flutter thy wings again:"
With that they laid him a ghastly corpse,
And the red blood ran amain.

"Oh help!" the lady shrieked aloud;
"Arise, Sir John, and flee;
Oh heard you not yon cry of pain
Like some mortal agony?"

"I hear it not," Sir John replied,
For his sleep was wondrous strong;
"But see yon flashing weapons, sure
To foemen they belong!"

[Pg 75]

The knight from his bed leaped forth to flee,
But they've pierced his body through;
And with wicked hands, and weapons keen,
Him piteously they slew!

But that porter grim, strict watch he kept,
Beside the stair sate he;
When lo! comes tripping down a page,
With a basket defterly.

"Now whither away, thou little page,
Now whither away so fast?"
"They have slain Sir John," said the little page,
"And his head in this wicker cast."

"And whither goest thou with that grisly head?"
Cried the grim porter again,
"To Warrington Bridge they bade me run,
And set it up amain."

"There may it hang," cried that loathly knave,
"And grin till its teeth be dry;
While every day with jeer and taunt
Will I mock it till I die!"

The porter opened the wicket straight,
And the messenger went his way,
For he little guessed of the head that now
In that basket of wicker lay.

"We've killed the bird, but where's the egg?"
Then cried those ruffians three.
"Where is thy child?" The lady moaned,
But never a word spake she.

But, swift as an arrow, to his bed
The lady in terror sprung;
When, oh! a sorrowful dame was she,
And her hands she madly wrung.

"The babe is gone! Oh, spare my child,
And strike my heart in twain!"
To those ruthless men the lady knelt,
But her piteous suit was vain.

[Pg 76]

"Traitor!" they cried to that grim porter,
"Whom hast thou suffered forth?
If thou to us art false, good lack,
Thy life is little worth!"

"There's nought gone forth from this wicket yet,"
Said that grim and grisly knave,
"But a little foot-page, with his master's head,
That ye to his charges gave."

"Thou liest, thou grim and fause traitor!"
Cried out those murderers three;
"The head is on his carcase yet,
As thou mayest plainly see!"

When the lady heard this angry speech,
Her heart waxed wondrous fain;
For she knew the page was a trusty child,
And her babe in his arms had lain.

"Where is the gowd?" said that grim porter,
"The gowd ye sware unto me?"
"We'll give thee all thine hire," said they;
"We play not false like thee!"

They counted down the red, red gold,
And the porter laughed outright:
"Now we have paid thy service well,
For thy master's blood this night;

"For thy master's blood thou hast betrayed,
We've paid thee thy desire;
But for thy treachery unto us,
Thou hast not had thine hire."

They've ta'en a cord, both stiff and strong,
And they sought a goodly tree;
And from its boughs the traitor swung;—
So hang all knaves like he!

But the lady found her pretty babe;—
Ere the morning light was nigh,

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To the hermit's cell[7] that little page
Had borne him craftily.

And the mass was said, and the requiem sung,
And the priests, with book and stole,
The body bore to its cold still bed,
"Gramercy on his soul!"

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View larger image

THE BLESSING.

"I had most need of blessing, and amen
Stuck in my throat."

—*Macbeth.*

We have been unable to identify the spot where the occurrence took place, the subject of the following ballad. It is in all likelihood one of those wild and monkish legends that may be fitted or applied to any situation, according to the whim of the narrator. Many such legends, though the number is lessening daily, are still preserved, and an amusing volume might be made of these unappropriated wanderers that possess neither a local habitation nor a name.

The chase was done—the feast was begun,
When the baron sat proudly by;
And the revelry rode on the clamouring wind,
That swept through the hurtling sky.

No lordly guest that feast had blessed,
No solemn prayer was said;
But with ravenous hands, unthankfully,
They brake their daily bread.

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The chase was done—the feast was begun,
When a palmer sat in that hall;
Yet his pale dim eye from its rest ne'er rose,
To gaze on that festival!

The crackling blaze on his wan cheek plays,
And athwart his gloomy brow;
While his hands are spread to the rising flame,
And his feet to the embers' glow.

For the blast was chill, o'er the mist-covered hill,
And the palmer's limbs were old;
And weary the way his feet had trod,
Since the matin-bell had tolled.

The baron spake—"This morsel take,
And yon pilgrim greet from me;
Tell him we may not forget to share
The joys of our revelry!"

Then thus began that holy man,
As he lowly bent his knee—
"I may not taste of the meat unblessed;
I would 'twere so with thee."

"Then mumble thy charm o'er the embers warm,"
That baron proud replied;
"No boon from my hand shalt thou receive,
Nor foaming cup from my side."

The palmer bowed, the giddy crowd,
With mirth and unseemly jest,
His meekness taunt, when he answered not,
The gibe of each courtly guest.

The minstrel sang, the clarions rang,
And the baron sat proudly there,
And louder the revelry rode on the wind,
That swept through the hurtling air.

"What tidings for me from the east countrie?
What news from the Paynim land?"
As the baron spake, his goblet bright
He raised in his outstretched hand.

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"There's tidings for thee from the east countrie,"
The pilgrim straight replied;
"A mighty chief, at a mighty feast,
There sat in all his pride."

"'Twas wondrous well;—and what befell
This chief at his lordly feast?"
"A goblet was filled with the red grape's blood,
And he pledged each rising guest."

"'Tis gladsome news;—but did they refuse
The pledge they loved so well?"
"Oh no; for each cup mantling forth to the brim,
Did the harp and the clarion tell."

"And where didst thou such tidings know?"
"A pilgrim told it me:
And he sat on the hearth at this unblessed feast,
Where he shared not the revelry,

"For ere was quaffed each sparkling draught,
Or the foam from the ruby wine,
He dashed the cup from that baron's lip,
As now I do from thine!"

And the palmer passed by, as each goblet on high
Was waved at their chief's command,
But ere the cup had touched his lip,
It was dashed from his lifted hand!

"A boon from thee, on my bended knee,"
The palmer boldly cried;
"Seize first with speed yon traitor page
Who bore the cup to thy side."

And the page they have bound on the cold, cold ground,
And his treason he hath confessed;
He had poisoned the cup with one subtle drop,
Which he drew from his crimson vest.

And the palmer grey his treachery
Had watched, when all beside
In the feast were gaily revelling,
Nor danger there espied.

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"Say where didst thou the treason know?"
The troubled chieftain cried;
"I had blessed thy bread, I had blessed thy bowl,"
The hoary man replied.

"And the blessing was given—the boon from heaven;
Or this night from thy lordly bed
Thy spirit had passed with the shuddering blast,
With the loud, shrill shriek of the dead!

"Oh! never taste the meat unblessed;
Remember the palmer grey;
Though he wander afar from thy castle gate,
Yet forget not thy feast to-day."

And the pilgrim is gone from that gate alone,
When prayer and vow were said;
And the blessing thenceforth from that house was heard
Ere they broke their daily bread.

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View larger image

THE DULE UPO' DUN.

"Wae, wae is me, on soul an' body,
Old Hornie has lifted his paw, man;
An' the carle will come, an' gallop me hame,
An' I maun gae pipe in his ha', man!"

—Old Ballad.

For the tradition upon which the following tale is founded, the author is indebted to *The Kaleidoscope*, an interesting weekly miscellany, published by Messrs Smith and Son at Liverpool.

Barely three miles from Clitheroe, as you enter a small village on the right of the high road to Gisburne, stands a public-house, having for its sign the title of our story. On it is depicted his Satanic majesty, curiously mounted upon a scraggy dun horse, without saddle, bridle, of any sort of equipments whatsoever—the terrified steed being off and away at full gallop from the door, where a small hilarious tailor, with shears and measures, appears to view the departure of him of the cloven foot with anything but grief or disapprobation.

The house itself is one of those ancient, gabled, black and white edifices, now fast disappearing under the giant march of improvement, which tramples down alike the palace and the cottage, [Pg 83] the peasant's hut and the patrician's dwelling. Many windows, of little lozenge-shaped panes set in lead, might be seen here in all the various stages of renovation and decay: some stuffed with clouts, parti-coloured and various; others, where the work of devastation had been more complete, were wholly darkened by brick-bats, coble-stones, and many other ingenious substitutes and expedients to keep out the weather.

But our tale hath a particular bearing to other and more terrific days—"the olden time," so fruitful in marvels and extravagances—the very poetry of the black art; when Satan communed visibly and audibly with the children of men—thanks to the invokers of relics and the tellers of beads—and was so familiar and reasonable withal, as to argue and persuade men touching the propriety of submitting themselves to him, as rational and intelligent creatures; and even was silly enough, at times, to suffer himself to be outwitted by the greater sagacity and address of his intended victims. For proof, we cite the following veracious narrative, which bears within it every internal mark of truth, and matter for grave and serious reflection.

"Little Mike," or more properly Michael Waddington, was a merry tailor of some note in his day, who formerly, that is to say, some eight or nine score years ago—dwelt in this very tenement, where he followed his profession, except when enticed by the smell of good liquor to the village alehouse—the detriment, and even ruin, of many a goodly piece of raiment, which at times he clipped and shaped in such wise as redounded but little to the credit of either wearer or artificer. Mike was more alive to a merry troll and graceless story, in the kitchen of mine host "at the inn," than to the detail of his own shopboard, with the implements of his craft about him, making and mending the oddly assorted adjuncts of the village churls. Such was his liking for pastime and good company that the greater part of his earnings went through the tapster's melting pot; and grieved are we, as veritable chroniclers, to state that it was not until even credit failed him, that he settled to work for another supply of the elixir vitæ—the pabulum of his being. It may be supposed that matters went on but indifferently at home, where want and poverty had left indelible traces of their presence. Matty Waddington, his spouse, would have had hard work to make both ends meet had she not been able to scrape together a few pence and broken victuals [Pg 84] by selling firewood, and helping her neighbours with any extra work that was going forward. Yet, in general, she bore all her troubles and privations with great patience and good humour—at any rate in the presence of her husband, who, though an idler and a spendthrift, was, to say the truth, not viciously disposed towards her, like many beastly sots, but, on the contrary, he usually behaved with great deference and kindness to his unfortunate helpmate in all things but that of yielding to his besetting sin; having an unquenchable thirst for good liquor, which all his resolutions and vows of amendment could not withstand.

One evening the little hero of our story was at his usual pastime in the public-house, but his "cup was run low," and his credit still lower. In fact, both cash and credit were finished; his liquor was within a short pull from the bottom; and he sat ruminating on the doleful emergencies to which he was subject, and the horrible spectres that would assail him on the morrow, in the shape of sundry riven doublets and hose, beside rents and repairs innumerable, which had been accumulating for some weeks, to the no small inconvenience and exposure of their owners and former occupiers.

"I wish I were the squire's footman, or e'en his errand-boy, and could get a sup of good liquor without riving and tuggin' for't," thought he aloud. Scarce were the words uttered, when there came a mighty civil stranger into the company, consisting of village professors of the arts, such as the barber, the blacksmith, and the bell-ringer, together with our knight of the iron thimble. The new-comer was dressed in a respectable suit of black; a wig of the same colour adorned his wide and ample head, which was again surmounted by a peaked hat, having a band and buckle above its brim, and a black rose in front. He looked an elderly and well-ordered gentleman, mighty spruce, and full of courtesy; and his cane was black as ebony, with a yellow knob that glittered like gold. He had a huge beaked nose, and a little black ferrety eye, which almost pierced what it gazed upon. Every one made way for the stranger, who sat down, not in the full glare of the fire to be sure, but rather on one side, so that he might have a distinct view of the company, without being himself subject to any scrutinising observances. [Pg 85]

"Pleasant night abroad," said the new-comer.

"Pleasanter within though," responded every thought.

"It's moonlight, I reckon," said Mike, who was just meditating over his last draught, and his consequent departure from this bibacious paradise.

"Nay, friend," said the black gentleman, "but the stars shine out rarely; and the snow lies so bright and crisp like, ye may see everything afore ye as plain as Pendle. Landlord, bring me a cup of the best; and put a little on the fire to warm, with some sugar, for it's as cold as a raw turnip to one's stomach."

"Humph!" said mine host, testily; "it's a good-for-nothin' belly that'll not warm cold ale."

"It's good-for-nothin' ale, Giles, thee means, that'll not warm a cowd belly," said one of the wits of the party, a jolly young blacksmith, an especial favourite amongst the lasses and good fellows of the neighbourhood.

"Nay, the dickens!" said another; "Giles Chatburn's ale would warm the seat of old cloven-foot himsel';" and with that there were roars of laughing, in which, however, the stranger did not participate. Mike wondered that so good a joke should not have its due effect upon him; and many other notable things were said and done which we have neither space nor inclination to record, but the stranger still maintained his grave and unaccountable demeanour. Mike ever and anon cast a glance towards him, and he always observed that the stranger's eye was fixed upon his own. A dark, bright, burning eye, such as made the recreant tailor immediately look aside, for he could not endure its brightness.

Mike began to grow restless and uncomfortable. He changed his place, but the glance of the stranger followed him. It was like the gaze of a portrait, which, in whatever situation the beholder may be placed, is always turned towards him. It may readily be supposed that Michael Waddington, though not averse to being looked at in the ordinary way, did not relish this continued and searching sort of disposition on the part of the gentleman in black. Several times he was on the point of speaking, but his heart always failed him as the word reached his lip.

His liquor was now done, but he was not loth to depart as beforetime; for at any rate, he should be quit of the annoyance he had so long endured. He arose with less regret assuredly than usual; [Pg 86] and just as he was passing the doorway he cast a look round over his shoulder, and beheld the same fixed, unflinching eye gazing on him. He jumped hastily over the threshold, and was immediately on his road home. He had not been gone more than a few minutes when he heard a sharp footstep on the crisp snow behind him. Turning round, he saw the dark tall peak of the stranger's hat, looking tenfold darker, almost preternaturally black, on the white background, as he approached. Mike felt his hair bristling through terror. His knees, usually bent somewhat inwards, now fairly smote together, so that he could not accelerate his pace, and the stranger was quickly at his side.

"Thou art travelling homewards, I trow," said he of the black peak. Mike made some barely intelligible reply. "I know it," returned the other. "But why art thou leaving so soon?"

"My money's done, an' credit too, for that matter," tardily replied the tailor.

"And whose fault's that?" returned his companion. "Thou mayest have riches, and everything else, if thou wilt be advised by me."

Mike stared, as well he might, at the dark figure by his side. The idea of wealth without labour was perfectly new to him, and he ventured to ask how this very desirable object might be accomplished.

"Listen. Thou art a poor miserable wretch, and canst hardly earn a livelihood with all thy toil. Is't not a pleasant thing and a desirable, however procured, to obtain wealth at will, and every happiness and delight that man can enjoy?"

Michael's thirsty lips watered at the prospect, notwithstanding his dread of the black gentleman at his elbow.

"I was once poor and wretched as thou. But I grew wiser, and—unlimited wealth is now at my command."

There was an awful pause; the stranger apparently wishful to know the effect of this mysterious communication. The liquorish tailor listened greedily, expecting to hear of the means whereby his condition would be so wonderfully amended.

"Hast thou never heard of those who have been helped by the powers of darkness to"——

"Save us, merci"——

"Hold!" said the peremptory stranger, seizing Mike rudely by the wrist. "Another such outcry, and I will leave thee to thy seams and patches; to starve, or linger on, as best thou mayst." [Pg 87]

Michael promised obedience, and his companion continued—

"There is no such great harm or wickedness in it as people suppose. Quite an ordinary sort of proceeding, I assure thee; and such an one as thou mayst accomplish in a few minutes, with little trouble or inconvenience."

"Tell me the wondrous secret," said Michael eagerly, who, in the glowing prospect thus opened out to him, felt all fear of his companion giving way.

"Well, then; thou mayst say two aves, the creed, and thy paternoster backwards thrice, and call upon the invisible demon to appear, when he will tell thee what thou shalt do."

Michael felt a strange thrill come over him at these fearful words. He looked at his companion, but saw not anything more notable than the high-peaked hat, and the huge beaked nose, as before. By this time they were close upon his own threshold, and Michael was just debating within himself upon the propriety of asking his companion to enter, when his deliberations were cut short by the other saying he had business of importance a little farther; and with that he bade him good night.

Michael spent the remaining hours of darkness in tossing and rumination; but in the end the gratifying alternative between wealth and poverty brought his deliberations to a close. He determined to follow the advice and directions of the stranger. There could be no harm in it. He only intended to inquire how such wealth might be possessed; but if in any way diabolical or wicked, he would not need to have anything further to do in the matter. Thus reasoning, and thus predetermined how to act, our self-deluded stitcher of seams bent his way, on the following forenoon, to a solitary place near the river, where he intended to perform the mighty incantation. Yet, when he tried to begin, his stomach felt wondrous heavy and oppressed. He trembled from head to foot, and sat down for some time to recruit his courage. The words of the stranger emboldened him.

"'Quite an ordinary business,'" said he; and Mike went to work with his lesson, which he had been conning as he went. Scarcely was the last word of this impious incantation uttered, when a roaring clap of thunder burst above him, and the arch enemy of mankind stood before the panic-stricken tailor. [Pg 88]

"Why hast thou summoned me hither?" said the infernal monarch, in a voice like the rushing wind or the roar of the coming tempest. But Michael could not speak before the fiend.

"Answer me—and truly," said the demon. This miserable fraction of a man now fell on his knees, and in a most piteous accent exclaimed—

"Oh! oh! mercy. I did not—I—want—nothing!"

"Base, audacious slave! Thou art telling me an untruth, and thou knowest it. Show me thy business instantly, or I will carry thee off to my dominions without further ado."

At this threat the miserable mortal prostrated himself, a tardy confession being wrung from him.

"Oh! pardon. Thou knowest my poverty and my distress. I want riches, and—and"—

"Good!" said the demon, with a horrible smile. "'Tis what ye are ever hankering after. Every child of Adam doth cry with insatiate thirst, 'Give—give!' But hark thee! 'tis thine own fault if thou art not rich, and that speedily. I will grant thee *three* wishes: use them as thou wilt."

Now the rogue was glad when he heard this gracious speech, and in the fulness of his joy exclaimed—

"Bodikins! but I know what my first wish will be; and I'se not want other two."

"How knowest thou that?" said the demon, with a look of contumely and scorn so wild and withering that Michael started back in great terror.

"Before this favour is granted though," continued the fiend, "there is a small matter by way of preliminary to be settled."

"What is that?" inquired the trembling novice with increasing disquietude and alarm.

"A contract must be signed, and delivered too."

"A contract! Dear me; and for what?"

"For form's sake merely; no more, I do assure thee—a slight acknowledgment for the vast benefits I am bound to confer. To wit, that at the end of seven years thou wilt bear me company."

"Me!" cried the terrified wretch; "nay, then, keep thy gifts to thyself; I'll none o' them on this condition. " [Pg 89]

"Wretched fool!" roared the infuriate fiend; at the sound of which the culprit fairly tumbled backward. "Sign this contract, or thou shalt accompany me instantly. Ay, this very minute: for know, that every one who calls on me is delivered into my power; and think thyself well dealt with when I offer thee an alternative. Thou hast the chance of wealth, honour, and prosperity if thou sign this bond. If thou do not, I will have thee whether or no—that's all. What sayest thou?" and the apostate angel spread forth his dark wings, and seemed as though ready to pounce upon his unresisting victim.

In a twinkling, Michael decided that it would be much better to sign the bond and have the possession of riches, with seven years to enjoy them in, than be dragged off to the burning pit immediately, without any previous enjoyment whatsoever. Besides, in that seven years who knew what might turn up in his favour.

"I consent," said he; and the arch-enemy produced his bond. A drop of blood, squeezed from the hand of his victim, was the medium of this fearful transfer; and instantly on its execution another

clap of thunder announced the departure of Satan with the price of another soul in his grasp.

Michael was now alone. He could hardly persuade himself that he had not been dreaming. He looked at his finger, where a slight wound was still visible, from which a drop of blood still hung —a terrible confirmation of his fears.

Returning home, sad and solitary, he attempted to mount to his usual place, but even this exertion was more than he could accomplish. One black and burning thought tormented him, and he sat down by his own cheerless hearth, more cheerless than he had ever felt before. Matty was preparing dinner; but it was a meagre and homely fare—a little oaten bread, and one spare collop which had been given her by a neighbour. Scanty as was the meal, it was better than the humble viands which sometimes supplied their board. Matty knew not the real cause of her husband's dumps, supposing it to be the usual workings of remorse, if not repentance, to which Mike was subject whenever his pocket was empty and the burning spark in his throat unquenched. She invited him to partake, but he could not eat. He sat with eyes half-shut, fixed on the perishing embers, and replied not to the remonstrances of his dame. [Pg 90]

"Why, Mike, I say," cried the kind-hearted woman, "what ails thee? Cheer up, man, and finish thy collop. Thou mayest fret about it as thou likes, but thou cannot undo a bad stitch by wishing. If it will make thee better for time to come, though, I'll not grumble. Come, come, goodman, if one collop winna content thee, I wish we'd two, that's all."

Scarce was the last word from her lips, when lo! a savoury and smoking rasher was laid on the table by some invisible hand. Michael was roused from his lethargy by this unlucky wish. Darting a terrified look on the morsel, he cried out—

"Woman, woman! what hast thou done? I wish thou wert far enough for thy pains."

Immediately she disappeared—whisked off by the same invisible hands; but whither he could not tell.

"Oh me—oh me!" cried the afflicted tailor at this double mishap; "what shall I do now? I shall assuredly starve; and yet I've one wish left. Humph, I'd better be wary in making it though. Best take time to consider, lest I throw this needlessly after the rest."

Mike could not make up his mind as to what he would have, nor indeed could he bend down his thoughts steadfastly to any subject. He was in a continual flutter. His brain was in a whirl. He looked round for some relief. The house was in sad disorder, and he thought on his absent wife.

"Dear me," thought he, as he fetched a scrap of wood to the fire, "I wish Matty were here;" and his wife was immediately at his side.

Mike, now grown desperate, revealed to her the fearful cause of these disasters, and the utter failure of any beneficial results from the three wishes.

"We be just as we were," said he, "save that I've sold mysel', body and soul, to the Evil One!"

Here he began to weep and lament very sore; and his wife was so much overcome at the recital that she was nigh speechless through the anguish she endured.

At length her tears began to lose their bitterness.

"It's no use greetin' at this gait," said she; "hie thee to the parson, Michael, an' see if he canna quit thee o' this bond."

"Verily," said the poor tailor, with a piteous sigh, "that would be leapin' out o' t' gutter into t' ditch. I should be burnt for a he-witch an' a limb o' the de'il. I've yet seven years' respite from [Pg 91] torment, an' that would be to throw even these precious morsels away. E'en let's tarry as we are, an' make the best on't. This comes of idleness and drink; but if ever I put foot across Giles's doorstone again, I wish—nay, it's no use wishing now, I've had enough o' sich thriftless work for a bit. But I'll be sober an' mind my work, and spend nothing idly, an' who knows but some plan or another may be hit on to escape."

Now his disconsolate wife was much rejoiced at this determination, and could not help saying—

"Who knows? perhaps it was for good, Mike, that this distress happened thee."

He shook his head; but his resolution was made, and he adhered to it in spite of the sneers and temptations of his former associates, who often tried to lead him on to the same vicious courses again. He had received a warning that he never forgot. The memory of it stuck to him night and day; and he would as soon have thought of thrusting his hand into the glowing coals as have entered Giles Chatburn's hovel again. He was truly an altered man, but his wife was the first to feel benefited by the change. He had plenty of work, and money came in apace. The house was cleaned and garnished. There was abundance of victuals, and a jug of their own brewing. He rarely stirred out but to wait upon his customers, and then he came home as soon as the job was completed. But there was an appearance of melancholy and dejection continually about him. He looked wan and dispirited. Time was rapidly passing by, and the last of the seven years was now ebbing away.

One night, as they were sitting a while after supper, he fetched a heavy sigh.

"It is but a short time I have to live," said he.

"Nay," said the dame, let's hope that Heaven will not let thee fall a prey to His enemy and ours. Besides thou hast gotten nothing from him for thy bargain. It cannot be expected, therefore, that the old deceiver can claim any recompense."

Mike shook his head, and looked incredulous.

"Sure as there's wind i' Meg's entry he'll come for his own. I've been considering that I'd best go to the old man that lives in the cave by Sally. He'll maybe give me some advice how to act when the time comes."

This suggestion met with his wife's approval; and the next morning our disconsolate hero was on his way to the "hermit" of the cave. The holy recluse had been long famed through that region for his kindness and attention to the wants of those who sought help and counsel; and Michael thought no harm could come of it, even though he might be unable to circumvent the designs of the arch-enemy. [Pg 92]

His dwelling was by the river-side, in a little hut, the back of which, the goodman's oratory, was scooped out in a circular form from the bank.

"Holy father," said the tailor, on entering the cell, "I crave thy benison."

The anchorite, who was on his knees before a crucifix, did not speak until he had finished his devotions. He then rose and pronounced the usual benedictory welcome.

"So far all is well," thought Mike; "I've got one blow at the devil anyhow."

The holy father was very old, but he was hale and active. His white silky beard almost touched his girdle, and his sharp though rheumy eyes peered inquisitively on the person of his guest.

"What is thine errand, my son?" inquired the recluse.

"I have fallen into a grievous temptation, and would crave your succour and advice."

"Heaven wills it oft, my son, that we fall into divers extremities to humble us, and to show the folly and weakness of our hearts. What is thy trouble and thy petition?"

"Alas!" said the other, weeping, "I have been face to face with the father of lies, and I have suffered much damage therefrom."

"Thou hast not been tampering with forbidden arts, I hope?"

"Truly, that have I, and to my soul's cost, I fear," said the tailor, with a groan of heartrending despair.

"Thy sin is great, my son; but so likewise is the remedy. Heaven willeth not a sinner's death, if he turn again to Him with repentance and contrition of spirit. I trust thou hast not trifled with thy soul's welfare by taking and using any of the gifts whereby the old serpent layeth hold on the souls of men?"

"Verily, nay; but he frightened me into the signing of a terrible bond, wherein I promised, that after seven years were past and gone I would be his!" [Pg 93]

"Thy danger is terrible indeed. But he gave thee some equivalent for the bargain? thou didst not sell thyself for nought?" said the hermit, fixing his eye sternly on the trembling penitent; "and now, when thou hast wasted the price of thy condemnation, thou comest for help; and thou wouldest even play at cheatery with the devil!"

"Nay, most reverend father," said Michael, wiping his eyes; "never a gift have I had from the foul fiend, save a bacon collop, and that was cast out untouched." And with that he told of the manner in which he was inveigled, and the scurvy trick which the deceiver had played him.

"Verily, there is hope," said the holy man, after musing a while; "yet is it a perilous case, and only to be overcome by prayer and fasting. If thou seek help sincerely, I doubt not that a way will be made for thine escape. Listen;—it is never permitted that the enemy of our race should reap the full benefit of the advantage which otherwise his superior duplicity and intelligence would enable him to obtain. There was never yet bond or bargain made by him, but, in one way or another, it might be set aside, and the foul fiend discomfited. It may be difficult, I own; and advice is not easily rendered in this matter: but trust in the power of the All-powerful, and thou shalt not be overcome. Wisdom, I doubt not, shall be vouchsafed in this extremity, if thou apply anxiously and earnestly for it, seeking deliverance, and repenting of thy great wickedness which thou hast committed."

With these and many other gracious words did the benevolent enthusiast encourage this doomed mortal; and though heavy and disconsolate enough, he returned more light-hearted than he came.

The time now drew near. The very week—the day—the hour, was come; and when the sun should have climbed to the meridian Michael knew that he would have to face the cunning foe who had beguiled him. His wife would have tarried; but he peremptorily forbade. He would not be disturbed in his intercessions. All that morning, without intermission, he supplicated for wisdom and strength in the ensuing conflict. He had retired to a little chamber at one end of the house, and here he secured himself to prevent intrusion.

Noon was scarcely come when, true to the engagement, a loud thunder-clap announced the approach and presence of this terrific being. [Pg 94]

"I am glad to find," said he, "that thou art ready."

"I am not ready," replied the trembling victim.

"How!" roared the sable chief, with a voice that shook the whole house, like the passage of an earthquake; "dost thou deny the pledge? darest thou gainsay this bond?"

"True enough," replied the debtor, "I signed that contract; but it was won from me by fraud and dishonest pretences."

"Base, equivocating slave! how darest thou mock me thus? Thou hadst thy wishes; the conditions have been fulfilled, ay, to the letter."

"I fear me," again said the victim, who felt his courage wonderfully supported, "that thou knewest I should never be a pin the richer or better for thy gifts; and thine aim was but to flatter and to cheat. It is not in thy power, I do verily believe, to grant me riches or any great thing that I might wish; so thou didst prompt, and, in a manner, force me to those vain wishes, unthinkingly, by which I have been beguiled."

"Dost thou doubt, then, my ability in this matter? Know that thy most unbounded wishes would have been accomplished, else I release thee from this bond."

"I say, and will vouch for 't, that all thy promises are lying cheats, and that thou couldst not give me a beggarly bodle, if thou wert to lay down thy two horns for it; so I demand my bond, according to thy pledge."

"To show thee that I can keep this bond, even conformably to the terms of my own offer just now, and thy pitiful carcase to boot, I'll e'en grant thee another wish, that thou mayest be satisfied thou art past all hope of redemption. Said I not, that if I could not fulfil any wish of thine, even to the compass of all possible things, and the riches of this great globe itself, I would release thee from this bond?"

"Yea," said Michael, with an eager assent.

"Then wish once more; and mind that it be no beggarly desire. Wish to the very summit of wealth, or the topmost pinnacle of thy ambition, for it shall be given thee."

"Then," said the tailor hastily, as though fearful the word would not come forth quick enough from his lips, "I wish thou wert riding back again to thy quarters on yonder dun horse, and never be able to plague me again, or any other poor wretch whom thou hast gotten into thy clutches." [Pg 95]

The demon gave a roar loud enough to be heard to the very antipodes, and away went he, riveted to the back of this very dun horse, which Michael had seen through the window grazing quietly in the lane, little suspecting the sort of jockey that was destined to bestride him. The tailor ran to the door to watch his departure, almost beside himself for joy at this happy riddance. Dancing and capering into the kitchen, where his wife was almost dying through terror, he related, as soon as he was able, the marvellous story of his deliverance.

He relapsed not into his former courses, but lived happily to a good old age, leaving behind him at his death good store of this world's gear, which, as he had no children, was divided amongst his poorer relatives. One of them having purchased the house where the tailor dwelt, set up the trade of a tapster therein, having for his sign "*The Dule upo' Dun*;" which to this day attests the truth of our tradition, and the excellence of "mine host's" cheer.

[Pg 96]

WINDLESHAW ABBEY.

"Adieu, fond love; farewell, you wanton powers;
I'm free again.
Thou dull disease of bloud and idle hours,
Bewitching pain,
Fly to fools that sigh away their time:
My nobler love to heaven doth climb;
And there behold beauty still young,
That time can ne'er corrupt, nor death destroy;
Immortal sweetness by fair angels sung,
And honoured by eternity and joy:
There lies my love, thither my hopes aspire;
Fond loves decline, this heavenly love grows higher."

—Beaumont and Fletcher.

This ruined chapel—"abbey" it is generally styled—is about a mile distant from St Helen's. Little remains now but the belfry, with its luxuriant covering of dark ivy, still preserving it from destruction. More than half a century ago, some ruffian hand nearly severed the stem from the root, but happily without material injury, the incision being incomplete. The burial-ground, formerly open, is now enclosed by a stone wall; and on the south side is a stone cross with three steps. The whole area has a reputation of great sanctity; many of those who die in the Romish faith, even beyond the immediate neighbourhood, being brought hither for interment.

There are no records, that we can find, of its foundation; but it may be suspected that the place was dedicated to St Thomas; for close by is a well of that name, unto which extraordinary virtues are ascribed.

The chapel was but small; not more than twelve yards in length, and about three in width; the tower scarcely eight yards high. Its insignificance probably may account for the obscurity in which its origin is involved.

It fell into disuse after the Dissolution; and its final ruin took place during the civil wars of Charles I.

Autumn was lingering over the yellow woods. The leaves, fluttering on their shrivelled stems, seemed ready to fall with every breath. Dark and heavy was the dull atmosphere—a melancholy stillness that seemed to pervade and surround every object—a deceitful calm, forerunner of the wild and wintrystorms about to desolate and to destroy even these flickering emblems of decay. [Pg 97] At times a low murmur would break forth, dying away through the deep woods, like some spirit of past ages wakening from her slumber, or the breath of hoary Time sighing through the ruin he had created.


View larger image

WINDLESHAW ABBEY
Drawn by G. Pickering.
Engraved by Edw^{d} Finden.

There is something indescribably solemn and affecting in the first touches and emblems of the year that has "fallen into the sear and yellow leaf." Like the eventide of life, it is a season when the gay and glittering promises of another spring are past; when the fervour and the maturity of summer are ended; when cold and monotonous days creep on; and we look with another eye, and other perceptions, on all that surrounds us. Yet there is a feeling of gladness and of hope mingling with our regrets in the one case, which cannot exist in the other. Autumn, though succeeded by the darkness and dreariness of winter, is but the womb of another spring. That bright season will be renewed; our own, never!

Perhaps it might be feelings akin to these which arrested the footsteps of an individual, who, though little past the spring-tide and youthful ardour of his existence, was yet not disinclined to anticipate another period characterised by the autumnal tokens of decay visible on every object around him.

He stood by the deserted chapel of Windleshaw. Time had then but just begun to show the first traces of his power. The building was yet uninjured, save the interior, which was completely despoiled, the walls grey with lichen, and hoary with the damps of age. The ivy was twining round the belfry, but its thin arms then embraced only a small portion of the exterior. A single yew-tree threw its dark and gloomy shade over the adjacent tombs; the long rank herbage bending over them, and dripping heavily with the moist atmosphere. An ancient cross stood in the graveyard, of a date probably anterior to that of the main building. A relic or commemoration, it might be, of some holy man who had there ministered to the semi-barbarous hordes, aboriginal converts to the Catholic faith.

It was in the autumn of the year 1644. Wars and tumults were abroad, and Lancashire drained the cup of bitterness even to the dregs. The infatuated king was tottering on his throne; even the throne itself was nigh overturned in the general conflict. A short time before the date of our story, the Earl of Derby and Prince Rupert, having brought the siege of Bolton and Liverpool to a [Pg 98] satisfactory issue—shortly after the gallant defence of the Countess at Lathom House—were then reposing from their toils at that fortress. The prince, remotely allied to the noble dame, lay there with his train; and was treated not only with the respect and consideration due to his rank, but likewise with a feeling of gratitude for his timely succour to the distressed lady and her brave defenders. After a short stay, the prince marched to York, which was closely besieged by the Earl

of Manchester and Sir Thomas Fairfax, and as vigorously and obstinately defended by the Marquis of Newcastle. On the approach of Prince Rupert, the Parliamentary generals raised the siege, and, drawing off their forces to Marston Moor, offered battle to the Royalists. Here the prince, whose martial disposition was not sufficiently tempered with prudence, unfortunately accepted the enemy's challenge, and obscured the lustre of his former victories by sustaining a total overthrow, thereby putting the king's cause into great jeopardy. The following extract from the "Perfect Diurnall" of the 9th of July 1644, will show the estimation in which this great victory was held by the Parliament, and the extent and importance of the results:—

"This day Captain Stewart came from the Leaguer at York with a letter of the whole state of the late fight and routing of Prince Rupert, sent by the three generals to the Parliament. The effect whereof was this:—'That, understanding Prince Rupert was marching against them with 20,000 men, horse and foot, the whole army arose from the siege, and marched to Long Marston Moor, four or five miles from York; and the prince, having notice of it, passed with his army the byway of Burrow Bridge; that they could not hinder his passage to York, whereupon our army marched to Todcaster, to prevent his going southward; but before the van was within a mile of Todcaster, it was advertised that the prince was in the rear in Marston Moor, with an addition of 6000 of the Earl of Newcastle's forces, and was possessed of the best places of advantage both for ground and wind. The right wing of our horse was commanded by Sir Thomas Fairfax, which consisted of his whole cavalry and three regiments of the Scots horse; next unto them was drawn up the right wing of the foot, consisting of the Lord Fairfax and his foot and two brigades of the Scots foot for a reserve: and so the whole armies put into a battalia. The battle being begun, at the first some of our horse were put into disorder; but, rallying again, we fell on with our whole body, killed and [Pg 99] took their chief officers, and took most part of their standards and colours, 25 pieces of ordnance, near 130 barrels of powder, 10,000 arms, two waggons of carbines and pistols, killed 3000, and 1500 prisoners taken.'"

Prince Rupert with great precipitation drew off the remains of his army, and retired into Lancashire. In a few days York was surrendered to the Parliamentary forces, and the garrison marched out with all the honours of war. Fairfax, occupying the city, established his government through the county, and sent 1000 horse into Lancashire to join with the Parliamentary forces in that quarter, and attend the motions of Prince Rupert. The Scottish army marched northwards after their victory, in order to join the Earl of Calendar, who was advancing with 10,000 additional forces; and likewise to reduce the town of Newcastle, which they took by storm. The Earl of Manchester, with Cromwell,—to whom the fame of this great victory was chiefly ascribed, and who was wounded in the action,—returned to the eastern association in order to recruit his army.[8]

Such were some of the fruits of this important victory, and such the aspect of affairs at the time when our narrative commences;—the fortunes and persons of the Royalists, or *malignants* as they were called by the opposite party, being in great jeopardy, especially in the northern counties.

The individual before-named was loitering about in the cemetery of the chapel, where the bodies of many of the faithful who die in the arms of the mother church are still deposited, under the impression or expectancy that their clay shall imbibe the odour of sanctity thereby. The stranger, for such he appeared, was muscular and well-formed. His height was not above, but rather below, the middle size. A bright full eye gave an ardour to his look not at all diminished by the general cast and expression of his features, which betokened a brave and manly spirit, scorning subterfuge and disguise, and almost disdaining the temporary concealment he was forced to adopt. A wide cloak was wrapped about his person, surmounted by a slouched high-crowned hat, with a rose in front, by way of decoration. His boots, ornamented with huge projecting tops, were turned down just below the calf of the leg, above which his breeches terminated in stuffed rolls, or fringes, after the fashion of the time. A light sword hung loosely from his belt; and a pair of [Pg 100] pistols, beautifully inlaid, were exhibited in front. Despite of his somewhat grotesque habiliments, there was an air of dignity, perhaps haughtiness, in his manner, which belied the character of his present disguise. He walked slowly on, apparently in deep meditation, till, on turning round the angle of the tower, he was somewhat startled from his reverie on beholding an open grave, at a short distance, just about to be completed. Clods of heavy clay were at short intervals thrown out by the workman, concealed from observation by the depth to which he had laboured. After a moment's pause, the cavalier cautiously approached the brink, and beheld a strange-looking being, with sleeves tucked up to the shoulders, busily engaged in this interesting and useful avocation.

"Good speed, friend!" said the stranger, addressing the emissary of death within. The grim official raised his head for a moment, to observe who it was that accosted him; but without vouchsafing a reply, he again resumed his work, throwing out the clods with redoubled energy, to the great annoyance of the inquirer.

"Whose grave is this?" he asked again, perseveringly, determined to provoke him to an answer.

"The first fool's that asks!" shouted the man from below, without ceasing from his repulsive toil.

"Nay, friend; ye do not dig for a man ere he be dead in this pitiful country of thine?"

"And why not? there's many a head on a man's nape to-day that will be on his knees to-morrow!"

"Then do ye rig folks out with graves here upon trust?"

"Nay," said the malicious-looking replicant, holding up a long lean phalanx of bony fingers; "pay

to-day, trust to-morrow, as t' old lad at the tavern says."

"What! is thy trade so dainty of subjects? Are men become weary o' dying of late, that ye must need make tombs for the living? I'll have thee to the justice, sirrah, for wicked malice aforethought, and misprision."

Here this hideous ghoul burst forth with a laugh so fearful and portentous that even the cavalier was startled by its peculiarly fierce and almost unearthly expression. The mouth drawn to one side, the wide flat forehead, projecting cheek-bones, and pointed chin, sufficiently characterised him as labouring under that sort of imbecility not seldom unmixed with a tact and shrewdness [Pg 101] that seem to be characteristic of this species of disease and deformity. He set one foot on the mattock, ceasing from his labours whilst he cried out, winking significantly with half-shut eyes—

"When the owl hoots, and the crow cries caw,
I can tell a maiden from a jackdaw."

Here he began whistling and humming by turns, with the most consummate and provoking indifference. The stranger was evidently disconcerted by this unexpected mode of address, apparently meditating a retreat, from where even victory would have been a poor triumph. He was turning away, when a drop of blood fell on his hand! This disastrous omen, with the grave yawning before him—the narrow dwelling, which, according to the prediction of the artificer, was preparing for his reception—discomposed the cavalier exceedingly, and, in all likelihood, rendered him the more easily susceptible to subsequent impressions.

"Art boun' for Knowsley?" inquired the hunchbacked sexton.

"Peradventure I may have an errand thither; but I am a wayfaring man, and have business with the commissioners in these parts." There was a tone of conscious evasion in this reply which did not pass unheeded by the inquirer.

"If thou goest in at the door," said he, "mind thee doesn't come out feet foremost, good master wayfarer!" He quickly changed his tone to more of seriousness than before. "Thou art not safe. Hie thee to Lathom."

"'Tis beleaguered again. The earl being away at his kingdom of Man, the hornets are buzzing about his nest. There seems now no resting-place, as aforetime, for unlucky travellers."

"For who?" shouted the sexton, climbing out of his grave with surprising agility. He fixed his eyes on the cavalier, as though it were the aspect of recognition. He then hummed the following distich, a favourite troll amongst the republican party at that period:—

"The battle was foughten; the prince ran away.
Did ever ye see sic' a race, well-a-day?"

The stranger, turning from his tormentor, was about to depart; but he was not destined to rid himself so readily from the intruder.

"And so being shut out from Lathom, thou be'st a cockhorse for Knowsley. Tush! a blind pedlar, [Pg 102] ambling on a nag, might know thee while he was a-winking."

"Know me!" said the cavalier;—"why—whom thinkest thou that I be? Truly there be more gowks in our good dukedom of Lancaster than either goshawks or hen-sparrows. I am one of little note, and my name not worth the spelling." He assumed an air of great carelessness and indifference, not unmingled with a haughty glance or two, whilst he spoke; but the persevering impertinent would not be withstood. Another laugh escaped him, shrill and portentous as before, and he approached nearer, inquiring in a half-whisper—

"Where's thine uncle?"

"Whom meanest thou?"

"He waits for thee at Oxford, man; but he may wait while his porridge cools, I trow: and so good den."

The cunning knave was marching off with his mattock, when the cavalier, recovering from his surprise, quickly seized him by the higher shoulder.

"Stay, knave; thou shalt tarry here a while, until thou and I are better acquainted. Another step, and this muzzle shall help thee on thine errand."

"And who'll pay the messenger?" said the undaunted and ready-witted rogue, not in the least intimidated by the threat, and the mouth of a huge pistol at his breast. "Put it by—put it by, friend, and I'll answer thee; but while that bull-dog is unmuzzled thou shalt get never a word from Steenie Ellison."

"Thou knowest of some plot a-hatching," said the stranger, putting aside the weapon. Another drop fell on his hand.

"I know not," said the sexton, doggedly.

"Thy meaning, then?" returned the stranger, with great vehemence; "for, o' my life, thou stirrest not until thou hast explained the nature of these allusions."

With a shrill cry and a fleet footstep the other bounded away from his interrogator like some swift hound, and was out of sight instantly. Retreating with some precipitation, the cavalier bent his steps from the graveyard towards a little hostelrie close by, where it appears he had taken up his abode for a few days along with a companion, whose sole use and business on their journey seemed to be that of protecting a huge pair of saddle-bags and other equipments for their travel, under a mulberry-coloured cloak of more than ordinary dimensions. They had journeyed from [Pg 103] Preston thitherwards; their intended route being for Knowsley, and so forward to the coast. Whether their motive for so long a stay at this obscure and homely tavern could be traced to the bright eyes and beautiful image of mine host's daughter—a luminary round which they were fluttering to their own destruction—or that they merely sought concealment, it were difficult to guess. The ostensible object of their journey was to take shipping for Ireland, being bound thither on some commercial enterprise, for the furtherance of which they expected to pass unmolested, being men of peaceable pursuits, who left the trade of fighting to those that hoped to thrive thereby. Such was the general tenor of their converse; but there were some who suspected that the widely-extolled beauty of Marian might have some remote connection with the continuance of these guests; and their long stay at the inn was regarded with a jealous eye. So well known was the beauteous Marian, "the fair maid of Windleshaw," that the present residence of the cavaliers, if such they were, was the worst that could have been chosen for concealment; inasmuch as her fame drew many customers to the tap who otherwise would have eschewed so humble a halting-place as that of Nathan Sumner.

Thoughtful, and with a show of vexation upon his features, the stranger entered the house, where breakfast was already prepared, and awaiting his return. In the same chamber were the tapster and his dame; for privacy was not compatible either with "mine host's" means or inclination.

"We have been watching for thee, Egerton," said his companion. "Didst thou meet with a bundle of provender in the graveyard that thy stomach did not warn thee to breakfast?"

"Prithee heed it not," was the reply; "I care little thus early for thy confections. Besides, I have been beset by a knave, whose vocation verily remindeth man of his latter end. I've been bandying discourse with the sexton yonder, as I believe."

"Heh! mercy on us! Ye have seen Steenie, belike," said the dame, lifting up one hand from her knee, which had been reposing there as a protection from the fervid advances of a glowing fire before which she sat.

"Truly, I do suspect this trafficker in ready-made tombs to be none other," said Egerton.

"An' howkin' at a grave?" [Pg 104]

"Ay! and with right good will, too."

"Then look well to your steps, Sir Stranger, that ye fall not into't; for Stephen never yet made grave that lacked a tenant ere long."

"'Tis strange!" said the cavalier, anxiously. "Do ye dig graves here by anticipation? or"——

"He scents death like a carrion crow, I tell ye; an' if he but digs a grave, somebody or other always contrives to tumble in; an' mostly they 'at first see him busy with the job. He's ca'd here 'the live man's sexton.'"

The cavalier sat down before a well-covered stool, on which was spread a homely but plentiful breakfast of eggs, cheese, rashers of bacon, a flagon of ale, and a huge pile of oat-cake; but he did not fall to with the appetite or relish of a hungry man.

"Let me reckon," said the host, beginning to muster up his arithmetic. "There was"——;

"Nathan Sumner, I say; thou'rt al'ays out wi' thy motty if a body speaks. Doesn't the beer want tunning, and thou'rt leesing there o' thy haunches; at thy whys and thy wise speeches. Let me alone wi' the gentles, and get thee to the galkeer. Besides, you see that he knoweth not how to disport himsel' afore people of condition—saving your presence, masters," said the power predominant, as her husband meekly retreated from the despotic and iron rule of his helpmate.

"Peradventure he doth himself provide tenants for his own graves," said the cavalier, thoughtfully; "but I'll split the knave's chowl, if he dare"——;

"You know not him whom you thus accuse," said a soft musical voice from an inner chamber. "I know those who would not see him with his foot in a new-made grave for the best rent-roll in Christendom!"

The speaker, as she came forward, bent a glance of reproof towards the stranger.

"And wherefore, my bonny maiden?" inquired he.

"Does he not scent the dying like a raven? When once his eye is upon them they shall not escape. There be some that have seen their last o' this green earth, and the sky, and yonder bright hills. I trust the destroying angel will pass by this house!"

"By'r lady," replied the other hastily, "the varlet, when I asked whose lodging it should be, [Pg 105] answered, mine! holding forth his long skinny paw that I might pay him for the job."

The maiden listened with a look of terror. She grew pale and almost ghastly; wiping her brow

with the corner of her apron, as though in great agitation and perplexity.

There was usually a warm and healthy blush upon her cheek, but it waned suddenly into the dim hue of apprehension, as she replied in a low whisper—

"Ye must not go hence; and yet"——She hesitated, and appeared as though deeply revolving some secret source of both anxiety and alarm.

The cavalier was silent too, but the result of his deliberations was of a nature precisely opposite to that of his fair opponent.

"Our beasts being ready, Chisenhall," said he to his companion, "we will depart while the day holds on favourable. We may have worse weather, and still worse quarters, should we tarry here till noontide, as we purposed. But"—and here he looked earnestly at the maiden—"we shall come again, I trust, when they that seek our lives be laid low."

She put one hand on his arm, speaking not aloud, but with great earnestness—

"Go not; and your lives peradventure shall be given you for a prey. There is a godly man hereabout, unto whom I will have recourse; and he shall guide you in this perplexity."

"We be men having little time to spare, and less inclination—higlers too, into the bargain," replied he, with a dubious glance toward his friend Chisenhall, who was just despatching the last visible relics of a repast in which he had taken a more than equal share of the duty; "we are not careful to tarry, or to resort unto such ghostly counsel. We would rather listen to the lips of those whose least word we covet more than the preaching of either priest or Puritan; but the time is now come when we must eschew even such blessed and holy"——

"There's a time for all things," said Chisenhall hastily, and as soon as his mouth was at rest from the solid contents with which he had been successfully, and almost uninterruptedly, occupied for the last half-hour; wishful, also, to abate the impression which his companion's indiscreet intimation of dislike to psalm-singers and Puritans might have produced. "There is a time to buy and to sell, and to get gain; a time to marry, and a time to be merry and be glad:" here he used a [Pg 106] sort of whining snuffle, which frustrated his attempts at neutralising the sarcasms of his friend. "Being in haste," he continued, "we may not profit by thy discourse; but commend ourselves to his prayers until our return, which, God willing, we may safely accomplish in a se'nnight at the farthest."

"If ye depart, I will not answer for your safe keeping."

"And if we stay, my pretty maiden, I am fearful we *shall* be in safe keeping." An ambiguous smile curled his lip, which she fully understood. Indeed, her manner and appearance were so much superior to her station, that no lady of the best and gentlest blood might have comported herself more excellently before these gay, though disguised cavaliers. There was a natural expression of dignity and high feeling in her demeanour, as if rank and noble breeding were enclosed in so humble a shrine, visible indeed, but still through the medium of a homely but bewitching grace and simplicity. This, in part, might be the consequence of an early residence at Lathom, where, in a few years, she had risen, from a station among the lower domestics to a confidential place about the person of the countess. Here she excited no small share of admiration; and it was partly to avoid the fervid advances of some vivacious gallants that she resolved on quitting so exposed and dangerous a position; the more especially as the lowering aspect of the times, and the uncertain termination of the coming struggle, might have left her without a protector, and at the mercy of the lawless ruffians who were not wanting on either side. Retiring home without regret, she had imbibed, from the ministrations of a zealous and conscientious advocate of the republican party, a relish for the doctrines and self-denying exercises of the Puritans, with whom she usually associated in their religious assemblies.

"Do ye purpose, then, for Knowsley to-day?" she inquired, after a short silence.

"Yea; unless our present dilemma, and the obstruction thereby, turn aside the current of our intent."

"Pray Heaven it may!" said the maiden, with great fervour; "for I do fear me that some who are not of a godly sort are abiding there—even they with whom righteous and well-ordered men should not consort withal."

"Heed not. Being of them who are not righteous overmuch, we can bear unharmed the scoffs of [Pg 107] prelatists and self-seekers."

"There be others," replied she; but the appearance of the dame, who had been overlooking the operations of her helpmate, interrupted the communication. The horses, too, were at the door, led forth by a lubberly serving-lad; and they seemed eager to depart, pawing, as though scarcely enduring a momentary restraint. The cavalier, after giving some order about the beasts, would have bidden farewell to the maiden in private; but she had departed unperceived. He was evidently chagrined, lingering long in the house, in hopes of her reappearance, but in vain. He was forced to depart without the anticipated interview.

Out of sight and hearing, the cavaliers began to converse more freely.

"Right fain I am," said Egerton, "of our escape from yonder house; for I began to fear me we were known, or, at any rate, suspected by one, if not more, of our good friends behind."

"By one fair friend, peradventure," said Chisenhall drily; "but, on the word of a soldier, I may be known, and little care I, save that it may be dangerous to be found in my company. In the last siege yonder, at Lathom, I have beaten off more rogues than flies from my trencher; and I would we had but had room and fair play at York; we would have given your"——

"Hold; no names; remember that I am plain Master Egerton: there may be lurkers in these tall hedges; so, both in-doors and out, I am—what mine appearance doth betoken."

"Well, Master Egerton, good wot, though a better man than myself, which few be now-a-days, for these strait-haired Roundheads do thin us like coppice-trees, and leave but here and there one to shoot at. I would the noble lord had been within his good fortress yonder, I think it would have been too hot to handle, with cold fingers, by the host of Old Nick, or Parliament, I care not which."

"It was partly at my suggesting that he retired to his island of Man. There were heart-burnings and jealousies amongst the courtiers on his account, which were but too readily given ear unto by the king."

"Grant it may not be for our hurt as well as his own. I had no notion that these wasps would have been so soon again at the honeycomb. Could we and our bands have made entry, we would have shown them some of the old match-work, and given them a psalm to sing that they would not readily have forgotten. As it is, we are just wanderers and vagabonds, without e'er a house or a homestead to hide us in, should our friends be driven from Knowsley, and our way be blocked up to the coast. What is worse, too, our supplies are nigh exhausted, and our exchequer as empty as the king's. I would we had not tarried here so long, waiting for advices, as thou didst say, Master Egerton; but which advices, I do verily think, were from a lady's lip; and the next tall fellow, with a long face and a fusee, may tuck us under his sleeve, and carry us to his quarters, like a brace of springed woodcocks." [Pg 108]

"Fear not, Chisenhall. We will make directly for the coast, and to-morrow, if we have luck, be under weigh for Ireland. If, as I do trust, we get our levies thence, down with the Rump and the Roundheads, say I, and so"——

"We are not bound for Knowsley, then?"

"No, believe me, I have a better nose than to thrust it into the trap, after the foretokenings we have had. The knave who elbowed me i' the graveyard, as well as the maiden yonder, warned us of some danger at Knowsley, where, I do verily suspect, the rogues are in ambush, waiting for us; but we will give them the slip, and away for bonny Waterford."

The morning was yet raw and misty. A dense fog was coming on, which every minute became more heavy and impervious to the sight. Objects might be heard, long ere they were seen. The rime hung like a frost-work from branch and spray, showing many a fantastic festoon, wreathed by powers and contrivances more wonderful than those by which our vain and presumptuous race are endowed. The little birds looked out from their covers, and chirped merrily on, to while away the hours till bedtime. The rooks cawed from their citadel—to venture abroad was out of the question, lest the rogues should be surprised in some act of depredation, and suffer damage thereby. So chill and searching was the atmosphere that the travellers wrapped their cloaks closely about their haunches, to defend themselves from its attacks. They were scarcely a mile or two on their road when, passing slowly between the high coppice on either hand, Egerton stayed his horse, listening; whilst thus engaged, another blood-drop fell on his hand. [Pg 109]

"There be foes behind us," said he, softly. His practised and ever-watchful ear had detected the coming footsteps before his friend.

"'Tis a fortunate screen this same quiet mist, and so let us away to cover." Without more ado he leaped through a gap in the fence, followed by his companion; and they lay concealed effectually from the view of any one who might be passing on the road. They were not so far from the main path but that the footsteps of their pursuers could be heard, and voices too, in loud and earnest discourse. The latter kept their horses at a very deliberate pace, as if passing forward at some uncertainty.

"I say again, heed it as we may, this mist will be the salvation of our runaways. After having dogged them to such good purpose from Lathom, it will be a sorry deed should they escape under this unlucky envelope."

"Tush, faint heart—thinkest thou these enemies of the faith shall triumph, and our own devices come to nought? Nay, verily, for the wicked are as stubble, and the ungodly as they whom the fire devoureth."

"But I would rather have a brisk wind than all thy vapours, thy quiddities, and quotations. Yet am I glad they have not ta'en the turn to Knowsley."

"Which way soever they turn, either to the right hand or to the left, we have them in the net, and snares and pitfalls shall devour them."

The remainder of this comfortable assurance was inaudible, and the cavaliers congratulated themselves on their providential escape.

"How stand ye for Knowsley now, Sir Captain?" said Chisenhall.

"Why, of a surety, friend, there be many reasons why we may pray for a safe passport from this unhappy land; but it seemeth as though our purposes were to be for ever crossed. Towards Knowsley, now, it doth appear that we must proceed, our haven and hiding-place; these rogues having got wind that we did not intend to pass by thither, we must countermine the enemy, or rather double upon their route."

"But how shall we be enabled to proceed?" [Pg 110]

"Forward to the right," said Egerton, "and we shall be sure to hit our mark, if I mistake not the bearing. 'Tis, I believe, scarcely two miles hence; and under this friendly cover we cannot be observed, though we should mistake our way."

Changing their course, they now attempted, at all hazards, a running chase along and across hedges and enclosures, in the supposed direction of their retreat. After a somewhat perilous journey for at least an hour in this thick mist, without discovering any object by which they could ascertain their relative situation, Chisenhall at length espied something like a dark square tower before them.

"Plague, pestilence, and all the saints! why if yonder be not that same old ugly grim tower dodging us!" He rubbed his eyes, hardly satisfied that his morning indulgences were ended.

"We are fairly on our way for the grave again, sure enough," said Egerton; "or it may be as thou sayest, the graveyard itself is following us." He tried to rally into a smile, but was unable to disport himself in this wise, and it became needful that some way should be hit upon for their extrication, and that speedily. Occupied in earnest discourse, they were not aware of the presence of a third person until a thin squeaking voice accosted them from behind.

"Back again so soon?—wi' the de'il at your crupper too!"

"Foul fa' thee, thou screech-owl," said Egerton, starting back at that ill-omened sound; "we shall ne'er be rid o' this pestilence!" He attempted to spring aside from the object of his abhorrence; but in a moment his horse was holden by the bridle with almost more than human strength; and the malicious creature set up an exulting and triumphant laugh that was anything but agreeable in their present evil condition.

"Let go—or, by thy master's hoofs, I will send thee to him in the twinkling of a trigger!" said Egerton, drawing forth his pistol.

"Hoo, hoo!" shouted his tormentor, mocking and making faces, with an expression of fiendish delight—"thee 'ill be first though, nunky."

Egerton pointed the weapon; but his horse, goaded in all probability by the strange being beside him, made a sudden spring, and, as ill-luck would have it, stumbled and fell, both horse and rider [Pg 111] sprawling in the dust. The cause of this foul accident scampered off with great activity: Chisenhall dismounted, extricating his friend from the trappings. He was bleeding profusely from the nostrils, and appeared insensible. Judging it the wisest plan, though at the risk of their captivity, to procure help, he galloped away to the tavern for assistance.

Much to the surprise of the family was Chisenhall's reappearance, but no time was lost in useless explanations; the host and his daughter immediately proceeded to the spot, with means and appliances for Egerton's removal and recovery; but to their astonishment and dismay the body was removed. His horse was grazing quietly on the herbage, yet there was no trace of Egerton's disappearance. Chisenhall was almost beside himself with distress and consternation; but Marian, though much concerned, seemed to possess some clue to this enigma.

"Steenie, thou sayest, was the cause of this untoward disaster?"

"Ay; that cursed fiend. I wish all his"——

"Nay, nay, friend, thou speakest like to the foolish ones, vain and impious men, whose mouths are full of cursing and bitterness. We had best return; I will think on this matter, and ere the morrow we may have tidings of thy friend; but"——Here she looked significantly aside as she spoke, but not in her father's hearing. "Keep snug here in thy quarters, friend; for since ye left there came divers of the people to inquire, and as He would have it, from me only. Ye be sons of Belial, they said, and cavaliers withal. But ye have eaten and drunken in our dwelling, and though red with the blood of the saints, I cannot deliver you into the hand of your pursuers."

Chisenhall reluctantly complied, having no other resource, and judging it best not to stir abroad, as it might be compromising the safety of both parties, without leading to any beneficial result.

The horses were unharnessed and turned out to graze, whilst Chisenhall was disposed of in an upper chamber above one of the outhouses. His anxiety for his friend allowed him but little rest, and often he was on the point of issuing forth in quest of intelligence; but happily prudence prevented him from sacrificing his own and another's life to a vain and fruitless impatience.

During Chisenhall's concealment Marian was by no means in the same state of idleness and [Pg 112] inactivity. She threw on her hood and kerchief; and a clean white apron, girt about her waist, fully displayed the symmetry of her form. Her cloak was adjusted but with little regard to outward show; and an hour was scarcely past ere she sallied forth, as she was often wont, to the dwelling of Gilgal Snape, a person of great note as a preacher and leader of the faithful in these parts. He was, in truth, a worthy and zealous man, sincerely devoted to the cause he espoused,

and the service of his Maker—one widely distinguished from the hypocrites and fanatics of that turbulent era, which, like our own, produced, though in a more exaggerated form, from the stimulus then abroad, the same rank and noxious weeds of hypocrisy and superstition; for man, like a mathematical problem, circumstances and conditions being the same, brings out, invariably, the same results. No form of worship, however ludicrous or revolting, but hath its advocates and supporters; and there is nothing which the proud mind and unsubdued heart of man will not put forth, when that heart is made the hot-bed of unholy and unsanctified feelings—all monstrous and polluted things ripening, even beneath the warm and blessed sun that revives and beautifies all else by its splendour.

Gilgal had, however, his figments and his fancies, inseparable perchance from the times and dispositions by which they were engendered. When men, awaking as from a dream, shaking off the deep slumber of bigotry, but not intolerance, through the medium of their yet unpractised sense saw "men as trees walking," regarding trivial and unimportant objects as paramount and essential, while others, whose nature was vital and supreme, were hardly discerned, or at best but slightly noticed or understood;—when minds long tinctured by superstition brought the whole of their previous habits and instincts to bear upon the newly-awakened energies that were heaving and convulsing the moral fabric of society, and the ground of preconceived notions and opinions on which they stood, they could hardly be persuaded that the kingdom of heaven "cometh not by observation;" that special miracles, and visible manifestations of divine favour, were not again to be vouchsafed to the "elect;" and that their faith and prayers were not sufficient to remove mountains, and to conquer and subdue every obstacle. There was more pride in these expectations than they were willing to allow, or even to suspect; and in many it was the very pride and "naughtiness of their hearts;" whilst in others it was but the operation of remaining ignorance, unsubdued lusts, and unsanctified affections. [Pg 113]

Gilgal was famous in his day for dealing with "spiritual wickedness in high places." The "prince of the power of the air" was subject unto him. In other words, it was said of him that he had cast out devils and healed the possessed. When others failed, Gilgal had wrestled and prevailed. One of the first-fruits of this outpouring of his soul was "Steenie Ellison," who, from his childhood, was subject to periodical and violent affections of the body—contortions that gave him, in the eyes of many, an appearance of one possessed. Stephen had a considerable share of cunning, a sort of knavish sagacity and ready impertinence, peculiar to most of his kind. He was an orphan, early left to the care of chance or charity, and being a follower of bell-ringers, grave-diggers, and the like, assumed a sort of semi-official attitude at all funerals, weddings, and merry-makings in the neighbourhood. He was generally suspected of holding intercourse with the powers of evil, and when suffering from disease, the unclean spirit whom he had offended was supposed to be afflicting him, having entered into his body to buffet and torment him for his contumacy and disobedience. So partial was he to the art and occupation of grave-making, that he was observed at times to hew out a habitation for the dead ere a tenant was provided. It was always remarked, nevertheless, that the narrow house failed not ere long to receive an inhabitant; and this apprehension considerably heightened the terror with which he was regarded, and rendered him celebrated throughout the country by the name of "the live man's sexton."

But the worthy minister being much moved with compassion towards this child of Satan, his bowels yearned for him, that he might cast out the unclean spirit, and deliver him from his spiritual bondage. He accordingly girded himself to the work, and a great name did he get throughout the land by this mighty achievement, for the possessed became docile as a little child before him, and was subsequently a sort of erratic follower of the party unto which Gilgal was allied; but he would at times forsake the assemblies of the faithful, when, it is said, the dark spirit of divination again came over him, and he would wander among the tombs, showing symptoms of a disordered intellect, though not of the same violent character as before. [Pg 114]

Towards the dwelling of Gilgal Snape did Marian direct her steps; it was but a short mile from her own. Often had she been a visitant to the house, where she imbibed the doctrines and instructions of this sincere and zealous confessor of the faith. She frequently mingled in the devotions that were there offered up; but her piety was of a more moderate and amiable cast—less violent and ascetic, not unmixed with love and pity for her enemies and the persecutors of the truth.

Her object in this visit was not so much to partake of the crumbs from the good man's spiritual banquet, as to gain some intelligence through him respecting Egerton's disappearance. She recognised the individuals who were in pursuit of him to be scouts from the republican leaders, with whom the divine was in constant communication. Of the real rank of Egerton she was still ignorant; but she more than suspected his disguise, and scarcely hesitated to conclude, from the anxiety shown for his apprehension, that he was of no little importance in the estimation of his opponents.

Musing and much troubled, by reason of many conflicting emotions, she took no note of the lapse of time until her arrival at the habitation of this devout minister of the word. It was built in a sequestered glen, by a narrow brook near to a couple of black, shapeless, scraggy firs, whose long lean arms were extended over the roof. A low porch guarded the door, in which dairy utensils and implements of husbandry were usually placed. The short casement windows were rendered still more gloomy, and in places screened from light, by the creeping woodbine throwing its luxuriant and unrestricted foliage about their deep recesses. A little wicket admitted the visitor into the court, on each side of which was a homely garden, where nothing ornamental was suffered to intrude or encroach upon the space devoted to objects of usefulness rather than

indulgence.

Marian lifted up the latch, entering upon the precincts of this hallowed abode. She passed on, through the large cold cheerless apartment generally called the house; turning thence towards a little chamber, used as an oratory, she heard a loud voice within. She tapped first upon the door, which she slowly opened, and beheld the good man with the sacred volume spread out before him. He raised his eyes for a moment as she entered, but refrained not from his exercise, nor altered in the least the strenuous tone of his orisons. [Pg 115]

"And Ehud put forth his left hand, and took the dagger from his right thigh, and smote Eglon, the King of Moab, so that he died. Thus perish the ungodly and the oppressor, even as Abimelech, the son of Jerubbaal, on whom the Almighty rendered the curse of Jotham his brother, and all his wickedness that he had committed, and all the evil of the men of Shechem did God return upon their own heads." Here he raised his eyes, closing the book with a devout aspiration of compliance to the will of Heaven. "I have sought counsel," he continued, "and been much comforted thereby. The wicked shall be utterly cut off, and the ungodly man shall fall by the sword. We may not spare, nor have pity, as Saul spared Agag, whom Samuel hewed in pieces; for the land is cursed for their sakes!"

"Hath Steenie yet returned from vain idols, and the abominations he hath committed?" inquired the maiden.

"He doth yet hunger after the flesh-pots of Egypt; but my bowels yearn towards him, even as my first-born. I do sorrow lest he be finally entangled in the snares of the evil one."

"Knowest thou where he abideth, or if he doth attend the outpouring of the word hereabout?"

"Verily, nay," said the divine; "but I have heard from Sarah and Reuben Heathcote that he hath been seen in the house of ungodly self-seekers, and notorious Papists and malignants, even with our enemies at Garswood. He hath likewise been found resorting unto that high place of papistry, Windleshaw, of late; despising—yea, reviling—the warnings and godly exhortations of the Reverend Master Haydock, who did purpose within himself to win, peradventure it might be to afflict with stripes, this lost one from the fold, that he might bring him back. But he hath sorely buffeted and evil-entreated this diligent shepherd with many grievous indignities; such as tying him unto a gate, and vexing him with sundry of Satan's devices. Yet we would fain hope that he is a chosen vessel, though now defiled by the adversary. He will return, peradventure, as heretofore, when the day of his visitation is past." The good man did, indeed, yearn over this erring sinner, and lifting up his voice he wept aloud. [Pg 116]

"There came two men to our habitation, where they abode certain days," said Marian.

"And they departed this morning," said the minister, sharply; "knowest thou that these be enemies of our faith, and contemners of the word?"

"I knew them not," she replied, "save that I suspected them as such, ere they departed."

"Thou wouldest not have them taken with thee in the house, and in that thou judgedst wisely; for I care not that a maiden's thoughts were so soon disposed for deeds like these, which be fitter for iron hearts and brazen hands. Though Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, slew Sisera in her tent, and Rahab the harlot received the spies in peace; yet thou didst, I doubt not, point out the way by which they went to the spies sent by the council of the holy state, to follow after these sons of Belial, and deliver them into their hands."

"I know not the path they took," said Marian, evasively.

"Heed not, for the men shall be delivered unto us; even now are they pursued, and, I doubt not, overtaken. Which way soever they turn, their steps are holden, and a snare is laid for their feet; for they shall surely die!" The preacher lifted up his eyes in righteous indignation. They have made themselves drunk with the blood of the saints."

"Will not their lives be given them for a prey?" inquired Marian, apparently in great alarm.

"I have sought counsel, I tell thee; and the Philistine and the Canaanite shall be destroyed utterly from the land."

"I fear me they be other than I had imagined," returned the maiden weeping; "yet still, and I trust I shall be forgiven, I could not betray them who have abided with us, and eaten of our bread."

"Thou knowest them not, wench," said Gilgal; "and 'tis perhaps well thou shouldest not." Here he looked fiercely from under his brows, as though he would have pierced the very inmost recesses of her soul. "Beware," continued he, "for thou art comely, and these men do use devilish and subtle devices to allure and to betray."

Marian was silent. A swollen tear, the overflowing of an overwhelmed and oppressed heart, slowly wandered down her cheek. It was the very crisis of the conflict; and the old man forbore to break the bruised reed. She seemed uneasy and anxious to depart; but he hindered her for a space. [Pg 117]

"Wilt thou not, as thou art wont, approach with me to the footstool of Him who doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men?"

Marian felt the rebuke, though it was so finely tempered, and administered so tenderly. She was

one of his earlier converts, and his love for her was that of a spiritual parent. Bending the knee, she covered her burning cheeks, and poured out her heart with him in fervour and sincerity. Whether both of them had precisely the same object in view as the end of their supplications, or whether the maiden's fears and inclinations might not lead her to offer up a sincere petition for the safety of others besides those of the household, we will not take upon ourselves to determine; but on leaving the dwelling of Gilgal Snape a suppressed sigh and an involuntary whisper escaped her—"He may yet be spared." She raised her eyes in thankfulness, and a gleam of hope, but not of happiness, irradiated her heart; for she now felt that a great gulf separated them for ever.

She had ascertained by her converse with the Puritan, who was well informed in all matters connected with his party, that they were yet unacquainted as to the ulterior proceedings of the strangers; and it seemed probable, from this circumstance alone, that at any rate Egerton had not fallen into their hands. Her next object was to find out "Steenie," and to elicit from him the knowledge of the stranger's fate; for unless this mischievous personage had in some wild erratic freak or another conveyed him off, she could not tell what mishap could have befallen him. Despite of her prejudices and the true bent of her disposition, which, though it partook not of the furious and headlong intolerance of the times, was yet sufficiently imbued with the spirit of her sect, the cavalier had won so unsuspectingly upon her kindness that she started as though she would have escaped from her own thoughts, when she felt the deep and agonising shudder which crossed her at the bare possibility that he might fall into the hands of the avenger of blood. At a glance she saw the fearful involutions and the almost inextricable toils by which the fugitives were encompassed. Unaided, she was well aware that their attempts would be fruitless. She knew not the intentions of the crazy sexton on this point. The wayward and apparently capricious [Pg 118] movements of this strange compound of Puritanism and Papistry were too dangerous and uncertain to allow any hope for ultimate safety under his management. Whether or not he had a hand in Egerton's removal was still a matter of conjecture. She felt, in addition to this uncertainty, no slight degree of awe and apprehension in her approaches to this solitary being; and a sort of undefined notion that, however modified and controlled by circumstances, yet his communications with the world of spirits were still in operation, imparting to his converse and communion with his fellow-men a strange and dubious character, which even strangers did not fail to perceive, and to shrink from contact with a being of such doubtful qualities. His predictions and dark sayings were often quoted, and much more importance was attached to them than their real and obvious meaning should have warranted. They derived greater credence, perhaps, from their usually vague and ambiguous character suiting any accident and condition, according to the fancy of the hearer, however remotely allied in their meaning and application. Whatsoever might be the event, there was little difficulty in shaping out an appropriate or equivalent prediction; and it did seem at times sufficiently marvellous that few occurrences should take place which could not be traced to some dark foretokening enveloped in one or other of these mystical revelations. Events happen to ourselves that do occasionally, and not unfrequently, rush back upon our minds with unaccountable and almost appalling force, as though, however novel in reality, they were but facts and feelings with which we had long ago been familiar, yet in what manner we are unable to determine. It might seem that they had suddenly, and for a moment, started forth from the Lethe which divides our present existence from some past state of being; that a sudden light had flashed from the portals of oblivion, too rapid or too dazzling, perhaps, to be apprehended or defined.

As she returned the shadows of evening were coming on dim and softly over the quiet glades and dewy meadows. The noisy rooks, having lately ventured forth, were cawing cheerily on their homeward flight, "beguiling the way with pleasant intercourse." The lesser birds were flitting towards the bushes; and through the lingering mist-wreath, floating still and tranquilly on the [Pg 119] moist meadows, came forth at times a solitary twitter, as though the lark had alighted softly and joyously on her nest. The glow and the brightness of evening were gone when Marian passed the threshold of her home, uncertain yet as to the fate of Egerton and the course she should pursue. She allayed, as well as she was able, the fretfulness and impatience of Chisenhall, entreating that he would remain quiet until the morrow, after which it was possible that something would transpire with regard to his friend. The irresistible conclusion, that by venturing forth he would compromise the safety of all parties, alone rendered him tractable, and prevented the consequences of any rash exposure.

Too much occupied in resolves and plans for to-morrow's enterprise, the maiden on retiring to her chamber felt no inclination for repose, and her little couch was left vacant. It was a low room within the thatch, into which a narrow window, projecting from the roof, admitted the clear mellow radiance of the moon, now shining uninterruptedly from above. So lovely and inviting was the aspect of the night, that, after a long and anxious train of thought, she resolved to enjoy the calm and delicious atmosphere, free and unconfined, hoping to feel its invigorating effects upon her exhausted spirits.

It might be within a short half-hour of midnight when she tripped lightly down the stairs, and was soon across the stile which led to the deserted chapel of Windleshaw. Attracted by the beauty and the reviving freshness of all around her, fearing no evil and conscious of no alarm, she proceeded, wandering without aim or purpose into the quiet cemetery.

In the dark shadow of the building she walked on, fearless and alone. Her bosom had been hitherto the abode of happiness and peace. To the stranger's appearance might be attributed the source of her present disquiet. She would have breathed after communion with heavenly things,

but earthly objects mingled in her aspirations; charity, peradventure, for those of another creed, and anxiety for another's fate. But she was not satisfied that this was the sole cause of her unhappiness; and the pang of separation, too, came like a barbed arrow into her soul. She felt alarmed, amazed at the sudden change. She feared that her weak and wandering heart was going back to the world, and resting for support on its frail and perishing interests. Tossed and buffeted with temptation, she still passed on; when, turning the angle of the grey tower, she emerged [Pg 120] again into the clear, unbroken moonlight—the little hillocks and upright gravestones alone disturbing the broad and level beam. She was startled from her reverie by dull and heavy sounds near her, as though a pickaxe were employed by invisible hands in disturbing the ground close to where she stood. She paused a moment and listened; the blows were still falling, and she felt the ground vibrating beneath her feet. A sudden thought crossed her—it might be "Steenie," even at this untimely hour, plying his accustomed vocation. He had been retarded probably by the accidents of the day; and the occasion being urgent, according to his own anticipations, had led him to labour so late for its completion. It was doubtless the grave which had been so mysteriously assigned to the lot of Egerton. A cold tremor crept upon her; she remembered the denunciation and the uncertain fate of the victim. Even now he might be hastening to his final account, and this horrid *ghoul* might be scenting the dissolution of the body that he was preparing to entomb.

"Graciously forbid it, Heaven!" she inwardly ejaculated, approaching the grave; but so softly, that her footsteps were not heard by the invisible workman, who was deep in the abyss of his own creating. The blows had ceased, and the mattock was now in requisition. Shovelfuls of earth were thrown out; thick and heavy clods were hurled forth in rapid succession. The scene would have driven back many a timid girl; and even some stout hearts and fierce stomachs would have shrunk from the trial. She was within range, and almost within the grasp, of a being whose evil dispositions were known and acknowledged—a being whose mysterious connection with intelligences of an unfriendly nature was universally admitted. A grave, dug in secret, peradventure during some baneful and preternatural process, yawned before her. Midnight, too, was nigh; and she was not devoid of apprehension—that inherent dread of the invisible things of darkness universally bound up with our feeble and fallen nature. Since the day of his first estrangement, man never, even in imagination or apprehension, approaches the dark and shadowy threshold of a world unseen without terror, lest some supernatural communication should break forth; it seems a feeling coeval with the curse on our first parents, when they heard "the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden, and were afraid." This apprehension still clings [Pg 121] to us; but, though surrounded in light, as well as in darkness, by a world of disembodied spirits, whose attributes and capacities are inconceivably superior to our own, our nature is so material, and our very essence so engrossed and identified with earth, that it is only when the startling realities of their existence become manifest in those visible emblems of their nature—darkness and death—that we shrink back in horror, lest our very being should suffer contact with spiritual and eternal things.

Concealed from view, Marian stood still at a very short distance from the grave. Steenie was humming a plaintive ditty, or rather dirge; for it partook of a double character, something between an alehouse roundelay and a funeral chant.

She soon perceived that each spadeful, as it was thrown out, was accompanied by a separate distich, the meaning of which she could distinctly gather from some uncouth and barbarous rhymes—the remnants, probably, of a more superstitious age—almost cabalistic in their form and acceptation. The following may serve as a specimen, though we have taken the precaution to render them a little more intelligible:—

"Howk, hack, and dig spade;
Tenant ne'er grumbled that grave was ill made."

Then came a heavy spadeful of earth again from the narrow house. Another shovelful produced the following doggerel:—

"Housen, and castles, and kings decay;
But the biggins we big last till doomus-day."

Some more coarse and less intelligible jargon followed, which it is not needful that we repeat. Again he threw forth a burden of more than ordinary bulk, resting from his labours during the following more elaborate ditty:—

"Dark and dreary though it be,
Thou shalt all its terrors dree:
Dungeon dark, where none complain,
Nor 'scape to tell its woe and pain."

Again he bent him to his task, and again the earth went rolling forth, accompanied by something like the following verse:—

"Though I dig for him that be living yet,
O'er this narrow gulf he shall never get;
The mouth gapes wide that 'Enough' ne'er cries;
Each clod that I fling on his bosom lies;
In darkness and coldness it rests on thee,
With the last stroke that falls thy doom shall be!"

[Pg 122]

With increasing energy did he work on, as though to accelerate the fate of his victim. Marian felt

herself on the brink of the tomb, and its icy touch was perceptible through every part of her frame.

The mystic chant was again audible, and more distinct than before—

"The charm is wound, and this stroke shall be
The last, when it falls, of his destiny;
Save he sell to another his birthright here,
Then the buyer shall buy both grave and bier."

Uttering this malediction, he scrambled out of the grave, and suddenly stood before the astonished maiden, who shuddered as she beheld the unshapely outline of a form which she instantly recognised.

He did not seem a whit surprised or startled, though he could not have been aware previously that a listener was nigh.

"What ho, wench!" said he; "art watching for a husband?" His sharp shrill voice grated on her ear like the cry of the screech-owl.

"I came to meet thee!" said she firmly. He broke forth into a loud laugh at this reply, more terrible than the most violent expression of hate or malignity. No wonder, in those ages, that it was supposed to be the operation of some demon, animate in his form, controlling and exercising the bodily functions to his own malignant designs.

"Where is he whom I seek?" inquired the maiden.

"Ask the clods of the valley, and the dust unto which man departs!" he replied, pointing significantly to the gulf at his feet.

"Nay," said Marian, apparently to humour the fantastical turn of his ideas; "thou knowest if he sell that grave to another, he shall escape, and the doom shall be foregone."

"Ay, lassie; but there be no fools now-a-days, I wot, to buy a man's grave over his head for the sake of a bargain!"

"I warrant thee now, Steenie, but thou hast hidden him hereabout." She said this in as careless and indifferent a tone as she could well assume.

"I am but a-keeping of him safe till his time comes. Neither priest nor Presbyterian shall cheat me out of him. He's mine as sure as that grave gives not back its prey."

"He is living, I trow?" [Pg 123]

"Good wot, I reckon so; but living men may die; and this pick never, for man or woman, opened a mouth that was left to gape long without victuals."

"Thou wouldst not harm him?"

"I'd not hurt the hair on a midge-tail, though it stung me. But his doom was shown me yesternight," said he, lowering his voice to a whisper; "and I would have him laid here in consecration, that the devil get not his bones to pick, for neither priest nor Puritan can bless the ground now-a-days like unto this."

Whether the cause of his anxiety was really a wish to provide a hallowed resting-place for the cavalier, or this pretence was merely to cover some ulterior purposes of his own, the maiden was left without a clue to form any plausible conjecture. She had heard sufficient, however, to ascertain that he was in some way or another accessory to the disappearance of Egerton, and that in all likelihood he knew the retreat of the unfortunate captive.

A woman's wits are proverbially sharpened by exigencies, and Marian was not slow in obeying their impulse.

"Where art thou abiding? I would fain speak with thee to-morrow touching thy condition, for thou hast been much estranged from us of late."

He pointed to the ivied belfry, where a grated loophole formed a dark cross on the wall.

"A man may sleep if the wind will let him; but such fearsome visions I have had of late, that I ha' been just nigh 'reft o' my wits. Wilt be a queen or a queen-mother, Marian? Something spake to me after this fashion; but I was weary with watching. The spirit passed from me, and I comprehended him not."

She was silent, apprehensive that his wits were at present too bewildered for her purpose, being always subject to aberration under any peculiar excitement of either mind or body.

"I will visit thee yonder to-morrow," said Marian.

"Me!" he shouted, in a tone of surprise. "Bless thy pretty face, Marian, I have bolted him in. He is but waiting for his dismissal."

"Whither?"

Again he pointed to the grave.

"Tush," said Marian; "he will not, maybe, get his passport thither so soon, unless, indeed, thou shouldst starve him to death." [Pg 124]

"Starve him! Nay, by"——He stopped just as he was on the point of uttering some well-remembered but long quiescent oath.

"I thought not of that before, Marian: he will want some food. Ay—ay, bless thy little heart, I did not think on 't. But for thee, Marian, I should ha' kept him there, and he might ha' starved outright; though he will not need it long, I trow, poor fool!" said he, with a sigh, ludicrous enough under other circumstances, but now invested with all the solemnity of a supernatural disclosure.

"I will away for victuals," said Marian: "stay here until I return." A short time only elapsed ere she came again, laden with provisions and other restoratives, judging that the captive stood in need of some refreshment.

Stephen was waiting for her in a deep and solemn fit of abstraction before the low door leading to a staircase at the foot of the tower. He spoke not until she stood beside him.

"My brain, Marian—Oh! my brain. Here, here!" Seizing her hand, he pressed it hurriedly over his brow, which was hot, almost scorching. The blood beat rapidly through his throbbing temples. Fearful lest the approaching hallucination might prevent her benevolent designs, she soothed and coaxed him to lead the way, which had the desired effect; muttering as he went on, at times unintelligibly, at others speaking with peculiar emphasis and vehemence.

"The foul fiend came again, though he was cast out; and I—I yielded. He promised me gold, if I would dig for 't. And I digg'd, and digg'd; but it always shaped itself into a grave—another's grave—and I never found any. Yea, once. Look thee, wench," said he, pulling out a bright Jacobus from his belt, and holding it in the beam that shot through a loophole of the ascent. "Yes; this—this! the devil brought it that tempted me. No, no; I sold my own grave for 't. Would it were mine again: I had been where the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest. Nay; there will be no rest for me. I am an apostate—a castaway—the devil that seduced me hath said it again and again—for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness, and the noisome pit for ever! But as long, look thee, as I keep this gold, I die not. No! though twice ten thousand were on my track; [Pg 125] for I sold my grave to a doomed one; nor, till I buy another with the same piece of gold, shall death and hell prevail against me. So sayeth the fiend."

Marian felt actually as though in the presence of the Evil One, so completely had the frenzy of this poor deluded idiot developed itself in this short interval. Some violent paroxysm was evidently approaching; and her object was, if possible, to procure the liberation of Egerton before her guide should be rendered either unwilling or incapable. He suddenly assumed a more calm and consistent demeanour, while, to her great joy, she heard him climbing the stair. She followed as closely as the darkness would permit, and heard him pause after ascending a few steps. Then a bolt was withdrawn, her hand was seized, and she was led hastily through the aperture. It was the entrance to a small chamber in the tower, lighted by the grating before named, through which the moonlight came softly, like a wizard stream, into the apartment.

By this light she saw something coiled up in a corner, like a human form in the attitude of repose. It was the prisoner Egerton, fast asleep. Nature, worn out with suffering, was unconsciously enjoying for a season the bliss of oblivion. He heard not the intruders, until Marian gently touched him, when, starting up, he cried—

"Is mine hour come? so soon! I thought"—

"Here be victuals; thy grave's not ready yet," said the maniac.

Soon the soft voice of the maiden fell calmly and quietly on his bosom: and in that hour Egerton felt how noble, how self-denying, was the spirit guiding the hand that ministered to him in the hour of danger and distress. Her disinterestedness was now manifest. Of another creed, and fully aware, perhaps, that he had been one of the most zealous persecutors of those who aforetime were hunted like the wild roe upon the mountains; he found that she had knowledge of him, generally, as belonging to the Royalist party, though not individually as to his rank and character.

If she had set herself to win his favour by draughts and love-philtres, she could not have compassed her design more effectually. His impetuous nature was alike impatient of restraint either in love or in war; but in the latter instance the flame had burnt so rapidly that it was nigh [Pg 126] extinguished. This maiden being renowned through the whole neighbourhood for her beauty, as well as the natural and engaging simplicity and gentleness of her manners, appertaining to one of high birth, nurtured in courts, rather than in so humble a station, the cavalier had beforetime looked on her with a favourable glance, but not with eyes at which the god Hymen would have lighted his torch. Now, so strange and wayward is that capricious passion which men call love, that when beset with dangers, his life in jeopardy, and threatened with death on every hand, he seemed to cling even to this lowly one as though his soul were bound to hers. Love, that mighty leveller, for a season threw down every barrier—the pride of birth, and the rank and sphere which were his birthright—nor did a licentious thought find a resting-place in his bosom. Young and ardent, he had spoken to her beforetime, though not explicitly, on the subject; and Marian, knowing none other but that he was a wayfaring man, of little note—so he represented himself—regarded his handsome person, his kindness, and his attentions, with still less appearance of disfavour.

"Thou shouldest be mine, Marian," said he, "were I"——

"Never!" she replied, interrupting him; but a sudden heaving of the breast showed the anguish that one hopeless word cost her.

Stephen was in the chamber, still hurrying to and fro, too fully absorbed in his own abstractions to understand or attend to what was passing.

"And wherefore?" inquired the cavalier, with some surprise.

"Wherefore? Ask your own nature and condition; your pride of station, which I have but lately known; your better reason, why; and see if it were either wise or fitting that one like yourself—though of your precise condition I am yet ignorant—should wive with the daughter of a poor but honest tapster. Suffer this plainness; I might be your bauble to-day, and your chain to-morrow."

"Thou dost wrong me!" said the cavalier; and he took her hand tenderly, almost unresistingly, for a moment. "I would wear thee as my heart's best jewel, and inlay thee in its shrine. It is but fitting that the life thou hast preserved should be rendered unto thee."

"Nay, sir," said she, withdrawing her hand, "my pride forbids it; ay, pride! equal, if not superior [Pg 127] to your own. I would not be the wife of a prince on these terms; nor on any other. 'Be not unequally yoked.' Will not this wholesome precept hold even in a carnal and worldly sense? I would not endure the feeling of inferiority, even from a husband. 'Twould but be servitude the more galling, because I could neither persuade myself into an equality, nor rid me of the chain."

"Thou dost reason wondrously, maiden. 'Tis an easy conquest, when neither passion nor affection oppose our judgment; when the feelings are too cold to kindle even at the spark which the Deity himself hath lighted for our solace and our blessing in this valley of tears."

"Mine!—Oh! say not they are too cold, too slow to kindle. They are too easily roused, too ardent, too soon bent before an earthly idol; but"—here she laid her hand on his arm—"but the right hand must be cut off, the right eye plucked out. I would not again be their slave, under the tyranny and dominion of these elements of our fallen nature, for all the pomps and vanities which they would purchase. There be mightier obstacles than those of expediency, as thou dost well imagine, to thy suit; but these are neither coldness nor indifference." Here her voice faltered with emotion, and her heart rose, rebelling against her own inflexible purpose, in that keen, that overwhelming anguish of the spirit. She soon regained her composure, as she uttered firmly: "They are—my altar and my faith!"

Egerton felt as though a sudden stroke had separated them for ever—as though it were the last look of some beloved thing just wrenched from his grasp. This very feeling, had none other prompted, made him more anxious for its recovery; and he would have urged his suit with all the energy of a reckless desperation, but the maiden firmly resisted.

"Urge me not again: not all the inducements I trust that even thou couldest offer would make me forget my fealty! No more—I hear thee not. The tempter I know hath too many allies within the citadel—worldly vanities and unsubdued affections—to suffer me to parley with the traitors and listen to their unholy suggestions. Again I say, I hear thee not."

Finding it was in vain, he forbore to persecute her further; and after having merely tasted of the cordial, and partaken of a slight refreshment, he listlessly inquired if the term of his imprisonment would soon expire. [Pg 128]

"Tarry here for a season, until the heat and energy of the pursuit be overpast, or at least abated. We could not find a more fitting place of concealment."

"Being straitened for moneys until we can obtain succour from our friends, I cannot reward your hospitality as I would desire; but if we are brought forth and delivered safely from this thrall, thy father's house shall not be forgotten."

"We will not touch the least of all thy gifts," said the maiden: "forbid that we sold our succour to the distressed, though it were to the most cruel and bitter of our enemies!"

A sudden thought excited this noble-hearted female. She cautiously approached her companion, who, having discontinued his perambulations, had seated himself in a corner, awaiting the termination of their interview. Knowing that he had generally a hoard of moneys about his person—for covetousness was ever his besetting sin—she ventured to solicit a loan, either for herself or the stranger, judging that Egerton's escape would be much impeded, if, as he had just confessed, his finances were hardly sufficient for his ordinary expenditure.

"And so I must give my blood and my groats to nourish thy sweethearts, wench," said the surly money-lender. "I have saved this prelatist and malignant from his adversaries, and now"——He considered a while, muttering his thoughts and arguments to himself with a most confused and volatile impetuosity of ratiocination. In a short time he seemed to arrive at some satisfactory conclusion through all this obscurity, and drew out a handful of coin, of some low denomination, apparently by the sound, and placed it in the hands of his fair suitor.

"There—there—one, two, three. Never mind, wench; I could have counted 'em once with the best clerkman i' the parish; and for the matter of that, I've told 'em oft enough, though,—but the count always seems to slip from me. It is all I have, save the price of my life; and I would not part with that for a world's worth; for what should it profit me, when with it I had bought my grave?"

Marian immediately transferred the long-hoarded treasure into the hands of the cavalier.

"Thanks; yea, better than these, for they were a poor recompense, my peerless maiden. I scruple not to receive this loan at thine hands, because it is part of the means thou dost employ for my escape. Yet doubt not of my willingness and ability to repay thee tenfold. Thou wilt not deny me this silly suit." [Pg 129]

As he said this, he, with the greatest gallantry and devotedness, kissed the hand held forth to supply his exigency. He was accompanying the movement with some fair and courtly speech when a loud and terrible cry startled him. It was more like the howl of some ravenous beast than any sound which human organs ever uttered. Curses followed—horrible, untold—the suggestion of fiends in their bitterness and malignity. Then came the cry, or rather shriek—

"Lost! lost!" at irregular intervals.

The cavalier and his companion were much alarmed by this unexpected occurrence. They doubted not that the foul fiend was before them, bodily, in the form of this poor maniac. After a short interval of silence, he cried, approaching them fiercely—

"Ye have sold me, soul and body, to the wicked one. May curses long and heavy light on ye! The coin! the coin! Oh, that accursed thing! I have bought thy grave, stranger; and my day of hope is past!"

The latter part of the speech was uttered in a tone of such deep and heartrending misery that pity arose in place of terror in the bosom of his auditors. Marian ventured to address him, hoping she might assuage or dissipate the fearful hallucination under which he laboured.

"There is yet hope for the repenting sinner. The hour of life is the hour of grace: for that, and that only, is life prolonged. Turn to Him from whom thou hast backslidden, nor add unto thy crime by wilfully rejecting the free offers of His mercy."

"Mercy!—Life!" Here he laughed outright. "Hearest thou not my tormentor?—Life!—I am dead, wench; and my grave is waiting for me, dug by these accursed fingers. That grave I digged for thee is now mine. Unwittingly have I bought it, and the coin is in thy purse!"

It seems the poor maniac, in replacing the mysterious coin to which, from some cause or other, he attached such importance, had unthinkingly added it to the common hoard, and in this manner conveyed it to the stranger, whose grave he persisted he had bought by this transfer; and nothing could shake his belief in so marvellous a conclusion. [Pg 130]

The cavalier attempted to comfort him; and in order to make the delusion subservient to the removal of its terrors, he offered to restore the coin, or even the whole of what he had received, that the simple gravedigger might be certain he had it in possession.

"'Tis needless; the token, once from my grasp and in the fingers of another whose grave I have digged, would never change my doom by its return. Keep what thou hast; and may it serve thee more faithfully than it hath served me! But remember—let me say it while my senses hold together, for I feel the blast coming that shall scatter them to the four winds—remember, if thou part therefrom, as I have done, to some doomed one, thou shalt go to the grave in his stead. But a charmed life is thine as long as it is in thy possession. Away—leave me—the master will be here presently for his own. Leave me, I say; for when the fiend cometh, he'll not tarry. But be sure you make fast the door, lest I escape, and mischief happen, should I get abroad."

"Stephen!" said Marian, "slight not the mercy of thy God, nor dishonour His name, by hearkening to the suggestions of the enemy. His arm is not shortened, nor His ear heavy."

"I know it; but when the fiend came, and found the house swept and garnished, did he not take unto himself seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and was not the latter end of that man worse than the first?"

"Yet," said Marian, "would he have been delivered if he had cried out to the strong man armed."

"But he would hear no refutation, persisting in the thought that his crime was unpardonable, since he had relapsed after the devil was cast out." During the present paroxysm, it was in vain to thwart him further; indeed their stay was attended with some hazard, of which, it seems, he felt aware, inasmuch as he drove them forth without ceremony. Availing themselves of his suggestion they bolted the door on the outside, thus preventing any further mischief. Here was a perplexing and unforeseen dilemma; and how to dispose of the cavalier was a question of no slight importance. At present the only alternative was to convey him to his fellow-traveller, Chisenhall, who, comfortably established in his narrow loft, was quite unconscious of the events that were passing so near him.

As they left the cemetery they heard the groans and cries of the unfortunate victim, suffering, as he imagined, from the resistless power of his tormentor. [Pg 131]

Early, with the early dawn, Marian again sought the dwelling of Gilgal Snape. She earnestly entreated him that he would make all speed to the chapel—again exercising his peculiar gift in "binding the strong man armed," or, in other words, dispossessing the demoniac.

The benevolent divine instantly accompanied her, and forthwith proceeded to the relief of the possessed. Howls and shrieks accosted him as he ascended the stair.

"I must be alone," said he; "no earthly witness may be nigh. Strong in faith, by the grace that is given me, I doubt not that this also thou wilt vouchsafe to thine unworthy dust,"—he raised his eyes toward Heaven;—"yet should I fail, He will not let me be overcome, nor fall into the snare of the wicked one; for I know, and am assured, that this trial shall turn out to the furtherance of His glory!"

Marian left him at the entrance. But, with the minister's appearance in the chamber, the agony of the deluded sufferer seemed to quicken, as if the sight of him who was the herald of mercy only added fresh fuel to his torments. Marian was fain to depart; her ears almost stunned with the cries and howlings of the demoniac. She withdrew in great agitation, her knees almost sinking under their burden. Hardly conscious of the removal, she reached her own chamber, where, covering her face with both hands, she wept bitterly. This outburst of tears relieved her; though she still suffered from the recent excitement. Her former resolutions were strengthened by the terrible example she had just witnessed; and the backsliding impenitent she looked upon as a watchlight to warn her from the rocks whereon he had made shipwreck.

Some hours passed on, but no tidings came from the "abbey." She often looked out across the path, and towards the stile which led to the ruins; but all was undisturbed. The sun shining down, bright and unclouded, all was harmony and peace—"all, save the spirit of man, was divine"—all fulfilling their Maker's ordinances, and his behest.

The sun was creeping down towards the dark low tower of the chapel; and Marian was still at the door, gazing out anxiously for intelligence. She saw a figure mounting the stile. It was—she could not be mistaken—it was the reverend and easily-recognised form of Gilgal Snape. She ran down [Pg 132] the path to meet him; and she could not help noticing that he looked more sedate than usual, appearing harassed and disquieted, betraying more obviously the approach of age and infirmities.

"Have you wrestled with the adversary and prevailed?" inquired she, anxiously.

"I have had a fearful and a perilous struggle. The fight was long; but, by the sword of the Spirit, I *have* prevailed."

"Has the backslider been brought again to the fold?"

"He hath, I trust, been found of the Good Shepherd; and he now sleepeth in Abraham's bosom!"

"Dead! Hath the grave so soon demanded its prey?"

"I left him not until the spirit was rendered unto Him who gave it. He entreated me sore that I would not leave him until I had watched his dismissal from the body."

"Then do I know of a surety that the evil spirit was cast out, and the lost one restored."

"There was joy in heaven over a repentant sinner this day. When the dark foe was vanquished, his spirit came again as a little child, and the leprosy of his sin was healed. Verily, the evil one, ere he was overthrown, did utter many strange words touching things to come, and our present perplexities. There seemed to be a spirit of divination within him which did prophesy. Marian," continued the divine, with a scrutinising look, "he did tell of thy dealing with our enemies, and that thou dost even now nourish and conceal those of whom we are in search."

"If thine enemy hunger"——But Marian was hastily interrupted in her plea.

"But of the secrets which, by virtue of mine office and godly vocation, men do entrust to my safe keeping, I may not use, even to the hurt of our enemies and the welfare of the Church, yet buffeted by Satan in the wilderness. Nevertheless, I was sore troubled that thou, even thou, shouldest harbour and abet these wicked men, who have broken the covenant and plucked up the seed of the kingdom. Truly, I wot not where the afflicted Church shall find succour when her foes be they of her own household."

"I knew not that they were enemies when first they sought our habitation. They had eaten and [Pg 133] drunken at our board, and the"——

"These sons of Belial found favour in thy sight, even the chief captain of the king's host. I would not accuse or blame thee rashly; but verily thou hast not judged wisely in this matter, for now must they depart, inasmuch as I cannot use, even to the advantage of our just cause, the knowledge I have gained; nor wilt thou render them up, I trow; but mark me, the avenger of blood is behind them, and though the city of refuge be nigh, they shall not escape!——Yet there be other marvels this wicked one did set forth," said the minister, with a searching eye directed to the maiden. "One of these uncircumcised Philistines did woo thee for his bride. What answer gavest thou?"

"Such answer as becometh one who seeketh not fellowship with the works of darkness."

"'Tis well. Now lead me to this Joab the son of Zeruiah, this captain of the king's host; for I have a message unto him also."

Following the astonished and trembling maiden, the divine, fraught with some weighty commission, was admitted into the temporary concealment of the fugitives. It was a narrow and inconvenient loft above one of the outbuildings—the roof so low that it was only in some places the upright figure of the minister might be sustained. The light penetrated through an aperture

in the roof, showing the guests within seated, and enjoying a frugal, but sufficient repast.

"I am one of few words," said the divine, "and so much the rather as that I now stand in the presence of mine enemies. What sayest thou, Prince Rupert, the persecutor of God's heritage, who didst not stay thine hand from the slaughter even of them that were taken captive? What sayest thou that the word should not go forth to kill and slay, even as thou didst smite and not spare, but didst destroy utterly them who, when beleaguered by thine armies in Bolton, were delivered into thine hand?"

"Ha!" said the Prince; "thou—a cockatrice to betray me!"

"She hath not betrayed thee. Yonder poor and afflicted sinner, when in bondage unto Satan, led captive by him at his will, did reveal it by the spirit of prophecy that was in him. But we take not advantage of this to thine hurt; we may not use the devil's works for the building up and welfare [Pg 134] of the Church, even though she were mightily holpen thereby. But listen: thou hast wooed this maiden to be the wife of thy bosom. In the dark roll of destiny it is written—so spake the unclean spirit—that if thou shouldest wed, a son springing from thy loins shall sit upon the throne of this unhappy realm. He shall govern the people righteously, every one under his own vine and his own fig-tree, none daring to make them afraid. Surely it would not be a vain and an evil thing should the maiden be——yet—this is my temptation. Get thee behind me, Satan. May the thought and the folly of my heart be forgiven me! No! proud and cruel persecutor, this maiden is a pearl of rare price which thou shalt not win—a chosen one who hath had grace given unto her above measure, even above that vouchsafed unto me. I do loathe and abhor myself for the iniquity of my heart, and the unsubdued carnality of my spirit."

"Your Highness had need of great meekness and patience to endure this grievous outpouring," said Chisenhall to the silent and bewildered Prince. "Shall I thrust him through, and make sure of his fidelity?"

"Hurt him not," said his Highness to this effectual admonisher unto secrecy. "And what if I should not wed?" continued he, addressing the divine, and at the same time looking tenderly on the damsel.

"To this point too was the prophecy accordant. The sceptre shall nevertheless be given to one of thy race; thy sister's son shall carry down the line of kings to this people; and the Lord's work shall still prosper. Now, daughter of many prayers—for I have yearned over thee with more than a father's love—choose thee without constraint this day. Thou hearest the words of this prophecy: wilt thou be the mother of kings, or the lowly and despised follower of God's heritage?"

"I will not grasp the bubble of ambition. It bursts—a hollow vapour when possessed. Let me choose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than obtain all the treasures of Egypt. But tempt me not again, for my soul cleaveth to the dust—flesh and blood shrink from the trial!"

She sobbed aloud, and threw herself on the old man's neck, who scarcely refrained from joining in her tears.

"Thou hast come forth as gold from the furnace—thou hast kept the faith, and holden fast thy [Pg 135] profession," said the divine, with a glance of triumph. Marian held out her hand to the Prince, who grasped it with fervour. She seemed more like to some holy and heavenward thing than a denizen of this polluted earth—more like a type of the confessors and martyrs of the primitive church than a disciple of our own, nurtured in the lap of carnal security, with little show of either zeal or devotion.

"Your Highness must depart—but whither?" said she, with an anxious and inquiring glance directed to the minister.

"Take no thought for their safety; thy constancy hath earned their deliverance. My safe-conduct will carry them unharmed beyond the reach of their enemies; but let them not return. It is at their own peril if they be found again harboured in this vicinage, and their blood be on their own heads!"

They departed, and the subsequent history of the gallant Rupert is well known. He joined the king at Oxford, and helped him to retrieve his defeat at Newbury, bringing off his artillery left at Dunnington Castle in the very face of the enemy. At the decisive Battle of Naseby we find him performing feats of extraordinary valour; but, as before, his headlong and precipitate fury led him into the usual error; and though the loss of the battle was not to be attributed entirely to his imprudence, yet a little more caution would have altered materially the results of that memorable conflict. Harassed and dispirited, he threw himself with the remainder of his troops into Bristol, intending to defend it to the last extremity; but even here his constitutional fortitude and valour seemed to forsake him: a poorer defence was not made by any town during the whole war, and the general expectations were extremely disappointed. No sooner had the Parliamentary forces entered the lines by storm, than the Prince capitulated, and surrendered the place to General Fairfax. A few days before, he had written a letter to the King, in which he undertook to defend it for four months, if no mutiny obliged him to surrender it. Charles, who was forming schemes and collecting forces for the relief of the city, was astonished at so unexpected an event, which was little less fatal to his cause than the defeat at Naseby. Full of indignation, he instantly recalled all Prince Rupert's commissions, and sent him a pass to go beyond sea.[9]

Several years afterwards we find him in command of a squadron of ships, entrusted to him by [Pg 136]

Charles II, when an exile in Normandy. Admiral Blake received orders from the Parliament to pursue him. Rupert, being much inferior in force, took shelter in Kinsale, and escaping thence, fled toward the coast of Portugal. Blake pursued and chased him into the Tagus, where he intended to attack him; but the King of Portugal, moved by the favour which throughout Europe attended the royal cause, refused Blake admission, and aided the Prince in making his escape. Having lost the greater part of his fleet off the coast of Spain, he made sail towards the West Indies; but his brother, Prince Maurice, was there shipwrecked in a hurricane. Everywhere his squadron subsisted by privateering, sometimes on English, sometimes on Spanish, vessels. Rupert at last returned to France, where he disposed of the remnants of his fleet, together with his prizes.[10]

He was never married; peradventure the remembrance of the noble and heroic maiden marred his wiving; he cared not for the presence of those courtly dames by whom he was surrounded, though a soldier, and a brave one. By one of his race the crown of these realms was inherited; and the same line is yet perpetuated in the person of our gracious monarch, whom God preserve! The sister of Rupert, Princess Sophia, by marriage with the Elector of Hanover, became the mother of George I.; and thus was that singular prediction of the supposed demoniac strangely and happily verified. Of Marian little remains to be told; the lives of the virtuous and well-doing furnish little matter for the historian; their deeds are not of this world; the bright page of their history is unfolded only in the next.

[Pg 137]


View larger image

CLEGG HALL, NEAR ROCHDALE
Drawn by G. Pickering.
Engraved by Edw^d^ Finden.

CLEGG HALL.

"Is there no exorcist
Beguiles the truer office of mine eyes?
Is't real that I see?"

—SHAKESPEARE.

Clegg Hall, about two miles N.E. from Rochdale, is still celebrated for the freaks and visitations of a supernatural guest, called "Clegg-Hall Boggart."

So desultory and various are the accounts we have heard, and many of them so vague and unintelligible, that it has been a work of much difficulty to weave them into one continuous narrative, and to shape them into a plot sufficiently interesting for our purpose. The name and character of "Noman" are still the subject of many an absurd and marvellous story among the country chroniclers in that region.

Dr Whitaker says it is "the only estate within the parish which still continues in the local family name." On this site was the old house built by Bernulf de Clegg and Quenilda his wife as early as the reign of Stephen. Not a vestige of it remains. The present comparatively modern erection was built by Theophilus Ashton of Rochdale, a lawyer, and one of the Ashtons of Little Clegg, about the year 1620.

Stubley Hall, mentioned in our tale, was built by Robert Holt in the reign of Henry VIII. The decay of our native woods had then occasioned a pretty general disuse of timber for the framework of dwelling-houses belonging to this class of our domestic architecture. Dr Whitaker says—"It is the first specimen in the parish of a stone or brick hall-house of the second order—that is, with a centre and two wings only. Long before the Holts, appear at this place a Nicholas and a John de Stubley, in the years 1322 and 1332; then follow in succession John, Geoffrey, Robert, and Christopher Holt; from whom descended, though not in a direct line, Robert Holt of Castleton and Stubley, whose daughter, Dorothy, married in the year 1649, John Entwisle of Foxholes. Robert, who built Stubley, and who was grandson of Christopher Holt before mentioned, was a justice of the peace in

the year 1528. In an old visitation of Lancashire by Thomas Tong, Norroy, 30 Hen. VIII., is this singular entry:—"Robarde Holte of Stubley, hase mar. an ould woman, by whom he hase none issewe, and therefore he wolde not have her name entryed." Yet it appears he had a daughter, Mary, who married Charles Holt, her cousin, descended from the first Robert. Her grandson was the Robert Holt, father to Dorothy Entwisle before-named, at whose marriage the events took place which, if the following tradition is to be credited, were the forerunners of a more strange and unexpected development. [Pg 138]

In the year 1640, nine years before the date of our story, Robert Holt abandoned Stubley for the warmer and more fertile situation of Castleton, about a mile south from Rochdale. It was so named from the *castellum de Recedham*, wherein dwelt Gamel, the Saxon Thane; which place and personage are described in our first series of *Traditions*. Castleton was principally abbey-land belonging to the house of Stanlaw. Part of this township, the hamlet of Marland or Mereland, was, at the dissolution of monasteries, granted to the Radcliffs of Langley, and sold by Henry Radcliff to Charles Holt, who married his cousin, Mary Holt of Stubley, and was grandfather to Robert, who left Stubley for this place, which we have noticed above.

Stubley, with its neighbourhood, was always noted for good ale. From its situation, exposed to all the rigours of that hilly region, the climate was reckoned so cold as to require that their daily beverage should be of sufficient strength to counteract its effects. That habits of intemperance would be contracted from the constant use of such stimuli may easily be inferred. The following letter from Nicholas Stratford, Bishop of Chester, to James Holt of Castleton, son of Robert Holt before-named, is but too melancholy a confirmation of this inference.

The original is in the possession of the Rev. J. Clowes of Broughton Hall:—

Sir,—Your request in behalf of Mr Halliwell was easily granted; for I am myself inclined to give the best encouragement I can to the poor curates, as long as they continue diligent in the discharge of their duty. But I have now, Sir, a request to make to you, which I heartily pray you may as readily grant me; and that is, that you will for the future abandon and abhor the sottish vice of drunkenness, which (if common fame be not a great liar) you are much addicted to. I beseech you, Sir, frequently and seriously to consider the many dismal fruits and consequences of this sin, even in this world—how destructive it is to all your most valuable concerns and interests; how it blasts your reputation, destroys your health, and will (if continued) bring you to a speedy and untimely death: and, which is infinitely more dreadful, will exclude you from the kingdom of heaven, and expose you to that everlasting fire where you will not be able to obtain so much as one drop of water to cool your tongue. I have not leisure to proceed in this argum^{t}, nor is it needful that I should, because you yourself can enlarge upon it without my ... I assure you, S^{r}, this advice now given you proceeds from sincere love and my earnest desire to promote your happiness both in this world and the next; and I hope you will be pleased so to accept from, [Pg 139]

"S^{r},
"Your affectionate friend
"and humble servant,
"Chester, *Nov.* 1699. "N. Cestriens.

Clegg Hall, after many changes of occupants, is now in part used as a country alehouse; other portions are inhabited by the labouring classes who find employment in that populous and manufacturing district. It is the properpty of Joseph Fenton, Esq., of Bamford Hall, by purchase from John Entwisle, Esq., the present possessor of Foxholes, in that neighbourhood.

To Clegg Hall, or rather what was once the site of that ancient house, tradition points through the dim vista of past ages as the scene of an unnatural and cruel tragedy. Not that this picturesque and stately pile, with its gable and zigzag terminations, the subject of our present engraving, was the very place where the murder was perpetrated; but a low, dark, and wooden-walled tenement, such as our forefathers were wont to construct in times anterior to the Tudor ages. The present building, with its little porch, quaint and grotesque, its balustrade and balcony above, and the points and pediments on the four sides, are evidently the coinage of some more modern brain—peradventure in King James's days. Not unlike the character of that learned monarch and of his times, half-classical, half-barbarous, it combines the puerilities of each, without the power and grandeur of the one, or the rich and chivalric magnificence of the other; and might remind the beholder of some gaunt warrior of the Middle Ages, with lance, and armour, and "ladye-love," stalking forth, clad in the Roman toga or the stately garb of the senator. The building, the subject of our tale, has neither the gorgeous extravagance of the Gothic nor the severe and stern utility of the Roman architecture. Little bits of columns, dwarf-like, and frittered down into mere extremities, give the porch very much the appearance of a child's plaything, or a Dutch toy stuck to its side.

It has the very air and attitude—the pedantic formalities—of the time when it was built. Not so the house on whose ruins it was erected; the square, low, dark mansion, constructed of wood, heavy and gigantic, shaped like the hull of some great ship, the ribs and timbers being first fixed, and the interstices afterwards filled with a compost of clay and chopped straw, to keep out the weather. Of such rude and primitive architecture were the dwellings of the English gentry in former ages: such was the house built by Bernulf and Quenilda Clegg, in the reign of Stephen, the supposed scene of that horrible deed which gave rise to the stories yet extant relating to "Clegg-Hall Boggart." Popular story is not precise, generally, as to facts and dates. The exact time when this occurrence took place we know not; but it is more than probable that some dark transaction of this nature was here perpetrated. The prevailing tradition warrants our belief. However fanciful and extravagant the filling up of the picture, common rumour still preserves untouched the general outline. It is said that, sometime about the thirteenth or fourteenth century, a wicked uncle destroyed the lawful heirs of this goodly possession—two orphan children that were left to his care—by throwing them over a balcony into the moat, that he might seize on the inheritance. Such is the story which, to this day, retains its hold on the popular mind; and ever after, it is said, the house was the reputed haunt of a troubled and angry spirit, until means were taken for its removal, or rather its expulsion. But upon the inhuman deed itself we [Pg 140]

shall not dilate, inasmuch as the period is too remote, and the events are too vague, for our purpose.

The house built by Bernulf Clegg had passed, with many alterations and renewals, into the possession of the Ashtons of Little Clegg. About the year 1620 the present edifice was built by Theophilus Ashton; and thirty years had scarcely elapsed from its erection to the date of our story. Though the original dwelling had, with one or two exceptions, been pulled down, yet symptoms of "the boggart" were still manifest in the occasional visitations and annoyances to which the inmates were subject.

The hues of evening were spread out, like a rich tapestry, above and behind the long unpicturesque line of hills, the lower acclivities of Blackstonedge, opposite to the stately mansion of Clegg Hall. The square squat tower of Rochdale Church peered out from the dark trees, high on its dim eyrie, in the distance, towards the south-west, below which a wan hazy smoke indicated the site of that thriving and populous town. To the right, the heavy blue ridge of [Pg 141] mountains, bearing the appropriate name of Blackstonedge, had not yet put on its cold, grey, neutral tint; but the mass appeared to rise abruptly from the green enclosures stretching to its base, in strong and beautiful contrast of colour, such as painters love to express on the mimic canvas. It was a lovely evening in October; one of Nature's parting smiles, ere she envelops herself in the horrors and the gloom of winter. So soft and balmy was the season that the wild flowers lingered longer than usual in the woods and copses where they dwelt. In the gardens some of the spring blossoms had already unfolded. The wallflowers and polyanthuses had looked out again, unhesitatingly, on the genial sky—deprived, by sophistication and culture, of the instincts necessary to their preservation: the wild untutored denizens of the field and the quiet woods rarely betray such lack of presentiment. But such are everywhere the results of civilisation; which, however beneficial to society in the aggregate, gives its objects altogether an artificial character, and, by depriving them of their natural and proper instincts, renders them helpless when single and unaided; while it makes them more dependent upon each other, and on the factitious wants, the offspring of those very habits and conditions into which they are thrown.

On the hollow trunk of a decrepit ash the ivy was blossoming profusely, gathering its support from the frail prop which it was fated to destroy. The insects were humming and frolicking about on their tiny wings, taking their last enjoyment of their little day, ere they gave place to the ephemera of the next.

"How merry and jocund every life-gifted thing looks forth on this our festival. It might be Nature holding high jubilee in honour of Holt's daughter on her wedding-night!"

Thus spake Nicholas Haworth to his sister Alice, as they stepped forth from the hall porch, and stayed for a moment by this aged trunk to admire the scene that was fast losing its glory and its brightness. They were bidden to the marriage-supper at Stubley, where a masqued ball was to be given after the nuptials of Dorothy Holt, the daughter of its possessor, with Entwisle, the heir of Foxholes.[11]

"It may be holiday and gladness too; but I feel it not," said Alice pensively, as she leaned on her [Pg 142] brother's arm, while they turned into a narrow lane overarched by irregular groups of beech and sycamore trees.

"Heed not such idle fancies," said her brother. "And so, because, forsooth, an impudent beggar-man predicts some strange event that must shortly befall thee, the apprehension doth cast its shadow ere it come, and thou art ready to conjure up some grim spectre in the gloom it hath created. But, in good sooth, here comes the wizard himself who hath raised these melancholic and evil humours."

"I never pass him without a shudder," said she, at the same time cringing closely to her protector.

This awful personage was one of an ancient class, now probably extinct; a sort of privileged order, supplying, or rather usurping, the place of the mendicant friars of former days. Their vocation was not of an unprofitable kind, inasmuch as alms were commonly rendered, though more from fear than favour. Woe betide the unlucky housewife who withheld her dole, her modicum of meal or money to these sturdy applicants! Mischief from some invisible hand was sure to follow, and the cause was laid to her lack of charity.

The being, the subject of these remarks, had been for many months a periodical visitor at the Hall, where he went by the name of "Noman." It is not a little remarkable that tradition should here point out an adventure something analogous to that of Ulysses with the Cyclop as once happening to this obscure individual, and that his escape was owing to the same absurd equivoque by which the Grecian chief escaped from his tormentor. Our tale, however, hath reference to weightier matters, and the brief space we possess permits no further digression. This aged but hale and sturdy beggar wore a grey frieze coat or cloak loosely about his person. Long blue stocking gaiters, well patched and darned, came over his knee, while his doublet and hosen, or body-gear, were fastened together by the primitive attachment of wooden skewers—a contrivance now obsolete, being superseded by others more elegant and seemly. A woollen cap or bonnet, of unparalleled form and dimensions, was disposed upon his head, hiding the upper part of his face, and almost covering a pair of bushy grey eyebrows, that, in their turn, crouched over a quick and vagrant eye, little the worse for the wear of probably some sixty years. A grizzled [Pg 143] reddish beard hung upon his breast; and his aspect altogether was forbidding, almost ferocious. A well-plenished satchel was on his shoulder; and he walked slowly and erect, as though little

disposed to make way for his betters in the narrow path, where they must inevitably meet. When they came nearer he stood still in the middle of the road, as though inclined to dispute their passage. His tall and well-proportioned figure, apparent even beneath these grotesque habiliments, stood out before them in bold relief against the red and burning sky, where an opening in the lane admitted all the glow and fervour of the western sunset. His strange, wayward, and even mysterious character was no bar to his admittance into the mansions of the gentry through a wide circuit of country, where his familiarities were tolerated, or perhaps connived at, even by many whose gifts he received more as a right than as an obligation.

He looked steadfastly on them as they approached, but without the slightest show either of respect or good-will.

"Prithee, stand a little on one side, that we may pass by without fear of offence," said Nicholas Haworth, good-humouredly.

"And whither away, young master and my dainty miss?" was the reply, in his usual easy and familiar address, such as might have suited one of rank and condition.

Haworth, little disturbed thereat, said with a careless smile,—"Troth, thou hast not been so long away but thou mightest have heard of the wedding-feast to-night, and, peradventure, been foremost for the crumbs of the banquet."

"I know well there's mumming and foolery a-going on yonder; and I suppose ye join the merry-making, as they call it?"

"Ay, that do we; and so, prithee, begone."

"And your masks will ne'er be the wiser for't, I trow," said the beggar, looking curiously upon them from beneath his penthouse lids.

"But that I could laugh at his impertinence, Alice, I would even now chide him soundly, and send his pitiful carcase to the stocks for this presumption. Hark thee, I do offer good counsel when I warn thee to shift thyself, and that speedily, ere I use the readiest means for thy removal."

"Gramercy, brave ruffler; but I must e'en gi'e ye the path; an' so pass on to the masking, my Lord Essex and his maiden queen." [Pg 144]

He said this with a cunning look and a chuckle of self-gratulation at the knowledge he had somehow or other acquired of the parts they were intended to enact.

"Foul fa' thy busy tongue, where foundest thou this news? I've a month's mind to change my part, Alice, but that there's neither leisure nor opportunity, and they lack our presence at the nuptials."

"How came he by this knowledge, and the fashion of our masks?" inquired Alice from her brother. "Truly, I could join belief with those who say that he obtained it not through the ordinary channels open to our frail and fallible intellects."

Mistress Alice, "the gentle Alice," was reckoned fair and well-favoured. Strongly tinctured with romance, her superstition was continually fed by the stories then current in relation to her own dwelling, and by the generally-received opinions about witches and other supernatural things which yet lingered, loth to depart from these remote limits of civilisation.

"Clegg-Hall Boggart" was the type of a notion too general to be disbelieved; yet were the inmates, in all probability, less intimately acquainted with the freaks and disturbances attendant thereon than every gossip in the neighbourhood; for, as it frequently happens, tales and marvels, for the most part originating through roguery, and the pranks of servants and retainers, were less likely to come to the ears of the master and his family than those of persons less interested, but more likely to assist in their propagation. The vagrant and erratic movements of "Noman" were, somehow or another, connected with the marvellous adventures and appearances in the "boggart chamber." At the Hall, this discarded room, being part of the old house yet remaining, was the one which he was permitted to occupy during his stay; and his appearance was generally the signal of a visit from their supernatural guest. To be sure, the strange sights he beheld rested on his testimony alone; but his word was never questioned, and his coming was of equal potency with the magician's wand in raising the ghost.

"We shall have some news from our troublesome guest, I suppose, in the morning," said Alice to her brother, as they went slowly on: "I know not the cause; but yonder vagrant seems to waken our ancient companion from his slumbers, either by sympathy or antipathy, I trow."

"For the most part they be idle tales," said he; "though I doubt not, in former days, the place was infested by some unquiet spirit. But this good house of ours hath modern stuff too strong upon it. The smell of antiquity alone hath a savour delicate enough for your musty ghost." [Pg 145]

Alice pressed his arm slightly as an admonition, at the same time gently chiding his unbelief. Thus beguiling the way with pleasant discourse, they drew nigh to the old house at Stubley, little more than a mile distant from their own dwelling.

Though now resident in his more modern, sheltered, and convenient mansion of Castleton, Holt determined that his daughter's wedding should be solemnised in the ancient halls, where Robert Bath, vicar of Rochdale, who was presented to the living on his marriage with a niece of

Archbishop Laud, was invited to perform the ceremony;—"A man," says Dr Whitaker, "of very different principles from his patron; for he complied with all changes but the last, and retained his benefice till August 24, 1662, when he went out on the Bartholomew Act, and retired to a small house at Deepleach Hill, near Rochdale, where he frequently preached to a crowded auditory."[12] [Pg 146]

As they came nigh, lights were already glancing between the mullions of the great hall window, then richly ornamented with painted glass. The guests were loitering about the walks and terraces in the little garden-plots, which in that bleak and chilly region were scantily furnished. In the hall, fitted up with flowers and green holly-wreaths for the occasion, the father of the bride and his intended son-in-law were pacing to and fro in loving discourse; the latter pranked out in a costly pair of "petticoat breeches," pink and white, of the newest fashion, reaching only to the knee. These were ornamented with ribands and laces at the two extremities, below which silk stockings, glistering like silver, and immense pink shoe-roses, completed his nether costume. A silken doublet and waistcoat of rich embroidery, over which was a turned-down shirt-collar of point-lace, surmounted the whole.

His friends and officials were busily employed in arranging matters for the occasion, distributing the wedding-favours, and preparing for the entertainments and festivities that were to follow.

Holt and his son-in-law were exempt from duty, save that of welcoming those that were bidden, upon their arrival.

Before an oaken screen, beautifully carved with arabesque ornaments and armorial bearings,[13] there was a narrow table, covered with a white cloth, and on it the prayer-book, open at the marriage formulary. Four stools were placed for those more immediately interested in the ceremony. Rosemary and bay-leaves, gilt and dipped in scented water, were scattered about the marriage-altar in love-knots and many fanciful and ingenious devices. A bride-cup rested upon it, in which lay a sprig of gilded rosemary—a relic or semblance of the ancient hymeneal torch. Huge tables, groaning with garniture for the approaching feast, were laid round the apartment—room being left in the central floor for all who chose to mingle in the games and dances that were expected after supper. [Pg 147]

The company were now assembled, and the ceremony about to commence. The bride, clothed in white, with a veil of costly workmanship thrown over her, was led in by her maidens and a train of friends. The bridegroom taking her hand, they stood before the altar, and the brief but indissoluble knot was tied. The kiss being given, the happy husband led away his partner into the parlour or guest chamber, followed by many of those who had witnessed the ceremony. Alice and her brother were amongst them; and the bride, perceiving their entrance, drew the hand of the maiden within hers, and retained her for a short season by her side.

The feast was begun; those who were for the mask took but a hasty refreshment, being anxious to proceed into the 'tiring rooms, there to array for the more interesting part of the night's revel. In due time issued forth from their crowded bowers lords and ladies gay, buffoons, morris-dancers, and the like; gypsies, fortune-tellers, and a medley of giddy mummers, into the hall, where the more sedate or more sensual were still carousing after the feast.

"Room for the masks!" was the general cry; and the musicians, each after his kind, did pierce and vex the air with such a medley of disquieting sounds that the talkers were fain to cease, and the dancers to fall to in good earnest. Alice and her brother were disguised as the cunning beggar had predicted—to wit, as the virgin queen and her unfortunate lover. Masks were often dropping in, so that the hall and adjoining chambers were fully occupied, resounding in wild echoes with noise and revelry.

Loud and long was the merriment, increasing even until the roofs rung with the din, and the revellers themselves grew weary of the tumult.

Alice was standing by the oaken screen during a temporary cessation on her part from the labours incident to royalty, when there came from behind it a tawny Moor, wearing a rich shawl turban, with a beard of comely aspect. His arms were bare and hung with massive bracelets, and he wore a tight jacket of crimson and gold. His figure was tall and commanding; but his face was concealed by a visor of black crape, which hindered not his speech from being clearly apprehended, though the sound came forth in a muffled tone, as if feigned for the occasion. Immediately there followed an Arabic or Turkish doctor, clad in a long dark robe, and his head surmounted by a four-cornered fur cap. In one hand he held a glass phial, and a box under his left arm. Of an erect and majestic stature, he stood for a moment apparently surveying the scene ere he mingled in the busy crowd. His face also was covered with black crape, and through the "eyelet-holes" a bright and burning glance shot forth, hardly repressed by the shadow from his disguise. Alice, being unattended, shunned these unknown intruders, and mingled again with a merry group who were pelting one another with comfits and candied almonds. The stately Elizabeth beckoned to her maidens; but they merely curtsied to their royal mistress, without discontinuing their boisterous hilarity. Indeed, the mumming hitherto had been more in dress than manners, so little restraint had their outward disguise occasioned, or their behaviour been altered thereby. The two late comers, however, produced a change. It appeared that their business was to enact a play or cunning device for the amusement of the company who, regarding them with a curious eye, one by one left off their several sports to gaze upon the strangers. [Pg 148]

The rest were generally known to each other; but whispers and inquiries now went round, from which it appeared that the new visitants were strictly concealed, and their presence unexpected.

"Now, o' my faith," said Harry Cheetham, whose skill in dancing and drollery had been conspicuous throughout the evening, "yon barbarians be come from the Grand Turk, with his kerchief, recruiting for the seraglio."

"Out upon thee!" said a jingling Morisco, enacted by young Hellawell of Pike House; "the Grand Signior loveth not maidens such as ours for his pavilion. They be too frosty to melt, even in Afric's sunny clime." This was said with a malicious glance at Alice, whose queen-like dignity and haughty bearing had kept many an ardent admirer at bay through the evening.

"Sure the master of the feast hath withheld this precious delectation until now," said Essex; "for they, doubtless, be of his providing."

"And give promise of more novel but less savoury entertainment," said Hamer of Hamer. But Holt either knew them not, or his look of surprise, not unmixed with curiosity and expectation, showed [Pg 149] that he was playing the masker too, without other disguise than his own proper features—the kind hospitable face of an honest north-country squire, ruddy with health and conviviality.

At the farther end of the hall the bride and her bride-maidens were standing, with the bridegroom at her side, whispering soft gallantries in her ear. The strangers, on their entrance, rendered neither token nor obeisance, as courtesy required, to the bride and her train, but followed Alice, who had joined her brother in the merry crowd, now watching the motions of these unexpected visitants. They approached with stately and solemn steps; and, without once deigning to notice the rest of the company, the gaudy Moor bowed himself in a most dignified *salaam* before the queen. Alice, apparently with some trepidation at being thus singled out from the rest, clung to her brother, she hardly knew why.

"My sublime master, emperor of the world, lord of the sun, and ruler of the seven celestial configurations, sendeth his slave unto the most high and mighty Queen—whose beauty, as a girdle, doth encompass the whole earth—with greeting."

"And who is he?" said Alice, timidly enough.

"The Sultan Ibrahim, lord of the seven golden towers, the emerald islands, and ruler over an hundred nations. He bade his slave kiss the hem of his mistress's garment, and beseech her to put her foot on the neck of his bondsman, her slave's slave, and accept his gift."

"And who is this thy companion?" said Alice, growing bolder, while the company were gradually gathering round them.

"This, whom your unworthy slave hath brought, most gracious Queen, is the renowned Doctor Aboulfahrez, high conjuror to the Khan of Tartary, and physician to the Great Mogul. He doth drive hence all pains and diseases whatsoever, and will cure your great majesty of any disorder of the spirit, by reason of charms or love-philtres heretofore administered."

With a slight bend of his illustrious person, as though the high conjuror to the Khan of Tartary, and physician to the Great Mogul, thought himself too nearly on an equality with her "high mightinesse" the Queen, the learned doctor for the first time broke silence— [Pg 150]

"Will it please the Queen's grace to command an ensample of mine art?"

"We must first be assured unto what purpose. Hast thou not heard," said Alice, with increasing confidence, "that it is treason to put forth strange or unlawful devices before the Queen?"

The stranger bowed. "But your grace hath traitors in those fair eyes which do prompt treason if they practise none."

This gallant speech was much applauded by the company, and relieved Alice from the necessity of a speedy and suitable answer; for she began to be somewhat perplexed by the address of these bold admirers.

"Look at this precious phial, the incomparable elixir, the pabulum of life, the grand arcanum, the supernaculum, the mother and regenerator of nature, the source and the womb of all existence, past, present, and to come!" The learned doctor paused, more from want of breath than from scarcity of epithets wherewith to blazon forth the great virtues of his discovery. Soon, however, he breathed again through the mouth-slit in his mask, and blew on the phial, when lo! a vapour issued from within, curling in long-drawn wreaths down the side, in a manner most wonderful to behold.

This trick roused the admiration of his audience, but he made a sign that they should be still, as their breath and acclamations might disturb the process. He now thrust one finger into the vapour, when it appeared to wind round his hand; then, letting the bottle drop, it fell, suspended from the finger by this novel and extraordinary chain—the vapour seeming to be the link by which it hung. This unexpected feat repressed the noisy burst of applause which might have been the result of a less wonderful device. Every one looked anxiously and uneasily at his neighbour, and at the renowned Doctor Aboulfahrez, not feeling comfortable, perhaps, or even safe, in the presence of so exalted a personage. But new wonders were at hand. The mysterious visitor uttered some cabalistic words, and lo! flames burst forth from the magic phial, to the additional wonder and dismay of the beholders.

"When the Queen's grace doth will it, this box shall be opened; but it will behove her to be discreet in what may follow, lest the charm be evaded."

The Moorish slave was silent during this procedure, standing with arms folded, as though he had been one of the mutes of his master's harem, rather than ambassador to his "ladye love." With the assent of Alice, the Doctor took in one hand the casket, which he cautiously unlocked. The lid flew open by a secret spring, and a peacock of surprising beauty and glittering plumage rose out of the box, imitating the motions of the real bird to admiration. The mimic thing, being placed on the floor, flapped its wings, and unfolded its tail with all the pride and precision of the original. [Pg 151]

"Beshrew me!" said Holt, approaching nearer to the performer, "but thou hast been bred to the black art, I think. Some o' ye have catered excellently for our pastime." But who it was none could ascertain, each giving his neighbour credit secretly for the construction of these dainty devices. Yet new wonders were about to follow, when the bride and bridegroom, though wedded to each other's company, came forward to see the spectacle. Not a guest was missing. Even those most pleasantly occupied at the tables left their sack and canary, their spices and confections. The musicians, too, and the menials, seemed to have forgotten their several duties, and stood gaping and marvelling at the show. Suddenly there flew open a little door in the breast of the automaton bird, and out jumped a fair white pigeon, which, after having performed many surprising feats, in its turn became the parent of another progeny—to wit, a beautiful singing bird, or nightingale, which warbled so sweetly, fluttering its wings with all the ecstacy of that divine creature, that the listeners were nearly beside themselves with ravishment and admiration. The nightingale now opened, and a little humming-bird of most surprising brilliancy hopped forth, and jumping up to the Queen, held out its beak, having a label therein, apparently beseeching her to accept the offering. She stooped down to receive the billet, which she hastily unfolded. What effect was visible on her countenance we cannot pretend to say, inasmuch as the mask precluded observation; but there was an evident tremor in her frame. She seemed to be overpowered with surprise, and held out the note as though for the moment incapable of deciding whether to accept it or no. Then with a sudden effort she crumpled it together, and thrust it behind her stomacher. Wonder sat silent and watchful on the face of every beholder. The actors in this strange drama had replaced the automata in the box again, closing its lid. The Moor had made his *salaam*, the Doctor his obeisance, disappearing behind the screen from which they had so mysteriously come forth. But at their departure a train of fire followed upon their track, and a lambent flame played curiously upon the wooden crockets for a few seconds, and then disappeared. [Pg 152]

Now was there a Babel of tongues unloosed, at first by sudden impulses and whispers, then breaking forth by degrees into a loud and continuous din of voices, all at once seeking to satisfy their inquiries touching this strange and unexpected visit. Their host was mightily pestered and besieged with questions and congratulations on the subject, which he has promptly and peremptorily disclaimed, attempting to fix the hatching of the plot upon the astonished bridegroom. But even he would not father the conceit; and, in the end, it began to be surmised that these were indeed what their appearance betokened, or something worse, which cast a sudden gloom on the whole assembly. Some sallied out of the door to watch, and others blamed the master for not seizing and detaining these emissaries of Satan. Alice was closely questioned as to the communication she had received; but she replied, evasively perhaps, that it was only one of the usual stale conceits appropriate to the masque.

Nothing more was heard or seen of them; and it was now high time they should accompany the bridegroom to his own dwelling at Foxholes—a goodly house situate on a pretty knoll near the town of Rochdale, and about two miles distant from Stubley.

Now was there mustering and hurrying to depart. An unwieldy coach was drawn up, into which the bride and her female attendants were forthwith introduced, the bridegroom and his company going on foot. On arriving at Foxholes, the needful ceremonies were performed. Throwing the stocking, a custom then universally practised, was not omitted; which agreeable ceremony was performed as follows:—

The female friends and relations conducted the bride to her chamber, and the men the bridegroom. The latter then took the bride's stockings, and the females those of the bridegroom. Sitting at the bottom of the bed, the stockings were thrown over their heads. When one of the "hurlers" hit the owner, it was deemed an omen that the party would shortly be married. Meanwhile the posset was got ready, and given to the newly-married couple.[14] [Pg 153]

It was past midnight, yet Alice sat, solitary and watchful, at her little casement. One fair white arm supported her cheek, and she was gazing listlessly on the silver clouds as they floated in liquid brightness across the full round disc of the moon, then high in the meridian. Her thoughts were not on the scene she beheld. The mellow sound of the waterfalls, the murmur from the river, came on with the breeze, rising and falling like the deep pathos of some wild and mysterious music. Memory, that busy enchanter, was at work; and the scenes she had lately witnessed, so full of disquietude and mystery, mingled with the returning tide of past and almost forgotten emotions. We have said that the prevailing bent or bias of her disposition was that of romance; and this idol of the imagination, this love of strange and enervating excitement, had not been repressed by the occurrences of the last few hours; on the contrary, she felt as though some wondrous event was impending—some adventure which she alone should achieve—some power that her own arm should contend with and subdue.

She took the billet from her bosom; the moonlight alone fell upon it; but the words were so

indelibly fixed upon her imagination that she fancied she could trace every word on that mystic tablet.

> "To-morrow, at midnight, in the haunted chamber! If thou hast courage, tarry there a while. Its occupant will protect thee."—['Wherefore am I so bent on this adventure? To visit the beggar in his lair!' thought she; and again she threw her eyes on the billet.] "Peril threatens thine house, which thy coming can alone prevent. Shouldest thou reveal but one word of this warning, thy life, and those dear to thee, will be the forfeit. From thine unknown monitor,
>
> "THESE."

The guest in the boggart-chamber was Noman, to whom it had been allotted, and though he told of terrible sights and harrowing disclosures, he seemed to brave them all with unflinching hardihood, and even exulted in their repetition. To remain an hour or two with such a companion was in itself a sufficiently novel adventure; but that harm could come from such a source scarcely entered her imagination. A feeling of irrepressible curiosity stimulated her, and prevailed over [Pg 154] every other consideration. It was not like spending the time alone; this certainly would have been a formidable condition to have annexed. Besides, would it not be a wicked and a wanton thing to shrink from difficulty or danger when the welfare and even life of one so dear as her brother, peradventure, depended on her compliance. Another feeling, too, more complicated, and a little more selfish it might be, was the hidden cause to which her inclinations might be traced.

"Mine unknown monitor!" she repeated the words, and a thousand strange and wayward fancies rose to her recollection. Often had she seen, when least expecting it, a stranger, who, in whatsoever place they met, preserved a silence respectful but mysterious. She had seen him in the places of public resort, in the solitary woods, and in the highways; but his reserve and secrecy were unbroken. When she inquired, not an individual knew him; and though his form and features were indelibly traced on her memory, she could never recall them without an effort, which, whether it was attended with more of pain than of pleasure, we will not venture to declare. Once or twice she had fancied, when awaking in the dead stillness of the night, that an invisible something was near and gazing upon her; but this feeling was soon forgotten, though often revived whenever she was more than usually sensitive or excited. The figure of the Moor was wonderfully similar to the form of the mysterious unknown. But the secret was now, at any rate, to be divulged; and a few hours would put her into possession of the key to unlock this curious cabinet. So thought Alice, and her own secret chambers of imagery were strangely distempered thereby. Was she beloved by one of a higher order of beings, a denizen of the invisible world, who tracked her every footstep, and hovered about her unseen? She had heard that such things were, and that they held intercourse with some favoured mortals—unlimited duration, and a nature more exalted, subject to no change, being vouchsafed to the chosen ones. The exploits at Stubley seemed to favour this hypothesis, and Alice fell into a delicious reverie, as we have seen, well prepared for the belief and reception of any stray marvels that might fall out by the way.

Looking upon the moat which lay stagnant and unruffled beneath the quiet gaze of the moon, she thought that a living form emerged from the bushes on the opposite bank;—she could not be [Pg 155] mistaken, it was her unknown lover. Breathless she awaited the result; but the shadows again closed around him, and she saw him not again. Bewildered, agitated, and alarmed, the day was springing faintly in the dim east when her eyelids lay heavy in the dew of their repose.

Morning was high and far risen in the clear blue atmosphere, but its first and balmy freshness was passed when Alice left her chamber. She looked paler and more languid than she was wont, and her brother rallied her playfully on the consequences of last night's dissipation; but her thoughts were otherwise engrossed, and she replied carelessly and with an air of abstraction far different from her usual playful and unrestrained spirit. The mind was absorbed, restricted to one sole avenue of thought: all other impressions ceased to communicate their impulse. Her brother departed soon afterwards to his morning avocations; but Alice sat in the porch. She looked out on the hills with a vacant, but not unwistful eye. Their slopes were dotted with many a fair white dwelling, but the rigour of cultivation had not extended so far up their barren heathery sides as now; yet many a bright paddock, green amid the dark waste, and the little homestead, the nucleus of some subsequent and valuable inheritance, proclaimed the unceasing toil, the primeval curse, and the sweat of the brow, that was here also.

To enjoy the warmth and freshness of the morning, Alice had removed her spinning-wheel into the porch. Here she was engaged in the primitive and good old fashion of preparing yarn for the wants of the household—an occupation not then perfected into the system to which it is now degraded. The wives and daughters of the wealthiest would not then disdain to fabricate material for the household linen, carrying us far back into simpler, if not happier times, when Homer sung, and kings' daughters found a similar employment.

Alice was humming in unison with her wheel, her thoughts more free from the very circumstance that her body was the subject of this mechanical exercise.

"Good morrow, Mistress Alice!" said a sonorous voice at the entrance. Turning suddenly, she espied the athletic beggar standing erect, with his staff and satchel, on one side of the porch.

"Ha' ye an awmous to-day, lady?" He doffed his cap and held it forth, more with the air of one [Pg 156] bestowing a favour than soliciting one.

"Thou hast been i' the kitchen, I warrant," said Alice, "by the breadth of thy satchel."

"An' what the worse are ye for that?" replied the saucy mendicant; "your hounds and puppies would lick up the leavings, if I did not."

"Go to," said Alice, impatiently; "thou dost presume too far to escape correction. Begone!"

"This air, I reckon—ay, this blessed air—is as free unto my use as thine," said Noman, sullenly, and without showing any symptoms of obedience.

"My brother shall know of thine insolence, and the menials shall drive thee forth."

"Thy brother!—tell him, pretty maiden, that though he is a lawyer, and his uncle, he who built this house to boot, he hath little left in this misgoverned realm but to deal out injustice. Other folks' money sticks i' their skirts that have precious little o' their own, I wis."

"I know not the nature of thine allusions, nor care I to bandy weapons with such an adversary."

"Hark ye, lady! it was to solder down as pretty a piece of roguery as one would wish to leave to one's heirs that Theophilus Ashton, thine uncle, thy mother's brother, now deceased, went to London when he had builded this house."

"Roguery!—mine uncle Ashton! Darest thou?"——

"Ay, the same. The spoils of my patrimony built this goodly dwelling, and the battle of Marston Moor gave thy brother wherewith to buy the remainder of the inheritance. I was made a beggar by my loyalty, he a rich man by his treason."

"What means this foul charge?" said Alice, astounded by the audacity of this accusation.

"But fear not. Had it not been for thee and another—whose well-being is bound up in thine own—long ago would this goodly heritage have been spoiled; for—revenge is sweeter even than possession; so good-morrow, Mistress Alice."

"What, then, is thy business with me?"

"Wentest thou not from the masque with thy pretty love-billet behind thy stomacher?"

"Insolent vagrant, this folly shall not go unpunished!" [Pg 157]

"Hold, wench! provoke not an"——he paused for one second, but in that brief space there came a change over his spirit, which in a moment was subdued as though by some over-mastering effort —"an impotent old man." His voice softened, and there was a touch even of pathos in the expression. "To-night—fail not—I, ay even *I*, will protect thee. Fear not; thy welfare hangs on that issue!"

Saying this, with an air of dignity far superior to his usual bluntness and even rudeness of address, he slowly departed. Thoughts crowded, like a honey swarm, to this hive of mystery, nor could she throw off the impression which clung to her. She had been warned against revealing this communication, but at one time she felt resolved to make her brother acquainted with the whole, and to claim his protection; but then came the warning, or rather threat, of some hidden mischief that must inevitably follow the disclosure. "Surely, in her own home, she might venture to walk unattended. The beggar she had known for some time in his periodical visits; and though she felt an unaccountable timidity in his presence, yet she certainly was minded to make an experiment of the adventure; but"——And in this happy state of doubt and fluctuation she remained until eventide, when a calm bright moon, as it again rose over the hill, saw Alice at the casement of her own chamber, looking thoughtfully, anxiously, down where the dark surface of the stagnant moat wore a bright star on its bosom. The scene, the soft and tender influence which it possessed—the hour, soothing and elevating the mind, freed from the harassing and petty cares of existence—to a romantic and imaginative disposition these were all favourable to its effects—the development of that ethereal spirit of our nature, that enchanter whose wand conjures up the busy world within, creating all things according to his own pleasure, and investing them with every attribute at his will. She felt her fears give way, and her resolution was taken: the die was cast, and she committed herself to the result. What share the handsome, dark, and melancholy-looking stranger had in this decision she did not pause to inquire, nor indeed could she have much if any suspicion of the secret influence he excited. There was danger, and this danger could only be averted by her interference: what might be curiosity was at any rate her duty; and she, feeling mightily like some devoted heroine, would not shrink from the trial. [Pg 158] When once brought to a decision she felt a load taken from her breast; she breathed more freely, and her tread was more vigorous and elastic. She left her chamber with a lofty mien, and the gentle Alice felt more like the proud mistress of an empire than the inhabitant of a little country dwelling when she re-entered the parlour: yet there was a restless glance from her eye which ever and anon would start aside from visible objects and wander about, apparently without aim or discrimination. Her brother was busied, happily, with domestic duties, too much engaged to notice any unusual disturbance in her demeanour, and Alice employed her time to little profit until she heard the appointed signal for rest. As they bade the usual "good-night," her heart smote her: she looked on the unconscious, unsuspecting aspect of her brother, and the whole secret of her heart was on her tongue: it did not escape her lips; but the tear stood in her eye; and as she closed the door it sounded like the signal of some long separation—as though the portal had for ever closed upon her.

Wrapped in a dark mantle, with cap and hood, the maiden stepped forth from her little closet

about midnight. She bore a silver lamp that waved softly in the night-wind as she went with a noiseless, timid step through the passages to the haunted chamber. The room wherein the beggar slept was somewhat detached from the rest of the dormitories. A low gallery led by a narrow corridor to a flight of some two or three steps into this room, now used for the stowage of lumber. It was said to have been one of the apartments in the old house, forming a sort of peduncle to the new, not then removed, like a remnant of the shell sticking to the skirts of the new-fledged bird. This adjunct, the beggar's dwelling, is now gone. An ancient doorcase with a grotesque carving disclosed the entrance. She paused before it, not without a secret apprehension of what might be going on within. For the first time she felt the novelty, not to say imprudence, of her situation, and the unfeminine nature of her exploit. She was just hesitating whether or not to return when she heard the door slowly open; a tall, gaunt, figure looked out, which she immediately recognised to be that of the mendicant. Somewhat reassured, and her courage strengthened by his appearance, she did not attempt to retreat, but stood silent for a space, and seemingly not a little abashed; yet the purity of her motives, as far as known to [Pg 159] herself, soon recurred to her aid, and her proud and somewhat haughty spirit immediately roused its energies when she had to cope with difficulty and danger.

"I come to thy den, old man, that I may unriddle thy dark sayings."

"Or rather," replied he, slowly and emphatically, "that thou mayest unriddle that pretty love-billet thou hast read."

"I am here in my brother's house, and surely I have both the right and the power to walk forth unquestioned or unsuspected of an intrigue or assignation," replied she, quick and tender on the point whereon her own suspicions were disagreeably awakened.

"Come in, lady," said he, "and thou shall be safe from any suspicions but thine own."

Alice entered, and the door was closed and bolted. Her feelings were those of uneasiness, not unmixed with alarm. Before her stood the athletic form of the mendicant; she was at some distance from the rest of the family—none caring to have their biding-place in the immediate vicinity of the haunted chamber—in the power, it might be, of this strange and anomalous being. A miserable pallet lay on the floor in one corner, and the room was nearly filled with useless lumber and the remains of ancient materials from the old apartments. Probably it was from this circumstance that the ghosts had their fancies for this room, haunting the relics of the past, and lingering around their former reminiscences. The light she held gleamed athwart the face of her companion, and his features were strangely significant of some concealed purpose.

"Whom do we meet in this place?" she inquired.

"Prithee, wait; thou wilt see anon. But let me counsel thee to remain silent; what thou seest note, but make no reply. Be not afraid, for no harm shall befall thee. But let me warn thee, maiden, that thou shrink not from the trial."

He now slowly retired, and she watched his receding figure until it was hidden behind a huge oaken bedstead in the corner. But he returned not, and Alice felt terrified at being so unexpectedly left alone. She called out to him, but there was no answer; she sought for some outlet, but no trace was visible whereby he could have departed from the chamber. As she was [Pg 160] stooping down, suddenly the light was blown out, and she felt herself seized by invisible hands.

"Be silent for thy life," said a strange whisper in her ear. She was hurried on through vaults and passages; the cold damp air struck chilly on her, and she felt as though descending into some unknown depths, beneath the very foundations of her own dwelling. Darkness was still about their steps; but she was borne along, at a swift pace, by persons evidently accustomed to this subterraneous line of communication.

"No harm shall happen thee," said the same whisper in her ear as before. Suddenly a vivid light flashed out from an aperture or window, and she heard a groaning or rumbling and the clank of chains; but this was passed, and a pale dull light showed a low vaulted chamber, into which Alice was conveyed. An iron lamp hung from the ceiling in what seemed to have been one of the cellars of the old house, though she was unaware beforetime of such a dangerous proximity. The door was closed upon her, and again she was left alone. So confused and agitated was she for a while that she felt unable to survey the objects that encompassed her. By degrees, however, she regained sufficient fortitude to make the examination. Her astonishment was extreme when she beheld, ranged round the vault, coffers full of coin—heaps of surprising magnitude exposed, the least of which would have been a king's ransom; fair and glistering too, apparently fresh from the hands of some cunning artificer. Her curiosity in some measure getting the better of her fears, she ventured to touch one of these tempting heaps—not being sure but that her night visions were answerable for the illusion. She laid her hand on a hoard of bright nobles. Another and another succeeded, yet each coffer held some fresh denomination of coin. There were moneys of various nations, even to the Spanish pistole and Turkish bezant. Such exhaustless wealth it had never yet entered into her imagination to conceive—the very idea was too boundless even for fancy to present. "Surely," thought she, "I am in some fairy palace, where the combined wealth of every clime is accumulated; and the king of the genii, or some old and ugly ogre, has certes fallen in love with me, and means to present it for my dowry." Smiling at this thought, even in the midst of her apprehensions—for the blow which severed her from her friends was too stunning to be felt immediately in all its rigour—she stood as one almost transported with admiration and [Pg 161] surprise. Yet her situation was far from being either enviable or pleasant, though in the midst of

a treasure-house of wealth that would have made an emperor the richest of his race. No solution that she could invent would at all solve the problem—no key of interpretation would fit these intricate movements. Here she stood, a prisoner perhaps, with the other treasures in the vault; and assuredly the miser, whosoever he might be, had shown great taste and judgment too in the selection. But the crisis was at hand. The door opened, and she heard a footstep behind her. A form stood before her whom she immediately recognised and perhaps expected. The mysterious stranger was in her presence. With a respectful obeisance he folded his hands on his bosom, but he spoke not.

"What wouldst thou? and why this outrage?" inquired she.

The intruder pointed to the surrounding treasures, then to himself: by which she understood (so quickly interpretated is the mute eloquence of passion) that he was in love with her, and devoted them all exclusively to her service. But what answer she gave, permit me, gentle reader, for a season to detain; for truly it is an event of so marvellous a nature whereon our tradition now disporteth itself, that, like an epicure hindering the final disposal of some delicate mouthful, of which, when gulped, he feeleth no more the savour, so we would, in like manner, courteous reader, do thee this excellent service, in order that the sweetness of expectation may be prolonged thereby; and the solution, like a kernal in the shell, not be crushed by being too suddenly cracked.

Turn we now to the inmates at the hall, where, as may easily be understood, there was a mighty stir and commotion when morning brought the appointed hour, and Mistress Alice came not to the breakfast meal. Her brother was at his wits' end when the forenoon passed, and still there were no tidings. Messengers were sent far and near, and no place was left untried where it was thought intelligence might be gained. She was not to be found, nor any trace discovered of her departure.

Nicholas was returning from Foxholes, Stubley, and Pike House. Passing, in a disconsolate mood, through the gate leading from the lane to his own porch, he met Noman, apparently departing. The beggar, seeing his approach, assumed his usual stiff and inflexible attitude, pausing ere he passed. A vague surmise, for which he could not account, prompted the suspicions of Nicholas [Pg 162] Haworth towards this unimportant personage.

"What is thy business to-day abroad?" he inquired hastily.

"A word in thine ear, master," said the beggar.

"Say on, then; and grant that it may have an inkling of my sister!"

"She hath departed."

"That I know. But whither?"

"Ask the little devilkins I saw yesternight. I have told ye oft o' the sights and terrible things that have visited me i' the boggart chamber, and that the ghost begged hard for a victim."

"What! thou dost not surely suppose he hath borne away my sister?"

"I have said it!" replied the mendicant, with an air of mystery.

"We'll have the place exorcised, and the spirit laid; and thou"—said Nicholas, pausing—"have a care that we hale thee not before the justice for practising with forbidden and devilish devices."

"I cry thee mercy, Master Haworth; but for what good deed am I to suffer? I have brought luck to thine house hitherto, and what mischief yon ghost hath wrought is none o' my doing. If thou wilt, I can rid thee of his presence, and that speedily, even if 'twere Beelzebub himself."

"But will thy conjurations bring back my sister?" said the wondering, yet half-credulous squire.

"That is more than I can tell. But, to prove that I am not in league with thine enemy, I will cast him out."

"Hath Alice been strangled, or in anywise hurt, by this wicked spirit?"

"Nay," said the beggar solemnly, "I guess not; but I heard him pass by, and the chains did rattle fearfully through mine ears, until I heard them at her bed-chamber. He may have spirited her away to fairy-land for aught I know; and yet she lives!"

"Save us, merciful Disposer of our lot!" said Nicholas, much moved to sorrow at this strange recital, yet in somewise comforted by the assurance it contained. "We are none of us safe from his visitations, now they are extended hitherto. I dreamt not of danger beforetime, though I have heard sounds, and seen unaccountable things; yet I imagined that in the old chamber only he had power to work mischief; and, even there, I did disbelieve much of thy story, as it respected his [Pg 163] freaks and the nature and manner of his visits. The rumblings that I fancied at times in the dead of night were in the end disregarded and almost forgotten."

"I too have heard the like, but I knew it was the spirit, and"——

"Beware, old man; for I do verily suspect thee as an abettor of these unlawful practices."

"And so the reward for my testimony is like to end in a lying accusation and a prison!"

"Canst thou win her back by driving from me this evil spirit?"

"I can lay the ghost, I tell thee, if thou wilt; but as for the other, peradventure it lieth not within the compass or power of mortal man to accomplish."

"What thou canst, let it be done without delay, for I would fain behold a sight so wonderful; yet will I first take precaution to put thee in durance until it be accomplished; perchance it may quicken thee to this good work; and I do bethink me too, thou knowest more than thou wouldest fain acknowledge of this evil dealing toward my sister."

The beggar sought not to escape; he knew it would be in vain, for the menials had surrounded them; and he was conveyed to the kitchen until he should be ready for the important duties he had to perform. To-morrow was appointed for the trial, but fearful was the night that intervened —rattling of chains, falling of heavy weights, loud rumblings, as though a coach-and-six were driving about the premises; these, intermingled with shrieks and howlings, were not confined to the old room, where the beggar lodged as heretofore, but were heard and felt through the whole house. It seemed as though his presence had hitherto confined them to the locality we have named, and that they had burst their bounds on his departure. Little rest had the household on that fearful night, and the morning was welcome to many who had been terrified so that they scarcely expected to see the light of another sun.

With the earliest dawn Nicholas Haworth hied him to the kitchen, where the beggar, a close prisoner, was comfortably nestled on his couch.

"What ho!" said the squire, "thou canst sleep when others be waking. Thy friends have been seeking thee through the night, mayhap. There have been more shaking limbs than hungry stomachs, I trow." [Pg 164]

"I know of naught that should keep me waking; my conscience made no echo to the knocking without; and so good-morrow, Master Nicholas."

There came one at this moment running in almost breathless, to say that the cart-horses were all harnessed and yoked ready in the stable by invisible hands, and that no one durst take them from their stalls. On the heels of this messenger came another, who shouted out that the bull, a lusty and well-thriven brute, was quietly perched, in most bull-like gravity, upon the hay-mow. It being impossible, or contrary to the ordinary law of gravitation, that he could have thus transported himself, what other than demon hands could or durst have lifted so ponderous and obstinate a beast into the place? In short, such were the strange and out-of-the-way frolics that had been committed, that Satan and all his company seemed to have been let loose upon the household on this memorable night.

"Thou shalt rid us of these pests, or by the head of St Nicholas," said his namesake, "the hangman shall singe thy beard for a fumigation."

"Let me go, and the spirit shall not trouble thee."

"Nay, gaffer, thou dost not escape me thus; my sister, we have yet no tidings of her, and, it may be, those followers or familiars of thine can help me to that knowledge."

"I tell thee I'll lay the ghost while the holly's green, or mire in Dearnly Clough, should it so please thee, Master Nicholas; but I must first be locked up for a space in the haunted chamber alone. Keep watch at both door and loophole, if thou see fit; but I gi'e thee my word that I'll not escape."

"Agreed," said Haworth; "but it shall not avail thee, thou crafty fox, for we will watch, and that right diligently; unless the de'il fly away with thee, thou shalt not escape us."

The bargain was made, and Noman was speedily conducted to the chamber. Sentinels were posted at the door, and round the outside, to prevent either entrance or exit.

A long hour had nigh elapsed, and the watchers were grown weary. Some thought he had gone off in a chariot of smoke through the roof, or in a whirlwind of infernal brimstone; while others, not a few, were out of doors gazing steadfastly up towards the chimneys, expecting to see him perched there, like a daw or starling, ready for flight. But when the hour was fulfilled, the beggar lifted up the latch, and walked forth alone, without let or molestation. [Pg 165]

"Whither away, Sir Grey-back?" said Nicholas, "and wherefore in such haste? We have a word or so ere thou depart. Art thou prepared?"

"Ay, if it so please thee."

"And when dost thou begin thine exorcism?"

"Now, if so be that thou have courage. But I warn thee of danger therefrom. If thou persist, verily in this chamber shall it be done."

"Then return, we will follow—as many as have courage, that is," said Nicholas Haworth, looking round and observing that his attendants, with pale faces and mewling stomachs, did manifest a wondrous inquietude, and a sudden eagerness to depart. Yet were there some whose curiosity got the better of their fears, and who followed, or rather hung upon their master's skirts, into the chamber, which, even in the broad and cheerful daylight, looked a gloomy and comfortless and unhallowed place. Noman commanded that silence should be kept, that not even a whisper should breathe from other lips than his own. He drew a line with his crutch upon the floor, and

forbade that any should attempt to pass this imaginary demarcation. The auditors were all agape, and but that the door was fastened, some would doubtless have gone back, repenting of their temerity.

After several unmeaning mummeries and incantations, the chamber appeared to grow darker, and a low rumbling noise was heard, as from some subterraneous explosion.

"*Dominus vobiscum*," said the necromancer; and a train of fire leapt suddenly across the room. A groan of irrepressible terror ran through the company; but the exorcist, with a look of reprehension for their disobedience, betook himself again to his ejaculations. Retiring backwards a few paces to a corner of the room, he gave three audible knocks upon the floor, which, to the astonishment and dismay of the assembly, were distinctly repeated, apparently from beneath. Thrice was this ceremony gone through, and thrice three times was the same answer returned.

"Restless spirit," said the conjuror, solemnly, and in a voice and manner little accordant with those of an obscure and unlearned beggar; "why art thou disquieted, and what is the price of thy departure?"

No answer was given, though the question was repeated. The adjurer appeared, for one moment, fairly at a nonplus.

"By thine everlasting doom, I conjure thee, answer me!" Still there was no reply. "Thou shalt not [Pg 166] evade me thus," said he, indignant at the slight which was put upon his spells. He drew a little ebony box from his bosom, and on opening it smoke issued therefrom, like the smell of frankincense. With this fumigation he used many uncouth and horrible words, hard names, and so forth, which probably had no existence save in the teeming issue of his own brain. During this operation groans were heard, at first low and indistinct, then loud and vehement; soon they broke into a yell, so shrill and piercing that several of the hearers absolutely tried, through horror and desperation, to burst the door; but this was secure, and their egress prevented thereby.

"Now answer me what thou wouldst have, and tell me the terms of thy departure hence."

A low murmur was heard. The beggar listened with great attention.

"This wandering ghost avoucheth," said he, after all was silent, "that there be two of them, and that they rest not until they have taken possession of this house, and driven the inhabitants therefrom."

"Hard law this," said Nicholas Haworth; "but, for all their racket, I shan't budge."

"Then must they have a sacrifice for the wrong done when they were i' the body; being slain, as they say, by their guardian, a wicked uncle, that he might possess the inheritance."

Again he made question, looking all the while as though talking to something that was present and visible before him.

"What would ye for your sacrifice, evil and hateful things? for I know, in very deed, that ye are not the innocent and heavenly babes whose spirits are now in glory, but devilish creatures who have been permitted to walk here unmolested, for the wickedness that hath been done. Again, I say that your unwillingness sufficeth not, for ye shall be driven hence this blessed day."

Another shriek announced their apprehension at this threat, and again there was a murmuring as before.

"He sayeth," cried the exorcist, after listening a while, "they must have a living body sacrificed, and in four quarters it must be laid; then shall these wicked spirits not return hither until what is severed be joined together. With this hard condition we must be content."

"Then, by 'r lady's grace, if none else there be, thou shalt be the holocaust for thy pains," said [Pg 167] Nicholas, "for I think we need not any other. What say ye, shall not this wizard be the sacrifice, and we then rid the world of a batch of evil things at once?" He looked with a cruel eye upon the mendicant; for he judged that his sister had, in some way or another, fallen a victim to his devilish plots; and he would have thought it little harm to have poured out his blood on the spot. The beggar seemed aware of his danger, but with a loud and peremptory tone he cried—

"There needeth not so costly an oblation. Bring hither the first brute animal ye behold, any one of you, on crossing the threshold of the porch."

A messenger was accordingly sent, who returned with a barn-door fowl in his hand, a well-fed chanticleer, whose crow that morning had awakened his cackling dames for the last time.

With great solemnity the conjuror went forth from the chamber, and in the courtyard the fowl was named "John;" sponsors standing in due form, as at an ordinary baptism. Then the bird was dismembered, or rather divided into four parts, according to the directions they had received. These were afterwards disposed of as follows:—one was buried at Little Clegg, in a field close by, another under one of the hearth-flags in the hall, another at the Beil Bridge, by the river which runs past Belfield, and the remaining quarter under the barn-floor. Nicholas continued to look on with a curious eye until the ceremony was concluded, when, after a brief pause, he inquired—

"Have there been no tidings yet from Alice? Can thine art not disclose to me whither she be gone?"

"The maiden lives," said the beggar doggedly.

"Thou knowest of her hiding, then?" said her brother sharply, and with a cunning glance directed towards the speaker.

"The spirit said so," replied Noman, as though wishful to evade or to shrink from the question.

"And what else?" inquired the other; "for by my halidome thou stirrest not hence until she be forthcoming, alive or dead! I verily suspect—nay, more, I charge thee with forcibly detaining her against her own privity or consent."

The beggar looked steadily upon him, not a whit either moved or abashed at this bold accusation.

"Peradventure thou speakest without heed and unadvisedly. I tell thee again, thou wouldest have been driven hence ere now had it not been for others whom that spirit must obey." [Pg 168]

"Who art thou?" said the perplexed inquirer; "for thou art either worse or better than thou seemest."

"Once the rightful heir, now a beggar, in these domains, wrested from me by rapine and the harpy fangs of injustice misnamed law. Theophilus Ashton, from whom ye took your share of the inheritance when death dislodged it from his gripe, won it himself most foully from my ancestors; —and have I not a right to hate thee?"

"And so thy vengeance hath fallen upon a defenceless woman?"

"Nay, I said not so; but if I had so minded I might have been glutted with vengeance, ay, to my heart's core. Hark thee. Secrets I have learned that will bind the hidden things of darkness, and bow them to my behest. The unseen powers and operations of nature have been open to my gaze. Long ago my converse and companionship were with the learned doctors and sages of the East. In Spain I have walked in the palace of the Moorish kings, the Alhambra at Grenada; and in Arabia I have learned the mystic cabala, and worshipped in the temple of the holy prophet!"

"And yet thou comest a beggar to my door! Truly thy spells have profited thee little."

The beggar smiled scornfully. "Riches inexhaustible, unlimited are mine; while nature is unveiled at my command."

"Thou speakest riddles, old man; or thou dost hug the very spectres of thy brain, which men call madness."

"I am not mad; save it be madness that I have not hurled thee from this thy misgotten heritage. A power of mighty and all prevading energy hath hindered me, and, it may be, rescued thee from destruction."

"Unto what unknown intercessor do I owe this forbearance?"

"Love!" said the mendicant, with an expression of withering and baneful scorn; "a silly hankering for a puling girl."

"Thee!—in love?"

"And is it so strange, so hard and incapable of belief, that in a frosty but vigorous age, the sap should be fresh though the outward trunk look withered and without verdure?"

Nicholas shuddered. A harrowing suspicion crossed him that his beloved sister had fallen a victim to the lawless passions of this hoary delinquent.

"Thou dost judge wrongfully," said the beggar; "she appertaineth not to me. 'Tis long since I have drunk of that maddening cup, a woman's love. Would that another had not taken its intoxicating draught." [Pg 169]

"Thou but triflest with me," said Haworth; "let the maiden go, or beware my vengeance."

"Thy vengeance! Weak, impotent man! what canst thou do? Thy threats I hold lighter than the breath that makes them; thy cajolments I value less than these; and thy rewards—why, the uttermost wealth that thou couldst boast would weigh but as a feather against the riches at my disposal."

"Then give her back at my request."

"I tell thee she is not mine, nor in my charge."

"But thou knowest of her detention, and where she is concealed."

"What if I do? will that help thee to the discovery?"

"Point out the place, or conduct me thither, and"——

The mendicant here burst forth into a laugh so tantalising and malicious that Nicholas, though silent, grew pale with choler.

"Am I a fool?" said the exorcist; "an everyday fool? a simpleton of such a dastardly condition that thou shouldest think to whine me from my purpose? Never."

Scarcely was the word spoken when a loud and awful explosion shook the building to its foundations. Horror and consternation were seen upon the hitherto composed features of the beggar. He grasped his crutch, and with a yell of unutterable anguish he cried, "Ruined—betrayed! May the fiends follow ye for this mischance!"

He threw himself almost headlong down the steps, and ran with rapid strides through the yard, followed by Nicholas, who seemed in a stupor of astonishment at these mysterious events.

Passing round to the other side of the house, he saw a smoke rising in a dense unbroken column from an outbuilding beyond the moat, towards which Noman was speedily advancing. Suddenly he slackened his pace. He paused, seemingly undecided whither to proceed. He then turned sharply round and made his way into the kitchen, passing up a staircase into the haunted chamber, still followed by Nicholas Haworth, and not a few who were lookers-on, hoping to ascertain the cause of this alarm.

To their great surprise the beggar hastily displaced some lumber, and, raising a trap-door, quickly disappeared down a flight of steps. With little hesitation the master followed, and keeping [Pg 170] the footsteps of his leader within hearing, he cautiously went forward, convinced that in some way or another this opportune but inexplicable event would lead to the discovery of his sister.

Suddenly he heard a shriek. He felt certain it was the voice of Alice. He rushed on; but some unseen barrier opposed his progress. He heard noises and hasty footsteps beyond, evidently in hurry and confusion. The door was immediately opened, and he beheld Noman bearing out the half-lifeless form of Alice. Smoke, and even flame, followed hard upon their flight; but she was conveyed upwards to a place of safety.

"There," said the mendicant, when he had laid down his burden, "at the peril of all I possess, and of life too, I have rescued her. My hopes are gone—my schemes for ever blasted—and I am a ruined, wretched old man, without a home or a morsel of bread."

He walked out through the porch, Nicholas being too busily engaged in attending to the restoration of Alice to heed his escape. Two other men, strangers, had before emerged from the avenue. In the confusion of the moment their flight was effected, and they were seen no more.

When Alice was sufficiently recovered, Nicholas, to his utter surprise and dismay, learned that she had been doomed to be imprisoned, even in her own house, until she consented to be the wife of one whom, however he might have won upon her regard by fair and honest courtship, she hated and repulsed for this traitorous and forcible detention. Yet they had not dared to let her go, lest the secrets of her prison-house should be told. The false beggar, whose real name was Clegg, having become an adept in the art of coining, acquired during his residence abroad, and likewise having arrived at the knowledge of many chemical secrets long hidden from the vulgar and uninitiated, had leagued himself with one of the like sort, together with his own son, a handsome well-favoured youth (whose mother he had rescued from a Spanish convent), for the purpose of carrying on a most extensive manufacture and issue of counterfeit money of several descriptions. His former knowledge, when young, of his ancestors' mansion at Clegg Hall suggested the fitness of this spot for their establishment. Its situation was sequestered; and the ancient vaults, though [Pg 171] nearly filled with rubbish, might yet be made available for their purpose. The secret entrance, and, above all, the currently-believed story of the ghost, might afford facilities for frightening away those who were disposed to be curious; and any noises unavoidable in the course of their operations might be attributed to this fruitful source of imposture. By a little dexterity, possession of the haunted chamber was obtained, the feigned beggar being a periodical visitant; thence a ready entrance was contrived, and all materials were introduced that were needful for their fraudulent proceedings. Many months their traffic was carried on without discovery; and in the beggar's wallet counterfeit money to a considerable amount was conveyed, and distributed by other agents into general circulation. Well might he say that boundless wealth was at their command; the means employed in disposing of the proceeds of their ingenuity were well calculated for the purpose. They had proposed, by machinations and alarms, to drive away utterly the present inhabitants and possessors of the Hall. The reign of terror was about to commence, plans being already matured for this purpose, had not the younger Clegg seen Alice Haworth; and love, that mighty controller of human affairs and devices, most inopportunely frustrated their intentions. The elder Clegg, too, was induced to aid the design, hoping that, should a union take place, the inheritance might revert into the old channel. We have seen the result: the wilfulness and obduracy of Alice, and the infatuation of the lover, who had thought to dazzle her with the riches he purposely spread before her, prevented the success of their schemes. She peremptorily refused and repulsed him, accusing him of a gross and wanton outrage. What might have been the end of this contention we know not, seeing that an unforeseen accident caused the explosion which led to her escape and the flight of her captors.

What remained of the old house was pulled down. The vaults and cellars, which were found to extend for a considerable distance even beyond the moat, were walled up, and every vestige that was left, together with an immense hoard of counterfeit money, was completely destroyed.

View larger image

THE MERMAID OF MARTIN MEER.

"Now the dancing sunbeams play
O'er the green and glassy sea:
Come with me, and we will go
Where the rocks of coral grow."

Little needs to be said by way of introduction or explanation of the following tale. Martin Meer is now in process of cultivation; the plough and the harrow leave more enduring furrows on its bosom. It is a fact, curious enough in connection with our story, that some years ago, in digging and draining, a canoe was found here. How far this may confirm our tradition, we leave the reader to determine. It is scarcely two miles from Southport; and the botanist, as well as the entomologist, would find themselves amply repaid by a visit.

Martin Meer, the scene of the following story, we have described in our first series of *Traditions*, where Sir Tarquin, a carnivorous giant, is slain by Sir Lancelot of the Lake. These circumstances, and more of the like purport on this subject, we therefore omit, as being too trite and familiar to bear repetition. We do not suppose the reader to be quite so familiar with the names and fortunes [Pg 173] of Captain Harrington and Sir Ralph Molyneux, though they had the good fortune to be born eleven hundred years later, and to have seen the world, in consequence, eleven hundred years older—we wish we could say wiser and better tempered, less selfish and less disposed to return hard knocks, and to be corrupted with evil communications. But man is the same in all ages. The external habits and usages of society change his mode of action—clothe the person and passions in a different garb; but their form and substance, like the frame they inhabit, are unchanged, and will continue until this great mass of intelligence, this mischievous compound of good and evil, this round rolling earth, shall cease to swing through time and space—a mighty pendulum, whose last stroke shall announce the end of time, the beginning of eternity!

Our story gets on indifferently the while; but a willing steed is none the worse for halting. Harrington and his friend Sir Ralph were spruce and well-caparisoned cavaliers, living often about court towards the latter end of Charles the Second's reign. What should now require their presence in these extreme regions of the earth, far from society and civilisation, it is not our business to inquire. It sufficeth for our story that they were here, mounted, and proceeding at a shuffling trot along the flat, bare, sandy region we have described.

"How sweetly and silently that round sun sinks into the water!" said Harrington.

"But doubtless," returned his companion, "if he were fire, as thou sayest, the liquid would not bear his approach so meekly; why, it would boil if he were but chin-deep in yon great seething-pot."

"Thou art quicker at a jest than a moral, Molyneux," said the other and graver personage; "thou canst not even let the elements escape thy gibes. I marvel how far we are from our cousin Ireland's at Lydiate. My fears mislead me, or we have missed our way. This flat bosom of desolation hath no vantage-ground whence we may discern our path; and we have been winding about this interminable lake these two hours."

"Without so much as a blade of grass or a tree to say 'Good neighbour' to," said Molyneux, interrupting his companion's audible reverie. "Crows and horses must fare sumptuously in these parts."

"This lake, I verily think, follows us; or we are stuck to its side like a lady's bauble." [Pg 174]

"And no living thing to say 'Good-bye,' were it fish or woman."

"Or mermaid, which is both." Scarcely were the words uttered when Harrington pointed to the water.

"Something dark comes upon that burning track left on the surface by the sun's chariot wheels."

"A fishmonger's skiff belike," said Sir Ralph.

They plunged through the deep sandy drifts towards the brink, hastening to greet the first appearance of life which they had found in this region of solitude. At a distance they saw a female floating securely, and apparently without effort, upon the rippling current. Her form was raised half-way above the water, and her long hair hung far below her shoulders. This she threw back at times from her forehead, smoothing it down with great dexterity. She seemed to glide on slowly, and without support; yet the distance prevented any very minute observation.

"A bold swimmer, o' my troth!" said Molyneux; "her body tapers to a fish's tail, no doubt, or my senses have lost their use."

Harrington was silent, looking thoughtful and mysterious.

"I'll speak to yon sea-wench."

"For mercy's sake, hold thy tongue. If, as I suspect—and there be such things, 'tis said, in God's creation—thou wilt"——

But the tongue of this errant knight would not be stayed; and his loud musical voice swept over the waters, evidently attracting her notice, and for the first time. She drew back her dark hair, gazing on them for a moment, when she suddenly disappeared. Harrington was sure she had sunk; but a jutting peninsula of sand was near enough to have deceived him, especially through the twilight, which now drew on rapidly.

"And thou hast spoken to her!" said he gravely; "then be the answer thine!"

"A woman's answer were easier parried than a sword-thrust, methinks; and that I have hitherto escaped."

"Let us be gone speedily. I like not yon angry star spying out our path through these wilds." [Pg 175]

"Thou didst use to laugh at my superstitions; but thine own, I guess, are too chary to be meddled with."

"Laugh at me an' thou wilt," said Harrington: "when Master Lilly cast my horoscope he bade me ever to eschew travel when Mars comes to his southing, conjunct with the Pleiades, at midnight—the hour of my birth. Last night, as I looked out from where I lay at Preston, methought the red warrior shot his spear athwart their soft scintillating light; and as I gazed, his ray seemed to ride half-way across the heavens. Again he is rising yonder."

"And his meridian will happen at midnight?"

"Even so," replied Harrington.

"Then gallop on. I'd rather make my supper with the fair dames at Lydiate than in a mermaid's hall."

But their progress was a work of no slight difficulty, and even danger. Occasionally plunging to the knees in a deep bog, then wading to the girth in a hillock of sand and prickly bent grass (the *Arundo arenaria*, so plentiful on these coasts), the horses were scarcely able to keep their footing—yet were they still urged on. Every step was expected to bring them within sight of some habitation.

"What is yonder glimmer to the left?" said Molyneux. "If it be that hideous water again, it is verily pursuing us. I think I shall be afraid of water as long as I live."

"As sure as Mahomet was a liar, and the Pope has excommunicated him from Paradise, 'tis the same still, torpid, dead-like sea we ought to have long since passed."

"Then have our demonstrations been in a circle, in place of a right line, and we are fairly on our way back again."

Sure enough there was the same broad, still surface of the Meer, though on the contrary side, mocking day's last glimmer in the west. The bewildered travellers came to a full pause. They took counsel together while they rested their beasts and their spur-rowels; but the result was by no means satisfactory. One by one came out the glorious throng above them, until the heavens grew light with living hosts, and the stars seemed to pierce the sight, so vivid was their brightness.

"Yonder is a light, thank Heaven!" cried Harrington.

"And it is approaching, thank your stars!" said his companion. "I durst not stir to meet it, through these perilous paths, if our night's lodging depended on it."

The bearer of this welcome discovery was a kind-hearted fisherman, who carried a blazing splinter of antediluvian firewood dug from the neighbouring bog; a useful substitute for more expensive materials. [Pg 176]

It appeared they were at a considerable distance from the right path, or indeed from any path that could be travelled with safety, except by daylight. He invited them to a lodging in a lone hut on the borders of the lake, where he and his wife subsisted by eel-catching and other precarious

pursuits. The simplicity and openness of his manner disarmed suspicion. The offer was accepted, and the benighted heroes found themselves breathing fish-odours and turf-smoke for the night, under a shed of the humblest construction. His family consisted of a wife and one child only; but the strangers preferred a bed by the turf-embers to the couch that was kindly offered them.

The cabin was built of the most simple and homely materials. The walls were pebble-stones from the sea-beach, cemented with clay. The roof-tree was the wreck of some unfortunate vessel stranded on the coast. The whole was thatched with star-grass or sea-reed, blackened with smoke and moisture.

"You are but scantily peopled hereabouts," said Harrington, for lack of other converse.

"Why, ay," returned the peasant; "but it matters nought; our living is mostly on the water."

"And it might be with more chance of company than on shore; we saw a woman swimming or diving there not long ago."

"Have ye seen her?" inquired both man and dame with great alacrity.

"Seen whom?" returned the guest.

"The Meer-woman, as we call her."

"We saw a being, but of what nature we are ignorant, float and disappear as suddenly as though she were an inhabitant of yon world of waters."

"Thank mercy! Then she will be here anon."

Curiosity was roused, though it failed in procuring the desired intelligence. She might be half-woman half-fish for aught they knew. She always came from the water, and was very kind to them and the babe. Such was the sum of the information; yet when they spoke of the child there was evidently a sort of mystery and alarm, calculated to awaken suspicion.

Harrington looked on the infant. It was on the woman's lap asleep, smiling as it lay; and an image of more perfect loveliness and repose he had never beheld. It might be about a twelvemonth old; but its dress did not correspond with the squalid poverty by which it was surrounded. [Pg 177]

"Surely this poor innocent has not been stolen," thought he. The child threw its little hands towards him as it awoke; and he could have wept. Its short feeble wail had smitten him to the heart.

Suddenly they heard a low murmuring noise at the window.

"She is there," said the woman; "but she likes not the presence of strangers. Get thee out to her, Martin, and persuade her to come in."

The man was absent for a short time. When he entered, his face displayed as much astonishment as it was possible to cram into a countenance so vacant.

"She says our lives were just now in danger; and that the child's enemies are again in search; but she has put them on the wrong scent. We must not tarry here any longer; we must remove, and that speedily. But she would fain be told what is your business in these parts, if ye are so disposed."

"Why truly," said Harrington, "our names and occupation need little secrecy. We are idlers at present, and having kindred in the neighbourhood, are on our way to the Irelands at Lydiate, as we before told thee. Verily, there is but little of either favour or profit to be had about court now-a-days. Nought better than to loiter in hall and bower, and fling our swords in a lady's lap. But why does the woman ask? Hath she some warning to us? or is there already a spy upon our track?"

"I know not," said Martin; "but she seems mightily afeard o' the child."

"If she will entrust the babe to our care," said Harrington, after a long pause, "I will protect it. The shield of the Harringtons shall be its safeguard."

The fisherman went out with this message; and on his return it was agreed that, as greater safety would be the result, the child should immediately be given to Harrington. A solemn pledge was required by the unseen visitant that the trust should be surrendered whenever, and by whomsoever, demanded; likewise a vow of inviolable secrecy was exacted from the parties that were present. Harrington drew a signet from his finger; whoever returned it was to receive back the child. He saw not the mysterious being to whom it was sent; but the idea of the Meer-woman, the lake, and the untold mysteries beneath its quiet bosom, came vividly and painfully on his recollection. [Pg 178]

Long after she had departed, the strange events of the evening kept them awake. Inquiries were now answered without hesitation. Harrington learned that the "Meer-woman's" first appearance was on a cold wintry day, a few months before. She did not crave protection from the dwellers in the hut, but seemed rather to command it. Leaving the infant with them, and promising to return shortly, she seemed to vanish upon the lake, or rather, she seemed to glide away on its surface so swiftly that she soon disappeared. Since then she had visited them thrice, supplying them with a little money and other necessaries; but they durst not question her, she looked so strange and

forbidding.

In the morning they were conducted to Lydiate by the fisherman, who also carried the babe. Here they told a pitiable story of their having found the infant exposed, the evening before, by some unfeeling mother; and, strange to say, the truth was never divulged until the time arrived when Harrington should render up his trust.

Years passed on. Harrington saw the pretty foundling expand through every successive stage from infancy to childhood—lovelier as each year unfolded some hidden grace, and the bloom brightened as it grew. He had married in the interval, but was yet childless. His lady was passionately fond of her charge, and Grace Harrington was the pet and darling of the family. No wonder their love to the little stranger was growing deeper, and was gradually acquiring a stronger hold on their affections. But Harrington remembered his vow: it haunted him like a spectre. It seemed as though written with a sunbeam on his memory; but the finger of death pointed to its accomplishment. It will not be fulfilled without blood, was the foreboding that assailed him. His lady knew not of his grief, ignorant happily of its existence, and of its source.

Their mansion stood on a rising ground but a few miles distant from the lake. He thus seemed to hover instinctively on its precincts; though, in observance of his vow, he refrained from visiting [Pg 179] that lonely hut, or inquiring about its inhabitants. Its broad smooth bosom was ever in his sight; and when the sun went down upon its wide brim his emotion was difficult to conceal.

One soft, clear evening, he sat enjoying the calm atmosphere, with his lady and their child. The sun was nigh setting, and the lake glowed like molten fire at his approach.

"'Tis said a mermaid haunts yon water," said Mrs Harrington; "I have heard many marvellous tales of her, a few years ago. Strange enough, last night I dreamed she took away our little girl, and plunged with her into the water. But she never returned."

"How I should like to see a mermaid!" said the playful girl. "Nurse says they are beautiful ladies with long hair and green eyes. But"—and she looked beseechingly towards them—"we are always forbidden to ramble towards the Meer."

"Harrington, the night wind makes you shiver. You are ill!"

"No, my love. But—this cold air comes wondrous keen across my bosom," said he, looking wistfully on the child, who, scarcely knowing why, threw her little arms about his neck, and wept.

"My dream, I fear, hath strange omens in it," said the lady thoughtfully.

The same red star shot fiercely up from the dusky horizon; the same bright beam was on the wave; and the mysterious incidents of the fisherman's hut came like a track of fire across Harrington's memory.

"Yonder is that strange woman again that has troubled us about the house these three days," said Mrs Harrington, looking out from the balcony; "we forbade her yesterday. She comes hither with no good intent."

Harrington looked over the balustrade. A female stood beside a pillar, gazing intently towards him. Her eye caught his own; it was as if a basilisk had smitten him. Trembling, yet fascinated, he could not turn away his glance; a smile passed on her dark-red visage—a grin of joy at the discovery.

"Surely," thought he, "'tis not the being who claims my child!" But the woman drew something from her hand, which, at that distance, Harrington recognised as his pledge. His lady saw not the signal; without speaking, he obeyed. Hastening down-stairs, a private audience confirmed her [Pg 180] demand, which the miserable Harrington durst not refuse.

Two days he was mostly in private. Business with the steward was the ostensible motive. He had sent an urgent message to his friend Molyneux, who, on the third day, arrived at H——, where they spent many hours in close consultation. The following morning Grace came running in after breakfast. She flung her arms about his neck.

"Let me not leave you to-day," she sobbed aloud.

"Why, my love?" said Harrington, strangely disturbed at the request.

"I do not know!" replied the child, pouting.

"To-day I ride out with Sir Ralph to the Meer, and as thou hast often wished—because it was forbidden, I guess—thou shalt ride with us a short distance; I will toss thee on before me, and away we'll gallop—like the Prince of Trebizond on the fairy horse."

"And shall we see the mermaid?" said the little maiden quickly, as though her mind had been running on the subject.

"I wish the old nurse would not put such foolery in the girl's head," said Mrs Harrington impatiently. "There be no mermaids now, my love."

"What! not the mermaid of Martin Meer?" inquired the child, seemingly disappointed.

Harrington left the room, promising to return shortly.

The morning was dull, but the afternoon broke out calm and bright. Grace was all impatience for the ride; and Rosalind, the favourite mare, looked more beautiful than ever in her eyes. She bounded down the terrace at the first sound of the horses' feet, leaving Mrs Harrington to follow.

The cavaliers were already mounted, but the child suddenly drew back.

"Come, my love," said Harrington, stretching out his hand; "look how your pretty Rosalind bends her neck to receive you."

Seeing her terror, Mrs Harrington soothed these apprehensions, and fear was soon forgotten amid the pleasures she anticipated.

"You are back by sunset, Harrington?"

"Fear not, *I* shall return," replied he; and away sprang the pawing beasts down the avenue. The lady lingered until they were out of sight. Some unaccountable oppression weighed down her [Pg 181] spirits; she sought her chamber, and a heavy sob threw open the channel which hitherto had restrained her tears.

They took the nearest path towards the Meer, losing sight of it as they advanced into the low flat sands, scarcely above its level. When again it opened into view its wide waveless surface lay before them, reposing in all the sublimity of loneliness and silence. The rapture of the child was excessive. She surveyed with delight its broad unruffled bosom, giving back the brightness and glory of that heaven to which it looked; to her it seemed another sky and another world, pure and spotless as the imagination that created it.

They entered the fisherman's hut; but it was deserted. Years had probably elapsed since the last occupation. Half-burnt turf and bog-wood lay on the hearth; but the walls were crumbling down with damp and decay.

The two friends were evidently disappointed. At times they looked out anxiously, but in vain, as it might seem; for they again sat down, silent and depressed, upon a turf-heap by the window, while the child ran playing and gambolling towards the beach.

Harrington sat with his back to the window, when suddenly the low murmuring noise he had heard on his former visit was repeated. He turned pale.

"Thou art not alone; and where is the child?" or words to this purport were uttered in a whisper. He started aside; the sound, as he thought, was close to his ear. Molyneux heard it too.

"Shall I depart?" said he, cautiously; "I will take care to keep within call."

"Nay," said his friend, whispering in his ear, "thou must ride out of sight and sound too, I am afraid, or we shall not accomplish our plans for the child's safety. Depart with the attendants; I fear not the woman. Say to my lady I will return anon."

With some reluctance Sir Ralph went his way homewards, and Harrington was left to accomplish these designs without assistance.

Immediately he walked out towards the shore; but he saw nothing of the child, and his heart misgave him. He called her; but the sound died with its own echo upon the waters. The timid [Pg 182] rabbit fled to its burrow, and the sea-gull rose from her gorge, screaming away heavily to her mate; but the voice of his child returned no more!

Almost driven to frenzy, he ran along the margin of the lake to a considerable distance, returning after a fruitless search to the hut, where he threw himself on the ground. In the agony of his spirit he lay with his face to the earth, as if to hide his anguish as he wept.

How long he remained was a matter of uncertainty. On a sudden, instantaneously with the rush that aroused him, he felt his arms pinioned, and that by no timid or feeble hand. At the same moment a bandage was thrown over his eyes, and he found himself borne away swiftly into a boat. He listened for some time to the rapid stroke of the oars. Not a word was spoken from which he could ascertain the meaning of this outrage. To his questions no reply was vouchsafed, and in the end he forbore inquiry—the mind wearied into apathy by excitement and its consequent exhaustion.

The boat again touched the shore, and he was carried out. The roar of the sea had for some time been rapidly growing louder as they neared the land. He was now borne along over hillocks of loose sand to the sea-beach, when he felt himself fairly launched upon the high seas. He heard the whistling of the cordage, the wide sail flap to the wind, with the groan of the blast as it rushed into the swelling canvas; then he felt the billows prancing under him, and the foam and spray from their huge necks as they swept by. It was not long ere he heard the sails lowered; and presently they were brought up alongside a vessel of no ordinary bulk. Harrington was conducted with little ceremony into the cabin; the bandage was removed from his eyes, and he found himself in the presence of a weather-beaten tar, who was sitting by a table, on which lay a cutlass and a pair of richly-embossed pistols.

"We have had a long tug to bring thee to," said the captain; "but we always grapple with the enemy in the long run. If thou hast aught to say why sentence of death should not pass on thee, ay, and be executed straightway too—say on. What! not a shot in thy locker? Then may all such land-sharks perish, say I, as thus I signify thy doom." He examined his pistols with great nicety as

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he spoke. Harrington was dumb with amazement, whilst his enemy surveyed him with a desperate and determined glance. At length he stammered forth—

"I am ignorant of thy meaning; much less can I shape my defence. Who art thou?"

The other replied, in a daring and reckless tone—

"I am the Free Rover, of whom thou hast doubtless heard. My good vessel and her gallant crew ne'er slackened a sky-raker in the chase, nor backed a mainsail astern of the enemy. But pirate as I am—hunted and driven forth like the prowling wolf, without the common rights and usages of my fellow men—I have yet their feelings. I *had* a child! Thy fell, unpitying purpose, remorseless monster, hath made me childless! But thou hast robbed the lioness of her whelp, and thou art in her gripe!"

"As my hope is to escape thy fangs, I am innocent of the crime."

"Maybe thou knowest not the mischief thou hast inflicted; but thy guilt and my bereavement are not the less. My child was ailing; we were off this coast, when we sent her ashore secretly until our return. A fisherman and his wife, to whom our messenger entrusted the babe, were driven forth by thee one bitter night without a shelter. The child perished; and its mother chides my tardy revenge."

"'Tis a falsehood!" cried Harrington, "told to cover some mischievous design. The child, if it be thine, was given to my care—by whom I know not. I have nurtured her kindly; not three hours ago, as I take it, she was in yonder hut; but she has been decoyed from me; and I am here thy prisoner, and without the means of clearing myself from this false and malicious charge."

The captain smiled incredulously.

"Thou art lord of yonder soil, I own; but thou shouldest have listened to the cry of the helpless. I have here a witness who will prove thy story false—the messenger herself. Call hither Oneida," said he, speaking to the attendants. But this personage could not be found.

"She has gone ashore in her canoe," said the pirate; "and the men never question her. She will return ere mid-watch. Prepare: thou showedst no mercy, and I have sworn!"

Harrington was hurried to a little square apartment, which an iron grating sufficiently indicated to be the state prison. The vessel lay at anchor; the intricate soundings on that dangerous coast [Pg 184] rendered her perfectly safe from attack, even if she had been discovered. He watched the stars rising out, calm and silently, from the deep: "Ere yon glorious orb is on the zenith," thought he, "I may be—what?" He shrank from the conclusion. "Surely the wretch will not dare to execute his audacious threat?" He again caught that red and angry star gleaming portentously on him. It seemed to be his evil genius; its malignant eye appeared to follow out his track, to haunt him, and to beset his path continually with suffering and danger. He stood by the narrow grating, feverish and apprehensive; again he heard that low murmuring voice which he too painfully recognised. The mysterious being of the lake stood before him.

"White man"—she spoke in a strange and uncouth accent;—"the tree bows to the wing of the tempest—the roots look upward—the wind sighs past its withered trunk—the song of the warbler is heard no more from its branches, and the place of its habitation is desolate. Thine enemies have prevailed. I did it not to compass thine hurt: I knew not till now thou wert in their power; and I cannot prevent the sacrifice."

"Restore the child, and I am safe," said Harrington, trembling in his soul's agony at every point; "or withdraw thy false, thine accursed accusations."

"Thou knowest not my wrongs and my revenge! Thou seest the arrow, but not the poison that is upon it. The maiden, whose race numbers a thousand warriors, returns not to her father's tribe ere she wring out the heart's life-blood from her destroyer. Death were happiness to the torments I inflict on him and the woman who hath supplanted me. And yet they think Oneida loves them—bends like the bulrush when the wind blows upon her, and rises only when he departs. What! give back the child? She hath but taken my husband and my bed; as soon might ye tear the prey from the starved hunter. This night will I remove their child from them—to depart, when a few moons are gone—it may be to dwell again with my tribe in the wigwam and the forest."

"But I have not wronged thee!"

"Thou art of their detested race. Yet would I not kill thee." [Pg 185]

"Help me to escape."

"Escape!" said this untamed savage, with a laugh which went with a shudder to his heart. "As soon might the deer dart from the hunter's rifle as thou from the cruel pirate who has pronounced thy death! I could tell thee such deeds of him and these bloody men as would freeze thy bosom, though it were wide and deep as the lakes of my country. Yet I loved him once! He came a prisoner to my father's hut. I have spilled my best blood for his escape. I have borne him where the white man's feet never trod—through forests, where aught but the Indian or the wild beast would have perished. I left my country and my kin—the graves of my fathers—and how hath he requited me? He gave the ring of peace to the red woman; but when he saw another and a fairer one of thy race, she became his wife; and from that hour Oneida's love was hate!—and I have waited and not complained, for my revenge was sure! And shall I now bind the healing leaf

upon the wound?—draw the arrow from the flesh of mine enemies? Thou must die! for my revenge is sweet."

"I will denounce thee to him, fiend! I will reveal"——

"He will not believe thee. His eye and ear are sealed. He would stake his life on my fidelity. He knows not of the change."

"But he will discover it, monster, when thou art gone. He will track thee to the verge of this green earth and the salt sea, and thou shall not escape."

With a yell of unutterable scorn she cried—

"He may track the wild bee to its nest, and the eagle to his eyrie, but he discerns not one footprint of Oneida's path!"

The pangs of death seemed to be upon him. He read his doom in the kindling eye and almost demoniac looks of the being who addressed him. She seemed like some attendant demon waiting to receive his spirit. His brain grew dizzy. Death would have been welcome in comparison with the horrors of its anticipation. He would have caught her; but she glided from his grasp, and he was again left in that den of loneliness and misery. How long he knew not; his first returning recollection was the sound of bolts and the rude voices of his jailers.

In this extremity the remembrance of that Being in whom, and from whom, are all power and mercy, flashed on his brain like a burst of hope—like a sunbeam on the dark ocean of despair. [Pg 186]

"God of my fathers, hear!" escaped from his lips in that appalling moment. His soul was calmed by the appeal. Vain was the help of man, but he felt as if supported and surrounded by the arm of Omnipotence, while silently, and with a firm step, he followed his conductors.

One dim light only was burning above. Some half-dozen of the crew stood armed on the quarter-deck behind their chief; their hard, forbidding faces looked without emotion upon this scene of unpitying, deliberate murder.

To some question from the pirate Harrington replied by accusing the Indian woman of treachery.

"As soon yonder star, which at midnight marks our meridian, would prove untrue in its course."

Harrington shuddered at this ominous reference.

"I cannot prove mine innocence," said he; "but I take yon orb to witness that I never wronged you or yours. The child is in her keeping."

"Call her hither, if she be returned," said the captain, "and see if he dare repeat this in her presence. He thinks to haul in our canvas until the enemy are under weigh, and then, Yoh ho, boys, for the rescue. But we shall be dancing over the bright Solway ere the morning watch, and thy carcase in the de'il's locker."

"If not for mine, for your own safety!"

"My safety! and what care I, though ten thousand teeth were grinning at me, through as many port-holes. My will alone bounds my power. Who shall question my sentence, which is death?"

He gnashed his teeth as he went on. "And your halls shall be too hot to hold your well-fed drones. Thy hearth, proud man, shall be desolate. I'll lay waste thy domain. Thy race, root and branch, will I extinguish; for thou hast made me childless!"

The messenger returned with the intelligence that Oneida was not in the ship.

"On shore again, the ——! If I were to bind her with the main-chains, and an anchor at each leg, she would escape me to go ashore. No heed; we will just settle the affair without her, and he shall drop quietly into a grave ready made, and older than Adam. I would we had some more of his kin; they should swing from the bowsprit, like sharks and porpoises, who devour even when they have had enough, and waste what they can't devour." [Pg 187]

"Thou wilt not murder me thus, defenceless, and in cold blood."

"My child was more helpless, and had not injured *thee*! Ye give no quarter to the prowling beast, and yet, like me, he only robs and murders to preserve his life. How far is it from midnight?"

"Five minutes, and yon star comes to his southing," said the person he addressed.

"Then prepare; that moment marks thy death!"

The men looked significantly towards their rifles.

"Nay," cried this bloodthirsty freebooter, "my arm alone shall avenge my child."

He drew a pistol from his belt.

"Yonder is Oneida," sang out the man at the main-top; "she is within a cable's length."

"Heed her not. When the bell strikes, I have sworn thou shalt die!"

A pause ensued—a few brief moments in the lapse of time, but an age in the records of thought.

Not a breath relieved the horror and intensity of that silence. The plash of a light oar was heard;—a boat touched the vessel. The bell struck.

"Once!" shouted the fierce mariner, and he raised his pistol with the sharp click of preparation.

"Twice!"

The bell boomed again.

"Thrice!"

"Hold!" cried a female, rushing between the executioner and the condemned: But the warning was too late;—the ball had sped, though not to its mark. Oneida was the victim. She fell, with a faint scream, bleeding on the deck. But Harrington was close locked in the arms of his little Grace. She had flown to him for protection, sobbing with joy.

The pirate seemed horror-struck at the deed. He raised Oneida, unloosing his neckcloth to staunch the wound.

"The Great Spirit calls me:" she spoke with great exertion: "the green woods, the streams, land of my forefathers. Oh! I come!" She raised herself suddenly with great energy, looking towards Harrington, who yet knelt, guarded and pinioned—the child still clinging to him. [Pg 188]

"White man, I have wronged thee, and I am the sacrifice. Murderer, behold thy child!" She raised her eyes suddenly towards the pirate, who shook his head, supposing that her senses grew confused.

"It was for thy rescue!" again she addressed Harrington. "The Great Spirit appeared to me: he bade me restore what I had taken away, and I should be with the warriors and the chiefs who have died in battle. They hunt in forests from which the red-deer flies not, and fish in rivers that are never dry. But my bones shall not rest with my fathers!—I come. Lake of the woods, farewell!"

She threw one look of reproach on her destroyer, and the spirit of Oneida had departed.

The pirate stood speechless and bewildered. He looked on the child—a ray of recollection seemed to pass over his visage. Its expression was softened; and this man of outlawry and blood became gentle. The savage grew tame. The common sympathies of his nature, so long dried up, burst forth, and the wide deep flood of feeling and affection rolled on with it like a torrent, gathering strength by its own accumulation.

Years after, in a secluded cottage by the mansion of the Harringtons, dwelt an old man and his daughter. She soothed the declining hours of his sojourn. His errors and his crimes—and they were many and aggravated—were not unrepented of. She watched his last breath; and the richest lady of that land was "The Pirate's Daughter."

[Pg 189]

View larger image

GEORGE FOX.

"O Thou who every thought pervades,
My darkened soul inform:
With equal hand Thy goodness guides
A planet or a worm."

On the eastern side of Swart Moor, about a mile from Ulverstone, stands Swartmoor Hall. This bleak elevation took its name from Colonel Martin Swart, or Swartz, an experienced and valiant soldier, of a noble German

family, to whom the Duchess of Burgundy, in 1486, entrusted the command of the troops which were sent to support Lambert Simnel in his claim to the English crown. A more detailed account of this transaction will be found in the first volume of our present series, in the tradition relating to "The Pile of Fouldrey." Suffice it to say that the rebel army was defeated here with great slaughter; and Swartz, along with several of the English nobility, was slain—an event which entailed the name of this chieftain on the place of his overthrow.

The hall, about 180 years ago, was the residence of Thomas Fell, commonly called Judge Fell, vice-chancellor of the Duchy Court at Westminster, and one of the judges that went the Welsh circuit; a man greatly esteemed both in his public and private capacity. His wife was a lady of exemplary piety: she was born at Marsh Grange, in the parish of Dalton, in the year 1614, and was married before she had attained to the age of eighteen. The Judge and his lady being greatly respected, and much hospitality being displayed in their house to ministers and religious people, George Fox, in the year 1652, on his first coming into Furness, called at Swartmoor Hall, and preaching there, and also at Ulverstone, Mrs Fell, her daughters, and many of the family adopted his [Pg 190] principles. The Judge was then upon the circuit. On his return he seemed much afflicted and surprised at this revolution in his family; and in consequence of some malicious insinuations from those who met him with the intelligence, he was greatly exasperated against George Fox and his principles. By the prudent intervention of two friends, however, his displeasure was greatly mitigated; and Fox, returning hither in the evening, answered all his objections in so satisfactory a manner, that the Judge "assented to the truth and reasonableness thereof;" the tranquillity of the family was restored; and from that time, notwithstanding numerous attempts to detach him from the cause, he continued a steady friend to the members of the society and its founder on all occasions where he had the power. A weekly meeting was established in his house the following Sunday. But his patronage did not last many years; he departed this life in September 1658, his health having been for some time before considerably on the decline.

Mrs Fell, after his death, suffered much inconvenience and oppression because of the religious principles she had embraced; yet, notwithstanding, the weekly meetings continued to be held at her house until the year 1690, when a new meetinghouse was opened about a quarter of a mile distant.

In 1669, eleven years after the death of Judge Fell, she married George Fox, whom she survived eleven years, dying at Swartmoor Hall in February 1702, nearly eighty-eight years old.[15]

The house is still inhabited, though in a very dilapidated condition. The barns and stables by which it is surrounded, and the litter of the farmyard, give it a very mean and undignified appearance.

The tenant is a substantial farmer, who is very assiduous in showing the premises. The hall is spacious, with an oaken wainscoting. The bedrooms, which are large and airy, were formerly ornamented with carved work, now greatly damaged. In one of them is a substantial bedstead, with carved posts, on which it is said this reformer used to repose, and any of his followers have permission to occupy it for one night. This privilege is either not known, or perhaps not very highly appreciated, for the tenant states that not a single "Friend" has availed himself of it during the whole time he has resided there. Here is shown the study of George Fox in all its pristine plainness and simplicity. On one side of the hall is an orchard, looking almost coeval with the building. The house stands high, and the upper windows command an extensive and beautiful prospect. The meetinghouse is a neat plain building, in perfect repair, still used by the Friends at Ulverstone and the neighbourhood for religious worship. Over the door is the following inscription, "*Ex dono G.F. 1688*." There is a burial-place surrounded with trees attached to the chapel.

George Fox did not reside constantly at Swartmoor after his marriage. The greater part of his time was spent in [Pg 191] itinerancy. He travelled nearly over the whole of Great Britain, and several parts of America in the exercise of his ministry. After encountering innumerable sufferings, oppositions, and afflictions, this indefatigable missionary departed this life on the 13th of November 1690, in the 67th year of his age, at a house in White Hart Court, London. He was interred in the "Friends Burying-Ground," near Bunhill Fields.

The author is aware that the following remarkable account of "a special interposition" has been attributed to other names and later dates, and is recorded as having happened to individuals at different places both in England and Ireland. The same fact attaching itself to different localities and persons—probably according to the caprice or partialities of the several narrators—is, as he has found in the course of his researches, no unusual occurrence. He does not attempt to decide in favour of any of the conflicting claims or authorities, but merely to give the tale as it exists, selecting those places and circumstances which are most suitable for his purpose.

The supremacy of a special Providence, guiding and overruling the affairs of men, is a doctrine which few will have the hardihood to withstand and still less to deny. It is interwoven with our very nature, and seems implanted in us for the wisest and most beneficent of purposes. It is a doctrine full of comfort and consolation; our stay and succour in the most appalling extremities. There does seem, at times, vividly bursting through the most important periods of our existence, a ray from the secret place of the Most High. We see an opening, as it were, into the very arrangements and councils of the skies; we catch a glimpse of the machinery by which the universe is governed; the wheels of Providence are for a moment exhibited, palpable and unencumbered by secondary causes, while we, stricken prostrate from the consciousness of our own insignificance, acknowledge with awe and admiration the protecting power of which we are so unworthy.

Of the special interference we have just noticed the following narrative, true as to the more important particulars, is a striking instance; events, apparently happening out of the ordinary way, seem brought about by this direct interposition at a period when the most eminent display of human foresight and sagacity would have been unavailing.

One chill and misty evening in the year 1652, being the early part of a wet and, as it proved, a tardy spring, two strangers were benighted in attempting to cross the wild mountain ridge called Cartmel Fell. They had proposed taking the most direct route from Kendal to Cartmel; having, [Pg 192] however, missed the few points which indicated their track, they had for several hours been beating about in the expectation of finding some clue to extricate themselves, but every attempt seemed only to fix them more inextricably in a state of doubt and bewilderment. A dense fog had been rapidly accumulating, and they began to feel something startled with a vague apprehension

of a night-watch amongst the hills, unprovided as they were with the requisite essentials for either food or lodging.

The elder of the two, though not more than midway between thirty and forty years old, was clad in a strange uncouth garb of the coarsest materials, and his lank long hair hung matted and uncombed upon his shoulders from a "brim" of extravagant dimensions. This style of dress was not then recognised as the distinctive badge of a religious sect, as it is now of the people called "Quakers," or, as they are more favourably designated, "Friends." The person of whom we speak was the founder of this society, George Fox, who, only about five years previous to the date of our story, after much contemplation on religious subjects, took upon himself the public ministry. In the year 1650 he was imprisoned at Derby for speaking publicly in the church after divine service; on being brought before a magistrate, he bade the company "*tremble at the word of the Lord*;" the expression was turned into ridicule, and he and his friends received the appellation of "*Quakers*."

His appearance was stout and muscular; and his general demeanour of that still, undisturbed aspect which, if not one of the essentials of his own religion, is at least looked upon as its greatest ornament, betokening the inward grace of a meek and quiet spirit. "He was," says John Gough, the historian of this people, "a man of strong natural parts, firm health, undaunted courage, remarkable disinterestedness, inflexible integrity, and distinguished sincerity. The tenor of his doctrine, when he found himself concerned to instruct others, was to wean men from systems, ceremonies, and the outside of religion in every form, and to lead them to an acquaintance with themselves by a most solicitous attention to what passed in their own minds; to direct them to a principle of their own hearts, which, if duly attended to, would introduce rectitude of mind, simplicity of manners, a life and conversation adorned with every Christian virtue, and peace, the effect of righteousness. Drawing his doctrine from the pure source of religious truth, the New Testament, and the conviction of his own mind, abstracted from the [Pg 193] comments of men, he asserted the freedom of man in the liberty of the gospel against the tyranny of custom, and against the combined powers of severe persecution, the greatest contempt, and keenest ridicule. Unshaken and undismayed, he persevered in disseminating principles and practices conducive to the present and everlasting well-being of mankind, with great honesty, simplicity, and success."

The companion of this reformer was arrayed in a more worldly suit; a mulberry-coloured cloak and doublet, with a hat of grey felt, that, for brevity of brim, would almost have vied with that of the brass basin worn by the knight of the rueful countenance, whose history may be consulted at length in the writings of that veracious historian, Don Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra. His movements were of a more irregular and erratic nature than comported with the well-ordered and equable gait of his companion. The rarely-occurring remarks of the latter were anything but explicit as to the state of his feelings in contemplation of an event, the possibility of which increased with every step—a night's lodgings in these inhospitable wilds. The sun was now evidently beneath the horizon; darkness came on with frightful rapidity; and they had, as yet, no reason to divest themselves of so disagreeable an anticipation. To one in the full glare of daylight, or with a sound roof-tree over his head and a warm fire at his elbow, the idea of a night-vigil may not appear either unpleasant or extraordinary; but, wrapped in a sheet of grey mist, the wet heath oozing beneath his feet, with the cold and benumbing air of the hills for his supper, there could be little question that he would be apt to regard it as a condition not far removed from the extremity of human suffering; especially if at the same time he had just exchanged a snug fireside and an affectionate neighbourhood of friends for these appalling discomforts.

"I know not what we shall do," said the younger traveller. "It never entered into my head beforehand to imagine the possibility of such an event. Surely, surely, we are not to live through a whole night in these horrid wilds. Pray, do speak out, and let me at least have the comfort of a complaint, for we are past consolation."

"I have been ruminating on this very matter," replied the other; "and it does appear that we are [Pg 194] as safe in this place verily as though we were encompassed with walls and bulwarks. Methinks, friend, thou speakest unadvisedly; in future, when thee knowest not what to do—wait! The more thee pulls and hauls, and frets and kicks, depend on it thou wilt be the less able to extricate thyself thereby. We are not left quite without comfort in this dreary wilderness; here is a goodly and a well-set stone, I perceive, just convenient. Verily, it is a mercy if we get a little rest for our limbs. Many a meek and holy disciple, of whom the world was not worthy, has ere now been fain of a slice of hard rock for his pillow."

"And, in truth, we are as likely as the holiest of 'em to refresh ourselves all night on a stone bolster," pettishly replied the unthankful youth, as he seated himself beside his friend.

It was not long ere a slight breeze began to roll the mist into irregular masses of cloud. The dense atmosphere appeared to break, and a star twinkled for a moment, but disappeared as suddenly as it came forth. Ralph Seaton, the younger of the pedestrians, pointed out the friendly visitant to his companion. It seemed as though the eye of mercy were beaming visibly upon them.

"I have seen it," said the man of quiet endurance; "and now gird up thy loins to depart. The fog will rapidly disperse; and it may be that some distant light will guide us to rest and shelter."

While he was speaking the mist coiled upwards, driving rapidly across the sky in the shape of a heavy scud. A few stars twinkled here and there through the lucid intervals, "few and far between;" but they were continually changing place, closing and unfolding as the wind mingled

or separated their shapeless fragments.

"It is even as I said. Seest thou yonder light?"

"I see not anything," replied Seaton.

"Just beneath that bright star to our left?" again inquired the elder traveller.

"I only see a dark hill rising there abruptly against the lowering swell of the sky."

Our "Friend" was silent for a space, when he replied in a tone of deep solemnity—

"It is the inward light of which I have spoken to thee before; a token of no ordinary import. To-night, or I am deceived, we are called on to pass through no common allotment of toil and tribulation. Oft hath this light been outwardly manifest, and as often has it been the precursor of [Pg 195] some sharp and fiery trial! Again! But thou seest it not. Yet mayest thou follow in my steps. Take heed thou turn not either to the right hand or to the left. But"——The speaker's voice here grew fearfully ominous and emphatic.

"Hast thou courage to do as I shall bid thee? I must obey the will of the Spirit; but unless thou hast faith to follow the light that is within me, rather pass the night on that cold unsheltered rock than draw back from His witness. Remember, it is no slight peril that awaits us."

Not without a struggle and certain waverings, which indicated a faith somewhat less implicit than was desirable on such an occasion, did the disciple promise to obey—ay, to the very letter—every command that might be given. Peradventure, a well-founded apprehension of spending the night companionless on the cold and wet dormitory to which his evil stars had conducted him, had some influence in this determination. Suffice it to say, never did disciple resolve more faithfully to obey than did our young adventurer in this perilous extremity.

Their path now appeared to wind precipitately down a steep and narrow defile, through which a rapid torrent was heard foaming and tumbling over its rugged bed. Following the course of the stream to a considerable distance, a rude bridge was discerned, sufficiently indicating a path to some house or village in that direction. The wind was rising in sharp and heavy gusts. The moon, not yet above the hills, was brightening the dark clouds that hung behind them like a huge curtain. The sky was studded, in beauteous intervals, with hosts of stars. This light enabled them to follow a narrow footpath, which, abruptly turning the head of a projecting crag, showed them a distant glimmer as though from some friendly habitation. Seaton bounded past his more recondite companion; and it was not long ere a fierce growl challenged him as he approached nearer to the dwelling. He threw open the door, and discovered what was sufficiently distinguishable as a public-house, a homely interior, dignified by the name of tavern. Two grim-looking men sat before a huge pile of turf, glowing fiercely from the wide expanse appropriated to several uses beside that of fireplace and chimney. Liquor and coarse bread were near them on a low three-legged table; while Seaton, overjoyed at his good fortune and happy escape, thought [Pg 196] the rude hut a palace, and the smell of turf and oat-cake a refection fit for the gods.

"Be quiet, Vixen." The fierce animal, at this rebuke from her mistress, slunk into a dark corner beside the chimney, whence two hideous and glaring eyes were fixed on the strangers for the rest of the evening. Wherever Seaton turned, he still beheld them, intently watching, as though gloating on their prey. The female who had thus spoken did not welcome her guests with that cheerful solicitude which the arrival of profitable customers generally creates. She bustled about unceasingly; but showed neither anxiety nor inclination to offer them any refreshment. Short and firm-set in person, she looked more muscular than was befitting her sex. Her hair was grizzled, and the straggling tresses hung untrammelled about her smoke-dried and hard-lined visage. Her features wore a dubious and unpleasant aspect, calculated to create more distrust than seemed desirable to their owner. Every effort, however, to disguise their expression only rendered them the more forbidding and repulsive.

Near the turf-stack, by the chimney, sat a being to all appearance in a state of mental derangement almost approaching to idiotcy. His eye rested for a moment, with a vacant and undefined stare, upon the strangers; then, with a loud shrill laugh, which made the listeners shudder, he again bent his head, basking moodily before the blaze. The moment Seaton had thrown down a light portmanteau that he carried, the dame, with a low tap, summoned two stout fellows from an inner room, who, with a suspicious and over-acted civility, inquired the destination and wishes of their guests. The elder of the travellers, now coming forward as spokesman, inquired about the possibility of obtaining lodgings for the night, and was informed that a room, detached from the rest, was generally used as a guest-chamber on all extra occasions.

"There's a bed in 't fit to streek down the limbs of a king," said one of the gruff helpers; "and maybe the gentlemen will sleep as sound here as they could wish. Rabbit thee, Will, but the luggage will break thy back. Have a care, lad. Let me feel: it's as light as a church poor's-box. The de'il's flown awa' with aw the shiners, I think; for it's lang sin' I heard a good ow'd-fashioned jink in a traveller's pack."

This was said more by way of comment than conversation, as he handled the stranger's valise. [Pg 197]

The features of these men exhibited a strange mixture of ferocity and mirth. Savage, and almost brutal in their expression, still an atmosphere of fun hovered about them—a Will-o'-the-wisp sort of playfulness, unnatural and decoying, like the capricious gambols of that renowned and

mischievous sprite.

The Quaker seated himself on a low bench before the fire. He took from his neck a huge handkerchief, spreading it out on his knees. He then drew off a pair of long worsted stocking-boots; leisurely untied his shoes, and extending his ample surface in the most convenient manner to the blaze, appeared, with eyes half-shut, pondering deeply some inward abyss of thought, yet not wholly indifferent to the objects around him. His tall and bony figure looked more like some stiff and imitative piece of mechanism than a living human frame with flexible articulations, so fashioned was every motion of the body to the formal and constrained habits and peculiarities of the mind. Seaton had observed, with no slight uneasiness, the suspicious circumstances in which they were placed; but he was fearful of betraying his mistrust, lest it should accelerate the mischief he anticipated. He looked wistfully at his friend; but there was no outward manifestation that could elucidate the inward bent of his thoughts. The keen expression of his eye was not visible; but his other features wore that imperturbable and stolid aspect which suited the stiff and unyielding substance of his opinions. Seaton was now reminded of his supper by an inquiry from the female as to their intentions on that momentous subject. A "flesh pye," as she termed it, was drawn from its lair—a dark hole used as a cupboard—and set before the guests. The very name sounded suspicious and disgusting. In the present state of his feelings the most trivial circumstance was sufficient to keep alive the apprehensions that haunted him. He endeavoured to rally himself out of his fears, and had in some measure succeeded, thrusting his knife deep into the forbidden envelope. At that moment a slight rustling caused him to look aside. The idiot was gazing on him. He shrank from this unexpected glance; and the knife loosened in his grasp. He thought the creature made a sign with his finger, forbidding him to eat. It might be fancy; but nevertheless he felt determined not to touch the food; and the former, with that natural cunning which, in characters of this description, almost assumes the nature of instinct, again appeared crouching over the blaze, and incapable either of observation or intelligence. This transaction [Pg 198] passed unnoticed by the rest of the party; and Seaton, afraid that some horrible and unnatural food had been set before him, secretly motioned to his friend, who, apparently unheeding, helped himself to a portion of the mysterious dish. For a moment it occurred to Seaton that the cunning half-wit, apprehensive lest too great a share of the savoury victuals should fall to their lot, had contrived to forbid this appropriation. After a few mouthfuls, however, he observed that his friend had as little relish for the provision as himself, remarking that a rasher of bacon would be preferred, if the hostess could furnish him with this delicacy. A whisper was the result of this request; but, in the end, a savoury collop was set upon the table. Beer was added, as a matter of course; but neither of them partook of the beverage. Though Seaton, to all appearance, drank a portion, yet his fears got the better of his fatigue; and some apprehension of treachery made him careful to convey away the liquor unobserved. Fox now drew up his gaunt figure in the attitude which indicated a change of position. With great deliberation he rose, and addressed the hostess —

"Canst thee show us to bed?"

Answering in the affirmative, she snatched up a light, and leading the way across a narrow yard, she pointed out a small step-ladder outside the building. Giving the candle into the hands of the grave personage who followed her, she left them after bidding "Good-night!"

They scrambled up the ladder, entering the room appropriated to their use. It was low, and of scanty dimensions. The walls were bare; and the damp oozed through chinks and crevices, where the wind met with slight interruption, though it clamoured unceasingly for admission. The only furniture in the apartment was a low bedstead, on which a straw mattress reposed in all the accumulated filth of past ages. A coverlid of coarse woollen partly concealed a suit of bed-linen that would have stricken terror amongst a tribe of Esquimaux. Neither party appeared wishful to tempt the mysteries that were yet unseen, or to divest himself of clothing. They flung their luggage on the floor, and sat upon it, each awaiting the first word of intercourse from his companion. After a while there was a heavy groan from the Quaker; and Seaton something hastily intimated his suspicions respecting the occupation and pursuits of the party below.

"I am of the like persuasion with thyself," was the reply. "Verily, the warning was not in vain. This [Pg 199] night may not pass ere faith shall have its test. I have had a sore struggle. Our safety will be granted; but through inward guidance rather than from our own endeavours. Yet must we use the means."

"I see no way of escape," returned Seaton, "provided they be what we have unhappily too good cause to apprehend. Unarmed, and without the means of defence, how can we cope with men whose object, doubtless, with the robbery, will be the concealment of their crime?"

"Follow my example. It is thine only chance for deliverance. Question me not; but be silent, and obey. I have said it."

While the speaker relapsed into one of his usual reveries, Seaton cast his eyes inquiringly round the room. Their feeble light was ready to expire. The rude gusts rocked the frail tenement "as if't had agues;" and the walls groaned beneath their pressure. There was a small casement, stuffed with paper and a matchless assortment of parti-coloured rags, near the roof, directly over the bed. He ascended softly to examine the nature of this outlet; but, to his further alarm, he found it guarded outside with iron bars. This was a direct confirmation of his surmises. A cold shudder crept over him. He felt almost stiffening with horror as he looked down upon his thoughtful companion, doomed, he doubted not, as well as himself, to fall a prey to the assassin. He gazed wildly round the apartment, as if with some desperate hope of deliverance. His head grew dizzy;

objects seemed to flit past him; and more than once he fancied that footsteps were creeping up the ladder. This acute burst of agony subsiding, he listened to the short and rapid whirl of the wind eddying by; and never had the sound fallen upon his ear so fearfully. It seemed like the wail of a departing spirit, or like some funeral dirge, moaning heavily and deep through the sudden pauses of the blast. He threw himself on the bed. Fatigue and long abstinence had enervated his frame. Nature, forced almost beyond the limit of endurance, had become passive, and almost incapable of suffering. A deep slumber stole upon him, yet could he not escape the horrors by which he was surrounded. Daggers reeking in blood—spectres covered with hideous wounds—
murderers on the rack—gibbets, and a thousand forms, shapeless and unimaginable, crowded [Pg 200]
past with inconceivable rapidity. A huge figure approached. In its hand a weapon was uplifted, as if to destroy him. He made a vehement effort to escape; but was holden, without the power of resistance. Just as it was descending he awoke. For a while he was unable to recollect precisely the nature of his situation. The apartment was quite dark. He groped confusedly about him, but to no purpose. At that instant a ray seemed to glide from the casement. It was a moonbeam struggling through that almost impervious inlet. By this light he beheld a figure intently gazing towards the window. At the first glance he did not recognise his companion; but, as he started from the couch, the former approached him, and, laying one hand on his shoulder, whispered that he should be still. He obeyed, and remained motionless. The reason for this admonition was soon apparent. He heard a slight pattering at intervals on the few brittle fragments which the window yet retained. Seaton at first thought it might be the rain, especially as the wind had considerably abated; but he soon found there must be some other cause, from the rattling of sand and other coarser materials upon the floor and bed. He crept close to the window, looking out below, but was unable to find out the reason of this disturbance. Suddenly a volley of pebbles bounded past his face, and the moon shining forth at the same instant, a figure was distinguished anxiously attempting to arouse and excite their attention. To his great astonishment he recognised the wayward being whose glance had startled him so disagreeably a few hours before. He recollected the idiot's former signal, and felt convinced that this was a more direct and friendly interference. Seaton carefully pulled away a portion of the stuffing, and was thus enabled to bring his head closer to the bars. This movement was observed; and with an admonition to silence, the strange creature pointed to the ground, at the same time he appeared as if urging them to escape. Seaton comprehended his meaning; but the iron fastenings were an apparently insurmountable impediment. He laid hold of one of the bars with considerable force; and to his great joy it yielded to the pressure. Apparently there was no other individual beneath, or this friendly warning would not have been given. It seemed as if the tenants of the hovel were too
secure of their prey to set a watch. He descended cautiously to his companion. A few whispers [Pg 201]
were sufficient to convey the intelligence. Again he mounted to the window; and, on looking down, found that their providential monitor had disappeared. There was no time to be lost. Seaton again tried the bar, and succeeded in removing it. Another was soon wrenched from its hold, and a few minutes more saw him safely through the aperture, from which he let himself down with little difficulty to the ground. His companion immediately followed; and once more outside their lodging, a new difficulty presented itself. Seaton knew of no other path than the one by which they had previously gained the cottage; and this would, in all probability, afford a leading track to their pursuers, who might be expected shortly to be aware of their escape. But he was relieved from this dilemma by his companion making a signal that he should follow. "Remember thy promise," said he. Seaton was prepared to obey, feeling a renewed confidence in the discretion of his guide. Turning into a pathway near the place where they had alighted, their course was towards a river, which they beheld at no great distance twinkling brightly in the moonbeams. They cautiously yet rapidly proceeded down a narrow descent, fear hastening their flight, for they expected every moment to hear the footsteps of their pursuers. In a little while they turned out of the road, and, by a circuitous path, which the guide seemed to tread with unhesitating confidence, they came to the river's brink. By the brawling of its current, and the appearance it presented, the water was evidently shallow, and might be crossed without much difficulty. Seaton was preparing to make the attempt, but was prevented by his comrade.

"I have some inward impression that we may not cross here. We shall be pursued; and our adversaries will imagine that we have passed over what is doubtless the ford of this Jordan. I know not why, but we must follow its banks, and for some distance, ere we pass."

Seaton urged the danger and folly of this proceeding, and proposed crossing immediately, but met with a decided and unflinching refusal from his companion. They now kept along the river's brink, but with much difficulty. The rain having swollen the waters, they were often forced to
wade up to the knees through the little creeks and rivulets that intersected their path. They [Pg 202]
journeyed on for a considerable time in silence, when the elder traveller made a sudden pause.

"It is here," said he. Seaton looked on the river; but the broad and deep wave rolled past with frightful impetuosity. The moonbeams glittered on a wide and rapid flood, whose depths were unknown, but to which, nevertheless, it seemed that they were on the point of committing themselves.

"The river is both wide and deep!" said the youth.

"Nevertheless, we must cross," replied his more taciturn companion. Without further parley the latter plunged boldly into the stream. Urged on by his fears, and preferring death in any shape to the death that was pursuing him, Seaton followed his example. For some time they struggled hard with the full sweep of the current; and it seemed little short of a miracle when they arrived, almost breathless and exhausted, on the opposite side.

"Praised be His name who hath given strength! Though deep waters have encompassed us, yet His arm is our deliverance."

With a holy and ardent outpouring of soul did this good man render thanksgivings unto Him whose hand had been so visibly stretched out for their protection. Just as he had made an end of speaking, a distant but distinct howl was borne down upon the wind. They listened eagerly, as the sound evidently grew nearer. It was like the short but stifled cry of a hound in full chase.

"Peril cometh as a whirlwind," said George Fox; "but fear not—a way will be left for our escape!"

"It is that malicious hound!" replied Seaton shuddering, as he remembered the beast which had gazed so intently on him, and which was evidently trained for the present purpose.

"We must climb up to those tall bushes with all speed," said the companion of his flight, at the same time leading the way with considerable haste and agility.

From this height they saw, at some distance up the river, three men on horseback, preceded by a large hound, who, true to the scent, was following steadily on their footsteps. They approached rapidly to the place where the fugitives had gone over, when the dog made a dead halt, and looked wistfully across.

"Loo, loo!" said the foremost rider, "hie on, lass!" But the beast would not move. [Pg 203]

"Sure now, Mike," said he, as the others came up, "if they've taken the water at this unlucky hole, they'll need no drownin' by this anyhow."

"It's the brute, bad luck to her," replied his comrade. "She's on the wrong scent. Why they're over the ford by this, and we shall have the bloody thief-catchers here before we can open the door for 'em."

"If the bitch had followed my nose, instead of her own beautiful scent," said the remaining speaker, "we should ha' been over the ford too, long ago. They'd as soon think of swimming o'er the bay in a cabbage-leaf as cross at this place. Back, back; and we'll shoulder 'em yet, my darlings. Come along, boys—one of you take the ford, an' watch the road over the hill. Have a care, now, that the rogues be not skulking round the bog. I'll keep the road hereabout; an' thou, Mike, lay to with the hound when thou art on the other side. Maybe they'll not find it just so easy to beat us in the hunting while we've a leg to lay on after them."

The worthy triumvirate here withdrew. The animal was with much difficulty forced from her track; but by the help of a stout cord she was dragged off, yelping and whining, to the great joy of their intended victims. Seaton could not but recognise the very finger of Providence, which had pointed out the means of preservation. No other way was left apparently for their escape. Whatsoever course they had taken, save this, must have inevitably thrown them into the very toils of their pursuers; and he determined to follow, fearlessly and without question, the future impulses of his companion.

"Shall we attempt to flee, or must we tarry here a space?" he hesitatingly inquired.

"Nay, friend," said his guide, "I wis not yet what we shall do; but methinks we are to abide here until morning!"

Seaton shivered at this intimation. His clothes were drenched, and his whole frame stiffened and benumbed with cold. His position, too, crouching amongst decayed branches and alder twigs, was none of the most eligible or easy to sustain. He felt fully resolved, however, to follow the leadings of his friend, being convinced that his ultimate safety depended on a strict adherence to this determination.

The country was very thinly inhabited, and their enemies were in possession of the only outlets by which they could escape to the nearest village. Aided, too, by the sagacity of the dog, their [Pg 204] track would inevitably be discovered before daylight enabled them to find shelter. These considerations were too important to be overlooked, and Seaton quietly resolved to make himself as comfortable as circumstances would permit. He wrung out the wet from his clothes, chafed his limbs, and ere long, to his inexpressible relief, the first symptoms of the dawn were visible in the east. Just as a glowing rim of light was gliding above the horizon, they ventured to peep forth cautiously from their retreat. To their great mortification, they saw, at a considerable distance, a horseman stationed on the brow of a neighbouring hill, evidently for the purpose of a more extended scrutiny. Signals would inevitably betray their route should they emerge from their concealment; and escape now seemed as hopeless as ever.

In this fresh difficulty Seaton again sought counsel from his friend, who replied with great earnestness—

"There is yet another and a more grievous trial;"—he lifted up his eyes, darkening already with the energy of his spirit;—"but I trust our deliverance draweth nigh. We must return!"

"Return?" cried Seaton, his lips quivering with amazement. "Whither? Not to the den we have just left?"

"Even so," said the other with great composure.

"Then all hope is lost!" mournfully returned the inquirer.

"Nay," replied his companion, "but let me ask what chance, even according to thine own natural and unaided sense, there is of deliverance in our present condition? Hemmed in on every hand, without a guide, and strangers to the path we should take, if the watchman from the hill miss our track, there is the hound upon our scent!"

There was no gainsaying these suggestions; but still a proposal that they should return to the cabin, whence they had with such pains and difficulty made their escape, in itself was so absurd and inexplicable a piece of manoeuvring, that common sense and common prudence alike forbade the attempt. Yet, on the other hand, common sense and common prudence appeared to be equally unavailing as to any mode of escape from the toils in which they were entangled.

Again he determined to follow his friend's guidance: who, addressing himself immediately to the task, made the best of his way to the ford which he had refused to cross the preceding night. [Pg 205] They now took the direct road to the house. The morning was sharp and clear. Seaton felt the cold and raw atmosphere cling to his frame, already chilled to an alarming degree; but the excitation he had undergone prevented further mischief than the temporary inconvenience he then suffered. As they came nearer the hut his very faculties seemed to escape from his control. A sense of danger, imminent and almost insupportable, came upon him. Bewildered, and actuated with that unaccountable but instinctive desperation which urges on to some inevitable doom, he rushed wildly into the dwelling. It was not as they had left it. Several horses were quietly standing by the door; and a party, who had merely called for the purpose of half-an-hour's rest and refreshment, were then making preparations to depart. Seaton took one of them aside, and disclosed the terrible circumstances we have related. By a judicious but prompt application of their forces they prevented any one from leaving the house, and were prepared to seize all who should return thither. A close search soon betrayed the quality and calling of its inmates. A vast hoard of plunder was discovered, and proofs too abundant were found that deeds had been there perpetrated of which we forbear the recital. The old woman was seized; and her capture was followed by the apprehension of the whole gang, who shortly after met with the retribution merited by their crimes.

The maniac proved to be a son of the old beldame. At times, the cloud unhappily clearing from his mental vision had left him for a short space fearfully cognisant of the transactions he was then doomed to witness. On that night to which our history refers a sudden providential gleam of intelligence flashed upon him, and an unknown impulse prompted his interference in behalf of the unfortunate, and, as he thought, unsuspecting victims. Ere leaving the country they saw him comfortably provided for; and, as far as the nature of his malady would permit, his mind was soothed, and his darkest moments partly relieved from the horrors which humanity alone could mitigate, but not prevent.

THE DEMON OF THE WELL.

[Pg 206]

"Avaunt, thou senseless thing!
Can graven image mimic life, and glare
Its stony eye-balls; grin, make mouths at me?
Go to, it is possessed;—some demon lurks
Within its substance."

Peggy's well, the subject of our engraving, is near the brink of the Ribble, in a field below Waddow Hall; Brunckerley Stepping-stones not being far distant, where several lives have been lost in attempting to cross, at times when the river was swollen by a rapid rise, which even a day's rain will produce. These calamities, along with any other fatal accidents which happened in the neighbourhood, are usually attributed to the malevolence of Peggy. The stepping-stones are alluded to in our first volume as the place where King Henry VI was taken, after escaping from Waddington Hall.

Some stones are still visible at low water; but whether these are the original "Hippins," or the foundations of a wooden bridge which succeeded them, and was borne down by the ice at the breaking up of the frost in the year 1814, is not known.

The stone image by the well, depicted in our engraving, has been the subject of many strange tales and apprehensions, being placed there when turned out of the house at Waddow, to allay the terrors of the domestics, who durst not continue under the same roof with this misshapen figure. It was then broken, either from accident or design, and the head, some time ago, we have understood, was in one of the attic chambers at Waddow Hall.

One loud, roaring, and tempestuous night—the last relics of the year 1660—some half-dozen boon companions were comforting themselves beside a blazing fire, and a wassail-cup, at the ingle of a well-ordered and well-accustomed tavern within the good borough of Clitheroe, bearing on its gable front, over a grim and narrow porch, a marvellous portraiture apparently of some four-footed animal, by common usage and consent denominated "The Bull." What recked they of the turmoil that was abroad, while good liquor lasted, and the troll and merry tale went round? The [Pg 207]

yule-log was blazing on the hearth, and their cups were bright and plenished.


View larger image

PEG O'NELLY'S WELL, NEAR CLITHEROE.
Drawn by G. Pickering.
Engraved by Edw^d^ Finden.

"'Ods bodikins, Nic—and that's a parson's oath," said a small waspish figure from the farther chimney-corner, in a sort of husky wheezing voice, "I'll lay thee a thimblefull of pins thou dar'na do it."

"And I'll lay thee a grey lapstone, an' a tachin-end to boot, that I run ower t' hippin-stones to-night, and never a wet sole; but a buss and a wet lip I'll bring fro' the bonniest maiden at Waddow!"

"Like enough, like enough, though thou hast to brag for't," said the first speaker tauntingly—an old customer of the house, and a compiler of leathern extremities for the good burghers and their wives.

"Give o'er your gostering," said another; "*Non omnes qui citharam tenent, sunt citharœdi.*[iii] Many talk of Robin Hood who never shot from his bow. Know ye not 'tis Peggy's year, and her oblation hath not been rendered? Eschew therefore the rather your bravery until this night be overpast."

This learned harangue betrayed the schoolmaster, who was prone to make Gaffer Wiswall's chimney-side a temporary refuge from the broils and disturbances of his own, where his spouse, by way of enticing him to remain, generally contrived either to rate him soundly or to sulk during their brief communion.

"Who cares for Peg?" said the hero who had boasted of his blandishments with the maids. "She may go drown herself i' the Red Sea for aught I care!"

This heretical, unbelieving, and impious scorner was a man of shreds and patches, a pot-valiant tailor, whose ungartered hosen, loose knee-strings, and thin shambling legs, sufficiently betokened the sedentary nature of his avocations. "I wonder the parson hasn't gi'en her a lift wi' Pharaoh and his host ere this," continued he.

"Or the schoolmaster," said that provoking little personage, the first speaker, whose sole aim was to throw the apple of discord amongst his fellows.

"And pray who may this lady be whom ye so ungallantly devote to perdition?" inquired a stranger from behind, who had hitherto been silent, apparently not wishful to join the hilarity of those he addressed. The party quesited was in the midst of a puff of exhalation more than usually prolonged when the question was put, so that ere he could frame his organs to the requisite reply [Pg 208] the pragmatical tailor, whose glibness of tongue was equalled only by his assurance, gave the following by way of parenthesis:—

"Plague on't, where's t'ou bin a' thy life, 'at doesn't know Peg O'Nelly, man?"

"Deuce tak' thee for a saucy lout," said the sutor; "I'll brak' thy spindle-shanks wi' my pipe-stump. Be civil if thou can, Nicky, to thy betters. Sir, if it please ye to listen, we'll have ye well instructed in the matter by the schoolmaster here." He cast a roguish look at the pedagogue as he spoke. But I pray you draw in with us, an' make one wi' the rest."

The scholar adjusted himself, passed one hand thoughtfully upon his brow, and with a gentle inclination commenced with a loud hem, or clearance of aught that might obstruct the free communication of his thoughts.

"Peg, or Peggy, as some do more euphoniously denominate her, was maid, woman, or servant —*ancilla*, *famula*, *ministra*, not *pedissequa*, or one who attends her mistress abroad, but rather a servant of all work, in the house yonder at Waddow, many years past. Indeed, my grandmother

did use to speak of it as *ex vetere famâ*—traditionary, or appertaining unto the like."

"I tell thee what, gossip, if thee doesn't get on faster wi' thy tale, Peggy's ghost will have a chronicle of another make. I can see Nic's tongue is yammering to take up a stitch i' thy narrative," interrupted the leathern artificer.

"And I'd bring it up in another guess way," said Nicholas, tartly, "than wi' scraps and scrapings fro' gallipots, and remnants o' mass books."

"Pray ye, friends, be at peace a while, or I may be dealt with never a word to my question," said the stranger beseechingly.

"Go on," rejoined the peremptory occupant of the chimney-corner; "but let thy discourse be more akin to thy text."

The schoolmaster, thus admonished, again set forward.

"As I was a-saying precedent or prior to this unseasonable interruption—*medium sermonem*—I crave your mercy, but I was born, as I may say, with the Latin, or the *lingua latialis* in my mouth, rather than my mother-tongue; so, as I was a-saying, this same Peggy, *filia* or daughter to Ellen, if I mistake not, seeing that Peg O'Nell doth betoken, after the manner and use of these rude provincials, that the genitrix or *mater* is the genitive or generator, being"——

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"Now a murrain light on all fools, coxcombs, and"——

"Tailors' shins—hang thee, for thou hast verily split mine wi' thy gilly-pegs. They're as sharp as a pair of hatchets," said an unfortunate neighbour who had the ill-luck to encounter the gyrations of these offensive and weapon-like appendages to the trunk of Nicholas Slater, who, in his great ardour and distress at the floundering and abortive attempts of the scholar, threw them about in all directions, to the constant jeopardy and annoyance of those more immediately within their sphere of operation.

"Keep 'em out o't gait then," said the testy aggressor, angry at the interruption, being fearful of losing so lucky an opportunity.

"Peg O'Nelly, sir, was a maid-servant once at Waddow, killed first, and then drowned i' the well by one o' the men for concubinage, as the parson says; and so for the wrong done, her ghost ne'er having been laid, you see she claims every seventh year an offering which must be summat wick—and"——While he hesitated another took up the thread of his narrative.

"This is the last night o' the year, you see," said the other in continuation; "and we be just thinking to bid good-bye to th' old chap, and greet th' new one with a wag of his paw, and a drink to his weel-doing. But the first cause o' this disturbance was by reason of its being Peggy's year, and as she hasn't had her sop yet, we thought as how it would be no bad job to get rid o' this drunken tailor here, and he might save some better man; so we have been daring him to cross t' hippin-stones to-night; for there is but an hour or two to spare before her time's up."

"It is not too late," said the stranger, with great solemnity. Every eye was bent upon him. He still sat in the broad shadow projected by one huge chimney-corner, his face overhung by a broad felt hat, girt with a band and buckle; a drooping draggled feather fell over its crown. His whole person was so curiously enveloped in a loose travelling cloak that nothing but a dark unshapely mass, having some resemblance to the human form, could be distinguished. Concealment was evidently the object. Every one was awed down into silence. The few words he had spoken seemed to have dried up, or rather frozen at its surface, the babbling current of their opinions, that ran, whilom, with unceasing folly and rapidity.

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"Silence!" cried the sutor from the opposite ingleside.

This command operated like a charm. The ice was broken, and the current became free. Without more ado, as if in opposition to the self-constituted authority from the high-backed chair, the guests, with one exception only, commenced with a vigorous discharge of "airy missiles," which by degrees subsided into a sort of desultory sharp-shooting; but their words were neither few nor well applied. It was evident that a gloom and disquietude was upon the assembly. There was a distinct impression of fear, though a vague notion as to its cause—a sort of extempore superstition—a power which hath most hold on the mind in proportion as its limits and operations are least known or understood. The bugbear owing its magnitude and importance to obscurity and misapprehension, becomes divested of its terrors when it can be surveyed and appreciated.

"*Te misereat, miserescat, vel commiserescat mei,*"

quoted the schoolmaster, who, before he could find an equivalent in his mother-tongue, was tripped up by the nimble constructor of raiment.

"The dule and his dam are verily let loose on us," said he.

"Our Lady and her grace forefend!" cried he of the awl and lapstone, whose pipe having unaccountably been extinguished, was just in the act of being thrust down into the red and roaring billets when he beheld a blue flame hovering on them; a spiral wreath of light shot upwards, and the log was reduced to a mass of glowing ashes and half-burnt embers. At this critical moment the stranger deliberately approached the hearth. He threw a whole flagon of liquor wilfully upon the waning faggots, and in a moment fiz, splutter, and smoke proclaimed that

the warfare of the elements, like many others, had ended in the destruction of both the contending belligerents. The yule-log was extinguished. There was a general rush, and a consternation of so unequivocal a nature, that tables, benches, platters, and drinking utensils were included in one vast overthrow. Some thought they saw the glowing emblem of Yule [Pg 211] transferred to the stranger's eyes, which twinkled like twin loopholes to the furnace within.

"I have thee now!" said he; but who this unfortunate might be whom they had so left, even in the very claws of the Evil One, they knew not, nor did they care to inquire. Each, too happy to escape, rushed forth hatless and sore dismayed into the street, with all the horrors of a pelting and pitiless night upon his head, and thought himself well off by the exchange, and too much overjoyed that his own person was not the victim in the catastrophe.

In the morning Isabel, the landlord's ward, and his coal-black steed were amissing!

Now, it was but a mile or so from this ancient borough to Brunckerley, or Bromiley hippin (stepping) stones, across the Ribble, where, upon this insecure but long-used mode of transit, the steps of our forefathers were guided over the ford. These same stepping-stones were quite as often the instruments or executioners of Peggy's vengeance as the well itself dignified by her name. It need not, therefore, be a matter of surprise that when the appalling and fearful events of the preceding night were bruited forth in the public thoroughfares upon New-Year's morning—a season when news-carriers and gossips, old and young, are more particularly prone to a vigilant exercise of their talents and avocations—we say it need not be a source of either suspicion or surprise that many of these conduit-pipes of intelligence, even before the day was broad awake, did pour forth an overwhelming flood of alarm and exaggeration. According to these veracious lovers of the marvellous, shrieks were heard about the requisite time, and in the precise direction where it must needs follow that Isabel was just in the act of being whisked off by one of Pegg's emissaries, and that ere now she was doubtless offered as one of the septennial sacrifices to her revenge.

It was a brave and comely morning, and a brave sight it was to see old and young go forth to the river on that blessed day. The crisp and icy brink of the brawling Ribble was beset by groups of idle folk, some anxiously looking out for symptoms or traces of the body, others occupied with rakes and various implements for searching the unknown regions beneath the turbid and angry waters. Beyond were the antlered and hoary woods of Waddow, every bow laden with the snows of yestereven, sparkling silently in the broad and level sweep of light, pouring in one [Pg 212] uninterrupted flood over the wide and chilly waste—a wilderness of snow, a gay and gorgeous mantle glittering on the bosom of death and desolation.

Gaffer Wiswall was there. The old man almost beside himself with grief, heart-stricken with the blow, felt alone, a scathed trunk, doomed to survive when the green verdure of his existence had departed.

Wet and weary were the searchers, and their toil unremitting, but the body was not found. The "Well," Peg O'Nelly's Well, was tried, with the like result. Surely this was a visitation of more than ordinary spite and malignity. Hitherto the bodies of the victims, with but few exceptions, had been rendered back to their disconsolate survivors, the revengeful ghost apparently satisfied with their extinction; but it is now high time to make the attempt, if possible, to rid themselves of her persecutions.

"Look here!" said one of the bystanders, pointing to the river's margin; "there hath gone a horse, or it may be two, along these slippery banks, but a few hours ago, and the track seems to come from the river."

"Let us see to the other side," said another, "if there be a fellow to it." And, sure enough, on the opposite bank, there were footmarks corresponding thereto, as though one or more adventurous horsemen had swam the swollen waters recently, a little higher up than the ford, pursuing their slippery way by the very margin, along the woods, for some distance, when their track was lost amid these deep and almost pathless recesses.

"Mercy o' me," said one, "it is deep enough thereabouts to drown the castle and hill to boot. Neither horse nor man could wade that hurly-burly there last night, for the waters were out, and the footboy from Waddow told me that nobody could even cross the hippin-stones at eight o'clock. He came round by the bridge."

"But if the beasts could swim?" said another, of more knowledge and shrewdness than the rest.

"Swim!—Go to!" said the small leathern-aproned personage whose functions we have before adverted to at the bright and merry ingle of old Wiswall; "neither man nor beast could have held breast against the torrent."

This was a complete negation to the whole. Nevertheless something had crossed, whether cloven- [Pg 213] footed or not they were unable to distinguish, inasmuch as the demon, or whatsoever it might be, had taken the precaution to make its passage in a pair of horse-shoes. The probability was, that Peggy had varied the usual mode of her proceedings, and sent a messenger with a strong arm and a fiery steed to seize her victim.

"We're none on us safe," cried one, "fro' this she div—div—Save us! I'd like to ha' made a bad job on't."

"The bloody vixen is ne'er satisfied," said an old gossip, whose nose and chin had been gradually

getting into closer fellowship for at least a long score of winters. "I'll hie me to Bet at the Alleys for a charm that'll drive aw t' hobgoblins to the de'il again. When I waur a wee lassie, the scummerin' dixies didn't use to go rampaging about this gate. There was nowt to do, but off to t' priest, an' th' job waur done. Now-a-days, what wi' new lights, doctrines, an' lollypops, Anabaptists an' Presbyterians, they're too throng wranglin' wi' one another to tak' care o' the poor sheep, which Satan is worrying and hurrying like hey go mad, and not a soul to set the dog at him, nor a callant to tak' him by t' horns, an' say 'Boh!'"

It seems "the good old times," even in those days, were objects of regret, still clung to with fondness and delight—reversing the distich; for—

"Man never is, but always *has been*, blest!"

It is a principle in our very nature that we should look back with yearnings to our youthful years, when all was fresh and joyous; when our thoughts were in all the prime, the spring-tide of their existence, and our emotions, young and jocund as ourselves, bubbled forth fresh and clear as the mountain-spring from its source. The change is not in the objects around us; it is in ourselves. Looking through the medium of our own jaded and enervated feelings, we fancy all things have the same worn-out aspect, and contrast the present with the freshness and vigour of our former existence.

Turn we now to the former inmates at Waddow, an old-fashioned building in that old-fashioned age, now re-edified and re-built. It is beautifully situated on a slope on the Yorkshire side of the Ribble, beyond the "hippin-stones" we have named.

In a low, dark chamber, panelled with dingy oak, into which the morning sun burst joyously, its garish brightness ill assorting with the solemnity and even sadness of the scene, there sat an [Pg 214] elderly matron, owner and occupier of the place. The casements were so beset with untrimmed branches and decayed tendrils that her form looked dim and almost impalpable, seen through the mist, the vagrant motes revelling in the sunbeams. It seemed some ghostly, some attenuated shape, that sat, still and stately, in that gloomy chamber. Before her stood a female domestic, antique and venerable as herself, and the conversation was carried on scarcely above a whisper, as though silence brooded over that mansion, rarely disturbed by voice or footstep.

"I heed not these idle tales. A hammer and a willing hand will pound yon bugbear into dirt," said the dame. "If there be none else, I'll try what the hand of a feeble but resolute woman can do. Yon Dagon—yon graven image of papistrie, which scares ye so, shall be broken for the very beasts to trample on."

"But the dins last night were"——

"Tell me not of such folly. When yonder senseless thing is gone, you shall be quiet, maybe, if the rats will let ye. Send Jock hither, and let Jim the mason be sent for, and the great iron mallet. Quick, Mause, at my bidding. We shall see whether or not yonder grim idol will dare to stir after it is cast down."

With a look of surprise, and even horror, at this impious intent, did the ancient housekeeper move slowly forth to execute her commands.

The innocent cause of all this broil was a certain stone figure, rudely sculptured, which, time out of mind, had been the disturbing but undisturbed inmate of an obscure corner in the cellar beneath an uninhabited wing of the mansion at Waddow. Superstition had invested this rude misshapen relic with peculiar terrors; and the generation having passed to whom its origin was known, from some cause or another it became associated with Peggy's disaster, who, as it was currently believed, either took possession of this ugly image, or else employed it as a kind of spy or bugbear to annoy the inhabitants of the house where she had been so cruelly treated. There did certainly appear some connection between Peggy's freaks and this uncouth specimen of primitive workmanship. Though bearing evident marks of some rude effigy, the spoliation of a religious house at some reforming, or, in other words, plundering, era—the ideal similitude [Pg 215] probably of a Romish saint—yet, whenever Peggy's emissaries were abroad and a victim was to be immolated, this disorderly cast-out from the calendar was particularly restless; not that any really authenticate, visible cases were extant of these unidol-like propensities to locomotion, but noises and disturbances were heard for all the world like the uncouth and awkward gambols of such an ugly thing; at least, those who were wiser than their neighbours, and well skilled in iconoclastics, did stoutly aver that they had heard it "clump, clump, clump," precisely like the jumping and capering of such a misshapen, ill-conditioned effigy, when inclined to be particularly merry and jocose. Now this could not be gainsaid, and consequently the innocent and mutilated relic, once looked upon as the genius or tutelary guardian of the house, was unhesitatingly assigned to the evil domination of Peggy. It might be that the rancour she displayed was partly in consequence of an adequate retribution having failed to overtake her betrayer, and the family, then resident at Waddow, not having dealt out to him the just punishment of his deserts. Thus had she been permitted to pervert the proper influences and benevolent operations of this mystic disturber to her own mischievous propensities; and thenceforth a malignant spirit troubled the house, heretofore guarded by a saint of true Catholic dignity and stolidity.

But it seemed the time was now come when these unholy doings were to be put an end to. The present owner of Waddow, tired, as we have seen, of such ridiculous alarms, and the terrors of her domestics, and wishful to do away with the evil report and scandal sustained thereby, was now resolved to dissipate these idle fears, to show at once their folly and futility.

"Well, Mause, the old lady will have her way, I know; but if she doesn't rue her cantrips, my name's not Jock; that's all." And here the speaker stamped with a heavy clouted foot upon the kitchen-hearth, whither the lady's message had been conveyed.

"Thou maun get thy hammer and pick, lad, and soon, too, I tell thee," said Mause.

"I'll do aught 'at she asks me; but—but—to run like some goupin' warlock to the whame o' destruction, wi' one's een open, it's what no Christian will do that hasn' forsworn his baptism." [Pg 216]

"Maun I tell her so?" inquired Mause, with a significant emphasis.

"Naw, naw; no' just soa; but thee maun—wait a bit; let's see." Here he began to beat about anxiously for an excuse, which did not present itself with the same facility as the expression of his unwillingness to undertake the job. "Eh me!—Jock Tattersall—herd and bailiff now these twenty years—that I should be brought to sich a pass; an' aw' through these plaguy women. Well, well; but if a good stiff lie, Mause, would sarve my turn, I wouldna' care so mich. Hears to me, owd wench; tell mistress I'm gone wi' t' kye to water, Peg's Well being frozen up."

"Tell her thysel'," said the indignant Mause; "an' then one lie may sarve. I'll no go to the dule upo' thy shouthers!"

"There's Bob i' the yard yon; winnat he do for her instead?"

"I tell thee what, Jock," said Mause, "mistress'll ha't done in her own way; so we may as weel budge sooner as later. But let's a' go together, an' I warrant our dame will be the first, an' she'll stand i' th' gap if aught should happen. Besides, courage comes wi' company, thee knows, an' there's a round dozen of us."

This proposal, in the present exigency, seemed the best that could be adopted. The whole household were full of misgivings about the result; yet, sheltered under the authority of their mistress, and themselves not consenting to the deed, they trusted Peggy would consider it in the same light, and if she should break forth upon them, doubtless she would possess sufficient discrimination to know the real aggressor, and wreak her vengeance where it was due.

Mause was despatched to their mistress, who, after a short period, starched and pinned, her aspect as stiff and unyielding as her disposition, consented to take the lead, and shame the unwillingness and cowardice of her domestics. Immediately behind walked, or rather lagged, the executioner with his weapons, looking more like unto one that was going to execution. Mause came next, then the remainder of the household, not one of them disposed to quarrel about precedency. The room to which they were tending was low, dark, and unfurnished, save with the *exuviæ* of other parts of the premises. Rats and lumber were its chief occupants. A few steps accomplished the descent, the chamber having less of the nature of cellarage than that of a dairy, [Pg 217] which, in former times, and until a more eligible situation had been found, was the general use and appropriation to which it was allotted. Seldom visited, Peggy, or rather her mysterious representative, reigned here without molestation or control. At times, as we have before seen, the image, awaking from its stony slumber, played the very shame amongst the chattels in the lumber-room.

Its activity and exertions against "social order" were now destined to be forever ended. Irrevocable was the doom, and the lowering aspect of the proud dame of Waddow, as the door unclosed, and a faint light from the loophole opposite revealed her enemy in all the mockery of repose—grim, erect, and undisturbed—showed the inflexibility of her purpose.

"Now to work," said she; "come hither with thy torch, Hal; why dost loiter so? and where's Jock and the mason with the tools?" But Jock and his compeer were loth to come, and the lady's voice grew louder and more peremptory. "Shame on ye, to be cow'd thus by a graven image—a popish idol—a bit of chiselled stone. Out upon it, that nature should have put women's hearts into men's bosoms. Nay, 'tis worse than womanhood, for they have the stouter stomach for the enterprise, I trow. Bring hither the hammer, I say. Doth the foul apprehension of a trumpet terrify you that has been dead and rotten these hundred years?"

Thus did the sturdy dame strive to quell their fears and stimulate them to the attack. Yet they lingered, and were loth to begin. Nay, one whispered to his fellow that the image grinned and frowned horribly during this harangue, and made mouths at the trenchant dame.

"It's no use," said Jock; "I darena strike!"

"Thou craven kestril!" said she, angrily; "and what should ail thee to shy at the quarry? Give me the weapon." And with that she seized the hammer as though rendered furious by the pusillanimity of her attendants. The whole group were paralysed with terror. Not a word was spoken; scarcely a breath was drawn; every eye was riveted upon her, without the power of withdrawal. They saw her approach, as though endowed with tenfold strength, and lending the whole weight of her long, thin arm to the blow, with a right good will added thereto, she dealt a powerful stroke at the head of this dumb idol. A headless trunk tumbled on the floor; but with [Pg 218] that there came a shriek, so wild, woeful, and appalling, that the cowardly attendants fled. The torch-bearer threw down the light, and the whole of the domestics, with dismal outcries, rushed pell-mell through the narrow passage; fearful, inconceivable horror urging their flight. The dame was left alone, but what she saw or heard was never divulged; an altered woman she looked when she came forth, like one of the old still portraits that had slipped down from its frame in the gloomy oaken chamber. She spoke not again even to Mause that day, but seemed as if bent on

some deep and solemn exercise. Abstracted from every outward impression, she sat, the image of some ancient sibyl communing with the inward, unseen pageantries of thought—the hidden workings of a power she could not control. Towards night she seemed more accessible. Naturally austere and taciturn, she rarely spoke but when it was absolutely necessary; yet now there was a softened, a subdued tone of feeling, and even a bland expression in her address, which for years had not been felt. Some bitter, some heart-searing disappointment, had dried up the sources of feeling, and left her spirit withered, without nurture, and without verdure, without so much as a green spot in the untrodden wilderness of her existence.

"I've seen him, Mause," said she, as though half in earnest, half-musing, when the faithful domestic came to warn her mistress that the time of rest was at hand.

"Seen who, my lady?"

"Bless thee, silly wench, I've seen William. Nay, nurse, it was thy boy, as thou didst use to call him; and as sure as these aged eyes have wept themselves dry at his departure and decease, I saw his vision this morning i' the image-chamber."

"Eh! the good saints guide and preserve us," said the aged menial, crossing herself very devoutly, more by way of conjuration or counter-charm, than from any proper feeling of reverence or faith in the mystic symbol of our redemption. "There's death at the door, then, sure enough," she continued; "aw this gramarye and foretokening isn't for nought; so who's to pay for it?"

"When the light was gone," said the dame, as though scarcely heeding the interpolation of her domestic, "I stayed a brief space; but what passed"——Here she raised her dim and hollow eyes [Pg 219] for a moment; "no matter now, Mause; suffice it that my nephew, who was drown'd seven long years ago, stood before me!"

"But young master, Heaven rest his soul, what can he want from yonder bright mansion of glory, where you always said he was gone," replied Mause, "that he should come again to this pitiful world? Eh me! that Peggy should ha' claw'd so fair a victim."

"Peace, Mause; never would I believe it. Nor even now will I, for one moment, apprehend that Heaven would put any of its creatures, for whom its care is continually going forth, into the power of a base and vindictive harlot—that the All-merciful and All-good would render up an innocent victim to her malice. Better worship Moloch and the devils, unto whom our forefathers did offer a vain and cruel sacrifice. No, Mause! believe me, our faith forbids. The light of revealed truth shows no such misrule in the government of the Deity. The powers of evil are as much the instruments of good in His hand as the very attributes of His own perfections. And yet, strange enough that my devoted William should appear at the very time, and in the very place, when the destruction of the ugly image was accomplished, as though the charm were then broken, and he were set free! I am distressed, bewildered, Mause; the links are too strong to be undone by my feeble and unassisted reason. That he was reckoned by common report as a doomed one to that vindictive ghost, I know; and that the mutilation of yonder image should apparently have called forth his very substance from the dark womb where he had lain, transcends my imperfect knowledge. Beshrew me, but I could readily become tinctured with the prevailing belief, did not my firm hold on the goodness and the omnipotence of the great Ruler of all sustain my faith and forbid my distrust."

"I know not what wiser heads may think; but if I'd seen his wraith rising fro' the image, I should ha' thought—what I do yet—and so"——

"Tarry with me through the night, Mause. This vision haunts me strangely, and I do feel more heavy and debilitate than I have been wont."

Whether the shock was too great or too sudden for a frame so stubborn and unyielding, we know not; but that the firmest often feel more intensely the blows and disasters which others, by [Pg 220] yielding to them, do evade, needeth not that we set forth, inasmuch as it is too plain and demonstrative to require illustration. On that same night, Mause, awakening from a short and broken slumber, looked on her mistress, and lo, she was a corpse!

This event, according to the popular belief, would doubtless add another to the list of Peggy's victims, and was looked upon as a terrible token from the demon against all who should hereafter have the temerity or presumption to interfere with her proceedings.

The following day it was noised abroad, and the survivors were mindful to have the entrance to this fearful chamber walled up, and thus prevent any further mischief or interference.

Towards eventide, or ere the lights were renewed in the death-chamber, there came a gentle knock at the hall-door. An aged domestic answered the summons; but with a scream, she fled as from the face of an enemy. A footstep was heard in the hall. Slowly it ascended the stairs. They creaked and groaned, every step seeming to strike with a cold shudder to the heart. They verily thought that the house was beset by a whole squadron of infernals, who had sent a messenger for the body of their mistress. The tramp of the mysterious visitor was heard in the death-chamber. Moans and bewailings were distinctly audible; and Mause, who was in the room, came down with a face colourless and wan, as though she had seen a ghost. She could not articulate, save one harrowing word—

"William!" she cried, and pointed upwards. Seven years ago had he been drowned, according to general belief, one fearful night, in crossing the river by Bromiley or Brunckerley hippin-stones.

Nephew and heir-presumptive to the lady of Waddow, he had left his home that evening writhing under her malediction; for he had in an evil hour, as she thought, formed a base-born attachment to an orphan living with Gaffer Wiswall, and generally looked upon as his daughter. It was this curse which clave like a band of iron about the breast of the proud dame of Waddow; for, in the morning light, when there came news to the hall that he had been seen swept down by the ravening flood—perishing without hope of succour—she sat as though stupefied, without a murmur or a tear, and her stricken heart knew not this world's gladness again. Solitary and [Pg 221] friendless, this fair creation seemed blotted out, and she became fretful and morose. All her earthly hopes were centred in this boy, the offspring of a sister, and they were for ever gone! Mause only had the privilege of addressing her without a special interrogation. The appearance, or it might be, the apparition of her beloved nephew, seemed again to open the sluices of feeling and affection; to soften and subdue the harshness that encrusted her disposition; but it was only the forerunner of an eternal change—the herald of that inexorable tyrant, Death!

Darkness was fast gathering about them; but the whole household were huddled together in the kitchen, none daring to venture forth to their occupations. A long hour it seemed, while every moment they were expecting some further visitation. The fire was nigh extinguished, for who durst fetch the billet from the stack? The conversation, if such might be called the brief and scanty form of their communications, was kept up in a sort of tremulous whisper, every one being frightened at the sound of his own voice. How long this state of things might have lasted we know not, inasmuch as the terrible footsteps were again heard upon the stairs—the same slow and solemn tread. They heard its descent into the hall. It became louder, and the fearful vision was evidently approaching. The sound was now in the narrow passage close to them. The next moment a form was presented to their view, carrying a taper, and recognised by the major part of the group; it being the very semblance of their deceased "young master," as he was generally called, changed, it was true, but still sufficiently like him, when living, to be distinguished from any other. One loud cry announced their discovery of the phantom.

"Why tarry here?" said the intruder. "Yonder corse hath need of the death lights;" and with that he disappeared. Yet, however needful it was that the usual offices should be rendered to the departed, there was no one bold enough to perform the duty. Nevertheless the lights were kindled by some invisible hand in the lady's chamber that night; and, by whomsoever the office was fulfilled, the corpse was not without a watcher, and a faithful one, till daylight came softly on the couch, driving away the darkness and the apprehensions it excited. [Pg 222]

It was past midnight ere the domestics retired to rest, or rather to their chambers; so fearful were they of another visit that, by a little care and management, they contrived so that none should be left alone till morning arose before them, bright and cheerful, dissipating, in some measure, their former terrors.

Softly and cheerily broke that morning sun upon the frosty and embossed panes of Gaffer Wiswall's dwelling; but the light brought no cheer, no solace unto him. The old man was now a withered, a sapless trunk, stripped of the green verdure which had lately bloomed on its hoary summit. His daughter, as he loved to call her—and he had almost cheated himself into the belief—was ravished from him, and the staff of his declining years had perished.

He was sitting moody and disconsolate, and, like the bereaved mother in Israel, "refusing to be comforted," when a stranger entered, and, without speaking, seated himself by the broad ingle, opposite the goodman, who was looking listlessly forth into the blazing faggots, but without either aim or discernment. The intruder was wrapped in a dark military cloak; his hat drawn warily over his forehead, concealing his features beneath the broad and almost impervious shadow.

Wiswall awoke from his study, and with a curious eye, seemed silently to ask the will and business of the stranger; but he spoke not. The old man, surveying his guest more minutely, inquired—

"Be ye far ridden this morning, Sir Cavalier?"

"Not farther than one might stride ere breakfast," was the reply, but in a low, and, it seemed, a hasty tone, as though impatient of being questioned, and preferring to remain unnoticed.

The tapster's instincts were still in operation. With the true spirit of his calling, he inquired—

"From the army, sir?"

"Ay, from the Grand Turk, an' thou wilt."

"The king, they say, hath a fairer word for the dames than for those stout hearts who won him his crown," said the victualler, seemingly conversant in the common rumours that were abroad. "The sparks about court," continued he, "do ruffle it bravely among the buxom dames and their beauteous"——Here his daughter's bright image came suddenly upon his recollection, and the old man wept. [Pg 223]

"Why dost weep, old man?" inquired his guest.

"Alas! I had a daughter once, a match fit for the bravest galliard that sun e'er shown upon. She was the wonder and dismay of all that looked on her. She loved a soldier dearly, and her mouth would purse and play, and her eye would glisten at a cap and plume; and yet the veriest prude in all Christendom was not more discreet."

"Mayhap her sweetheart was a soldier, and abroad at the wars; so that these were but the outgoings of hope and expectation for his return."

"Her sweetheart, marry! she had once—but—he was ta'en from us. The young heir of Waddow, as we always called him, at the hall yonder, was her true love; but one night, seven long bitter years back, the flood swept him away: we never saw him again, but Isabel's hope was for ever blighted!"

"And the body—was it not found?"

"Nay, for the current was swift, and bore him hence. The demon—she hath ta'en mine, as the next dainty morsel for her ravening appetite."

"'Tis seven years since I first sought my fortune as a soldier. I served my king faithfully. With him I went into exile. He hath returned, and here I come to redeem my pledge."

The stranger threw off his cloak, and the astonished and almost incredulous tapster beheld the nephew of the dame now heir to the inheritance of Waddow.

"Though swept rapidly down the stream on that dreadful night when I fled, heedlessly fled, from the denunciations of her who had supplied a parent's place from my infancy, I escaped, almost by a miracle, at a considerable distance below the ford, where I attempted to cross; yet, knowing her inflexible disposition—for she had threatened to leave me penniless—I resolved to seek my fortune as a soldier until I should be enabled to wed with better prospects for the future. I contrived to assure Isabel of my safety, but I strictly enjoined secrecy. I was not without hope that one day or another, appearing as though I had risen from the dead, I should win a reluctant consent, it might be, to our union. A long exile was the only recompense for my loyalty. The restoration hath rendered me back, and I have redeemed my pledge. At my urgent entreaty the other night, the first of my return, she accompanied me, and we have plighted our vows at the same altar. I took her privily to my former home. Knowing a secret entrance to the chamber [Pg 224] where the image is deposited, I concealed her there, safe, as I thought, from molestation, until I had won the consent of her who was my only friend. To my horror and surprise she discovered me there, and the screams of Isabel had nigh betrayed her presence; but it was evident she thought the grave had given back its dead. I could not then undeceive her, and when I returned she was a corpse! Dying without will, I am now the lawful heir to yon good inheritance, and Isabel is the proud mistress of Waddow!"

This unlooked-for intelligence was almost overwhelming; the old man's frame seemed hardly able to bear the disclosure. He wept like a child; but the overflow of his joy relieved the oppressed heart, full even to bursting.

Yet Peggy was not without a sacrifice, according to popular belief, which sacrifice was offered in the person of the late defunct at Waddow. Indeed, according to some, it were an act of unbelief and impiety to suppose any other, and only to be equalled by that of the attack made by this resolute dame upon Peggy's representative—an outrage she so dearly atoned for by her own death.

The headless trunk was, however, removed some years afterwards to its present site by the brink of "the Well," where, having fallen upon evil and unbelieving times, it is desecrated to the profane uses of a resting-place for cans unto the merry maidens who come thither at morning and eventide to draw water.

Many are the victims now recorded to the capricious malevolence of Peggy; and though deprived of her domicile at Waddow, still her visitations are not the less frequent; and whether a stray kitten or an unfortunate chick be the sufferer, the same is deemed a victim and a sacrifice to the wrath of Peggy's *manes*.

[Pg 225]

View larger image

ULVERSTONE SANDS.
Drawn by G. Pickering.
Engraved by Edw^d^ Finden.

THE SANDS.

"It is the shout of the coming foe,
Ride, ride for thy life, Sir John;
But still the waters deeper grew,
The wild sea-foam rushed on."

—*Old Ballad.*

The following account of an excursion over the sands, from Mr Baines's *Companion to the Lakes*, will give a very accurate idea of the mode in which travellers accomplish this interesting, though sometimes perilous journey, over the bare sands of the Bay of Morecambe. Taking a horse at Lancaster, and setting out at the same time with the "Over-sands" coach, he says—

"We arrived at Hest Bank, on the shores of Morecambe Bay, three miles and a half from Lancaster, about five in the afternoon. Here a little caravan was collected, waiting the proper time to cross the trackless sands left bare by the receding tide. I soon saw two persons set out in a gig, and, following them, I found that one of them was the guide appointed to conduct travellers, and the other a servant who was driving his master's gig to the Cartmel shore, and was to return with the horse the same evening. He had of course no time to lose, and had begun his journey at the earliest possible hour. We found the sands firm and level, except the slight wrinkles produced by the ripple of the waves; but they were still wet, having only just been left by the sea. The guide appeared to drive with caution, and in no place went farther than a mile from land. We had a good deal of conversation, and I found him intelligent and communicative. His name is Thomas Wilkinson. He is a tall, athletic man, past the middle age, and bears marks of the rough weather he has been exposed to in discharging the duties of his post during the winter months. In stormy, and more especially in foggy weather, those duties must be arduous and anxious. It is his business to station himself at the place where the river Keer runs over the sands to the sea, which is about three miles from Hest Bank, and to show travellers where they may pass with safety. The bed of the river is liable to frequent changes, and a fresh of water after rain may, in a very short time, convert a fordable place into a quicksand. When we came to the river, he got out of the gig, and waded over to ascertain the firmness of the bottom, the water being about knee-deep. Having escorted us a little farther, till we saw the guide for the Kent at a distance, and having pointed out the line we should keep, [Pg 226] he left us to return to his proper post. We gave him, as is usual, a few pence; for though he is appointed by government, his salary is only £10 a-year, and he is, of course, chiefly dependent on what he receives from travellers.

"These sands are called the Lancaster Sands, and the guide said that they were at present eleven miles over, from Hest Bank to Kent's Bank, but that he had known them when he could pass directly over in not more than seven miles. The tide forms a channel in the sand, which has been gradually coming nearer the shore for some years past, and has obliged persons crossing to take a longer circuit. It was now the spring-tide, and the sands we were travelling upon would, at high-water, be seventeen feet below the surface of the sea.

"The day was exceedingly fine, and the prospects, in crossing over the sands, were splendid. The whole coast of the bay, from Peel Castle round to the shore beyond Lancaster; the stern crags of Warton and Arnside Fells, on the right; farther eastward, the well-known form of Ingleborough, whose broad head, not apparently of very great elevation, is still visible from every considerable hill in Lancashire, Westmoreland, and Cumberland, and seems to lift itself in serene and unchanging majesty over the neighbouring hills; the broken and picturesque shores of the Kent, beautifully wooded, and forming a vista to the eye;—the fells of Cartmel, rising in the mid-distance, their sides hung with forests, and several ornamental parks lying round their base; and above, and far beyond them, the noble chain of the Westmoreland and Cumberland mountains, whose lofty summits, clothed with light, formed a sublime barrier stretching along the northern horizon. Such are the principal features of a prospect which is not the less beautiful because it rises from the level expanse of the sands, and which was to me the more interesting from the novelty of my own situation.

"The Ulverstone coach, several gigs, and some persons on horseback, had followed us at a little distance, keeping the track left by the wheels of the vehicle which conveyed the guide. When Wilkinson left us, we rode on two or three miles before we came to the channel of the Kent, and there we found a guide on horseback, who had just forded the river from the opposite side. The guide stationed here has long gone by the name of the Carter, and it is difficult to say whether the office has been so called from the family in which it has been vested, or the family have assumed their official title as a cognomen; but it is certain that for many ages the duties of guide over the Lancaster Sands have been performed by a family named Carter, and have descended from father to son. The present possessor of the office is named James Carter, and has lately succeeded his father. He told me that some persons said the office of guide had been in his family five hundred years, but he did not know how anybody could tell that; and all he could say was, that they had held it 'for many grandfathers back, longer than anyone knew.' The salary was only £10 a-year till his father's time, when it was raised to £20; [Pg 227] yet I should suppose that the office is a rather productive one, as the family have accumulated some property.

"The Carter seems a cheerful and pleasant fellow. He wore a rough greatcoat and a pair of jack-boots, and was mounted on a good horse, which appeared to have been up to the ribs in the water. When we came to him, he recommended us to wait till the arrival of the coach, which was nearly a mile distant, as the tide would then be gone farther out. I asked if there had been any accidents in this place lately; to which he replied, that some boys were drowned two years ago, having attempted to pass when the tide was up, in defiance of warnings; but that, with that exception, there had not been any accidents for a considerable time. When the coach came up we took the water in procession, and crossed two channels, in one of which the water was up to the horses' bellies. The coach passed over without the least difficulty, being drawn by fine tall horses. Arrived at the other side, the man of high genealogy received our gratuities, and we rode on, keeping close to a line of rods which have been planted in the sand to indicate the track, and which have remained there for many months. We

shortly met the coach from Ulverstone, and several other vehicles, and as we proceeded the views of the estuary and the distant mountains became still more beautiful and interesting. Three or four miles brought us to Kent's Bank, on the Cartmel shore. I infer that the river is not fordable for any long period, as the guide told the servant whom I have mentioned that he must return in an hour if he wished to pass over again that evening.

"The peninsula formed by the Kent and the Leven is three miles over; and, after passing it, I came to the latter river, the sands of which are of the same breadth, and must be crossed to reach Ulverstone."

These sands are reckoned more dangerous than the former, as the channel of the river is frequently shifted.

It is safest to cross at spring-tides; the water then is more completely drained out, and the force of the tide sweeps the bottom clean from mud and sediment.

Here another guide on horseback escorts travellers over.

The views up the Leven are fully as picturesque, though not quite so extensive, as those at the mouth of the Kent. A bold, woody promontory, seen in our engraving, projects into the river at the mouth of the ford, narrowing it to less than half the breadth. The two ridges of the Cartmel and Ulverstone Fells, the former clothed with wood and the latter with verdure, run up inland, and carry the eye back to the mountains, round the head of Coniston Water and Windermere. On the Ulverstone shore, to the left of the town, are the grounds of Conishead Priory, which adorn with their rich woods and lawns the gently-waving side of the hill; and the mouth of the Leven opens out to the Bay of Morecambe, the shores of which are visible to a great extent.

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The sands forming the Bay of Morecambe, covered by the sea at high water, are crossed every day by travellers whose time or inclination leads them to choose this route rather than one more circuitous, and nearly thrice the distance, inland. Yet the sands are by no means without danger, especially to the uncautious or unwary. Scarcely a year passes without some loss of lives, generally owing to the obstinacy or foolhardiness of the victims. Guides are appointed to conduct strangers across this trackless waste, whose duty it is to examine daily, on the receding of the tide, the several routes by which passengers may accomplish their journey. The places where danger is to be apprehended are the fordings of the several rivers or watercourses, which, even when the sands are bare, still pour forth a considerable stream to the ocean. These fords are continually changing by reason of the shifting of the sands, so that one day's path may on the morrow prove a dangerous and impassable quicksand.

The principal guide has a small annuity from government, and is obliged, in all weathers, to perform this disagreeable but highly-important duty. The priory of Conishead was charged with this office over the Leven or Ulverstone sands, and the guide whom they appointed, besides perquisites, had an allotment of three acres of land, with fifteen marks per annum. Henry the Eighth, on the dissolution of the monasteries, charged himself and his successors with the payment of a certain sum to the person that should be guide for the time being, by patent under the seal of the duchy of Lancaster. Such was the importance and the idea of danger attached to this journey, that on a little rocky island midway between the shores of Cartmel and Furness, there stood a small chapel or oratory built by the monks of Furness, where prayers were daily offered for the safety of travellers then occupied in this perilous attempt. Yet these, called the Ulverstone sands, are scarcely more than three miles across, whilst the well-known Lancaster sands are nine miles, from the circuitous line of the track, though it is said that the shorter passage is the more dangerous. That the longer journey is not unattended with risk may be inferred from the accidents which have occurred, as well as from the fact, that carriages are sometimes left to the mercy of the coming tide, the passengers making their escape in the best manner they are able.

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Our tale hath reference to one of these perilous adventures, long years ago; and as neither plot nor story is evolved, the reader is warned, if he so please, that he leave the few following pages unread, unless he be of a temper not liable to suffer disappointment thereby.

The night was beautifully calm: the moon just sinking upon the verge of the distant waters, where the Bay of Morecambe, the great estuary so called, according to some authorities, by Ptolemy, opens out into the broad channel of the Irish Sea.

The stars shone down, keen, bright, and piercing,—"fixed in their everlasting seat,"—ever presenting the same aspect, the same order and disposition, through all the changes of this changing and mutable world. The scene was peculiarly inviting—so calm, so placid, the whole wide and visible hemisphere was without a blot. Nature, like a deceitful mistress, looked so hypocritically serene, that her face might never have been darkened with a cloud or furrowed by a frown. So winning was she withal, that, though the veriest shrew, and all untamed and ungovernable in her habits and conditions, this night she became hushed and gentle as the soothed infant in its repose.

The same night came down to the Kent side, intending to set out on their perilous march over the sands of the bay, divers travellers, well mounted for the occasion. Yet were their steeds much harassed, weltering in mud and foam, by reason that their journey had been both long and hasty, and their business urgent, nor were they yet without apprehension of pursuit. They looked wistfully down towards the west, where the moon hung over the ocean's brim, a red ensanguined crescent, as if about to dip her golden bowl into the raging deep, or mayhap to launch her glittering bark on that perilous tide. For, in good sooth, the travellers on that same day, having forded the estuaries of the Duddon and the Leven, were barely in time for their passage across the sands of the Kent, their destination being the tower of Arnside, standing on a round rocky peninsula, little more than two miles from their present station. Yet was the way perilous, though they had time sufficient for their purpose. The river Kent, or Ken, which, when the tide hath

receded from the bay, followeth often at a considerable depth and speed, was at this period much swollen by reason of the late swells and freshes from the hills. Moreover, the tide would ere long press back the waters towards their source, and but few hours should elapse ere the ocean itself would roll over and obliterate every trace of their intended path. Yet though sure and undeviating [Pg 230] was the peril before them, another more imminent and perchance not less remote, awaited them from behind. They were pursued. Hot and hasty was the chase, and their blood alone would slake the vengeance of their adversaries.

Pausing ere the first plash was heard in the heavy sands beneath the shore, the foremost horseman of the party thus held discourse. Those that followed were likewise armed, and to all appearance were followers or retainers of the chief, who had been with them upon some foray or predatory excursion.

"We are between fire and water, I trow; but what of that? We must e'en cross."

"And how if the fog of yesternight should come again, or we should miss our track?"

"Tush, Harry, with thine evil croak. There will be time enough to discourse with danger when it comes. Besides, I would know it blindfold, and the night doth bear no token of either distemper or disquiet."

"Thou art passing careless of our jeopardy. It were better, even now, that we follow the track by the coast. My counsel was set at naught, or we had gone forward by Cartmel, and missed this perilous pathway of the sea."

"And with it met the enemy at my gate; or, peradventure, having passed on thither before us, we should have found them in quiet possession of our good fortalice yonder. Truly it were a precious entertainment! We should have Lenten fare, I trow, where they be lords o' the feast."

"Our steeds, I think, would have outstripped them, even by way of the forest and the bridges, but"——

"Thou reckonest not for delay by the hill-paths and the morass, let alone the weary miles that we should have to ride. Tut, man, they fancy not of our crossing this little brooklet here, because I misled them ere we departed; and they are now mightily sure of cutting off our retreat, and getting at the tower before us. How the knaves will slink back when they find the gate barred in their teeth. Forward, Sir Harry, and let the Cumberland wolves take the hindmost!"

They dashed down the slope into the heavy mud by the beach, and soon the little band might have been seen moving like dark specks on the sandy waste, even though night had come on, so clear and unsullied was the atmosphere.

The wind, which through the day had blown light, but piercing, from the north, seemed all at once to become more bland and genial. A pause was felt; then a veering to and fro, like the [Pg 231] flapping sail, ere the big canvas comes bellying before the wind; a pause, created by one of those occult and uncomprehended operations of nature, to be understood only in the secret recesses of her power, where all the germs of being are elaborated, but whither the most daring and exalted of human capacities never penetrated.

It was near the turn of the tide, and the wind, obeying her spell, as though at the call of that mighty wizard, was gradually veering towards the sea, and shortly would ride on with the rolling billows, driving forward, like some proud charioteer, the dark waters of the Atlantic in its progress.

The travellers were pricking on their way discreetly, the channel of the river just before them, rippling pleasantly over some quiet star, that seemed to sink deep within its bosom.

To their right was the voice of the restless and mystic ocean, obeying the fiat of Him who hath fixed its bounds—at too great a distance now to excite other feelings than those of their own impotence, and the immensity by which they were surrounded. I know of no sound to be compared to it. There is nought in the wide range of our intelligence that can produce the dread, the almost terrific expansion which it seems to create in the mind, save it be the dizzy view over some dark and unfathomable abyss—an impression that comes over us like the dread unutterable anticipations of eternity!

Suddenly a thin white vapour was seen obscuring the brightness in the west. Then came a cloud-like haze, scudding on the very surface of the stream, wherein the plash of horses' feet announced their entrance. They rode slowly on, but the channel was deep, and it seemed as though some sleight and witchery was about them, for the mist became so dense that the clouds seemed to have dropped down to encompass and enfold them. The stream gradually became deeper, until the foremost horse was wading to the belly, labouring and snorting from the chillness and oppression upon his chest.

"'Tis an unlucky and an embarrassing escort that we are favoured with," said the rider. "The wind, too, whiffles about strangely. 'Tis on my face, now, and verily I think the stream will ne'er be crossed. I trust we are not wading it down towards the sea."

"Troth but we be, though," hastily replied his friend, after looking down, bending as low as possible to observe his horse's feet, where he could just discern the gouts of foam as they ran [Pg 232] right before, instead of passing them from left to right.

"Put back—put back, and soon!" he cried, in great alarm; for the mist bewildered them strangely. They did put back, but instead of all obeying the same impulse, some of the party, finding themselves on opposite sides of the stream, were plunging and replunging into it, to rejoin their comrades, every one calling out for his neighbour to follow; so that, in the end, the whole party were so confused that, on being gathered together once more on the sand, they really knew not on which side of the stream they stood, nor which way to move. They seemed like persons discoursing in a dream, and the mist hung about them so closely that they could not, even by dismounting, see the marks of their own footsteps. They felt that they were standing on a bank of sand, which they knew must inevitably, and ere long, be covered by the raging tide, even then, perhaps, on its way to overwhelm and devour them. But this was the utmost of their knowlege, for the direction in which to proceed, or the bearing of either shore, was beyond their knowledge or apprehension. They would now have been glad to retrace their steps, but this, alas! they knew not how to accomplish. To remain would be certain destruction; to go on, might only be hastening to meet it. But move they must, as the only chance of escape; yet opinions were as various as the points of the compass. One was for going to the right, another to the left, another straight forward; so that, what with arguing and wrangling, they became more bewilderd and uncertain than ever.

"I do verily believe we have not yet crossed the river," said one.

"Not come across!" replied another; "why we've been through and through, to my own certainty, at least thrice."

"Thrice in thy teeth!" said his angry opponent; "and so I'll go forward."

"And I'll go back," was the reply. But the precise idea they had formed of these opposite and important determinations was more than either of them could explain; even though they had been ever so certain upon these points, to proceed in a straight line in any direction was impossible, without some object by which to direct their course. Ever and anon was heard a heavy plunge into the stream, but even this token had ceased to avail them, for its course could not be ascertained. The tide was now arresting its progress, and the water moved to and fro in [Pg 233] every direction, according to the various impulses it received. The wind, too, was light and treacherous; its breath seemed to come and go, without any fixed point by which they could feel either its arrival or departure. In this dilemma, and without any clue to their extrication, harassed and confounded, they were like men bereft of their senses, and almost at their wits' end. Still they clung instinctively about each other, but their conduct had now taken the opposite extreme. Before, all was bustle and activity, everybody giving directions, hallooing, shouting, and so forth. Now, they were silent, and almost stationary, stupefied, distracted. There is a fascination in danger. I have known those who never could look down a precipice without a horrible impulse to leap over the brink. Like the scared bird, almost within the gripe of its destroyer, yet unable to flee, so had they lost, apparently, all power of escape. It was a silence more awful even than the yellings of despair. Its horrid gripe was on every heart; every bosom withered beneath its touch. The nature of the most courageous appeared to change; trembling and perplexity shook the stoutest frame; yet suddenly and unexpectedly was the silence broken, and the spell that bound them dissolved.

"Hark!" said every voice together; "a bell, by the blessed Virgin!" The sound roused them from their stupor. Hope again visited the prison-house of the spirit.

"On, on!" said their leader.

"On, on!" was re-echoed on every side; but they were still attempting to escape in different directions. Scarcely two of them were agreed as to the place whence the sound proceeded. Yet it came on, at stated intervals, a long, deep, melancholy knell, almost terrific in their present condition. Another council was attended with the same results—opinions being as varied as ever. Still that warning toll had some connection with their fellow-men, some link, which, however remote, united them to those who were now slumbering in happiness and security. Yet of their true course and bearing they were as ignorant as ever.

"Now, by'r lady," said one, "there's either witch or wizard at the tail o' this. Haven't I passed this very place to and fro, man and boy, these twenty years, and never went away by a yard's space, right or left. Now"——

"Right well, Humphry Braithwaite, should I know it too, and yet we might be in a wilderness for [Pg 234] aught I can distinguish, either land-mark or sea-mark. Hush, I'm sure that bell is from the right."

"Nay, I hear it yonder, to the left, if I'm not witched."

"Thee'rt gone daft, man, 'tis —— Well, if the sound binna from both sides, right and left! I hear it behind me now."

"We must be moving," said the leader. There's no chance for us here. We can but meet the enemy at the worst, and there are three chances of escaping for one of drowning, which way soever we take, at a blind venture. Then let us away together; and may the Virgin and St Bees be our helper!"

But there were some who would rather trust to their own guidance; and what with the indecision of one, the obstinacy of another, and the timidity of a third, he soon found himself with only one companion, besides his good grey steed, when he flung the reins to his control, and spurred

forward.

Reckless, almost driven to desperation, he committed his way to the beast's better discretion, as he thought, goading on the jaded animal incessantly, his fellow-traveller still keeping behind, but at no great distance. They halted after a space; but how long it is impossible to say. Hours and minutes, in seasons of pain or excitement, are, in the mind's duration, arbitrary and conventional. To measure time by the state of our feelings would be as futile as an attempt to measure space by the slowness or impetuosity of our movements. Hours dwindle into minutes, and minutes are exaggerated into hours, according to the circumstances under which the mind moves on. We are conscious of existence only by the succession of our feelings. We are conscious of time only by its lapse. Hence we are apt to make the same measure serve for both; and, as our own dispositions predicate, so doth time run fast or slow. True it is that time cannot measure thought. The mind notes but the current and passage of its own feelings; they only are the measure of existence and the medium of identity.

"Halt, Lord Monteagle!" cried his companion from behind; "I hear the sea before us. Hush, and use thine own senses, if they be worth the trial."

The other listened, but it was only for one moment; the next saw him wheel round, urging on his flight in the opposite direction, for he knew, or his senses were rendered deceptive through terror, the sound of the coming tide.

"Halt, Lord Monteagle!" again cried the horseman from behind; "for the water is deeper at every plunge. Halt, I say, for the love of"—— The sound died on the speaker's lip, for he was overwhelmed and sickening with the dread anticipation of death. [Pg 235]

"On one side or the other, then, I care not which," cried the foremost rider.

"To the right, and Heaven grant us a safe deliverance!"

Away went the panting steeds; but the waters increased; yet were they powerful animals, and they swam boldly on amid the roar and dash of the rising waves. Still it was with difficulty they could breast the torrent. The courageous beasts braced every sinew to the work—instinctively grappling with danger—every effort was directed to their escape. Suddenly a loud shout was heard, and something dark rose up before them. It might be the hull of some vessel, that was approaching an ark of safety. This thought was the first that crossed them. But they felt a sudden shock and a vibration, as though their steeds had struck the land.

They saw, or it was a deception produced by agitation or excitement, the dark outline of the beach, and men hurrying to and fro with lighted torches. They galloped on through the waves, and a few moments brought them safely upon the hard, loose pebbles of the shore.

Joyful was the recognition; for those who had come to their succour were the party from whom they had separated, who had luckily gained the shore before them. But what was their surprise when they found they had been galloping to and fro almost within a stone's throw of the beach opposite the place of their destination! Yet such was their state of bewilderment that it was an even hand but they had put about on the other side, and attempted to return across the channel. In that case no human help could have rescued them from destruction, for the tide already had overtaken them, and it was only their close proximity unto the shore which enabled the horses to regain their footing, and bear them safely to land.

It seems that their pursuers were still outdone, for their stronghold was open to receive them; and the enemy, foiled in their expectations, returned with all speed into Cumberland, lest during their absence some more dangerous foe from the Borders should lay waste their possessions.

[Pg 236]

View larger image

THE RING AND THE CLIFF.

"And still I tried each fickle art,[ii]
Importunate and vain;
And while his passion touched my heart,
I triumphed in his pain."

—GOLDSMITH.

Having in vain attempted to ascertain the locality of the following tradition, we suspect that it may have strayed originally from another county, though it has taken root in our own.

The only place that could by any possibility answer the description which marks the catastrophe is the high ridge above Broughton, in Furness; and even here it would be difficult to point out any single spot which would exactly correspond in every particular.

The Lancashire coast, with here and there an exception, is one low bank or ridge of sand, loosely drifted into hillocks of but mean height and appearance; only preserving their consistency by reason of the creeping roots of the bent or sea-mat weed (*Arundo arenaria*)[16] which bind the loose sands together, and prevent them from being dispersed over the adjoining grounds. On the opposite coast fancy might often recognise those very cliffs to which our story alludes; perpendicular, bare, and almost inaccessible, with rents and chasms, where little difficulty would be found in pointing out the exact features represented in this tradition. [Pg 237]

On the sea-coast, where a wild bare promontory stretches out amidst the waves of the Irish Channel, is a small hamlet or fishing station. Its site is in the cleft of a deep ravine, through which a small stream lazily trickles amid sand and sea-slime to the little estuary formed by the sea at its mouth. Between almost perpendicular cliffs the village lies like a solitary enclosure, where the inhabitants are separate and alone—aloof from the busy world—their horizon confined to a mere segment of vision. The same ever-rolling sea hath swung to and fro for ages in the same narrow creek, at the sides of which rise a cluster of huts, dignified with the appellation of village—some of these ornamented about and upon the roofs with round patches of the yellow stone-crop and house-leek, that never-failing protection against lightning and tempest, according to indubitable testimony set forth by Master Nicholas Culpepper in his *Herbal*.

The strong marine odour, so well known to all lovers of sea-side enjoyments, may here be sensibly appreciated; for the pent-up effluvia from the curing of fish, marine algæ, and other products of the coast, abundantly strengthen the reminiscences connected with this solitary and secluded spot.

It was on a cold, grey morning in October that two individuals were loitering up a narrow path from the hamlet which led to the high main road, passing from village to village along the coast; branches from which, at irregular intervals, penetrated the cliffs to the different fishing stations along the beach. The road, on rising from the village, runs along the summit, a considerable height above the sea; terrific bursts through some rocky cleft reveal the wide ocean rolling on from the dim horizon to the shore. Here and there may be seen the white sail, or the hull of some distant bark, gliding on so smooth and silently as to suggest the idea of volition obeyed without any visible effort. Rising from the ravine, the road passes diagonally up the steep. At the period of which we speak, ere it reached the main line of communication through the country, a reft or chasm in the steep wall towards the sea—a nearly perpendicular rent—left the mountain path without protection, save by a slender paling for the space of a few yards only. Nothing could be more dreary and terrific. Through this dizzy cleft—the sides bare and abrupt, without ledge or projection—the walls, like gigantic buttresses, presenting their inaccessible barriers to the deep—the distant horizon, raised to an unusual height by the point of sight and position of the spectator, seemed to mingle so softly and imperceptibly with the sky that it appeared one wide sea of cloud stretching to the foot of the cliff. From that fearful summit the billows were but as the waving of a summer cloud, undulating on the quiet atmosphere. The fishing bark, with its dun, squat, picturesque sail, looked as though floating in the sky—a fairy boat poised on the calm ether. [Pg 238]

As we before noticed, two persons were loitering up this path. They paused at the brink of the chasm. It might be for the purpose of gazing on the scene we have just described; but the lover's gaze was on his mistress, and the maiden's eye was bent on the ground.

"'Tis even so, Adeline. We must part. And yet the time may come, when——But thou art chill, Adeline. The words freeze ere they pass my lips, even as thine own; for I never yet could melt the frost-work from thy soul. Still silent? Well. I know thy heart is not another's; and yet thou dost hesitate, and linger, and turn away thy cold grey eyes when I would fain kindle them from mine. Nay, Adeline; I know thou lovest me. Ay! draw back so proudly, and offer up thine and thy true lover's happiness for ever on the altar of thy pride."

"Since thou knowest this heart so well," retorted the haughty maiden, "methinks it were a bootless wish to wear it on thy sleeve, save for the purpose of admiring thine own skill and bravery in the achievement."

"Thou wrongest me, Adeline; 'tis not my wish. Say thou art mine; we are then safe. No earthly power shall part us. But I warn thee, maiden, that long years of misery and anguish will be our

portion should we separate while our troth is yet unplighted. This ring," said he, drawing off his glove, "is indifferently well set. The bauble was made by a skilful and cunning workman. The pearls have the true orient tinge, and this opal hath an eye like the hue of the morning, changeable as—woman's favour. How bright at times!—warm and radiant with gladness, now [Pg 239] dull, cold, hazy, and"——unfeeling, he would have said, but he leaned on the slender barrier as he spoke, and his eye wandered away over the dim and distant wave, across which he was about to depart. Whether he saw it, or his eye was too intently fixed on the dark and appalling future, we presume not to determine.

"A woman's favour, like thy similes, Mortimer, hath its colour by reflection. Thou seest but thine own beam in't; the hue and temper of thy spirit. We have no form nor feeling of our own, forsooth; we but give back the irradiation we receive."

"Thou canst jest, Adeline. Thy chillness comes upon my spirit like the keen ice-wind; it freezes while it withers."

The maiden turned aside her head, perhaps to hide a gleam of tenderness that belied her speech.

"Adeline, dark hours of sorrow are before thee! Think not to escape."

He seized her hand.

"Shouldst thou wed another, a doom is thine—a doom from which even thought recoils."

He looked steadfastly upon her, but the maiden spoke not; a tear quivered through her drooping eyelashes, and her lip grew pale.

"But I must away," continued Mortimer. "Yonder bark awaits me," and he drew her gently towards the brink. "It will part us, perhaps for ever! No, no, not for ever. Thou wilt wed—it may be—and when I return—Horror!"

He started back, as from a spectre which his imagination had created.

"That ring—take it. Let it be thy monitor; and should another seek thy love, look on it; for it shall warn thee. It shall be a silent witness of thy thoughts—one that will watch over thee in my stead; for the genii of that ring," said he, playfully, "are my slaves."

But she returned the pledge.

"I cannot. Do not wind the links around me thus, lest they gall my spirit; lest I feel the fetters, and wish them broken!"

"Then I swear," said Mortimer, vehemently, "no hand but thine shall wear it!"

He raised his arm, and the next moment the ring would have been hurled into the gulf, but ere it [Pg 240] fell he cast another glance at his mistress. Her heart was full. The emotion she sought to quell quivered convulsively on her lip. He seized her hand; but when he looked again upon the ring it was broken!

By what a strange and mysterious link are the finest and most subtle feelings connected with external forms and appearances! By what unseen process are they wrought out and developed; their hidden sources, the secret avenues of thought and emotion, discovered—called forth by circumstances the most trivial and unimportant! Adeline turned pale; and Mortimer himself shuddered as he beheld the omen. But another train of feelings had taken possession of her bosom; or rather her thoughts had acquired a new tendency by this apparently casual circumstance; and true to the bent and disposition of our nature, now that the slighted good was in danger of being withdrawn, she became anxious for its possession. She received the token. A slight crack upon its rim was visible, but this fracture did not prevent its being retained on the hand.

After this brief development their walk was concluded. They breathed no vows. Mortimer would not again urge her. A lock of hair only was exchanged; and shortly the last adieu was on their lips, and the broad deck of the vessel beneath his feet, whence he saw the tall cliff sink down into the ocean, and with it his hopes, that seemed to sink for ever into the same gulf!

Some few years afterwards, on a still evening, about the same time of the year, a boat was lowered from a distant vessel in the offing. Three men pulled ashore as the broad full moon rose up, red and dim, from the mist that hung upon the sea. The roll of the ocean alone betokened its approach. Its melancholy murmur alone broke the universal stillness. The lights came out one by one from the village casements. The cattle were housed, and the curs had crept to the hearth, save some of the younger sort, who at intervals worried themselves, fidgeting about, and making a mighty show of activity and watchfulness.

One of the passengers stepped hastily on shore. He spoke a few words to the rowers, who threw their oars into the boat, fastening her to the rocks. Afterwards they betook themselves to a tavern newly trimmed, where, swinging from a rude pole, hung the "*sign*" of a ship—for *sign* it could [Pg 241] only be called—painted long ago by some self-initiated and village-immortalised artist, whose production had once been the wonder of the whole neighbourhood.

A roaring blaze revealed the whole interior, where pewter cups and well-scoured trenchers threw their bright glances upon all who wooed these dangerous allurements at "The Ship."

But the individual whom the rowers had put ashore withstood these tempting devices. He strode rapidly up the path, and paused not until he approached the cliff where the agony of one short hour had left its deep furrows for ever on his memory.

The incidents of that memorable day were then renewed with such vividness that, on a sudden, writhing and dismayed, he hurried forward in the vain hope, it might seem, of flying from the anguish he could not control.

A dark plain stone house stood at no great distance, and hither his footsteps were now directed. A little gate opened into a gravel walk sweeping round an oval grass plat before the door. He leaned upon the wicket, as though hesitating to enter. By this time the moon rode high and clear above the mist which was yet slumbering on the ocean. She came forth gloriously, without a shadow or a cloud. The wide hemisphere was unveiled, but its bright orbs were softened by her gaze. The shadows, broad and distinct, lay projected on a slight hoar-frost, where a thousand splendours and a thousand crystals hung in the cold and dewy beam. Bright, tranquil, and unruffled was the world around him—but the world within was dark and turbulent—tossed, agitated, and overwhelmed by the deep untold anguish of the spirit.

The tyrant sway of the passions, like some desolating invader, can make a paradise into a desert, and the fruitful places into a wilderness. How different to Mortimer would have been the scene viewed through another medium! His soul was ardent, devoted, full of high and glorious imaginings; but a blight was on them all, and they became chill and decayed—an uninformed mass, without aim or vitality.

He was afraid to proceed, lest his worst suspicions might be confirmed. He had heard——But we will not anticipate the sequel. [Pg 242]

A loud barking announced the presence of an intruder, but the sagacious animal, when he had carefully snuffed out a recognition, fawned and whined upon him, running round and round towards the house, with gambols frolicsome and extravagant enough to have excited the smiles of any human being but Mortimer.

As he approached he heard a soft, faint melody from within. It was her voice;—he could not be mistaken, though years had passed by;—though the dull tide of oblivion had effaced many an intervening record from the tablet of his memory, those tones yet vibrated to his soul. His heart thrilled to their impression like two finely-modulated strings, which produce a corresponding sympathy upon each other. He listened, almost breathless. The recollection came like a track of fire across his brain. Memory! how glorious, how terrible art thou! With the wand of the enchanter thou canst change every current of feeling into joy or woe. The same agency—nay, the same object—shall awaken the most opposite emotions. The simplest forms and the subtlest agents are alike to thee. Nature seems fashioned at thy will, and her attributes are but the instruments of thy power.

The melody that he heard was a wild and mournful ballad which he had once given to Adeline, when the hours flew on, sparkling with delight, and—she had not forgotten him!

The thought was too thrilling to endure. His brain throbbed with ecstacy. Unable to restrain his impatience, he applied hastily to the door. Such was the excitement under which he laboured that the very sound made him start back: it struck so chilly on his heart. Then came an interval of harrowing suspense. He shuddered when he heard the approaching footsteps, and could with difficulty address the servant who stood inquiring his errand.

"Is—is Adeline within?"

The menial silently surveyed the inquirer, as though doubtful in what manner to reply, ere he answered—

"My mistress is at home, sir."

Mortimer stepped into the hall. The servant threw open the door announcing his name, and Mortimer was in the presence of Adeline.

The meeting was too sudden for preliminary forms and courtesies. There was no time for preparation. The blow was struck, and a thousand idle inquiries were perhaps saved; but Adeline, after one short gaze of astonishment and dismay, covered her face; a low groan escaped her, and she threw herself convulsively on the chair. [Pg 243]

Mortimer hastened to her relief, but she shrank from his touch. She spoke not; her anguish was beyond utterance.

"Adeline!"

She shuddered as though the sound once more awakened the slumbering echoes of memory.

"Leave me, Mortimer," she cried. "I must not"——

"Leave thee!" it was repeated in a tone that no words can describe. Inquiry, apprehension, were depicted in his look as if existence hung on a word; while a pause followed, compared with which the rack were a bed of roses. The silence was too harrowing to sustain.

"And why? I know it all now," cried the unhappy Mortimer; and the broad impress of despair was upon his brow, legibly, indelibly written.

"I am here to redeem my pledge; and thou! O Adeline! Why—why? Say how is my trust requited? Were long years too, too long, to await my return? I have not had a thought thou hast not shared. And yet thou dost withhold thy troth!"

"It is plighted!"

"To whom?"

"To my husband?"

Though anticipating the reply, the words went like an arrow to his heart. We will not describe the separation. With unusual speed he descended the path towards the village. He rushed past the cleft with averted looks, fearful that he might be tempted to leap the gulf. He entered the tavern; but so changed in manner and appearance that his companions, fearful that his senses were disordered, earnestly besought him to take some rest and refreshment.

In the end he was persuaded to retire to bed. But ere long fever and delirium had seized him; and in the morning he was pronounced by a medical attendant to be in extreme danger, requiring the interposition of rest and skill to effect his cure.

It was in the cold and heavy mist of a December evening that a female was seated upon the tall cliff above the chasm we have described. As the solitary gull came wheeling around her, she [Pg 244] spoke to it with great eagerness and gesticulation.

"Leave me—leave me!" she cried. "I must not now. Poor wanderer! art thou gone?" With an expression of the deepest bitterness and disappointment, she continued, "Why, oh, why didst thou take back thy pledge? Nay, it is here still; but—alas! 'tis broken. Broken!" and a scream so wild and pitiful escaped her, it was like the last agony of the spirit when riven from its shrine. Her hair wet with the drizzly atmosphere hung about her face. She suddenly threw it aside, as if listening.

"'Tis he! Again he comes. My—no, no; he *was* my lover! I have none now. I have a husband; but—he is unkind. Alas! why am I thus? I feel it! O merciful Heaven! my brain leaps; but I am not—indeed I am not mad!"

Saying this, she bounded down the cliff into the path she had left, with surprising swiftness. Returning, she was met by her husband, with two servants, who were in search. He chid her harshly—brutally. He threatened—ay, he threatened restraint. She heard this; but he saw not the deep and inflexible purpose she had formed. Horror at the apprehension of confinement, which, in calmer intervals, she dreaded worse than death, prompted her to use every artifice to aid her escape. She was now calm and obedient, murmuring not at the temporary attendance to which she was subjected. She sought not the cliff and the deep chasm; but would sit for hours upon the shore, looking over the calm sea, with a look as calm and as deceitful.

Vigilance became relaxed; apprehension was lulled; she was again left to herself, and again she stole towards the cliff. Like to some guilty thing, she crept onward, often looking back lest she should be observed. Having attired herself with more than ordinary care, before leaving her chamber she unlocked an ivory casket with great caution, taking thence a ring, which she carefully disposed on her forefinger. She looked with so intense a gaze upon this pledge—for it was the pledge of Mortimer—that she seemed to be watching its capricious glance, like the eye of destiny, as if her fate were revealed in its beautiful and mystic light.

Sunset was near as she approached the cliff. She paused where the chasm opened out its deep vista upon the waters. They were now sparkling in the crimson flush from a sky more than [Pg 245] usually brilliant. Both sky and ocean were blent in one; the purple beam ran out so pure along the waves, that every billow might now be seen, every path and furrow of the deep.

Adeline climbed over the rail. She stood on that extreme verge, so fearful and abrupt that it might have rendered dizzy a stouter head than her own.

"This night are we married, Mortimer. The *ring* and the *cliff*!"

The ring at this moment shot forth a tremulous brightness; probably from participation with the glowing hues by which it was surrounded.

"The genii of that ring—said he not so?—they will bear me to him. Our couch is decked, and the bridal hymn——Hark!"

It was only the sound from some passing skiff that crept along the waters, but Adeline thought she heard the voice of her lover.

"He calls me; when will he return?"

She looked anxiously on the ring, as though expecting a reply; but she saw its bright hues diminish, and gradually grow dim in the dull grey light which displaced the gaudy sunset.

"Oh, why art thou gone so soon?" Her heart seemed full, as though in the very agony of separation.

"I must away. His bark is on the deep; and he will not return."

She buried her head in her lap, and wept. But suddenly she started up; she looked on the distant wave as though she beheld some object approaching. She again climbed upon the rail, and gazed eagerly through the twilight on the billows, now foaming back in triumph with the returning tide. Her features were yet beautiful, though wasted by disease; and as she gazed, a smile, rapturous and bright, passed over, like a sunbeam on the dark billows. She waved her hand.

"I have waited for thee. Bear me hence. Haste! Oh, haste! They are here."

She listened. Her countenance grew more pale and agitated. Voices were heard, and footsteps evidently approaching. She recognised the hated sound of her pursuers. Agony and despair were thy last ministers, unhappy victim! She wrapped her cloak closer to her form, and, with one wild and appalling shriek, leaped that dizzy height, by the foot of which her mangled remains were shortly discovered. [Pg 246]

In the family of —— is a ring, taken from the finger of a female ancestor of the house who leaped from "*The Lady's Cliff*,"—for such it continues to be called; and it is still said to be haunted by her spirit. The ring was found uninjured, save by a crack through the rim, where it seems bent by a sudden stroke. Superstition attaches strange stories to this relic. True enough, at times it appears almost gifted with intelligence; though perhaps the answer, intimated by the brilliancy or dimness of the stone, may often be construed according to the thoughts or wishes of the inquirer. It is kept in a little ivory box, and preserved with great care. It is said there never was a question propounded to this oracle—if done with a proper spirit, with a due and devout reverence, and a reliance on its wondrous efficacy—but the ring, by its brightness or its gloom, shadowed forth the good or evil destiny of the querent.

Mortimer recovered. In this village, many years afterwards, lived an old man, whose daily walk was to the cliff. From that height he would gaze until the last hue of evening died upon the waves. He then returned, with a vacant and down-cast look, sad and solitary, to his dwelling. He was buried there in the churchyard; and a plain-looking stone, with the initials C. M., still marks the spot called The Stranger's Grave.

[Pg 247]

View larger image

THE DEAD MAN'S HAND.

"Yet stay, fair lady, turn again,
And dry those pearly tears;
For see, beneath this gown of grey,
Thy own true love appears."

—Percy's *Reliques*.

Bryn Hall, the scene or rather the solution, of the following tradition, is now demolished. It was the ancient seat of the Gerards, by virtue of marriage between William Gerard, about the year 1280, with the daughter and sole

heir of Peter de Bryn. It was built in a quadrangular form with a spacious courtyard, to which admittance was gained by a narrow bridge over the moat surrounding the whole fabric. The gatehouse was secured by massy doors well studded with iron; a curiously-carved porch led to the great hall, where, on the chimney-piece, were displayed the arms of England, not older than the reign of James I. A railed gallery ran along one side, on which persons might stand to observe the entertainments below without mingling in them. It was supported by double pillars in front of pilasters, forming arches between, profusely ornamented by rich carved work. Most of these decorations, together with the carved wainscots, were taken to embellish Garswood Hall, near Ashton, a few miles distant, where the family resided after their removal.

In the windows were some armorial bearings of painted glass, the first quarterings beginning with the Leighs of Lyme, instead of Gerard or Bryn, as might have been expected. Here was a Roman Catholic chapel, and a priest who continued long after the family had departed, having in his custody the hand mentioned in the following pages. It is still kept by them, or rather by the priest, who now resides at Garswood. Preserved with great care in a white silk bag, it is still resorted to by many diseased persons, and wonderful cures are said to have been wrought by this saintly relic. It is called the Hand of Father Arrowsmith—a priest who is said to have been put to death at Lancaster for his religion in the time of William III. When about to suffer, he desired his spiritual attendant to cut off his right hand, which should then have the power to work miraculous cures on those who had faith to believe in its efficacy. Not many years ago, a female, sick of the smallpox, had it lying in bed with her every night for six weeks, in order to effect her recovery, which took place. A poor lad, living in Withy Grove, Manchester, afflicted with scrofulous sores, was rubbed with it; and though it has been said he was miraculously restored, yet, upon inquiry, the assertion was found incorrect, inasmuch as he died in about a fortnight after the operation. [Pg 248]

Not less devoid of truth is the tradition that Arrowsmith was hanged for witnessing a good confession. Having been found guilty of a misdemeanour, in all probability this story of his martyrdom and miraculous attestation to the truth of the cause for which he suffered was contrived for the purpose of preventing the scandal that might have come upon the Church through the delinquency of an unworthy member.

One of the family of the Kenyons attended as under-sheriff at the execution; and it is said that he refused the culprit some trifling favour at the gallows, whereupon Arrowsmith denounced a curse upon him—to wit, that whilst the family could boast of an heir, so long they should never want a cripple: which prediction was supposed by the credulous to have been literally fulfilled.

What a strange and appalling history would be that of superstition! how humiliating, how degrading to the boasted dignity of our nature! In all ages this teeming source of error has yielded abundantly all varieties of phantasms—the sublime, the solemn, the horrible, and the ridiculous—a mildew, a blight, on the fairest blossoms of truth; an excrescence; a coat of rust, which eateth as a canker, and makes religion, which was given as a blessing and a boon to our perishing race, a burden and a curse. And yet neither good nor evil is unmixed. Such is the nature even of our most baneful impressions that instances do arise where good may come from so corrupt a source. The connection between material and immaterial, between mind and matter, so operates, that sometimes, and in proportion to the strength of the impression, a change is wrought by the mere control of the mind over the bodily functions. [Pg 249]

To this operation may be ascribed the wonder-workings of these latter days. We do not question the effects thereby produced; but totally, unhesitatingly, deny the cause. Imagination at times doth so usurp the mastery over the animal and bodily faculties, that she has been known to suspend their ordinary processes, and to render the frame insensible even to the attacks of pain itself.

In one of the northern divisions of the county—we know not the precise situation, nor is it needful to our purpose that we inquire—there dwelt a comely maiden, who, at a period of little more than twenty summers from her birth, found herself in the undisturbed possession, if not enjoyment, of an abundant income, with a domain of more than ordinary fertility and extent. Her parents dying during the period of her youth, she, as the only offshoot of the family, held her dominion uncontrolled. That the possessor of such an abundant stock of liberty should wish to wear a chain is verily a marvel not easily resolved. But so it was; and she seemed never so well pleased as when the links were firmly riveted. The forging of this invisible chain was a work performed in secret. She felt her thrall, but she sighed not to be free! For, alas! a grievous malady had seized her. The light of her eyes—a brisk and winning gallant, in the shape of a male cousin—had departed. He went out to the wars, as was reported, and Ellen refused to be comforted. He knew not, peradventure, of her liking towards him. He was of a different creed, moreover—a Catholic—and she had, in the sovereignty of her caprice, treated him with something of petulance—he thought scorn. What a misfortune, that two fond hearts should have wanted an interpreter!

She sat one evening in her bed-chamber, and Bridget her maid, a little Roman Catholic orphan, who had served her from a child, was busily engaged in preparing her mistress for the night's repose. Now Bridget was a zealous believer in saints, miracles, and the like; and Ellen would often disport herself gently on the subject.

"I wish I could believe in thy legends and thy saints' gear; it would verily be a comfortable disposition of my thoughts in all extremity to have a hope of a special interference."

"And why not?" said Bridget, who confessed thrice a-year, and knew the marvellous histories of a dozen saints by rote.

"Because," said her mistress, "I did not imbibe thy faith with my mother's milk as thou hast done. 'Tis part of thy very nature, wench; and thou couldst not but act in conformity thereto." [Pg 250]

"There have we the better of our birthright. But, nevertheless, those who repent and turn to the true faith have the same privileges; yet it is hard, as well it may be, to bend their stubborn nature to this belief. How comfortable to have one's sins struck from the calendar, and to know that we

are holy again as a little child, besides ailments of the body innumerable that are cured whenever we can bring our faith to its full exercise!"

"Well, Bridget, if I were a good Catholic as now I am an unbeliever and heretic, dost think that St Somebody, or whoever I might take a fancy to for the purpose, would be propitiated by a few prayers and genuflexions, and restore me to health and—and"——

She faltered in her speech; the banter died away on her lips; memory gave a sudden twinge, and her heart grew dark under the dim cloud that was passing over.

"I'd answer for it, if you were a good Catholic, that Father O'Leary would cure you as readily as he did Davy Dean's sow, that went mad, and bit her master."

"But seeing that I am neither a good Catholic nor even Davy Dean's sow, is there a saint in the whole calendar would think it worth while to work a miracle on such a wicked unbeliever as I am?"

"There's one way, as I've heard tell; that if ye take a sprig of St John's wort, and say three *credos* over it and a *paternoster*, and lay it under your pillow, you shall dream of the remedy by which a cure may be wrought."

Ellen did not immediately reply to this suggestion, for she thought that no special revelation was needed to point out a remedy.

"I would give the world if I had it to know what my cousin William is doing," said she in a musing fit, as though some sudden fancy had crossed her.

"And why may you not?" said the ready-witted maid; "yea, as sure as St Peter's at Rome, and that's not to be gainsaid either by Turk or infidel."

"What, dost thou learn these crotchets in thy creed?" said Ellen.

"Nay," replied the other, "it is a bit of conjuration not enjoined by the Church; a kind of left-handed intercourse which we get by stealth from other guess-folk, I reckon, than the holy saints." [Pg 251]

"Am I to dream of this too?"

"Why, nay; you may be wide awake for that matter; but you must just take a phœnix feather in one hand, a cockatrice tooth in your mouth, and breathe on the glass, when, as the breath departs, they say your true love will appear therein."

"But he is not my true love, wench; and so I may not bind him with such spell, mayhap."

"How know ye that, fair mistress?"

"Go to; thou dost wound and vex me with thy questions. Hath he not been gone these five months, and never a word, good or bad, hath been rendered to me? Nay, did he not, ere he went, so deport himself with most cold and supercilious arrogance, and even with neglect and disdain?"

"Because in your own bright self, lady, he had the first example; for of all the gay sparks that fluttered about you there was never a one o' them that had to endure such chilling looks and so haughty a bearing as were usually reserved for him."

"Hold thy tongue; thou dost presume too much, methinks, upon thy former freedoms, wench. I like not such unguarded speech."

Bridget was silent at this rebuke; and, whatever was uppermost in her thoughts, no more was said that night.

The following days Ellen was much worse. The disease appeared to be rapidly gaining strength, and the maiden seemed doomed to an early grave.

"And isn't it a silly thing for one like you to die so soon?" said Bridget; "I can ask for you, what I would not have the face to ask for myself."

Ellen smiled. The hectic flush was apparently on her cheek; and the fever that fed it was on her vitals; at least, so said the village chroniclers by whom it was told.

What was the precise nature of the request that Bridget made the next Sunday from her patron saint, we know not; but she seemed mightily occupied therewith; and if ever there was faith in such an intercessor, Bridget felt assured that her patron would intercede on behalf of her mistress, though a heretic and unbeliever. But St Bridget was told, in all likelihood, that Ellen must necessarily be a convert to the true faith should a miracle be wrought in her favour.

The following morning Bridget was early at the bedside of her mistress, with a countenance more than usually indicative of some important communication. But Ellen was the first to break silence. [Pg 252]

"I have had a strange dream last night."

"So I guessed," said Bridget, with a face of great importance; "and what said the holy saint, my good kind patron?"

"Bless thy silly face, it was no woman saint that I saw."

Bridget looked sad and chop-fallen at this intimation; she was fearful that her prayers were unheeded.

"There came, as I thought in my dream," said Ellen, "a long-robed priest to my bedside."

"Sure enough, then, St Bridget—blessings on her wherever she be!—sent him."

"Prithee, be quiet, and listen. He stood there, methought, and when I asked him of his errand, he raised his right arm, and I saw that the hand was wanting, being taken off at the wrist. I marvelled exceedingly at this strange apparition; but as I was a-going to question him thereon I awoke. I know not why, but the vision sorely troubled me, especially when again going to sleep, for it was repeated thrice."

"It's a riddle," said Bridget, "and one with a heavy meaning in it, too, if we could find it out."

"Verily, I think so," said Ellen; "for the impress doth not pass away like that from ordinary dreams; but rests with a deep and solemn power upon my spirit, such as I can neither throw off nor patiently endure."

"I'll unriddle it for you, or go a pilgrimage to our Lady at Loretto," said Bridget, determined not to be behindhand in her curiosity. So she set her woman's wits immediately to work; yet she saw her mistress daily losing strength, and no clue was obtained by which to know the interpretation of the vision. She consulted her confessor; but he was equally at a loss with herself, and knew not the nature of the dream, nor its meaning.

One day Mistress Bridget brought in a tall beggar woman, dumb, or pretendedly so, and apparently deaf. She made many signs that the gift of foreknowledge was in her possession, though she seemed herself to have profited little by so dangerous an endowment. Ellen, being persuaded by her maid, craved a specimen of this wonderful art. The hag, a smoke-dried, dirty-looking beldame, with a patch over one eye, and an idiotic expression of face, began to mutter and make an odd noise at the sight of the sick lady. She took a piece of chalk from her [Pg 253] handkerchief, and began her work of divination. First she drew a circle on the floor, as a boundary or frame, and within it she put many uncouth and crabbed signs; but their meaning was perfectly unintelligible. Under this she sketched something like unto a sword, then a hideous figure was attached to it, with a soldier's cap on his head. Before him was a heart, that seemed to hang, as it were, on the point of this long sword; which when Ellen saw she changed colour, but attempted to smile; yet she only betrayed her agitation. The dumb operator drew one hand across her own breast, and with the other pointed to the lady; which appeared to Ellen as though intimating that a soldier had won her heart, and that this was the true cause of her illness. Such an interpretation, perchance, was but the conscious monitor speaking from within, as it invested this unmeaning hieroglyphic with the hue and likeness of its own fancies. But more marvellous still was the subsequent proceeding. Having revealed the cause, it seemed as though she were about to point out, obscurely as before, the method and means of cure. When she had drawn the long unshapely representation of a cloak, above it was placed something like unto a human head, without helm or other covering; and to this figure two arms were added; one having a huge hand, displayed proper, as the heralds say, the other arm entirely destitute of this useful appendage. Ellen at once remembered her dream, and watched the process even with more interest than before.

The hand which should have been attached to the wrist was now drawn distinct from the rest, as though grasping a heart wounded by the sword; and doubtless the interpretation, according to Bridget's opinion, was, that the application of a hand, which had been severed from the body, would alone cure the disease under which she pined. The dumb prophetess did not communicate further on the subject; and after having received her bounty, she departed.

"How very strange!" said Ellen.

"Marvellous enough," said the maid; "but St Bridget hath doubtless sent her to your help. Nay, peradventure, it was St Bridget herself! Save us, what a kind, good creature she must be!"

Here she crossed herself with great fervour, forgetting that even a saint among womankind would hardly feign herself dumb.

"There is some mystery about this hand," thought Ellen; but where to seek for a solution was a mystery of equal magnitude with the rest. Bridget was sure, from the disclosures already [Pg 254] vouchsafed, that the needful directions would not be withheld.

Ellen felt restless and disturbed for a while after this event; but her sensations were again reverting to their ordinary channel when one morning she awoke in a fearful trepidation. She said that the figure of a human hand was visible, in her slumbers; that it led the way, pointing to an old house like a fortified mansion, with a moat and gatehouse before the main entrance. As she followed, the hand seemed to twine its fingers about her heart, and for that time she felt relieved of her pain. So vividly was the scene impressed upon her imagination that she felt assured she should recognise the building again, and especially the interior, where, in a stately chamber, the miraculous cure was performed. Bridget rubbed her hands, and capered about for joy.

"The name of St Bridget be praised!" said she, and vowed twenty things in a breath; but the principal of these was an embroidered petticoat, which vow she expected her mistress would enable her to fulfil. Indeed, she had long set her mind upon this lustrous piece of attire, and was

waiting, somewhat impatiently, the time when it should be allotted to her. So audibly had she made her vow that Ellen was reminded of her pertinacity in still hoarding this precious and coveted piece of finery, which Bridget looked upon as an unwarrantable detention of her perquisites.

The cunning maid having obtained the garment for her patron saint, what harm was there in wearing it, a while at least, for her sake?

Affairs went on for a little time in this dubious state; but the continued and increasing illness of Ellen made it expedient that a change of air should be attempted, and the journey accomplished by short and easy travel. The family coach was brought out, and Mistress Bridget, invested with the dignities of her office, went forth as attendant of the body, and principal conductor of stores and packages.

Journeying southwards at a slow pace, pausing to take a look where there was any object worth the attention, they came one afternoon, about the fourth day from their departure, to Wigan. When they had journeyed thence a mile or so, as they were passing down a jolting road, Bridget, whose curious eye was ever on the look-out, suddenly exclaimed, at the same time pointing through the window— [Pg 255]

"I declare if there is not the dummy again yonder!"

Ellen beheld the dumb sibyl, whose predictions were not forgotten. Bridget, by her looks, seemed to ask leave to stop the carriage and hold another conference with the woman; and Ellen, whom illness had rendered somewhat passive in such matters, did not make any opposition. Having accosted this walking oracle, Bridget curtsied with great reverence, peradventure fancying that St Bridget herself might be again embodied before her; but the beldame went straight to the carriage, addressing herself to the invalid within by pointing to her breast, and making divers motions of the like signification, which were not easy to be understood, even by the party for whom they were intended. The prophetess seemed fully to comprehend that her symbolic representations were unintelligible, and no fitting place being at hand whereon they could be readily portrayed, she strove with the greater vehemence to explain her meaning. There appeared a more than ordinary anxiety on her part to communicate something of importance; and the travellers looked as though fully aware of it. Her most unequivocal signs, however, were to this purport—that they should not proceed farther. Ellen, impelled by fear and curiosity, spoke aloud—

"Surely we are not to remain here at the beck of this woman!"

The one-eyed sibyl nodded an affirmative. This, at any rate, helped them to an easier mode of communication, finding that she was not deaf, as they had hitherto supposed.

"And whither shall we proceed?"

The woman here pointed to a narrow lane on the right of the main road they were pursuing.

"Truly that seems but an indifferent path. Wherefore should we turn in thither?" inquired Ellen.

Again the prophetess pointed to her own breast, and then at the bosom of the invalid.

"By this token I understand that in so doing I am to expect some relief."

Again nodded the officious intruder.

"But how shall that relief be obtained?"

The woman here lifted up her hand, again pointing towards the path by which they should proceed.

"Go and see, I suppose thou wouldst say," said Ellen.

Another affirmatory nod was the answer. [Pg 256]

"Wilt thou be our guide?"

The person addressed here darted a look at Ellen which seemed to express pleasure at the request, if pleasure it might be called that could irradiate such an aspect. She put out her hand for the customary largess ere setting forward as their guide on the expedition. Some difficulty now arose by reason of the straitness of the path; but their dumb leader hastened up the lane with unusual speed, beckoning that they should follow. From this signal it appeared that there was sufficient room, and the postilion addressed himself to proceed by so unusual a route.

They went forward for about a mile with little difficulty; but a sudden turn, almost at right angles with their course, presented an obstacle which the driver hesitated whether or not to encounter; but it was impossible to return, though they were not without serious fears that the weird woman might lead them on to a situation from which they could not extricate themselves. Still she beckoned them forward, until they emerged into another and a wider road, on which they travelled without further impediment.

Ellen, whose eyes were abundantly occupied, suddenly assumed a look of greater fixedness and intensity. For a while she seemed nearly speechless with amazement. At length she cried—

"'Tis there!—There!"

Bridget looked forth, but saw nothing worthy of remark save an old gatehouse over a dark lazy moat, secured by heavy wooden doors.

This gatehouse was apparently the entrance to a court or quadrangle, enclosed by buildings of wood and plaster of the like antiquity. Their guide stood on the bridge, as though to intimate that their wanderings would here terminate.

"I have seen it before," said Ellen, with great solemnity and emotion. Bridget perhaps fancied her mistress's thoughts were wandering strangely, and was just going to recommend rest and a little of the medicine she carried, when Ellen again spoke, as though sensible of some incoherency in her remark:—"In my dreams, Bridget."

"St Bridget and the Virgin be praised! Is this the house you saw when"——

"The very same. I should know it again; nor should I forget it if I were to live to the age of the patriarchs."

"It's an evident answer to my prayers," said Bridget; and here the devout enthusiast began to [Pg 257] recite internally some holy ejaculations, which, if they did not possess any positive efficacy, were at least serviceable in allaying the excitement under which she laboured.

Ellen determined to alight and witness the issue of the adventure; so in due time these forlorn damsels were seen advancing over the bridge unto this enchanted castle.

The beldame knocked loudly at the gate, and immediately she sprang back; but when the travellers again looked round she was gone!

Now were they in a precious dilemma. Two females before a stranger's gate; the warder a-coming, when their business would of necessity be demanded. A tread, every footstep of which might have been passing over them, was close at hand. The bolts shrieked; the gate shook, and a curious face peeped forth to inquire their errand. Bridget, whose ready tongue rarely refused its office, replied—

"Is there a Catholic priest hereabout? for we would fain have a word with one of that persuasion."

The grim warder smiled.

"Ye have not far to go for such an one," said he; "but ye be far-off comers, I reckon, or ye would have known Bryn Hall belike, the dwelling-place of the noble house of Gerard, that hath never been without a priest and an altar therein."

He threw the gate wide open, and invited them to follow; after which he led them through a clumsily-ornamented porch into the great hall, at the end of which was a low gallery, supported by pillars and pilasters richly and profusely carved. From these arches were sprung, and a flight of stairs at one end led to the upper chambers.

Their guide preceded them into a small wainscoted room, fitted up as a study, or perhaps an oratory in those days. A wooden crucifix, with a representation of the Saviour carved in ivory, was placed in a recess, occasionally covered by a green curtain. Shelves laden with books occupied the farther end of the room, and writing materials were laid upon an oak trestle or table, before which sat a tall white-haired personage in a suit of sables, to whose further protection the porter left his charge.

Ellen had suffered herself to be led passive hitherto by her maid; but when she saw that they were now fairly committed to the disposal of the priest, for so he appeared, she felt uneasy and [Pg 258] anxious to depart. The room and the whole scene were vividly brought to her recollection; for she fancied that, at one time or another, she had been present in a similar place.

Bridget curtsied to the holy father, who, doubting not that either a case of conscience or a need-be for confession brought these strangers to his presence, began the usual interrogatories.

"Here is a sick person, most reverent sir, who would have the benefit of your prayers," said Bridget. The pale and wasting form that was by her side sufficiently corroborated this reply.

"Daughter, the prayers of the church are for the penitent and believing; hast thou made shrift and a clear confession?"

Bridget was prepared for this question.

"She is not of the faith; but, peradventure, if aid be vouchsafed, she shall be reclaimed."

"If she have faith, I will cure her malady. What sayest thou?" He fixed his clear grey eye upon her, and Ellen felt as though some charm were already at work, and a strange tingling went through her frame. She stammered out something like an assent, when the priest carefully proceeded to unlock a little cabinet, inlaid with ivory and gold, from which he took out a white silk bag that diffused a grateful perfume through the chamber. He offered up a prayer before he unloosed the strings; after which, with great formality and reverence, he drew forth a human hand, dried and preserved, apparently by some mysterious process, in all its substance and proportions. Ellen was dumb with astonishment. Bridget could with difficulty refrain from falling on her knees before this holy relic; and her delight would easily have run over in some form of religious extravagance had it been suffered to have free vent. To this relic, doubtless, had the predictions referred: and she doubted not its power and efficacy.

"This rare and priceless thing," said the priest, "was once the right hand of an English Martyr, Father Arrowsmith by name, put to death for his holy profession. In consideration whereof, it is permitted, by the will of the Supreme, that an honourable testimony be rendered to his fidelity by the miracles that it doth and shall work to the end of time. Rub it thrice on the part affected, and mark the result. If thou receive it with humility and faith, trusting in Heaven, from whence alone the healing virtue doth flow—these holy relics being, as it were, but the appointed channels and conduits of His mercy—thou shall assuredly be healed." [Pg 259]

But Ellen was at some loss to know the precise situation of her complaint, until she recollected the picture drawn by the dumb fortune-teller, who described the heart alone as touched by this miraculous hand. Yet, in what manner to make the application was a matter of some difficulty.

Bridget again relieved her from the dilemma.

"If it so please your reverence, the seat of the complaint is not visible. Suffer us to use it privately. We will not carry forth nor misuse this precious keepsake; for I have been brought up in the nurture of the Holy Church, and am well instructed in her ceremonies."

"I fear not for the harm that can happen to it, by reason of ungodly or mischievous devices. If taken away, it would assuredly return hither. Should the lady have some inward ailment, let her lay it as near as may be to the part where she feels afflicted, and keep it there for a space, until she findeth help."

The two visitors were then shown into another chamber; and here Bridget, with great devoutness, and a firm faith in its efficiency, placed the dead cold hand upon her mistress's heart. Ellen shuddered when she felt its death-like touch. It was either fancy, or something more, but she really felt as though a load were suddenly taken away—an oppression, an incubus, that had continually brooded over her, was gone. Surprised, and lightened of her burden, she returned into the oratory, and gave back the relic, along with a liberal offering into the hands of the priest. He said there would scarcely be occasion for a repetition of the act, as it was evident the faith of the recipient had wrought its proper work.

The day by this time being far spent, the priest begged permission to introduce Ellen to Lady Gerard, who, he said, would be much gratified to afford them entertainment, and, if need were, shelter for the night. On hearing the name of her visitor, this kind lady would take no denial, but expressed herself warmly on the folly and imprudence of an invalid being exposed to the night air; and Ellen, delighted with the change she felt, was all compliance and good-nature. After a little hesitation, she suffered her first refusals to be overcome, and the night wore on with pleasant converse. By little and little Lady Gerard gained the confidence of Ellen, who seemed glad that she could now speak freely on the subject nearest to her heart. [Pg 260]

"It is marvellous enough," continued Lady Gerard, "that you should have been conducted hither; for in this house there is a magic mirror, which may, peradventure, disclose what shall relieve your anxiety. On being looked into, after suitable preparations, it is said—for I never tried the experiment—to show wondrous images within its charmed surface; and like the glass of Cornelius Agrippa, of which we have a tractate in the library chamber, will show what an absent person is doing, if the party questioning be sincere, and anxious for his welfare."

"I have long wished," said the blushing Ellen, "that I might see him of whom our evening's discourse hath, perchance, been too much conversant. I would not for worlds that he knew of my wish; but if I could see him once more, and know the bearing of his thoughts toward me, I could now, methinks, die content."

"This very night, then, let us consult the oracle," said Lady Gerard; "but there must not be any witness to our exploit; so while away your impatience as best you may until I have made the needful preparations for our adventure."

Ellen could not repress her agitation when, after waiting alone for a little time, her kind hostess came to summon her to the trial. She was conducted up the staircase before mentioned, and through a corridor of some length. The lamp grew pale and sickly in the cold wind of the galleries they trod. Soon, however, they paused before a low door. Lady Gerard pressed her finger on her lip, in token of silence. She then blew out the light, and they were involved in total darkness. Taking hold of Ellen's arm, which trembled excessively within her own, she opened the door, but not a ray was yet visible. She was conducted to a seat, and Lady Gerard whispered that she should be still. Suddenly a light flashed forth on the opposite side, and Ellen saw that it came from a huge antique mirror. A form, in male attire, was there discernible. With a slow and melancholy pace he came forward, and his lips seemed to move. It was—she could not be mistaken—it was her cousin William! She thought he looked pale and agitated. He carried a light which, as it glimmered on his features, showed that they were the index of some internal and conflicting emotion. He sat down. He passed one hand over his brow, and she thought that a sigh laboured from his lips; but as she gazed the light grew dim, and ere long the mirror, ceasing to be illuminated, again left them in total darkness. A few minutes elapsed, which were swollen to [Pg 261] long hours in the estimation of the anxious and wondering inquirer. Her companion again whispered that she should await the result in silence. Suddenly the light flashed out as before, and she saw the dumb fortune teller instead of the individual she expected. Her features were more writhen and distorted than ever; and she seemed to mutter, it might be, some malignant spell, some charm, the operation of which was for some unknown and diabolical intent. Ellen shuddered as the weird woman took a paper-roll from her bosom. Unfolding it, there was

displayed the figure of her lover, as she supposed, kneeling, while he held out his hands toward the obdurate heart which he in vain attempted to grasp.

"I have wronged him," said Ellen, in a whisper to her companion; "if I interpret these images aright, he now sighs for my favour; and—would that we had known each other ere it was too late!"

"He knows now," said Lady Gerard; and immediately the dumb prophetess was at her side. She threw off a disguise, ingeniously contrived, and Ellen beheld her cousin William! The magic mirror was but an aperture through the wainscot into another apartment, and the plot had been arranged in the first place by Mrs Bridget, who had been confederate with the handsome but somewhat haughty wooer, having for his torment a maiden as haughty and intractable as himself. Thus two loving hearts had nigh been broken for lack of an interpreter. William's absence had taken deeper hold on Ellen's finely-tempered frame than was expected; and it was with sorrow and alarm that he heard of her illness. His distant relative, Lady Gerard, to whom he had retired for a season, spake of the marvellous hand, which, he was sure, being a devout and pious Catholic, would cure any disease incident to the human frame. It was absolutely needful that a cure should be attempted, along with some stratagem, to conquer the yet unbroken obstinacy in which, as with a double panoply, Ellen had arrayed herself. The result of the experiment has been shown. She was united to her cousin ere a few months were old, and the "merrie spring" had melted in the warm lap of summer.

[Pg 262]


View larger image

THE LOST FARM, NEAR SOUTHPORT.
"Drawn by G. Pickering."
"Engraved by Edw^d^ Finden."

THE LOST FARM;

OR, THE HAUNTED CASKET.

"And when of me his leave he tuik,
The tears they wat mine ee,
I gave tull him a parting luik,
'My benison gang wi' thee;
God speed thee weil, mine ain dear heart,
For gane is all my joy;
My heart is rent, sith we maun part,
My handsome Gilderoy.'

"Of Gilderoy sae 'fraid they were,
They bound him mickle strong,
Tull Edenburrow they led him thair,
And on a gallows hung.
They hung him high aboon the rest,
He was sae trim a boy;
Thair dyed the youth whom I lued best,
My handsome Gilderoy."

On the flat, bare, sandy coast, near to Southport, now a modern bathing-place of great resort, described in the first series of this work, might be seen, some few years ago, a ruined barn, cottage, and other farmyard appurtenances, around which the loose and drifting sand was accumulated, covering, at the same time, some acres of scanty pasture, once held under lease

and occupation by an honest fisherman, who earned a comfortable, if not an easy subsistence, from his amphibious pursuits. The thatched roofs were broken through—the walls rent and disfigured—all wore the aspect of desolation and decay. Long grass had taken root, flourishing luxuriantly on the summit, though surrounded by a barren wilderness, a wide and almost boundless ocean of sand. The ruin was the only fertile spot in this dreary waste. Though painful and melancholy the aspect, still, as the sea-breeze came softly over, sighing gently on its time-worn furrows, and on the nodding plumes that decorated the crest of this aged and hoary relic of the past, the sensation, though pleasing, became mournful; the heart seemed linked with the [Pg 263] unknown, the mysterious events of ages that are for ever gone—feelings that make even a luxury of grief, prompted by that within us, "the joy of sorrow;" something more hallowed, more cherished in the heart's holiest shrine, than all the glare and glitter of enjoyment—the present bliss—which we prize only when it departs.

Many years ago, this humble tenement was the abode of George Grimes, the fisherman to whom we have just alluded. It was a dwelling one story only from the ground, as the general use was in these regions, ere modern edifices, staring forth in red, white, and green—their bold and upstart pretensions outfacing and supplanting the lowly but picturesque abodes of the aboriginal inhabitants—had overtopped and overshadowed these meek, rural, and primitive displays of architectural simplicity.

Grimes, we repeat, was of that amphibious class, common upon every coast, combining the occupations incident to land and water in his own proper person. Half-fisherman, half-farmer, he ploughed the seas with his keel, when upon land his coulter was out of use. He was nigh sixty, and had long settled down into that quiet nap-like sort of existence, when the passions are lulled, scarcely visible, as they creep over the stagnant current of life. He was hale and hard featured; the lines on his visage betokening, if need were, a stern, decisive, and obstinate bent in his disposition, that might have issued in deeds of high and noble daring had its possessor been thrown into circumstances favourable to the display. As matters stood, George was master of his own household. Here none questioned his authority; no profane, irreverent approach ever awakening the dormant energies of his character, or thwarting the current, visible only by opposition.

His wife was a round, brown, heavy-cheeked, dark-eyed dame, with a cap white as the whitest goose of the flock that marched every morning from her barn-doors to the common, where, by some little pool, a scanty and close-bitten herbage formed their daily subsistence. She wore a striped apron; the blue lines would have vied with the best Wigan check for breadth and distinctness. Her good-humoured mouth, reverse from her husband's, was usually puckered up at the corners into an expression of kindness, benignity, and mirth—the contrast greatly aided by proximity; for though George Grimes was benevolent and kind-hearted at the bottom, yet he was [Pg 264] by no means apt to let these gentler feelings rise to the surface.

An only daughter was now passing within the precincts of womanhood. Her complexion, red, and —not white, reader—but of that rich, healthy, and wholesome tinge, perfect as an example of the real English brunette. Her face exhibited a beautiful modification of her father's hard and determined expression, blended with her mother's gentleness and placidity. A smile of thrilling sweetness would sometimes pass upon her calm and thoughtful countenance, always beautiful—if such a term can be allowed in speaking of a brown, rosy, plump, and well-conditioned girl, of good stature, whose form had not been squeezed into shape, nor her linsey woolsey flourished into flounce and farthingale. Her hair hung in bright clusters on her brow; fresh from Nature's toilet, their wild untutored elegance was singular and bewitching. Indeed, Katherine, or "Kattern," as she was more generally called, was the cynosure of this clime—a jewel, that needed not the foil of its homely setting; the envy and admiration of the whole neighbourhood—well known at church, and at Ormskirk market, where she attended weekly—at the latter place to dispose of her produce. Here she was the torment of many a rustic, unable to conquer, or even to understand, the power by which his heart was taken captive.

Avarice was the besetting sin of her father. He was always fearful of becoming poor, and "not paying his way," as he called it. Yet was it suspected that George Grimes had a "powerfu'" hoard, concealed both from his family and friends. Money he doated on. It was an undoubted fact that many a shining face went into the coffer of old Grimes that was never again seen performing the common everyday functions of currency and traffic.

He was always a-dreaming, too, that he had found treasure. Often he would spend the greater part of a morning tide in pacing the brink of the boiling waves, hoping to find there some coinage of his brain that had been his dream on the preceding night. Southport then existed not, at least in name. No gay and laughing crowds fluttered on the margin of the deep. No lines of well-trimmed "green-eyed" houses looked on, nor boats with their dancing pennons and bright forms shone gallantly on the waves. All was bleak, bare, and unappropriated. The very air seemed [Pg 265] tenantless, save when the solitary gull came sailing on heavily with the approaching tide, screaming over the gorge she beheld rising on the billows. The loud lunge of the sea was interrupted solely by the cry of the fisherman, and the "cockler's" whistle, plying his scanty trade among the shoals and sandbanks about the coast. It is scarcely possible to conceive a situation more desolate and uninviting. Hills of arid sand skirting the beach, without vegetation or enclosure, except where the withered bent and little golden-starred stone-crop gave their own wild and peculiar aspect to the scene. The shore is flat and unbroken to the very horizon, where the tide, retreating to its extreme verge, throws up a dim sparkle in the distance—Nature even here displaying her never-ceasing round of reproduction and decay, of advance and retrocession.

We had almost forgotten that there was another inmate of the household—a tall, thick-browed, high-cheeked menial, whose coarse habiliments displayed a well-proportioned shape, and shoulders of an athletic width. He had been engaged at the farm barely twelve months before the date of our narrative; and, at the first, a more egregious simpleton, as to farming and fishing operations, never drew a net or whistled at the plough-tail. Yet he came well recommended by a Catholic gentleman in the neighbourhood as a stout servant of all work, who would serve Grimes honestly and for moderate wages. He had one excellence or defect, as it might be—that which we impute to one dumb from his birth, but not deaf. He perfectly understood what was spoken, though, to make known his wishes, he was obliged to have recourse to signs or writing. In the former accomplishment he seemed to be well skilled, for he often elucidated his meaning by rude sketches in chalk upon the floor and table. There was a mystery about his appearance he cared not to divulge. His country and connections, too, were equally unknown. By the neighbours it was often suspected that he dealt with the Evil One. The "evil eye" was sometimes attributed to him; and the signs and chalkings were supposed to be mystic emblems of the future, into the hidden secrets of which he had the power of directing his inquiries.

He was apt in learning, and served George Grimes diligently and faithfully. He soon became acquainted with the various duties of the farm; and could unreef a sail or make a net with the best labourer in the parish. [Pg 266]

His only companion was Katherine. She taught him to knit, and to make nets; directed him how to find the best peats, and showed him where the rabbits burrowed and the larks and lapwings made their nests. Sometimes the instructress and her pupil would sit on the sandhills, and watch the sun sink down upon the ocean; sometimes they would gather shells, when the day's work was over, and string them in fantastic chaplets, which "*Dummy*" was very expert in contriving. He could converse with Kattern without difficulty. He had taught her his vocabulary of signs, and the maiden liked to observe his strange remarks and inquiries on passing events.

In the forenoon of a dark, threatening, and squally day, just before high tide, Grimes and his assistant had trudged towards the beach, intending to go out with the boat for a little while. The weather having been stormy of late, supplies were becoming scanty, and he wanted a few fish for their own use. They proposed to take the smaller boat only, hoping to be back with the next flood.

Toiling through the sand-drifts, they came to an opening between the hills, which looked immediately on the beach. The sky was black and heavy on the horizon towards the south-west. Round hard-edged clouds rode on from the main body, like flying squadrons, "grim couriers" of the storm. Here and there, through an opening in the clouds, the sky was of a deep, vivid, and intense blue, contrasting wildly with the rolling forms that tumbled about in turbulent confusion over the whole hemisphere. The sea was rising in breakers over the banks, hillocks of white foam riding on the crest of the billows, while the margin of the waves boiled and frothed like some vast cauldron.

The old man was not in a particularly complaisant mood that day. He was cross and snappish at trifles; irritable and out of humour with himself. As he waded through the narrow defile, the dumb assistant behind him whistled faintly, and perhaps inadvertantly. The fisherman looked back with a furious glance.

"Thou staring buzzard, is't not enough to see sich a bellyful o' wind i' brewing but thou must whistle for more to keep it company? Hang thee for a he-witch; I never hear that accursed piping but the wind follows, like sea-gulls to the garbage." [Pg 267]

He had just turned a corner of the hill, when, looking round, he cried in a tone of terror and amazement—

"How now, Dick? Why, the boat is gone! what prank next? Thou careless unthrift, ill-luck follows i' thy wake. She has slipped anchor, and the little *Kitty* is gone to the Manx herring-boats. I am ruined, thou limb of Old Nick! thou chub! thou"——

Epithets were accumulating with prodigious force, when Dick, half-closing his eyes, pointed to something dark, like a small boat, in the offing.

"What's yon thee'rt pointing at? A porpoise-back, I warrant. Ay, shake thy head, fool; 'twill bring my bonny *Kitty* back. Why, thou'rt staring like a bit-boomp in a gutter catching frogs!"

Soon, however, the black speck became less ambiguous. George beheld a white stern heaving up and down. He ran forward as if to accelerate her return, crying out to his companion—

"A murrain catch thy tail, thou hast ever a longer sight than beseems thee. But she's coming, sure enough, whatever she be."

The old man gazed in wonder and suspense. He saw a sail unfurl, and the bark—his own little tight, trim vessel—come prancing on the white billows toward the shore. Soon he observed, sitting therein, perfectly at his ease, and unmindful of the near approach to, and the portentous menaces of, the owner, a figure clad in a garment of grey frieze, and a dark hairy cap on his head. One hand grasped the helm, and in the other he held the sheet, while he managed the boat with the most seamanlike skill and composure. His eye was fixed alternately on the shore and on the vane at the masthead as he came dancing through the surf, until he ran right upon the sands, where the boat grounded, and he sprang out upon the beach. The astonishment of Grimes can hardly be conceived when, without once deigning to notice him, away went the stranger,

vouchsafing neither thanks nor acknowledgments.

"Holloa, friend!" cried the incensed owner; "your disposition be freer than welcome, methinks. Holloa, I say, whither away so fast?" cried he impatiently, quickening his pace; but the stranger [Pg 268] altered not his gait in the least, plodding steadily onwards, without appearing to notice the angry inquiries of his pursuer.

Soon the quick long strides of George Grimes brought him alongside of the person he addressed. Crossing before him, and almost intercepting his progress, he exclaimed—

"How now, friend? I'd be bold to know what thou be'st. I'm mightily beholden to thee for this favour."

A malicious grin quivered on his pale and angry countenance; but the stranger was unmoved. He merely waved his hand, as though kindly admonishing the inquirer to depart and leave him unmolested.

"Nay, good man; I'm not so soon put off. Prithee, save thy wit, for I'm not i' the humour for a jest this morning."

A melancholy smile accompanied the reply.

"Friend," said he, "I am beholden to thee for thy boat; and if thou art seeking conditions for the hire, I am willing to return its equivalent. Will this content thee?"

Here George saw a bit of gold twinkling in the stranger's hand, which, like a beam on the dark waters, cleared his brow immediately.

He doffed his bonnet with great humility; but he was still curious about the matter, and more particularly as to what errand could have been requisite that boisterous morning. He stammered out some inquiry, and the stranger replied—

"Seek not to know; 'tis a doomed thing and accursed. I would have given thrice my revenue long ago, to have been rid o' the pest. But the wave hath swallowed it—for ever, I would earnestly pray; and I am again free!"

Saying this, he passed on, leaving the astonished fisherman gaping mute with wonder, until a projecting sandhill shut him out from their sight. During this interview the dumb assistant was busily engaged with the boat, disposing of the nets and other implements, though at the same time evidently keeping a wary eye towards the stranger.

The little bark was soon afloat, the wind again filled the sails, and shortly she was seen flying over the billows in defiance of "wind, water, and foul weather."

Grimes only purposed to cast the nets a mile or two from shore, for a good haul at that period was easily obtained much nearer the coast than is now practicable, the fish being driven away, as [Pg 269] the inhabitants superstitiously but firmly believe, by the quarrels that have taken place amongst the fishermen.

The bark went merrily on, leaping over the waves, with the old mariner at her helm, and his dumb servant by the mainsheet. The wind was blowing more steadily; the short and squally gusts had increased into a roaring gale, driving right ahead from the west. To work, however, they went, when, after a haul or two, the old man being engaged with the tackling, up came something in the net—at least old Grimes saw it glittering amongst the fish when he turned round, and it could have come from none other quarter than the sea.

Grimes drew it forth, and a fair and weighty casket it was, apparently uninjured. It was ornamented in the arabesque or antique fashion, inlaid with great care and skill. He grasped the prize; he poised it, to ascertain its gravity. It seemed to be both heavy and well-filled.

This at last was the treasure he had often dreamt about, and the old man was almost frantic with joy. He hugged the unlooked-for messenger of wealth and good-fortune, and, putting the vessel about, made all sail for land.

Once more anchored as near the beach as the retiring tide would allow, Grimes was too much engaged with his prize to notice that "Dummy" took another route to the farm. Alone with his bundle, and a pelting storm at his heels, the old man came to his dwelling. His early appearance was unexpected, but the women, little used to question his movements, immediately set about preparing for dinner. Depositing the casket, which was locked, in the oaken chest or ark at his bedside, he purposed to break it open when he had procured the means, without harming the exterior.

The storm was rapidly gaining strength; the wind blew a hurricane; the thunder rolled on, louder and more frequent; and the rain came down in torrents. It was not an ordinary tempest, but more like one of those tropical tornadoes, when the elements—fire, air, and water—seem to mingle in universal uproar, fighting and striving for the mastery.

"I think, o' my conscience, this wind is raised by the ould one," said the elder female. Scarcely were the words uttered when the room seemed in a blaze, and a clap of thunder followed: so loud and appalling, that it made the very walls to rock and the whole fabric to reel with the stroke. The fisherman grew pale; the stranger's words rang in his ears. Was it the *casket* that he had [Pg 270] committed to the deep, and of which he spake with such horror and execration? Strange as was

the idea, yet he could not get rid of it; there seemed some connection between this fearful agony of nature and the mysterious treasure beneath his roof. The pipe fell from his mouth, and he sat listening, as he fancied, to the awful denunciations mingled with the howling storm, as though he had not power to move or to avert his gaze from the window.

"Bless me, I had forgotten you were by yourself, father," said Katherine. "He will be almost drowned, if he has not ta'en shelter."

"I know not," muttered Grimes; "he left me on the shore. He might ha' been here long since." The rain and wind abated for a brief space, when old Isabel appeared to be listening near the chamber door, where Grimes had left the casket.

"Mercy! what's that, George?"

The fisherman was immediately all eye and ear; his head bent towards the door, which stood ajar.

"Who is there in the chamber?" inquired the old woman. "I hear it again."

"Hear! what?" replied he, in great agitation.

"Something like an' it were a-whispering there," replied the dame.

But a gust of wind again overwhelmed every other sound in its progress. Grimes thought he had heard a whisper that made his blood freeze, and the very flesh to creep over his bones with terror.

But Katherine fearlessly entered; she looked cautiously about, but all was still, and she returned. Ere she closed the door, however, she heard a soft whisper, as though behind her. Naturally courageous, she immediately went back, but all was quiet as before; nor could she find that any person had been concealed in the apartment. She opened the chest where Grimes had stowed his booty, and seeing the casket, she took it up, running hastily into the adjoining room.

"Why, father, what a pretty fairing you have brought me. I'se warrant, now, you would not have told me on't till after the wakes, if I had not seen it."

The old man looked as if he had seen a ghost. The whispers he had heard were, foolishly enough perhaps, connected in his mind with the presence of this mysterious thing. [Pg 271]

"Take it back—back, wench, into the chest again. It was not for thee, hussy. A prize I fished up with the nets to-day."

"From the sea. Oh me! it is—it is unholy spoil. It has been dragged from some wreck. Cast it again to the greedy waters. They yield not their prey without a perilous struggle," said the girl.

The fisherman was silent. He looked thoughtful and disturbed, while Katherine went back to put the treasure into its hiding-place.

"I wonder what that whispering could be?" thought the maiden, as she opened the old chest. Ere the lid was pulled down, she cast one look at the beautiful but forbidden intruder, and she was sure—but imagination is a potent wizard, and works marvellously—else she was sure that a slight movement was visible beneath the casket. She flung down the lid in great terror; pale and trembling, she sprang out of the room, and sat down silent and alarmed. Again the mysterious whispers were audible in the momentary pauses of the blast.

"Save us!" said the elder female; "I hear it again."

Bounce flew open the door of the bed-chamber, and—in stalked their dumb assistant, as though he had chosen this mode of ingress, through the window of the sleeping-room, rather than through the house-door.

"Plague take thee! Where hast thou been?" said the old woman, partly relieved from her terrors. Yet was the whispering precisely as incomprehensible as before. The dumb menial that stood before her was obviously incapable even of this act of incipient speech.

"Where hast thou been, Dick?" inquired Grimes, seriously. But the former pointed towards the beach.

"How long hast thou been yonder?—in the chamber, I mean."

Dick here fell into one of his ordinary fits of abstraction, from which neither menace nor entreaty could arouse him. As the old man turned from the window he saw a blaze of light flashing suddenly upon the wall. The yard was filled with smoke. Rushing forth, the inmates found the barn thatch on fire, kindled probably by the lightning. The rain prevented it from extending with much rapidity; and Grimes, mounting on the roof, soon extinguished the burning materials before much damage had been the result. Misfortunes verily seemed to crowd upon each other; and that unlucky casket, doubtless, was the cause. When the old man, with his dame, returned into the house, Katherine was nowhere to be found. The "Dummy," too, was unaccountably absent. Anxious and wondering, they awaited, hoping for their appearance at dinner; but their meal was cheerless and unvisited. Evening came, serene, deceitful as ever—but their child did not return. They went out to make inquiries, but could find no clue to aid them in the search. Katherine had never stayed from home so late. The parents were nigh distracted. There was evidently some connection between the disappearance of their servant and her own absence. Fearful surmises [Pg 272]

ensued. Suspicion strengthened into certainty. The casket was forgotten in this fearful distress; and, after a fruitless search, they were forced to return.

On the third night after this occurrence, Grimes and his disconsolate helpmate were sitting by the turf embers in moody silence, broken only by irregular whiffs from the pipe—the old man's universal solace. After a longer pull than usual, he abruptly exclaimed—

"Three days, Isabel, and no tidings of the child. Who will comb down my grey hairs now, or read for us in the Book o' nights? We must linger on without help to our grave; none will care to keep us company."

"Woe's me!" cried the dame, and she wept sore; "my poor child! If I but knew what was come to her, I think i' my heart I would be thankfu'. But what can have happen'd her? unless it be Dick indeed; and yet I think the lad was honest, though lungeous at times, and odd-tempered. By next market, surely, we shall ha' tidings fra' some end. But I trow, 'tis that fearsome burden ye brought with you, George, fra' the sea, that has been the cause of a' this trouble."

Grimes started up. He threw the ashes from his pipe, and, without saying a word, went into the bed-chamber. Lifting up the chest-lid, he saw the casket safe, and apparently undisturbed. He drew it fearlessly forth, and vowed that he would throw it into the sea again, without further ado, on the morrow. It felt much lighter, however, than before; but not another night should it pass [Pg 273] under his roof; so he threw it beside a turf-heap in the yard. His heart, too, felt lighter as he cast the abominable thing from him; and he was sure it was this mischievous inmate alone that had wrought such woe in his hitherto happy and quiet household.

Morning came; and Grimes, for the first time since his loss, took the boat, committing himself alone with the haunted casket on the sea. It was a lovely morning as ever sun shone upon; the waters were comparatively smooth; and the tide brought one of those refreshing breezes on its bosom, so stimulating and healthful to the invalid.

But Grimes thought not of the brightness or beauty of the morning. With the helm in his hand, one light sail being stretched out to the wind, he was steering through the intricate channel, and amongst the sandbanks which render the coast so dangerous even to those best acquainted with its perils.

He stood out to a considerable distance, intending to have depth and sea-room enough to drown his burden.

The breeze was fair, the sea was bright, and the mariner sailed on. He determined, this time at least, that the casket should be sent far enough out of harm's way.

"If that plaguy thing had been down deep enough before," thought he, "this mischief had not happened." He looked at it, and thought again, "How very sad to part with so beautiful a treasure." He had not observed before that the lid was unlocked. He might as well peep before it should be hidden for ever beneath the dark billows. He lifted up the rim of the coffer cautiously; he trembled as the hinges gave way; and—it was empty!

"I am a fool!" thought he; "a downright fool. An empty box can have nothing to do with——

But, as if to belie his own conclusions, and to convince him that peril, and misfortune must attend the presence of that mysterious thing, he having just quitted the helm for a more convenient examination, a sudden squall nearly upset the boat. Fortunately she righted, but not before most of the movables were tossed out, including the cause of all his troubles. This at any rate was lucky, and cheaply purchased with the loss and breakage of his marine stores.

The tide was still coming in, though nearly at the height, and Grimes floated merrily to land. After hauling the boat ashore, he stood for a moment looking towards the sea, when he saw, [Pg 274] dancing like a spectre on the very edge of the wave that broke in a thousand bubbles at his feet, the identical box he had taken such pains to commit to the safe keeping of that perilous deep. It was evidently pursuing him. He would have fled, but fear had arrested his footsteps. He did not recollect that the box was now empty, and floated from its own buoyancy.

"It will not drown," thought he. After a little reflection he resolved to dispose of it in some other manner.

"It will haunt me as long as it is above ground. I'll bury it." In pursuance of this wholesome resolve, he took it home again. Digging a deep grave in the peat-moss behind this cottage, he thrust in the object of his apprehensions, trusting that he was now safe from its power.

But noises horrid and unaccountable disturbed him. Demons had surely chosen his dwelling for their head-quarters. Nor day nor night could he rest—fancying that a whole legion of them were haunting him. He seemed to be the sport and prey of his own terrors; and with a heavy heart he resolved to quit, though suffering a grievous loss by the removal.

The story of the haunted casket, with many additions and improvements, soon got abroad. No one dared to pass the house after nightfall, and "The Lost Farm" has ever since been tenantless.

Grimes removed to another in a few weeks; but his happiness and his hopes were for ever dissipated by the mysterious intruder. Hearing no tidings from his daughter, he determined, several weeks after the adventure, to sally forth in quest of intelligence.

It was a cold blustery morning when the old man set out on his errand. He was clad in a coarse blue frieze coat, with the usual complement of large white-plated buttons. His head was sheltered by an oil case-covered hat, tied down with a blue and white check handkerchief, and he held a long stick before him at arm's length, on which his sorrowful and drooping frame hung more heavily than usual. He had grown a dozen years older at least in less than as many weeks; and when he came to Church Town, having taken the bypath through the hills, he was fain to rest himself a while at the inn-door. Before it stood several carts on their way towards Preston, [Pg 275] whither they were bound for the disposal of their produce on the morrow. Grimes thought he might as well make some inquiries there; Katherine having at times visited that remote town to make purchases. He would have company too if he went with the carts, and a lift now and then if he were tired; so, throwing down his bundle, he entered the house intimating his wish that they should join company.

"To Preston, lad?" said a jolly carter, holding a pewter pot that seemed as if glued to his hard fist. "Rare doings there, old one. What! thee wants to look at the fun, I warrant. Why, the rebels ha' been packed off to Lunnun long sin'; but we han had some on 'em back again; that is, thou sees, their Papist heads were sent back i' pickle into these parts, and one on 'em grins savagely afore the Town Ha'."

Grimes knew little of political niceties, or whether kings *de facto* or *de jure* were better entitled to the throne.

The late disturbances had not reached these districts; so that the rebellion of 1745 might as well have happened in Kamtschatka or Japan for any personal knowledge that old Grimes had of the matter.

"Rebels!" said he; "I have heard a somewhat of this business; though I know nothing, and care less about them cannibals."

"Then what be'st thee for in such a hurry to Preston?"

"I had a daughter, but she has left me, the staff and comfort of my old age, when I stood most in need of the prop!" Here the old man drew his hat over his brows, partly turning aside.

"Cheer up, friend," saith another; "thy daughter, maybe, is gone wi' Prince Charlie, when he piped through Preston 'Hie thee, Charlie, hame again!'"

This malicious sally raised a loud laugh; but the old man heard it with great agony and consternation; for though a bow drawn at a venture—a chance expression merely, intended as a clever hit at the women's expense, who had followed in the train of the rebels—Grimes construed the passage literally; and from that time it ran continually in his head, that his daughter's absence would be found to have some connection with these events.

"Hang thy jibes!" said the first speaker, for whom this piece of wit was more especially intended; "hang thee, I'll knock thy neck straight; pepper me but I will!" [Pg 276]

This worthy had a wife, who incontinently had contributed to augment the rebel train when the Prince, in far different plight, on the 27th of November 1745, passed through Preston, on his route to London, piping "The king shall have his own again."

A fray was nigh commencing—a circumstance not at all unusual in those turbulent times—but the master of the band speedily interfered, threatening displeasure and a wholesome discipline to his refractory servants.

Grimes accompanied them on their journey, riding, walking, and gossiping, at irregular intervals; during which he learned much news relating to the aspect and circumstances of the time, the names of the leaders, and those attainted and condemned, in this hasty and ill-timed rebellion. A considerable number of Lancashire partisans, officers of the Manchester regiment, commanded by Colonel Townley, had been conveyed to London, and tried for high treason, in July 1746. Some were reprieved and pardoned; others were executed, with all the horrid accompaniments prescribed by the law. The heads of Townley and one Captain Fletcher were placed upon Temple Bar. The heads of seven others, having been preserved in spirits, were at that time ornamenting posterns and public thoroughfares in Manchester, Preston, Wigan, and Carlisle, to the great comfort of the loyal and well-disposed, and the grievous terror of the little children who passed in and out thereat. Others, the noble leaders of this short and ill-acted tragedy for the benefit of the selfish and bigoted Stuarts, suffered death; while others escaped, amongst whom was the titular Earl of Derwentwater, supposed to have been conveyed secretly aboard ship for Scotland.

In these rebellions, it may generally be said, that in the county of Lancaster, Catholics as well as Protestants displayed a firm attachment to the reigning family. Instances of defection were very rare; and, when they occurred, might be imputed to some peculiarity in the situation of the delinquents rather than to party or religious feelings. The romantic attempt of the young Chevalier, as displayed in this rebellion, had in it something imposing to ardent and enthusiastic minds; and those who embraced his cause south of the Tweed were principally young men of warm temperament, whose imaginations were dazzled by the chivalrous character of the enterprise.[17] [Pg 277]

About the close of day, the towers of "proud Preston" were seen rising above the broad sweep of the river below Penwortham Bridge. The situation chosen by our ancestors for the erection of "*Priest's Town*"—so called because the majority of its inhabitants in former times were

ecclesiastics—evinces the discriminating eye of a priest, and shows that, whether the religious orders selected a site for an abbey or for a city, they were equally felicitous in their choice. Placed at a convenient distance from the sea, upon the elevated banks of one of the finest rivers in England, with a mild climate and a dry soil, and commanding a rich assemblage of picturesque views, in one of the most interesting portions of Ribblesdale, the spirit of St Wilfred himself, to whom the parish church is dedicated, and who was the most accomplished ecclesiastic of his age, must have animated the mind that fixed upon this spot.[18]

Grimes, adjusting his satchel and other appendages, trudged warily on, according to the directions he had procured from his guides, in respect to lodgings. His route lay up Fishergate; and on his way, near the Town Hall, his progress was interrupted by a dense crowd. The soldiers and local authorities were just conveying a prisoner of some note from the hall of justice to head-quarters at the Bull Inn, under a strong guard.

Grimes, impelled by curiosity, and likewise having an idea that it might be one of the rebels, with whom he still connected the disappearance of his daughter, thrust himself, edgeways, into the crowd; his primitive appearance causing no slight merriment amongst the bystanders.

Guarded by soldiery and a bevy of constables before and behind, came a tall, muscular figure, attired in a ragged suit—probably a disguise, and not of the most reputable or becoming description. He looked haggard and dejected—harassed, in all likelihood, by long watching and fatigue. His hair was intensely black, surmounted by a coarse cap or bonnet, such as the mechanics then wore at their ordinary occupations.

The old man looked steadfastly at the prisoner.

"Surely it cannot be!" said he half-aloud. He pressed into the foremost rank, and near enough to receive a lusty blow from one of the constables; but not before he had, with an exclamation of joy and astonishment, recognised the features of his former servant and dumb inmate at the farm. [Pg 278]

Grimes, caring not a whit for the blow, in his ready and imprudent zeal stepped up to the leader of the party, thinking there was doubtless some mistake in the person they had seized, and anxious, too, for an opportunity of speaking with the prisoner anent his errand.

"Stand back!" said the official representative gruffly.

"Friend, I know thy prisoner well. He was lodged and victualled at my house not six weeks agone."

"The——he was; then we may as well try a hand with thee too," said the constable.

But the simplicity and openness of the old man was his protection; for the constable walked on, without deigning to bend his truncheon to such low and inglorious enterprise.

"But look thee," said the pertinacious and unsuspecting fisherman, "he is my servant; and you are i' the wrong to capture him without my privity."

"And who art thou?" inquired another of these myrmidons of justice, eyeing Grimes and the cut of his habiliments from head to foot. "I do bethink me thou art i' the roll. Thee would make a grim fixture for a pole here hard by." He looked significantly towards the reward of treason hung in front of the Town Hall above them.

"Like enough!" said the other, taking the offender by the collar; who, astonished beyond measure at this proceeding, was unable for a while to give such an account of himself as to satisfy the officers and regain his liberty. The prisoner looked at him, but did not betray the least symptom of acknowledgment.

"Ill-mannered varlet!" thought the old man; "but what can they be a-wanting with our Dummy?"

Still urged on by the crowd, he resolved to see an end of the business; so, pushing with them through the gateway of the inn, he came so near the prisoner as to touch him gently by the sleeve during the press and scuffle in the entry. For a moment—and it was a glance observed by the fisherman alone—the pale features of the unfortunate rebel showed a glimpse of recognition; but immediately they relapsed into their former stern though melancholy expression.

Being much amazed at this conduct, the old man could not forbear exclaiming—

"Varlet!—my daughter—thou"——But the prisoner was out of sight and hearing, and the crowd were driven from the gateway. Grimes heard a few of the bystanders speaking of some great man that was taken, and of the reward that would be obtained for his apprehension; but the old fisherman smiled at their ignorance. He knew better. It was none other than his dumb retainer at the farm; and he set his wits to work—no despicable auxiliaries at a pinch—in order to procure an interview. [Pg 279]

In vain he attempted to persuade such of the crowd as would give him a hearing of the real state of the case, and the great injustice of the man's arrest. But they listened to him with impatience and suspicion. The old man was doubtless either crazed or guilty as one of the rebel partisans.

"I tell thee what, old crony; if thou dost not change thy quarters, we will lay thee by the heels i' the cage, presently. Budge! move, quick; or"—— Here the speaker, a little authoritative-looking personage, would have made a movement corresponding to the words; but Grimes, perceiving that he was not to be trifled with, unwillingly drew aside out of harm's way.

Hungry, weary, and dispirited, the old man inquired his way to an obscure lodging in one of the wynds near the market. It was a low, dismal-looking tavern, wherein sat two or three unwashed artificers, drinking beer and devouring the news.

"I'm right fain he's taken," said one of the politicians, whose black leathern apron and smutty face betokened his occupation. "There's but old Lovat, they say, now, to chop shorter by a handful of brains. Proud Preston, say I, for ever. Hurra!"

"Ay, and the mayor's wife too, say I; and may she never want a pair of garters to tuck round a rebel's neck!" replied a little giggling, good-humoured fellow, who seemed to imbibe ale as he drew his breath—both being vitally necessary to his existence.

"She's a rare wench, and would sooner see a rebel hanged, than bod her nose at a basin of swig and roasted apples."

"She played the husband's part to some purpose when Charles Edward levied the tribute forsooth, Mr Mayor being gone to look after his children, by Longridge; but old Sam the beadle says he was afeard o' the wild Highlanders, and slunk out of the way." [Pg 280]

Whilst this conversation was going on Grimes untied his handkerchief, doffed his stocking boots, and embracing his satchel, drew forth a piece of hard, unsavoury cheese, and some barley-cake, with which he proceeded to entertain, if not satisfy, his stomach. A glass of beer finished this frugal repast, when the old man retired into the shadow of a huge projecting chimney, ruminating on the perplexities by which he was encompassed, and on the possibility of his final extrication. Opposite to him, in the shadow, as if shunning observation, sat another person who appeared wishful to avoid any intercourse with the guests. Grimes stretched his gaunt figure on a bench beside the hearth, as though desirous to let in the dark waters of oblivion upon his spirit.

The hostess was bustling in and out, doubtless impatient at this prolonged stay when the cup was empty; and, in one of these inspectory visits, the old man addressed her, scarcely raising his contemplative gaze from the embers, where he had been poking his eyes out for the last half-hour.

"I want a bed for the night, good dame."

"We have none to spare," said the dissatisfied landlady—"for such guests as thee," perhaps she would have added, but the stranger from the opposite corner interrupted her.

"He shall have mine: I can lie on the squab."

The voice of the speaker was soft and musical, apparently in a disguised tone.

"You're very kind, sir," said the hostess; "but this over-thrifty customer may find other guess places i' the town; unless, indeed, he chooses to pay handsomely for the lodging."

"And then, maybe," said the stranger, "the siller would find out a bed to lie in."

"I could lend him mine, perhaps," returned the accommodating landlady.

"Then here's a crown," said the other, "and let the old man be both fed and bedded. I have money enough; and his purse, I think, is not overstocked with provision, if we may guess by the lining of his wallet."

The dame, growing courteous in an instant, promised as good a bed as King George himself slept in that blessed night. The astonished fisherman could hardly credit his senses. He thanked his stars for this unexpected interposition; nor would he refuse the gift, though from the hands of a stranger. [Pg 281]

The latter shortly afterwards retired to rest; and the political weaver and blacksmith, having settled the hanging, drawing, and quartering of the unfortunate prisoner, not without a full and minute-description of this disgusting and barbarous, though to them diverting process, called for a parting cup, to drink confusion to the rebels and a speedy dismissal to the Chevalier.

Old Grimes retired also; and in a low wide room, white-washed and bare-walled, containing a broken chair, two-thirds of a table, and a bed without tester, covered with a thick blue quilt, was deposited the mortal fabric of the weary fisherman.

He could not sleep for a considerable time; the strange events he had witnessed, the excitement he had undergone, together with the rude brawls beneath his window, prevented him from closing his eyes until past midnight. He heard not a few loyal home-made songs, by the red-hot braggarts, pot-valiant and full of "gentle minstrelsie," as they trolled lustily past his lodging. Amongst many others, the following seemed an especial favourite:—

1.

Down wi' the Papists an' a', man,
Down wi' the priest and confession;
Down wi' the Charlies an' a', man,
And up wi' the Duke an' the nation.

2.

"There's Townley, an' Fletcher, an' Syddal,

And Nairn, wi' his breeks wrang side out, man;
Some ran without breeks to their middle,
But Charlie ran fastest about, man."

After a while, the sounds began to mingle confusedly with the images floating on his own sensorium. He felt as though unable to separate them: ideal forms took up the real impressions, and arrayed themselves so cunningly withal, that to his mind's eye the image of his daughter seemed to approach. The brawling ceased; the room was lighted up. It was his own chamber, and Katherine sprang towards him, smiling as she was wont, for her usual "Good-night." "God bless thee, my child!" said he, as he threw his arms about her. Starting up, awake, at the sound of his own voice, he found that he had not grasped a shadow; but a being, real and substantial, was in his embrace. Grimes was horribly alarmed.

"Father, it is I," said a soft whisper. It was the voice of his daughter. [Pg 282]

"Hush!" said she; "be silent, for your life and mine. You shall know all; but not now. Fear not for me. I'm safe; but I will not leave *him*—my companion—yonder unfortunate captive. Help me, and I'll contrive his rescue."

"*Thy* companion, wench! why, how is this? Art"——

"Honest and true, as he is faithful. We may yet be happy as we once were, when this fearful extremity is past. Say no more; we may be overheard. Now aid me; for without our help he is lost! and, oh, refuse not this one, perhaps this last request of thy child!"

She fell upon his neck, and the old man was moved to an unwonted expression of tenderness; for truly his daughter was dearer to him than any earthly object; and still dearer in the moment when the lost one was restored.

"To-morrow night," said the maiden, "bring your boat, with four stout rowers, to the quay at Preston Marsh. Let me see; ay, the moon is near two days old, and the tide will serve from nine till midnight. You know the channel well, and wait there until I come."

"Kattern, thou shall go with me. I'll not leave thee now."

"Nay," said the faithful girl; "I must not; I *will* not. There is life depending on my endeavours. Father," continued she, throwing her arms round the old man's neck, who now sobbed aloud, "hear me; no power shall force me to leave him now in misery and misfortune. I would move the very stones for his rescue; and cannot I move thee?"

"Well, Kattern, I am a silly and a weak old body, and thou—But thou art disguised. Where didst get that coat? and—I declare—trousers. For shame, wench!"

"Nay, you shall know all, father, when I return; when we have delivered him, and not before."

The old man was too much overjoyed not to promise the requisite attendance.

"My life depends on 't, father; so good-night."

"Stay—stay, wench—a moment!"

But a light step, and the sound of a gently-closing door, announced her departure; and Grimes was forced to remain, where he lay sleepless on his pallet, impatiently awaiting daybreak.

With the first peep of dawn was old Grimes astir; and the lark was but just fluttering from the dew when the quaint, angular form of the mariner was again seen plodding towards the coast. [Pg 283]

"Since that plaguy box came into my fingers, I've had neither rest nor luck. I'll ne'er meddle with stray goods again while I live!" and in this comfortable determination he continued, thinking of his bonny Kattern to lighten the toil of his long and lonesome journey.

The same day the sun lighted early on the towers and gables of "Proud Preston." Longridge Fell threw off its wreath of mist; but on the river a long and winding vapour followed its course, everything betokening one of those pure, exhilarating days that so rarely visit our watery and weeping regions.

The mayor was but just awakened; yet Mrs Mayor had long been vigilantly engaged in household and political affairs (for she ruled the civic power in Preston's thrice happy borough), when a stranger came on some business of importance.

"What is your will, my good friend?" inquired the mayoress, taking off a light pair of shagreen-mounted spectacles; for being of that debatable age when time is hardly known by his advances on the person, having just mounted these helps occasionally, as she said, when mending a pen or sewing fine work, she cared not to show that they were in use at other seasons more germane to their purpose.

"I would have a word in private with the mayor."

"Mr Mayor has no words in private that come not through his lady's ear. Once more, your business?"

"I must see him, and alone," said the intruder.

"*Must* see him?" replied the female diplomatist; "I tell you that you shall not see him before I am acquainted with the cause. I hear your master on the floor above," said she to a servant who had just entered; "tell him he need not hurry down; breakfast is not yet ready."

The servant retired as he was bid; but, having heard more of the foregoing colloquy than his mistress intended, the message, as delivered to his worship, was of an opposite tenor from what he had been charged with. The stranger continued firm in his determination not to divulge his errand; and the anxiety of the ruling power to ascertain his motive would not suffer her to dismiss him. [Pg 284]

Great was the disappointment and dark the storm on the lady's brow, when, beslippered and begowned, came in hastily the chief magistrate of this ancient borough.

"A word in your worship's ear," said the stranger; "my time is short and the affair is urgent."

"Speak out; my wife shares the burdens of this office, and, indeed"——

"But, sir, I crave an audience in private. Should you not grant my request, there be other ears shall have the benefit of what is meant for your own."

The magistrate quailed before the terrors of his wife's frown; but however dangerous the duty—and it was fraught with no ordinary peril—still, in his official capacity, he could not refuse to grant the stranger a private interview.

The mayor was a round, full-eyed personage, whose cheek and nose displayed the result of many a libation to the jolly god. Short-legged, short-breathed, and full-paunched, he strode, quick and laborious, like a big-bellied cask set in motion, as if glad to escape, into a small back chamber, furnished with two stools, a desk, and sundry big books—implements in use only as touching his private affairs.

"Now, sir," said his majesty's vicegerent, puffing from unwonted exertion, "it is my lot to fill the civic chair in these troublous times; and truly my portion is not in pleasant places; but I am loyal, sir, loyal. The king has knighted many a servant less worthy than myself; and, but that Mrs Mayor is looking forward to the title, there would be little good-will to the office from 'my lady' that is to be. Now, sir."

The garrulous and ambitious minister of justice here paused, more for lack of breath than words or will to utter them; and the stranger, who had hitherto kept his hat just below his chin, waiting for a pause in this monologue, replied—

"My message respects your prisoner."

"Well, sir, go on. Proceed, sir, I say. What! can't you speak? Why stand there as if stricken dumb in our presence?"

The stranger did proceed the moment that an interval was granted.

"I am brief, your worship."

"Brief—brief—so am I; and my lady—that is, Mrs Mayor—though she likes that I should, in some sort, furnish my tongue to an acquaintance with the speech, so that I often speak of and to her as such, you observe, that when it may seem good unto his Majesty's pleasure, knighting my poor honesty"—here he made a slight obeisance—"the words may fall trippingly off the tongue, as though we were used to the title, and wore our honours like they who be born to them, sir. Proceed, sir. Why stand dilly-dallying here? Am I to wait your pleasure?" [Pg 285]

"Mine errand is simply this:—A plot is laid for the escape of your prisoner on his way to London; so that, unless means be taken to hinder it, he will be liberated."

"Escape!—what?—where? We will raise the soldiery. How say you? I will tell my lady instantly. Escape! If he escape I am undone. My knighthood—my knighthood, sir, is lost for ever; and my lady—she will ne'er look kindly on me again."

Here the little man arose, and, in great agitation, would have sought counsel from his wife, but the stranger prevented him.

"This must not be; 'tis for your ear alone. Stay!"

His worship was too much alarmed to resist; and the other led him gently from the door.

"If you will be guided by me you may prevent this untoward event. Let him be conveyed with all speed aboard the king's ship that is in the Irish Channel yonder; so shall you quit your hands of him, and frustrate the plans of his confederates. This must be done secretly, or his friends may get knowledge of the matter, who have had a ship long waiting for him privily on the coast to convey him forthwith to Scotland."

"I will about it directly. Dear me, I have left my glasses. The town-clerk must be apprised. The jailer—ay, good—thinkest thou he had not best be committed to jail?"

"Peradventure it will be prudent to do this. I will bear your orders to the town-clerk for his removal."

"What, immediately?"

"When your worship thinks best; but I would recommend despatch."

"I will about it instantly. There—there—take this. I shall be at the clerk's office myself shortly. Tell Mr Clerk to be discreet until I come."

The little twinkling eyes of the functionary were overflowing at the good fortune which revealed to him alone this vile Popish treason. Thus happily frustrated by himself, it would doubtless be the means of raising him from plebeian ranks to the honours of knighthood, perhaps further. His head grew dizzy at the prospect. He shook the stranger by the hand, who bowed and withdrew. [Pg 286]

Soon a little antiquated clerk, with green spectacles mounted in huge black rims, and a skin like unto shrivelled parchment, was seen accompanying the stranger to the inn.

The bolts opened to this demi-official, and they were at once ushered into the prisoner's chamber. He had already arisen, and was pacing the apartment in great haste.

"We come, sir," said the clerk, "to announce your removal; but first we search for plots. This rebel's disguise—where, sayest thou, is it concealed?"

"Upon his person," said the stranger.

"Pray doff that noble suit, sir," said the jocose purveyor of justice.

The prisoner, with an angry scowl, in which both grief and astonishment were mingled, silently obeyed the mandate; and displayed, underneath these coarse habiliments, a complete suit of female apparel—the very clothes worn by Katherine Grimes at the time of her disappearance.

"A well-contrived disguise, sir, truly. I wot you can suddenly change your gender at a pinch," said the clerk, chuckling at his own impertinence. But the prisoner, no longer dumb, as aforetime at the farm, answered, in a voice that awed even this presuming minion, with all the attributes of both law and power at his grasp.

"Why call you me sir, Sir Knave? I own no nicknames, and I answer to none. My title is Derwentwater."

"The titular earl, truly; but now Charles Ratcliffe, since your brother was"——

"Hanged, thou wouldst say," said the unfortunate and attainted peer, interrupting him; "it was his lot, as I pray thine may be, when the king shall have his own again. Silence!" continued he, in a commanding tone, as one accustomed to be obeyed. "I own it was my purpose to escape; but there is treachery in the camp—treachery in our own bosom—treachery"—here he cast a keen glance at the stranger—"ay, where our best feelings were cherished. I have leaned on a spear, and it hath pierced me! deeper than I thought—in this hard and seared heart." [Pg 287]

A strong and painful emotion came over his dark features; he clenched his hands; but the stranger betrayed no symptoms of compunction.

"Now, sir, I am ready," said the earl; "make my fetters tight; or perhaps I may be spared that indignity."

But the proud Earl of Derwentwater would not stoop to propitiate.

"Nay, bind them, and I will be prouder of their insignia than of all the honours, all the trappings, that George Guelph can bestow."

"We have orders merely for your safe keeping in the jail," said the clerk; "to which the proper officers will see you conveyed."

He was accordingly removed to the town jail, then situated to the west of Friargate. This building had been formerly a Franciscan convent of Grey Friars, or Friars Minor, built by Edmund, Earl of Lancaster, son of Henry III., in 1221, to which Robert de Holland, who impeached Thomas, Earl of Lancaster, for high treason, contributed largely, and was buried there. In its original state it was a small collegiate building, with a chapel attached to its quadrangular cloisters. By the mutations of time, it became the residence of the Breares of Hammerton, in Bowland; next a house of correction, until the prison at the bottom of Church Street was erected in 1790.

The clerk, being more particular in his inquiries than his worship, addressed the stranger as follows when their mission was ended:—

"Thou hast given good evidence of this plot, and too full of circumstance and confirmation to be disbelieved. The name is Oswald thou sayest, and one of the party who have plotted for his rescue?"

"I have told thee of this before," replied the stranger, sullenly.

"What should prompt thee to betray him?"

"The same that prompts thee to minister to the hangman's trade—gold!"

"Humph!" replied the other drily, wiping his spectacles; "and what will satisfy your craving?"

"Why, thinkest thou that I deserve not a reward for my loyalty and readiness to reveal this plot? I will to London with the prisoner; the king will not fail to grant me great largess for what this proud lack-land calls my treachery." [Pg 288]

"Why an it be a noose mayhap: for my part," continued the greedy and disappointed man of law, "I have touched never a doit of the bounty, though I have got many a sound rating, and am harder worked than a galley-slave, without even so much as a 'thank ye' for my pains. The mayor himself, who dreams he shall be knighted, may whistle a duet with 'my lady' as he calls her, as long as a county precept, or ere his title be forthcoming, though it be only a puff of empty breath. There's no luck in being loyal; neither honour nor honesty thrive therein. But 'tis the spoke that's uppermost; and so are we."

"Thinkest thou that I may get no share of the reward for his apprehension?" inquired the avaricious betrayer.

"Yes; Judas's reward, maybe, who sold his Master," said the indomitable clerk, much diverted by his own talents for tormenting. "Hold—I bethink me thou mayest claim the earl's linsey-woolsey gown and petticoats."

A loud laugh proclaimed that he had fully appreciated his own wit; though the stranger made no comments thereon.

"To-night, thou sayest, a boat will be in readiness, one hour before midnight and by the mayor's orders?"

"Yes; arrangements will be made, and soon after daylight we shall have our prisoner safe aboard the king's cruiser," replied the stranger, "for I know her bearing to a league."

"Thou wilt with us then?"

"Why, ay, if they will grant me a free passage. I would fain see him safe at head-quarters."

"I know not but thou art right; though, rest thee satisfied, he shall be sufficiently guarded."

The worthies here separated—one to his indictments and his desk, the other to gloat on the mischief he had either committed or prevented.

About an hour before midnight a heavy jarring sound announced to the prisoner that the time was at hand for his departure.

"Quick—quick, sir," said the jailer; "the mayor and his posse will see you safe aboard."

"The mayor! Wherefore comes he to swell the procession?"

"A prisoner of your rank and influence must be well looked after, I guess. The mayor will see you safely afloat, sir, and then he may go home with a quiet heart. He has had sore misgivings on account of your safety." [Pg 289]

The earl accompanied his keeper; a close carriage was at the gate, well guarded. Mr Mayor and his green-eyed clerk took their seats with the prisoner: and the heavy vehicle rumbled dismally through the now deserted streets, wakening many a drowsy burgher as it passed.

They gained the low landing-place without interruption, having taken the precaution to chain the legs and wrists of their prisoner to prevent escape. The mayor and his shadow, the gossiping clerk, stepped out first, the carriage being well guarded on each side. Conducted along a jet or wooden pier, they saw a fishing-boat lying beneath. The waves flapped heavily on her sides, beating to and fro against the pier. Four rowers were leaning silently on their oars, awaiting the arrival of their cargo; their dark, low-crowned hats heaving above the dim light which yet lay upon the water.

The wind howled in the rising sail, and the creaking cordage whistled through the block. The sail was hoisted. The wind was fresh, and the rowers raised their oars. The earl was lifted into the boat by two of the attendants. The jailer next stepped in; three other myrmidons of justice followed.

"You know the offing well, my lads, I guess?" said the jailer.

"Ay, ay, sir," replied several voices.

"Where is the king's cutter?" said he, addressing the stranger, who was already in the boat.

"Lying to, between us and the Peel of Fouldrey," replied he.

"This is a strange boat I think," said the inquisitive jailer.

"We came with fish to market from Church Town," was the reply.

"One of your own men engaged her," said the stranger; "and these have grumbled long and hard enough, that they should have the ill-luck to be pressed into this disagreeable service."

"I would you had laid your paws on some other boat. We shall ha' na' luck after this," said the

elder of the seamen. "You may hire another now, and welcome."

But there were none at hand. The jailer, with a hearty curse at his insolence, bade him be silent and push off. [Pg 290]

"Hast thou gotten the memorial touching my poor services to the king?" inquired the trenchant mayor.

"Have ye gotten the warrant safe, and the prisoner in close custody?" inquired the clerk.

But the boat pushed from shore, and the answer was scarce heard, mingling with the rush of the waves and the hollow wind, while the trampling of horses and the rumbling of the coach announced the departure of Preston's high and illustrious ruler and his learned clerk: one to dream of swords, knights, and drawing-rooms; the other to soar through those mystic regions, sublime and incomprehensible—the awful, inscrutable forms, fictions, and subtleties of law.

The boat soon gained the mid-channel. The wind was favourable, and the tide, beginning to return, swept them rapidly down the river. The stranger, at whose instigation this plan had been adopted, lay in the little cabin, or rather coop, wrapped in a fisherman's coat, apparently asleep. Derwentwater sought not repose; he sat, moody and silent, in a deep reverie, unconscious or insensible to all but his own dark and untoward fate.

The loud dash and furrowing of the wave, the roar of the wind, and the cry of the boatman as he gave the soundings, were often the only audible sounds. No one was inclined to converse, and the roll and pitching of the boat when they approached the river's mouth made the jailer and his friends still less willing to disturb their comrades.

After nearly four hours the lights of the little fishing hamlet of Lytham were passed, and they were fast entering upon the open sea. The stranger came out of the cabin, stationing himself by the steersman. They were evidently on the look-out for signals. It was not yet daybreak, and the wind was from the north, a bitter and a biting air, that made the jailer's teeth to chatter as he raised himself up to examine their course and situation as well as the darkness would permit.

"How long run we on through these great blubbering waves ere we end our voyage? This night wind is worse than a Robin Hood's thaw."

"We will hoist signals shortly," was the reply; "if the ship is within sight, she will answer and bring to."

"Have ye any prog[iv] aboard?" inquired the officer.

A bottle was handed to him. He drank eagerly of the liquor, and gave the remainder to his assistants. [Pg 291]

"I wish with all my heart," said he, "the prisoner were safe out of my custody, and I on my way back. I had as lief trot a hundred miles on land bare-back as sit in this confounded swing for a minute. How my head reels!"

He leaned against one of the benches, to all appearance squeamish and indisposed.

A faint light now flickered on the horizon and disappeared. Again. It seemed to rise above the deep. They were evidently approaching towards it, and the stranger spoke something in a low tone to the steersman.

"Yonder it be, I reckon," said the jailer, lifting up his head on hearing an unusual bustle amongst the crew. "I am fain to see it, for I am waundy qualmish dancing to this up-an'-down tune, wi' nought but the wind for my fiddle."

"And who pays the piper?" asked a wavering voice from below.

"Thee Simon Catterall, bumbailiff, catchpole, thieftaker, and"——

Here a sudden lurch threw the jailer on his beam-ends. A pause was the result, which this worthy official was not inclined to interrupt.

A light hitherto concealed, was now hoisted up to the masthead. This was apparently answered by another signal at no great distance.

"Friends!" said the stranger; "and now hold on to your course."

They had passed the banks and were some leagues from shore. Morning was feebly dawning behind them, when the dark hull of a ship, rapidly enlarging, seemed to rise out, broad and distinct, from the thin mist towards the west. The loud and incessant moan of the waves, the dash and recoil of their huge tops breaking against the sides of the vessel, with voices from on board, were distinctly heard, and immediately the boat was alongside.

The transfer of their cargo was a work of more difficulty, partly owing to the clumsiness and unseamanlike proceedings of the men who had charge of the prisoner, and partly owing to the light being yet too feeble for objects to be distinctly seen. A considerable interval in consequence elapsed ere the jailer, his assistants, and their charge were hoisted on the deck, not of a trim, gallant war-ship, well garrisoned and appointed, but of a lubberly trading vessel, redolent of tar, grease, and fish-odours, bound for merry Scotland. [Pg 292]

"Yoh-o-ih! There—helm down—back maintopsail. So, masters, we had nigh slipped hawser and away. Why, here have we been beating about and about for three long nights; by day we durst not be seen in-shore. Yon cruiser overhauls everything from a crab to a crab-louse. What! got part of your company in the gyves! Where is the earl?"

"Here!" said the prisoner, coolly.

"Hold, captain," cried the wondering jailer, "the vessel goes not on her voyage until I and two of my friends here depart with the boat; we go not farther with our prisoner. The remaining two will suffice to see him delivered up at head-quarters. Yet, this cannot be." Here the bewildered officer looked round. "I have a warrant to commit this rebel unto the safe keeping of—ay, the captain of his majesty's cutter, the *Dart*. But this," surveying the deck with a suspicious glance, "is as frowsy and fusty a piece of ship-timber as ever stowed coals and cods' tails between her hatches. I pray we be not nabbed!" said he in a supplicating tone to his head craftsman.

The prisoner himself seemed as much surprised as any of the group; but the stranger, now addressing him, unravelled the mystery.

"My lord; I am no traitor; though until now labouring under that imputation; but you are amongst friends. Thanks to a woman's wits, we are, despite guards, bolts, and fetters, aboard the vessel which was waiting for us when you were surprised and seized, unfortunately, as we were trying our escape towards the coast. With the aid of my parent, I have been at last successful. You are now free!" It was Katherine who said this.

She changed her hitherto muffled voice as she continued:—"Captain, we have nabbed as cunning a jailer as ever took rogue to board in a stone crib. We will trouble thee to use thy craft; undo these fetters, prithee. He must with you, captain, till you can safely leave him and his companions ashore; but use him well for his vocation's sake. My lord, through weal and woe I have been your counsellor—your friend; but we must now part—'tis fitting we should. While you were in jeopardy, that alone could excuse my flight. Should better times come!"——Her voice faltered; she could not proceed; and old Grimes drew his hat over his face. [Pg 293]

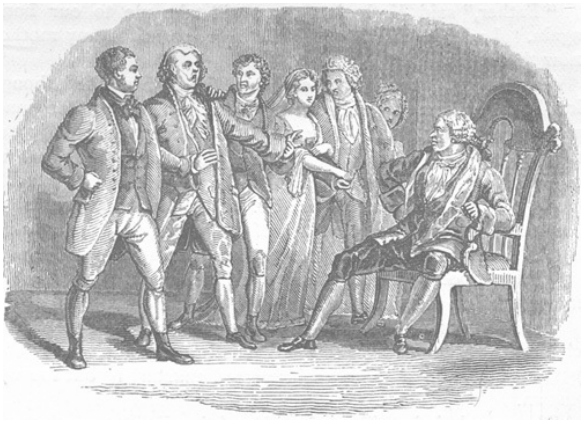
"Father," said Katherine, "you will take me to our home again. I will be all to you once more; and to my mother, now that *he* is safe."

One kiss from the gallant earl, and the high-minded, though low-born, maiden stepped into the boat. One wave of the hand, when the morning mist interposed its white veil, and parted them for ever;—yet not before old Grimes, taking a last survey of the vessel, was quite sure he saw the magician of the casket looking at him over the ship's side. In all probability his fancy had not deceived him; the affair of the casket, though supposed by the fisherman to be altogether of a supernatural nature, was, in all likelihood, a means of supplying the earl with money and information to aid his escape.

The subsequent history of this unfortunate but misguided chieftain, whose daring and audacious bravery was worthy of a better cause and a more disinterested master, is but too well known.

The vessel, being ill equipped and hardly sea-worthy, was pursued—the earl taken, and an ignominious death gave to the world assurance of a traitor.

[Pg 294]



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THE MAID'S STRATAGEM;

OR, THE CAPTIVE LOVER.

"Let me alone with him. If I do not gull him into a nayword, and make him a common recreation, do not think I have wit

enough to lie straight in my bed."

—*Twelfth Night.*

The following tale is perhaps the most apocryphal in our series. There has been considerable difficulty in fixing its locality: and, indeed, we are hardly sure that the names, dates, and places we have hit upon, will answer to the facts in every particular. We have done our best to verify it, and have succeeded, we trust, in the attempt, more to our reader's satisfaction than our own.

"There be more fools than farthingales, and more braggarts than beards, in this good land of ours. A bald-faced impertinent! it should cost the grand inquisitor a month's hard study to invent a punishment for him. This pretty morsel! Hark thee, wench; I'll render his love-billet to thine ear. Listen and be discreet.

> "'If my sighs could waft the soft cargo of their love to thy bosom, I would freight the vessel with my tears, and her sails should be zephyr's wings, and her oars love's fiercest darts. If I could tell but the lightest part of mine agony, your heart, though it were adamant, would melt in the furnace of my speech, and your torture should not abate till one kind glance had irradiated the bosom of your most unhappy, and most wretched of lovers,
>
> ANTONIO.'

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"Now for the *post scriptum*. If thy sighs be as long as thine ears,——help the furnace they are blown through. Again.

> "'If one ray of compassion lurks in your bosom, lady, let those radiant fingers illuminate your pen, touching one little word by way of answer to this love-billet, though it were but as a rope thrown out in this overwhelming ocean of love to keep from sinking your unhappy slave. These from my dwelling at ——.'

"O' my troth, answer thou shalt have, and that quickly, on thy fool's pate. Dost think, Marian, it were not a deed worth trying, to quell this noisome brute with a tough cudgel?"

"It were too good for him," replied the maid; "but if you will trust the rather to my conceits, lady, we will make this buzzard spin. He shall dance so rare a coarnto[v] for our pastime; beshrew me, but I would not miss the sport for my best holiday favours."

But we leave the beauteous Kate and her mischief-loving maiden, to plot and machinate against the unsuspecting lover. It behoveth us, moreover, to be absent for a somewhat grave and weighty reason, to wit, that when women are a-plotting, another and a more renowned personage—the *beau ideal* of whose dress and personal appearance, according to the testimony of a reverend divine, consists of a black coat and blue breeches—generally contrives to be present, as was by that learned dignitary umquhile set forth in a well-known ditty, of which the veracity is only equalled by the elegance and propriety of the subject, and the classical dignity of its composition.

Leaving them, though in somewhat dangerous company, we just glance at the lover, whose epistle to the proud maiden proved so galling to her humours.

Master Anthony Hardcastle was the only son of a substantial yeoman of good repute long resident in ——. Dying he left him, when scarcely at man's estate, the benefit of a good name, besides a rich store of substance, in the shape of broad pieces, together with lands and livings. The sudden acquisition of so much loose wealth to one whose utmost limit of spending money aforetime had been a penny at Easter and a groat at Michaelmas, did seem like the first breaking forth of a mighty torrent, pent up for past ages, forming its own wild and wilful channel, in despite of all bounds and impediments. His education had been none of the most liberal or extensive; and, astonished at his own aggrandisement, he found himself at once elevated into an object of importance ere he could estimate his own relative insignificance in the great world around him. Thus he became an easy prey to the hordes of idlers and braggarts with whom he associated. He had been to town, kept company with some of the leading cut-and-thrust bullies of the day; but Nature had denied him the headstrong boldness, the desperate recklessness of disposition, requisite for this amiable occupation. His infirmity had consequently often led him to play the coward. At the same time it probably was the means of restraining him from many of those evils into which his lavish and simple disposition might have been enticed, and he was now settling down quietly in the character of a good-natured, well-furnished simpleton. Fond of dress and a gaudy outside, he aimed at ladies' hearts through the medium of silken cloaks and ponderous shoe-buckles;—designing to conquer not a few of the fair dames with whom he associated. But, alas! the perversity of woman had hitherto rendered his efforts unavailing; still an overweening opinion of his own pretensions to their favour prevented him from giving up the pursuit, every succeeding mishap in no wise hindering him from following the allurements of the next fair object that fluttered across his path. He had heard of the wit and beauty of Kate Anderton, only daughter to Justice Anderton of Lostock Hall, a bluff and honest squire who spent his mornings in the chase and his evenings in the revel incident thereto; a man well looked upon by his less distinguished neighbours, being of a benevolent disposition, and much given to hospitality. Kate's disposition was fiery and impetuous, but tempered withal so pleasantly by the sweetness of a naturally tender and affectionate spirit, that you loved her the better for these sharp and wayward ingredients, which prevented that sweetness from cloying.

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Master Anthony, hearing of this goodly maiden, found himself, after secretly beholding her,

moved to the exploit of winning and wearing in his bosom so precious a gem, which many a high-flown gallant had essayed to appropriate. He began the siege by consulting the most approved oracles and authorities of the time for the construction of love-billets. The cut and fashion of the [Pg 297] paper, too, were matters of deep and anxious consideration. Folded and perfumed, the missile was despatched, and the result was such as we have just seen.

Upon this memorable day, it then drawing on towards eventide, Anthony, full of solicitude and musing on the fate of his billet, was spreading himself out, like a newly-feathered peacock, in the trim garden behind his dwelling. A richly-embroidered Genoa silk waistcoat and amber-coloured velvet coat glittered in the declining sun, like the church weathercock perched just above him at a short distance from the house.

The mansion of Squire Anderton lay a few miles off; yet there had been sufficient time for the return of his trusty valet, who was the bearer of this love-billet. Several times had he paced the long straight gravel walk stretching from the terrace to the Chinese temple, and as often had he mounted the terrace itself to look out for the well-known figure of Hodge, ere the hind was descried through a cloud of hot dust, urging on his steed to the extremity of a short but laborious trot. Needless were it to dwell upon the anxiety and foreboding with which he awaited the nearer approach of this leaden-heeled Mercury. To lovers the detail would be unnecessary, and to others description would fail to convey our meaning.

"I ha't, measter."

"What hast thou brought, Hodge?"

"A letter."

"Quick—quick, fellow. Canst not give it me?"

"Ay, i' fackens; but where is it?"

Great was the consternation depicted in the flat and vapid face of the boor as he fumbled in his pocket, turned out the lining, and groped down incontinently "five fathom deep," into his nether appendages; but still no letter was forthcoming.

"She gi'ed me one, though; an' where it is——I'se sure it waur here, an'——Bodikins if those de'ilments hanna twitched it out o' my——Thoose gigglin' wenches i' th' buttery took it when I waur but putting my nose to the mug the last time, for a lift i' the stirrup."

Terrible was the wrath and disapprobation evinced by Master Anthony at this disaster. He had nigh despoiled the curls of his new wig, which were become twisted and awry with choler.

Patiently to endure was the business of Hodge; and his master's fury having "sweeled" down into [Pg 298] the socket, a few hasty flashes just glimmered out from the ignited mass, ere it was extinguished.

"But thou hadst a letter—dolt—ass!"

"Ay, master, as sure as I am virtuous and well-favoured."

"Then is the lady kindly affected towards my suit? But oh, thou gull—thou dunderpate—thou losel knave, to lose one line moved by her sweet fingers. Get in; I'll not defile my rapier with beating of thee. Thanks to the lady thou hast just left; her condescension so affecteth my softer nature that I could not speak an angry word without weeping. March, rascal, and come not into my presence until thou art bidden, lest I make a thrust at thee with my weapon. O Katherine! my life—my love,—'my polar star, my axle; where all desire, all thought, all passions turn, and have their consequence!'"

Anthony had picked up this scrap from the players, with whom he had smoked, and committed the usual delinquencies, not peculiar to that age of folly and licentiousness.

"I'll go dream of thee where there be a bank of flowers. Here let me lose myself in a delirium of sweets."

Choosing a fair position, he squatted down upon a ripe strawberry bed, and great was the dismay with which he beheld the entire ruin of his best puce-coloured breeches. So sudden was the dissipation of his complacency, that he determined to beat Hodge forthwith; to which thrifty employment we commend him, whilst we address ourselves to the further development of our story.

Near to the lower extremity of the village dwelt a maiden whose bloom had been wasted, and whose matchless hopes were always frustrated ere their accomplishment. Many a simpering look had she cast towards the goodly raiment of Master Anthony, and some incipient notion was entertained that the indweller at the big house was not averse to a peep, now and then, more tender than usual, at the window of Mrs Bridget Allport. When a boy, Anthony had been a sort of spoiled pet of the maiden, who was then opening into bloom, and the bud of promise breaking forth in all its pride and loveliness. While Anthony's legs were getting rounder, and his face and figure more plump and capacious, the person of Mistress Bridget was, alas! proceeding, unluckily, in a manner quite the reverse. Anthony's love had not quickened into fruition with his growth: but the lady kept a quick and wary eye upon his movements, and many a pang had his [Pg 299] flattering favours caused in her too susceptible heart.

Distantly related to the family, she sometimes visited Lostock Hall; and at the period when our

narrative begins she was located therein.

Kate had long been aware of her likings and mishaps, and was no stranger to her predilection for Master Anthony Hardcastle.

The first overt act of mischief resulting from the plots of Kate and her maid was a smart tap at the door of Mistress Bridget, her bed-chamber, where she was indulging in reverie and romance; but the day being hot, she had fallen asleep, and was dreaming of "hearts, darts, and love's fires." She started from this mockery of bliss at the summons.

"Prithee, Marian, what is it?"

"A billet from—I don't care to tell who!"

"A billet, sayest thou?—eh!—who can it be? What! It is—go away, my good Marian; I cannot—oh! when will my poor heart——'*Waft a cargo of love to thy bosom.*' '*Melt in the furnace.*' Dear, delightful passion! How pure! Just like mine own, I declare. '*Harder than adamant.*' Nay, thou wrongest me. Prithee, Marian, who—where is he?"

"A trusty messenger is below." She dropped a handsome curtsy.

"Give me my tablets and my writing-stool. O Marian! little did I think of this yesterday. When I was telling thee of—of—oh, I am distraught!"

She commenced a score of times ere something in the shape of a communication could be despatched.

"There—there; let it be conveyed quick. Nay, I will see him myself. Lead me to him, girl. I will say how—and yet, this may look too bold and unmaidenly. Take it, good girl, and say—what thou thinkest best."

Lightly did the laughing maiden trip through the great hall into the buttery, where Hodge was ambushed along with a huge pie, fast lessening under his inspection. Her intention was not to have given him the billet, but she was suddenly alarmed at the approach of Mistress Bridget. Fearful lest the deception might be discovered, she hastily gave Hodge the precious deposit, trusting to some favourable opportunity when she might extract the letter from his pouch. An occasion shortly occurred, and Hodge was despatched, as we have seen, billetless, and unconscious of his loss. [Pg 300]

The lover was sore puzzled how to proceed. It was possible—nay, more than probable—that the message might have appointed a meeting; or twenty other matters, which he was utterly unable to conjecture, woman's brain being so fertile in expedients; and if he obeyed not her injunctions it might be construed amiss, and unavoidably prove detrimental to his suit. Should he send back the messenger? She would perhaps laugh at him for his pains; and he was too much afraid of her caprice to peril his adventure on this issue. A happy thought crossed his brain; he capered about his little chamber; and could hardly govern himself as the brilliant conception blazed forth on his imagination. This bright phantasy was to be embodied in the shape of a serenade. It would be more in the romantic way of making love—would stimulate her passions—powerfully enlist her feelings in his favour, and doubtless bring on something like an appointment, or a permission, at any rate, to use a freer intercourse.

"To-morrow night," said he, rubbing his hands and stroking his soft round chin, for be it understood, gentle reader, the youth was of a tender and fair complexion, with little beard, save a slight blush on his upper lip. He was not ill-favoured, but there was altogether something boyish and effeminate throughout his appearance, which seemed not of the hue to win a lady's love. He could twang the guitar, and had at times made scraps of verse, which he trolled to many a damsel's ear, but to little purpose hitherto.

On the morrow he watched the sun creep lazily up the sky, and more lazily down again. The old dial seemed equally dilatory and unwilling to move. He had sorted out his best and most ardent love sonnet, and strummed as many jangling tunes as would have served a company of morris-dancers and pipers for a May festival. Twilight came on apace. The moon was fast mounting to her zenith. No chance of its being dark; so much the better—it would enable the lovers to distinguish each other the more easily.

Hodge had long been ready, and the steeds duly caparisoned. At length, reckoning that his arrival would take place about the time the lady had retired to her chamber, he set forth, accompanied by his trusty esquire. The road lay for some distance over a long high tract of moorland, while beautifully did the bright stars appear to shoot up from the black, bleak, level horizon. The moon seemed to smile suspiciously upon them, and even Hodge grew eloquent beneath her glance. [Pg 301]

"It's brave riding to-night, master; one might see to pick up a tester if 'twere but i' the way. Well, I does like moonlight, ever since Margery came a-living at the parson's."

"Peace, sirrah!" Anthony was conning inwardly, and humming the soft ditty by which he proposed to excite his mistress' ear. "I think thou art mine evil destiny, doomed everlastingly to be my plague and annoyance."

"Body o' me, but you're grown woundily humoursome of a sudden," muttered the other at the lower end of his voice. "I waur but saying as how Margery"——

Hodge here received another interruption. A stray ass, turned out to browse on the common, seemingly actuated thereto by sympathy or proximity of either man or beast, burst into one of those hysterical, though exquisite cadences, which defy all imitation, and at the same time produce an extraordinary and irresistible effect on the animal economy.

"That is all along of thy prating," said the meditative lover, when the "*strain*" was concluded. "It bodes no good; and I'd as lief see a magpie, and hear a screech-owl, as one of those silly beasts. The salutation of an ass by night is ever held a sound of ill-omen; and lo! there be two of ye, reckoning thine own ugly voice."

"Then may two bode good, if one bode ill, as the maids say of the magpies," replied the indefatigable attendant.

"I'll cudgel thine infirmity out o' thee. Hold thy tongue! Hadst thou not been left me by my father, a precious bequest, I had sent thee a packing, long ere thou hadst worn a badge in my service."

The rest of their journey was accomplished in comparative silence, until a short ascent brought them to a steep ridge, down which the road wound into the valley. It was a scene of rich and varied beauty, now lighted by a bright summer moon. A narrow thread of light might be seen twining through the ground below them, broken at short intervals, then abruptly gliding into the mist which hung upon the horizon. Lights were yet twinkling about, where toil or festivity held on their career unmitigated. A mile or two beyond the hill they were now preparing to descend lay a [Pg 302] dark wood, extending to the shallow margin of the adjacent brook. Above this rose the square low tower of Lostock Hall; clusters of long chimneys, irregularly marked out in the broad moonlight, showed one curl of smoke only, just perceptible above the dark trees, intimating that some of the indwellers were yet awake. Ere long a bypath brought them round to a fence of low brushwood, where a little wicket communicated with the gardens and offices behind.

"Here stay with the beasts until I return," said Anthony, deliberately untying the cover wherein reposed his musical accompaniment.

"And how long may we kick our heels and snuff the hungry wind for supper, master?"

"Until my business be accomplished," was the reply.

Master Anthony commenced tuning, which aroused the inquiries of several well-ordered and decently-disposed rooks who were not given to disturb their neighbours at untimely hours, and were just at the soundest part of their night's nap.

"These villainous bipeds do fearfully exorbitate mine ear," said the agonised musician. "'Tis not in the power of aught human to harmonise the strings."

The clamour increased with every effort, until the whole community were in an uproar, driving the incensed wooer fairly off the field. Trusting that he should be able to eke out the tune in spite of these interruptions, he hastened immediately to his destination. He crossed a narrow bridge and passed through a gap into the garden, taking his station on one side of the house, where he commenced a low prelude by way of ascertaining if the lady were within hearing, and likewise the situation of her chamber. To his inexpressible delight a window, nearly opposite the tree under which he stood, was gently opened, and he could distinguish a figure in white moving gently behind the drapery. He now determined to try the full power of his instrument, and warbled, with no inconsiderable share of skill and pathos, the following ditty:—

"Fair as the moonbeam,
Bright as the running stream,
Sparkling, yet cold;
In Love's tiny fingers
A shaft yet there lingers, [Pg 303]

And he creeps to thy bosom, and smiles, lady.
Soon his soft wings will cherish
A flame round thine heart,
And ere it may perish
Thy peace shall depart.

Oh listen, listen, lady gay;
Love doth not always sue;
The brightest flame will oft decay,
The fondest lover rue, lady!
The fondest lover rue, lady!"

At the conclusion he saw a hand, presently an arm, stretched out through the casement. Something fell from it, which glistened with a snowy whiteness in the clear moonlight. He ran to seize the treasure—a scrap of paper neatly folded—which, after a thankful and comely obeisance towards the window, he deposited in his bosom. The casement was suddenly closed. The lover, eager to read his billet, made all imaginable haste to regain the road, where, mounting his steed, he arrived in a brief space, almost breathless with anticipation and impatience, at his own door. The contents of the despatch were quickly revealed in manner following:—

> "I know thine impatience; but faith must have its test. Send a message to my father; win his consent to thy suit; but as thou holdest my favour in thine esteem come not near the house thyself ere one month have elapsed. Ask not why; 'tis sufficient that I have willed it. Shouldst thou not obey, I renounce thee for ever.

"This shall be the test of thy fidelity.

KATHERINE."

He kissed the writing again and again; he skipped round the chamber like unto one demented; and when the old housekeeper, who was in a sore ill-temper at being deprived of her accustomed allowance of rest, came in to know his intentions about supper, he bade her go dream of love and give supper to the hogs.

The morning found Anthony early at his studies. A letter, painfully elaborated, was despatched in due form "To Master Roger Anderton, these;" and the lover began to ruminate on his good fortune. The terms were hard, to be sure, and the time was long; but women, and other like superior intelligences, will not bear to be thwarted; at least, so thought Master Anthony Hardcastle, as he threw his taper legs over the opposite chair, screwing his forbearance to the test.

The same day an answer was received, briefly as follows:— [Pg 304]

> "Though thy person and qualifications be unknown to me, yet have I not been ignorant of the respect and esteem which thy father enjoyed. Shouldst thou win my daughter's favour, thou shall not lack my consent, if thou art as deserving as he whose substance thou hast inherited."

Leaving to Anthony the irksome task of minuting down the roll of time for one unlucky month, turn we to another personage with whom it is high time the reader should be acquainted. At Turton Tower, a few miles distant, dwelt a cavalier of high birth, whose pedigree was somewhat longer than his rent-roll. To this proud patrician Kate's father had long borne a bitter grudge, arising out of some sporting quarrel, and omitted no opportunity by which to manifest his resentment. Dying recently, he had left an only son, then upon his travels, heir to the inheritance and the feud with Anderton.

Shortly after his return, Kate, being on a visit in the neighbourhood, saw him; and as nothing is more likely to excite love than the beholding of some forbidden object, unwittingly, in the first instance, she began to sigh; and with each sigh came such a warm gush of feeling from the heart as did not fail to create a crowd of sensations altogether new and unaccountable. On his part the feeling was not less ardent, though less inexplicable, at least to himself, and a few more glances fixed them desperately and unalterably in love. Hopeless though it might be, yet did the lovers find a sad and mournful solace in their regrets, the only sentiment they could indulge. They had met, and in vows of secrecy had often pledged unintermitting attachment.

Love at times had prompted some stratagem to accomplish their union, for which the capricious and unforgiving disposition of the old gentleman seemed to afford a fair excuse. It is a most ingenious and subtle equivocator that same idle boy, and hath ever at hand palliatives, and even justifications, in respect to all crimes done and committed for the aiding and comforting of his sworn lieges. And thus it fell out, Kate's wits were now at work to make Anthony's suit in some way or another subservient to this object. Once committed to a purpose of such duplicity, no wonder that contrivances and plots not altogether justifiable should ensue; and Kate's natural archness and vivacity, coupled with the mischievous temper of her maid, gave their proceedings a more ludicrous character than the dignity of the passion would otherwise have allowed. [Pg 305]

The month was nigh spent when Hodge one morning entered the chamber of his master, who sat there dribbling away the time over a treatise on archery.

"How now, sirrah?"

"Please ye, master, Mistress Kate is to be wed on the feast of St Crispin; an' I'm a-thinking I've no body-gear fitting for my occupation."

"Married, sayest thou?—to whom?"

"Nay, master, an' ye know not, more's the pity if it be not to your honour."

"To me, sayest thou?"

"They ha' so settled it, belike; and I thought, if it would please ye, to order me new boots and a coat for the wedding."

"Peace!—where gattest thou the news?"

"At the smithy. I was but just getting the mare shoed, and a tooth hammered into the garden rake."

"It is wondrous strange!" replied Anthony, musing; "but women are of a subtle and unsearchable temper. She did appoint me a month's abstinence. Sure enough, the feast thou hast named happeneth on the very day of my release. She hath devised this plot for my surprise! Excellent!—and so the rumour hath gotten abroad? Now, o' my troth, but I like her the better for't. Go to; a new suit, with yellow trimmings, and hose of the like colour, shall be thine: thou shalt be chief servitor, too, at my wedding."

Anthony seemed raving wild with delight. He resolved that the jade should know of his intelligence, and he would attack the citadel by a counterplot of a most rare and excellent device. To this end he resolved on going to the hall the night preceding his appointment; in the meantime diligently maturing his scheme for the surprise and delight of the cunning maiden.

With the evening of an unusually long and tedious day, whose minutes had been spun to hours, and these hours into ages, did Master Anthony Hardcastle, accompanied by his servant, set forth on this perilous exploit. Upon a rich and comely suit, consisting of a light blue embroidered vest, and a rich coat of peach-coloured velvet, with bag-wig and ruffles, was thrown a dark cloak, partly intended as a disguise, and partly to screen his gay habiliments from dust and pollution.

They passed slowly on for an hour or two, dropping down to the little wicket as aforetime, above which the crows were again ready with the usual inquiries. The squires being left with the steeds, [Pg 306] Master Anthony once more scrambled over the garden hedge, and sustained his person in a becoming attitude against the pear-tree whence he had so successfully attacked and carried the citadel on his former visit. He now beheld, with wonder, lights dancing about in the house, frisking and frolicking through the long casements like so many jack-o'-lanterns. Indeed, the greater part of the mansion seemed all a-blaze, and of an appalling and suspicious brightness. Sounds, moreover, of mirth and revelry approached his ear. He would instantly have proceeded to ascertain the cause of this inauspicious merry-making had not Kate's injunction kept him aloof. The noise of minstrelsy was now heard—symptoms of the marriage-feast and the banquet. More than once he suspected some witchery, some delusion of the enemy to beguile him by enchantments. However, he resolved to be quiet; and, for the purpose of a more extended vision, he climbed, or rather stepped into, the low huge fork of the tree. From this tower of observation he kept a wary eye, more particularly towards the window whence the billet was thrown, expecting to behold some token of his mistress's presence. But this chamber seemed to be the dullest and darkest in the whole house; not a ray was visible. It seemed shut out, impervious to the gladness which irradiated the bosom of its neighbours.

A white cur now came snarling about the bushes; then, cautiously smelling his way to the tree, suddenly set up a yell so deafening and continuous that he roused some of the revellers within. Two men staggered from the house, evidently a little the worse in their articulation by reason of the potations they had taken.

"Quiet, Vick! Hang thy neck, what's a matter? Eh! the pear-tree? It's the thief again—and before the fruit's ripe. Bodikins! but we'll catch thee now, 'r lady. We'll have a thong out of his hide; split me, if we ha'n't!"

The men approached as cautiously as their condition would permit; while Anthony, overhearing the latter part of their dialogue, sat somewhat insecurely on his perch.

"Dan, get th' big cudgel out o' t' barn. I see a some'at black like, an' fearsome, i' th' tree."

Probably they had imbibed courage with their liquor, otherwise the black "somewhat" in the tree might have indisposed them for this daring attack. [Pg 307]

"I'll have a blow at it, be't mon or devil, hang me."

Anthony pulled his cloak tightly about him; and while the weapon was providing he entertained serious thoughts of surrendering at discretion; but the effect which this premature disclosure might have on his mistress's determination towards him retarded the discovery; and he was not without hope of eluding the drunken valour of the brutes.

"Now gie't me, Dan—Tol de rol—

'An' back and sides go bare, go bare.'"

Approaching to the attack, Barnaby brandished his cudgel to the time and tune of this celebrated alehouse ditty. The concluding flourish brought the weapon waving within a very concise distance of the goodly person of Master Anthony Hardcastle.

"Murder!—Villains!" cried the terrified lover, unable to endure the menacing aspect of this fearful invader; "I'm Master Anthony, ye sots, ye unthrifts—your master, is to be; and I—I'll have ye i' the stocks for this."

"Bodikins and blunderkins? hear'st him, Dan? Why, thou lying lackpenny, I'll soon whack the corruption out o' thee. Master Anthony, indeed! he be another guess sort of thing to thee, I trow. Thee be'st hankering after the good things hereabout; but I'll spoil thy liquorish tooth for tasting. Come, unkennel, vermin!"

"I am Master Anthony, friend, as safe as my mother bore me. If thou lackest knowledge, go ask Hodge with the horses at the back gate."

"Then what be'st thou for i' the pear-tree? Na, na; Master Anthony is gone home a great whiles back. He's to marry young mistress i' the morn, an' we're getting drunk by participation. There's for thee! I talks like ou'd Daniel the schoolmaster."

Sorely discomposed with the infliction of this vile contumely, Anthony was forced to descend. Nothing, however, would convince the clowns of their mistake. He showed them his glossy raiment; but their intellects were too confused for so nice a discrimination; they consequently resolved to hold him in durance until the morrow, when their master would bring him to account for this invasion of his territory. But who shall depict the horror and consternation of the unhappy lover, on finding them seriously bent on his incarceration in a filthy den, used heretofore [Pg 308] as a receptacle for scraps and lumber, near the stables. Remonstrance, entreaty, threats, solicitations, were equally unavailing. He demanded an audience with the justice.

"Thee'll get it soon enough, I warrant thee. And thee may think well o' the stocks; but th' pillory is no more than I'll be bound for. The last we catched, Jem Sludge, we belaboured in such fashion as I verily think he waur more like a midden' nor a man when he got his neck out o' th' collar. Come along—it's not to th' gallows, this bout, my pretty bird. Lend him a whack behind, Dan, if he do not mend his pace."

A rude blow was here administered to the unfortunate captive. He cried out lustily for help; but the inquirers from the hall made merry at his captivity, rejoicing that the thief was now safely in the trap.

On the following morning, the eventful day of his daughter's bridal, the justice rose earlier than he was wont. His features wore a tinge of anxiety as he paced the room with sharp and irregular footsteps. Suddenly he was disturbed by approaching voices, and a sort of suppressed bustle along the passage. On opening the door he saw Daniel and his doughty companion, Barnaby, whose red eyes and hollow cheeks betokened their too familiar indulgence in past festivities.

"We've catched him at last, master."

"Who? What dost stand agape for?"

"Why, a rogue 'at was robbing the gardens."

"A murrain light on both of ye! I cannot be chaffed with such like matters now."

"But your worship," cautiously spake Dan, "he be the most comical thing you ever clapped eyes on. He says he be Master Anthony, your worship's new son that is to be to-day."

"How sayest thou? I think thy wits are the worse for bibbing o' yesternight."

"Nay, your worship's grace, but we'll e'en fetch him. He's pranked out gaily; and a gay bird he be for your honour's cage."

Two or three domestics now entered, leading in their prisoner. His woe-begone looks were angrily bent on his conductors. He shook off their grasp, approaching the owner of the mansion where he had been so evil-entreated. His hair, released from its bonds, dangled in primæval [Pg 309] disorder above his shoulders. His goodly raiment, no longer hidden, was rumpled and soiled, like the finery of a stage wardrobe. Indeed, the Squire guessed he was one of the village players that had been foraging for his supper after a scanty benefit.

"How now, braggart? What evil occupation brings thee about my house? What unlucky hankering, sirrah, brings thee, I say, a-robbing of my grounds and poultry-yards? Methinks thou hast but a sorry employment for thy gingerbread coat."

"I came, sir, to wed your daughter," replied Anthony, simpering, and with great modesty.

"My daughter!" cried Anderton, in a voice of thunder; "and pray may I inquire to whom I am beholden for this favour?"

"To Master Anthony Hardcastle," said the lover, drawing himself up proudly, and casting a glance of triumph and defiance at his tormentors.

"Whew!" cried the other; "why, Master Anthony is no more like thee, thou tod-pate, than thou to St George or the dragon of Wantley. A rare device, truly—a cunning plot—a stage-trick to set the mob agape! Why, thou puny-legged Tamburlane!—thou ghost of an Alexander!—how darest thou confront me thus? Now, i' lady, but I've a month's mind to belabour the truth out o' thee with a weapon something tough and crabbed i' the tasting."

Anthony's face lengthened inordinately at this unexpected rebuke, and a latent whimper quivered about the corners of his pale and pursy mouth. Sobs and protestations were useless; there seemed a base conspiracy to rob him even of his name and identity. He vowed, that the period of his proscription being past, Kate was hourly expecting him, and his appearance overnight was but to execute a little stratagem for her surprise. This explanation but served to aggravate; and in vain did he solicit an interview with the lady, promising to abide by her decision.

"Why, look thee," said the justice; "Anthony Hardcastle, whom thy lying tongue and figure most woefully defame, hath been our guest oftentimes during the past month, and truly his gallant bearing and disposition have well won my consent. No marvel at my daughter's love! But thou!—had she stooped from her high bearing to such carrion, I'd have wrung your necks round with [Pg 310] less compunction than those of two base-bred kestrils."

Anthony was dumb with astonishment. The whole transaction had the aspect of some indistinct and troubled dream, or rather some delusion of the arch-enemy to entangle and perplex him. At this moment tripped in the pert maiden, whose share in the machinations we before intimated. She looked on the bewildered lover with a sly and equivocal glance. Craving permission to speak, she said—

"'Tis even so, your worship; this interloper is none other than the very person he represents; and here come those who will give the riddle its proper answer."

Immediately came in the blushing Kate, led in by a tall and comely gentleman, whom her father recognised as the real Anthony.

"We come but to crave your blessing," said this personage, bending gracefully on his knee, whilst Kate seized the hand of her parent.

"Forgive this deceit:" she looked imploringly at the old man, who seemed too astonished to reply: "it was but to win my father's knowledge and esteem for the man to whom my vows are for ever plighted."

"Nay, start not," said the bridegroom; "I but borrowed this ill-used gentleman's name, as I knew none other mode of access to your presence than the disguise that his *suit* afforded; and from him I now crave forgiveness."

"And I knew," said Kate, glancing round towards the real Anthony, "that the man of my choice would be yours, could I but contrive you should hold a fair judgment between them, as you now do this day."

A reconciliation was the result; but ere a "little month was old" were seen at the same altar, and with the same object, Master Anthony Hardcastle and Mistress Bridget Allport.

[Pg 311]

View larger image

THE SKULL HOUSE.

"That skull had a tongue in't that could sing once."
—*Hamlet.*

Wardley Hall, in the manor of Worsley, is an ancient building about seven miles west from Manchester. It was an old seat of the Downes family, and afterwards of Lord Barrymore. A human skull was formerly shown here, beside the staircase, which the occupiers would not permit to be removed. This grim fixture, it was said, being much averse to any change of place or position, never failed to punish the individual severely who should dare to lay hands on it. If removed or buried, it was sure to return, so that in the end each succeeding tenant was fain to endure its presence, rather than be subject to the terrors and annoyances consequent upon its removal. Its place was a square aperture in the wall; nor would it suffer this opening to be glazed, or otherwise filled up, without creating some disturbance. It seemed as if those rayless sockets loved to look abroad, peradventure on the scenes of its former enjoyments and reminiscences. It was almost bleached white by exposure to the weather, and many curious persons have made a pilgrimage there even in late years. Several young men from Manchester once going on this errand, one of them, unobserved of his fellows, thought he would ascertain the truth of the stories he had heard. For this purpose he privately removed the skull to another situation, and left it to find its way back again. The night but one following, such a storm arose about the house, that many trees were blown down, the roofs were unthatched, and the tenants, finding out the cause, as they supposed, replaced the skull, when these terrific disturbances ceased.

The occurrences detailed more fully in the following pages are usually assigned as the origin of this strange superstition.

[Pg 312]

"I wonder what that hair-brained brother of mine can be doing. No fresh brawl, I hope," said Maria Downes to her cousin Eleanor, as they sat, mopish and disquieted enough, in a gloomy chamber of the old hall at Worsley.

"I hope not, too," replied Eleanor; and there was another long and oppressive silence.

It was in the dusk of a chill, damp November evening. The fire shot forth a sharp uncertain glimmer, and the dim walls threw back the illumination.

"I know not why," said Maria, "but my spirits are very sad, and everything I see looks mistrustful and foreboding!"

So thought her cousin; but she did not speak. Her heart was too full, and a tear started in her eye.

"Would that Harry had eschewed the frivolities and dissipations of yonder ungodly city; that he had stayed with us here, in safe and happy seclusion. I have hardly known pleasure since he went."

Eleanor's bosom again responded to the note of agony that was wrung from her cousin, and she turned her head to hide what she had too plainly betrayed.

"Since that unhappy fray in which peradventure an innocent and unoffending victim was the result of Harry's intemperance, the bloody offence hath been upon my soul—heavier, I do fear, than upon his own. But unless he repent, and turn aside from his sinful courses, there will, there must, come a fearful recompense!"

"Do not sentence him unheard," said Eleanor; but her words were quivering and indistinct. "It was in his own defence, maybe, however bitterly the tidings were dropped into your ear. Sure I am," said she, more firmly, "that Harry was too kind, too gentle, to slay the innocent, and in cold blood!"

"Nay, Eleanor, excuse him not. It may be that the foul deed was done through excess of wine, the fiery heat of debauch, and amid the beastly orgies of intemperance; but is he the less criminal? I tell thee nay; for he hath added crime to crime, and drawn down, perchance, a double punishment. He is my brother, and thou knowest, if possible, I would palliate his offence; but hath it not been told, and the very air of yon polluted city was rife and reeking with the deed, that Harry Downes, the best-beloved of his father, and the child of many hopes, did wantonly, and [Pg 313] unprovoked, rush forth hot and intemperate from the stews. Drawing his sword, did he not swear —ay, by that Heaven he insulted and defied, that he would kill the first man he met, and—oh, horror!—was not that fearful oath fulfilled?"

Eleanor had covered her face with her hands—a convulsive sob shook her frame; but though her heart was on the rack, she uttered no complaint. Maria, inflexible, and, as some might think, rigid, in those principles of virtue wherein she had been educated, yet sorrowed deeply for her cousin, who from a child had been her brother Harry's playmate, and the proofs of mutual affection had been too powerful, too early, and too long continued, to be ever effaced. Timid as the frighted fawn, and tender as the wild flower that scarce bent beneath her step, she lay, a bruised reed; the stem that supported her was broken. Her fondest, her only hopes were withered, and the desolating blast of disappointment had passed upon her earliest affections. Her little bark, freighted with all a woman's care and tenderness, lay shivered with the stroke, disabled and a wreck!

Just as the short and murky twilight was expiring, and other lights were substituted, there came a loud summons at the outer gate, where a strong barrier was built across the moat. The females started, as though rendered more than usually apprehensive that evil tidings were at hand. But they were, in some measure, relieved on hearing that it was only Jem Hazleden, the carrier from Manchester, who had brought a wooden box on one of his pack-horses, which said box had come all the way from London by "Antony's" waggon. Maria thought it might be some package or present from her brother, who had been a year or two in town, taking terms; but a considerable period had now passed since tidings were sent from him. She looked wistfully at the box, a clumsy, ill-favoured thing, without the least symptom of any pleasant communication from such a source; so different from the trim packages that were wont to arrive, containing, maybe, the newest London chintz, or a piece of real brocade, or Flanders lace of the rarest workmanship.

"No good lurks in that ugly envelope," thought she; and, stooping down, she examined the direction minutely. It was a quaint crabbed hand—not her brother's, that was certain; and the [Pg 314] discovery made her more anxious and uneasy. She turned it over and over, but no clue could be found, no index to the contents. It would have been easy, methinks, to have satisfied herself on this head, but she really felt almost afraid to open it, and yet——At any rate, she would put it off till the morrow. She was so nervous and out of spirits that she positively had not courage to open a dirty wooden box, tied round with a bit of hempen cord, and fastened with a few rusty nails. She ordered it to be removed to her bed-chamber, and morning, perchance, would dissipate these idle but unpleasant feelings. She went to bed, but could not sleep; the wind and rain beat so heavily against the casement, and the recent excitement kept her restless and awake. She tried various expedients to soothe and subdue her agitation, but without effect. The rain had ceased to patter on the windows, but the wind blew more fiercely and in more violent gusts than before. The sky was clearing, and a huge Apennine of clouds was now visible as she lay, on which the moonbeams were basking gloriously. Suddenly a ray glided like a spirit into the chamber, and disappeared. Her eyes were at that moment directed towards the mysterious box which lay opposite, and her very hair moved with horror and consternation; for in that brief interval of light she thought she saw the lid open, and a grisly head glare out hideously from beneath. Every hair seemed to grow sensitive, and every pore to be exquisitely endued with feeling. Her heart throbbed violently, and her brain grew dizzy. Another moonbeam irradiated the chamber. She was still gazing on the box; but whether the foregoing impression was merely hallucinatory, an illusion of the feverish and excited sense, she knew not, for the box was there, undisturbed, grim, silent, and mysterious as before. Yet she could not withdraw her eyes from it. There is a fascination in terror. She could hardly resist a horrible desire, or rather impulse, to leap forth, and hasten towards it. Her brow felt cold and clammy; her eyes grew dim, and as though motes of fire were rushing by; but ere she could summon help she fell back senseless on her pillow.

Morning was far advanced ere she felt any returning recollection. At first a confused and dream-like sensation came upon her. Looking wildly round, her eyes rested on the box, and the whole

interval came suddenly to her memory. She shuddered at the retrospect; but she was determined, whether it had been fancy or not, to keep the secret within her own breast, though more undetermined than ever to break open the fearful cause of her disturbance. Yet she durst not seek repose another night with such a companion. Her apprehensions were not easily allayed, however disposed she might be to treat them as trivial and unfounded. [Pg 315]

"Will you not open yonder package that came last night?" inquired Eleanor, as they were sitting down to breakfast. Maria shuddered, as though something loathsome had crossed her. She shook off the reptile thought, which had all the character of some crawling and offensive thing as it passed her bosom.

"I have not—that is, I—I have not yet ordered it to be undone."

"And why?" said Eleanor, now raising her soft blue eyes with an expression of wonder and curiosity on her cousin. "It did not use to be thus when there came one of these couriers from town."

"'Tis not from Harry Downes; and—I care not just now to have the trouble on't, being jaded and out of spirits."

"I will relieve you of the trouble presently, if you will permit me," said Eleanor, who was not without a secret hope, notwithstanding Maria's assertion, that it was a message of gladness from Harry, with the customary present for his sister, and perhaps a token of kindness for herself.

"Stay!" said Maria, laying her hand on Eleanor as she rose, whilst with a solemn and startling tone she cried, "Not yet!" She sat down; Eleanor, pale and trembling, sat down too; but her cousin was silent, evidently unwilling to resume the topic.

"To-morrow," said she, when urged; but all further converse on the subject was suspended.

Maria, as the day closed and the evening drew on apace, gave orders that the box should be removed into a vacant outbuilding until morning, when, she said, it might be opened in her presence, as it probably contained some articles that she expected, but of which she was not just then in need.

"It's an ugly cumbersome thing," said Dick, as he lugged the wearisome box to its destination. "I wonder what for mistress dunna break it open. Heigho!" [Pg 316]

Here he put down his burden, giving it a lusty kick for sheer wantonness and malice.

"What is't sent here for, think'st 'ou?" said Betty the housemaid, who had followed Dick for a bit of gossip and a sort of incipient liking which had not yet issued on his part into any overt acts of courtship and declaration. It was nigh dark, "the light that lovers choose;" and Betty, having disposed herself to the best advantage, awaited the reply of Dick with becoming modesty.

"How do I know the nature o' women's fancies? It would be far easier to know why there's a change o' wind or weather than the meaning o' their tricks and humours."

"I know not what thee has to complain on," said Betty. "They behaven better to thee nor thou deserves."

"Hoity, toity, mistress; dunna be cross, wench. Come, gie's a buss an' so——

"Keep thy jobbernowl to thysel'," said the indignant Betty, when she had made sure of this favour. "Thy great leather paws are liker for Becky Pinnington's red neck nor mine," continued she, bridling up, and giving vent to some long-suppressed jealousy.

"Lorjus days; but thou's mighty quarrelsome and peevish; I ne'er touch'd Becky's neck, nor nought belongin' to her."

"Hush," said Betty, withdrawing herself from the approaches of her admirer. "Some'at knocks!"

Dick hastened to the door, supposing that somebody was dodging them.

"'Tis somethin' i' that box!" said Betty; and they listened in the last extremity of terror. Again there was a low dull knock, which evidently came from the box, and the wooers were certain that the old one was inside. In great alarm they rushed forth, and at the kitchen-chimney corner Dick and his companion were seen with blanched lips and staring eyes, almost speechless with affright.

Next morning the story was bruited forth, with amendments and additions, according to the fancy of the speaker, so that, in the end, the first promulgers could hardly recognise their own. The grim-looking despatch was now the object of such terror that scarcely one of them durst go into the place where it stood. It was not long ere Maria Downes became acquainted with the circumstance, and she thought it was high time these imaginary terrors should be put an end to. [Pg 317] She felt ashamed that she had given way to her own apprehensions on the subject, which doubtless were, in part, the occasion of the reports she heard, by the seeming mystery that was observed in her manner and conduct. She determined that the box should be opened forthwith. It was daylight, be it remembered, when this resolution was made, and consequently she felt sufficiently courageous to make the attempt.

But there was not one amongst the domestics who durst accompany her on this bold errand—an

attack, they conceived, on the very den of some evil spirit, who would inevitably rush forth and destroy them.

Alone, therefore, and armed with the necessary implements, was she obliged to go forth to the adventure.

The terrified menials saw her depart; and some felt certain she would never come back alive; others did not feel satisfied as to their own safety, should their mistress be the victim. All was terror and distress; pale and anxious faces huddled together, and every eye prying into his neighbour's for some ground of hope or confidence. Some thought they heard the strokes—dull, heavy blows—breaking through the awful stillness which they almost felt. These intimations ceased: and a full half-hour had intervened; an age of suspended horror, when—just as their apprehensions were on the point of leading them on to some desperate measures for relieving the suspense which was almost beyond endurance—to their great joy, their mistress returned; who, though appearing much agitated, spoke to them rather hastily, and with an attempt to smile at their alarm.

"Yonder box," said she, passing by, "is like to shame your silly fears. Some wag hath sent ye a truss of straw—for a scrubbing wisp, maybe." But there was, in the hurried and unusual hilarity of her speech, something so forced and out of character, that it did not escape even the notice of her domestics. Some, however, went immediately to the place, and after much hesitation lifted up the lid, when lo! a bundle of straw was the reward of their curiosity. By degrees they began to rummage farther into the contents; but the whole interior was filled with this rare and curious commodity. They could hardly believe their eyes; and Dick, especially, shook his head, and looked as though he knew or suspected more than he durst tell; a common expedient with those whose mountain hath brought forth something very like the product of this gigantic mystery. [Pg 318]

Dick was the most dissatisfied with the result, feeling himself much chagrined at so unlooked-for a termination to his wonderful story, and he kept poking into and turning about the straw with great sullenness and pertinacity. His labours were not altogether without success.

"Look! here's other guess stuff than my lady's bed straw," said he, at the same time holding up a lock of it for the inspection of his companions. They looked and there was evidently a clot of blood! This was a sufficient confirmation of their surmises; and Dick, though alarmed as well as the rest, felt his sagacity and adroitness wonderfully confirmed amongst his fellows. They retired, firmly convinced that some horrible mystery was attached thereto, which all their guessing could not find out.

At night, as Dick was odding about, he felt fidgety and restless. He peeped forth at times towards the outhouse where the box was lying, and as he passed he could not refrain from casting a glance from the corner of his eye through the half-closed door. The bloody clot he had seen dwelt upon his imagination; it haunted him like a spectre. He went to bed before the usual hour, but could not sleep; he tossed and groaned, but the drowsy god would not be propitiated. The snoring of a servant in the next bed, too, proved anything but anodyne or oblivion to his cares. He could not sleep, do what he would. Having pinched his unfortunate companion till he was tired, but with no other success than a loud snort, and generally a louder snore than ever, in the end, Dick, rendered desperate, jumped out of bed, and walked, or rather staggered across the floor. He looked through the window. It was light, but the sky was overcast, though objects below might readily be distinguished. The outhouse where the box lay was in full view; and as he was looking out listlessly for a few minutes he saw a female figure bearing a light, who was gliding down stealthily, as he thought, in the yard below. She entered the building, and Dick could hardly breathe, he was so terrified. He watched until his eyes ached before she came out again, when he saw plainly it was his mistress. She bore something beneath her arm; and as Dick's curiosity was now sufficiently roused to overcome all fear of consequences, he stole quickly down-stairs, and by [Pg 319] a short route got sufficiently on her track to watch her proceedings unobserved. He followed into the garden. She paused, for the first time, under a huge sycamore tree in the fence, and laid down her burden. She drew something from beneath her cloak, and, as he thought, began to dig. When this operation was completed she hastily threw in the burden, and filled up the hole again; after which, with a rapid step, she came back to the house. Dick was completely bewildered. He hesitated whether or not to examine immediately into the nature of the deposit which his mistress seemed so desirous to conceal; but as he had no light, and his courage was not then screwed up to the attempt, he satisfied himself at present with observing the situation, intending to take some other opportunity to explore this hidden treasure. That his mistress's visit had some connection with the contents of the mysterious box was now certain, and whatever she had concealed was part of its contents, a conclusion equally inevitable; but that she should be so wishful to hide it, was a problem not easy to be explained without examination. Was it money? The clotted blood forbade this surmise. A horrible suspicion crossed him; but it was too horrible for Dick to indulge.

Wondering and guessing, he retraced his steps, and morning dawned on his still sleepless eyelids.

Some weeks passed by, but he found none other opportunity for examination. Somebody or something was always in the way, and he seemed destined to remain ignorant of all that he was so anxious to ascertain.

After the arrival of the box Maria Downes never mentioned her brother unless he was alluded to; and even then she waived the subject as soon as possible, whenever it happened to be

incidentally mentioned. Eleanor saw there was an evident reluctance to converse on these matters; and, however she might feel grieved at the change, in the end she forbore inquiry.

One morning her cousin entered the breakfast-room, where Eleanor was awaiting her arrival. Her face was pale—almost deathly—and her lips livid and quivering. Her eyes were swollen, starting out, and distended with a wild and appalling expression.

She beckoned Eleanor to follow; silently she obeyed, but with a deadly and heart-sickening [Pg 320] apprehension. Something fearful, as connected with the fate of her cousin Harry, was doubtless the cause of this unusual proceeding. Maria led the way up the staircase, and on coming to the landing, she pointed to a square opening in the wall, like unto the loophole of a turret-stair. Here she saw something dark obstructing the free passage of the light, which, on a closer examination, presented the frightful outline of a human skull! Part of the flesh and hairy scalp were visible, but the whole was one dark and disgusting mass of deformity. She started back, with a look of inquiry, towards her cousin. Hideous surmises crowded upon her while she beheld the features of Maria Downes convulsed with some untold agony.

"Oh, speak—speak to me!" cried Eleanor, and she threw her arms about her cousin's neck, sobbing aloud in the full burst of her emotion. Maria wept too. The rising of the gush relieved her, and she spoke. Every word went as with a burning arrow to Eleanor's heart.

"I have hidden it until now; but—but Heaven has ordained it. His offence was rank—most foul—and his disgrace—a brother's disgrace—hangs on me. That skull is Harry's! Believe it as thou wilt, but the truth is no less true. The box, sent by some unknown hand, I opened alone, when I beheld the ghastly, gory features of him who was once our pride, and ought to have been our protection. My courage seemed to rise with the occasion. I concealed it with all speed until another opportunity, when I buried this terrible memorial—for ever, as I hoped, from the gaze and knowledge of the world. I thought to hide this foul stain upon our house; to conceal it, if possible, from every eye; but the grave gives back her dead! The charnal gapes! That ghastly head hath burst its cold tabernacle, and risen from the dust, without hands, unto its former gazing-place. Thou knowest, Eleanor, with what delight, when a child, he was accustomed to climb up to that little eyelet-hole, gazing out thereat for hours, and playing many odd and fantastic tricks through this loophole of observation."

Eleanor could not speak; she stood the image of unutterable despair.

"In that dreadful package," continued Maria, "this writing was sent:—'Thy brother has at length paid the forfeit of his crimes. The wages of sin is death! and his head is before thee. Heaven hath [Pg 321] avenged the innocent blood he hath shed. Last night, in the lusty vigour of a drunken debauch, passing aver London Bridge, he encounters another brawl, wherein, having run at the watchman with his rapier, one blow of the bill which they carry severed thy brother's head from his trunk. The latter was cast over the parapet into the river. The head only remained, which an eye-witness, if not a friend, hath sent to thee!"

Eleanor fell senseless to the ground, whence her cousin conveyed her to the bed from which she never rose.

The skull was removed, secretly at first, by Maria herself; but invariably it returned. No human power could drive it thence. It hath been riven in pieces, burnt, and otherwise destroyed; but ever on the subsequent day it is seen filling its wonted place. Yet was it always observed that sore vengeance lighted on its persecutors. One who hacked it in pieces was seized with such horrible torments in his limbs that it seemed as though he might be undergoing the same process. Sometimes, if only displaced, a fearful storm would arise, so loud and terrible, that the very elements themselves seemed to become the ministers of its wrath.

Nor would this wilful piece of mortality allow of the little aperture being walled up; for it remains there still, whitened and bleached by the weather, looking forth from those rayless sockets upon the scenes which when living they had once beheld.

Maria Downes was the only survivor of the family. Her brother's death and deplorable end so preyed on her spirits that she rejected all offers of marriage. The estate passed into other hands, and another name owns the inheritance.

RIVINGTON PIKE; [Pg 322]

OR, THE SPECTRE HORSEMAN.

"Are you a man?
Ay, and a bold one, that dare look on that
Which might appal the devil."

This beacon stands on a conical hill, at an elevation of 1545 feet from the level of the sea. An immense pile of wood was raised here when the alarm of the French invasion prevailed, at the beginning of the present century.

Rivington Hall was for many ages the seat of one of the Pilkingtons, of which family Fuller says—"The Pilkingtons were gentlemen of repute in this shire before the Conquest;" and the chief of them, then sought for after espousing the cause of Harold, was fain to disguise himself as a mower; in allusion to which the man and scythe was taken as their crest. James Pilkington, a descendant, and Master of St John's, Cambridge, was one of the six divines appointed to correct the Book of Common Prayer; for which and other services he was in 1560 created Bishop of Durham. After the suppression of the great northern rebellion in 1569, headed by the Earls of Northumberland and Westmoreland, he claimed the lands and goods of the rebels attainted in his bishopric. In support of this claim he brought an action against the queen for a recovery of the forfeited estates; and though his royal mistress was accustomed to speak of unfrocking bishops, the reverend divine prosecuted his suit with so much vigour and success that nothing but the interposition of Parliament prevented the defendant from being beaten in her own courts.

The present erection, the scene of our story, was built in the year 1732, by Mr Andrews, the owner of Rivington Hall, whose family have for many generations—with, perhaps, one interruption only—had it in possession.

The evening was still and sultry. The clear and glowing daylight was gone, exchanged for the dull, hazy, and depressing atmosphere of a summer's night. The cricket chirped in the walls, and the beetle hummed his drowsy song, wheeling his lumbering and lazy flight over the shorn meadows.

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View larger image

RIVINGTON PIKE.
"Drawn by G. Pickering."
"Engraved by Edw^d^ Finden."

It was about harvest-time—the latter end of August. The moors were clothed in their annual suit of gay and thickly-clustered blossoms, but their bloom and freshness was now faded. Here and there a sad foretokening of dingy brown pervaded the once glowing brilliancy of their dye, like a suit of tarnished finery on some withering and dilapidated beau.

A party of sportsmen had that day taken an unusually wide range upon the moors, stretching out in wild and desolate grandeur through the very centre of the county, near the foot of which stands the populous neighbourhood of Bolton-le-Moors. Rivington Pike, an irregularly conical hill rising like a huge watch-tower from these giant masses of irreclaimable waste, is a conspicuous and well-known object, crowned by a stone edifice for the convenience of rest and shelter to those whom curiosity urges to the fatigue and peril of the ascent. The view from this elevated spot, should the day be favourable, certainly repays the adventurer; but not unfrequently an envious mist or a passing shower will render these efforts unavailing, to scan the wide creation—or rather but a circlet of that creation—from an insignificant hillock, scarcely an atom in the heap of created matter, that is itself but as a grain of dust in the vast space through which it rolls. But to our tale, or rather, it may be, to our task—for the author is now sitting in his study, with the twilight of as dull, hazy, and oppressive an atmosphere about him as beset our adventurous sportsmen at the close of their campaign; enervating and almost paralysing thought; the veriest foe of "soaring fantasy," which the mere accident of weather will prevent from rising into the region where she can reign without control, her prerogative unquestioned and unlimited.

The party to whom we have just referred consisted of three individuals, with their servants, biped and quadruped, from whom their masters derived the requisite assistance during their useful and arduous exploits—the results being conspicuous in the death of some dozen or two of silly grouse or red game, with which these hills are tolerably well supplied during the season. But alas! we are not sportsmen ourselves, and bitterly do we lament that we are unable to describe the [Pg 324] desperate conflict, and the mighty issues of that memorable day; the hopes, fears, and *fire-escapes* of the whole party: the consumption of powder, and the waste of flint, or the comparative

merits of Moll and Rover, we shall not attempt to set forth in our "*veritable prose*," lest we draw down the wrath of some disappointed fowler upon us for meddling with matters about which we are so lamentably ignorant, and we are afraid to say, in some measure, wilfully deficient. To the spoils, when obtained, it may be that we are less indifferent; and we hail, with favourable reminiscences and anticipations, the return of another 12th of August—an era which we would earnestly and affectionately beseech our friends to remember likewise, for purposes too interesting in the history of our domestic arrangements to allow them willingly to forget.

But the August in which our narrative opens was many years ago—though not precisely in the olden time—when the belief in old-world fancies and delights was not in danger of being blazed out by "diffusions of useful knowledge," which "useful" knowledge consists in dissipating some of our most pleasant dreams, our fondest and most cherished remembrances. We are afraid a writer of "Traditions" must be looked upon with inconceivable scorn by those worthies whose aim is to throw open the portals of Truth to the multitude; or, as the phrase goes, she is to be made plain to the "meanest capacity." For our own parts, we were never enamoured with that same despotic, hard-favoured, cross-grained goddess, Truth: she "commendeth not" to our fancy; nor in reality is she half so worthy of their homage as her ardent and enthusiastic worshippers imagine. We are more than ever inclined to believe that imagination is the great source of our pleasures; and in consequence we look not with an eye of favour on those who would persuade us that our little hoard of enjoyment is counterfeit, not being the sterling coin of sovereign and "immutable truth."

Little did we imagine or anticipate that we should be so deviously betrayed from our subject. We never had the temerity to speak of ourselves before. Thoughts, wishes, and opinions were studiously concealed; and if we have been led unwarily and unintentionally from the subject in this our concluding effort, that very circumstance alone is a sufficient warranty against a repetition of the offence.

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The day was fast closing when the party had surmounted the last hill on their return to the valley. For the sake of proximity, they had spent the previous night in a little way-side tavern at the foot of the descent; and they now looked down towards the place of their destination, still some weary miles distant—their prospect partly interrupted by the huge hill called the Pike, of which we have before spoken. From the elevation whereon they now stood the ascent was but short to the summit of the beacon, though somewhat abrupt and difficult of access. When they had gained the ridge overlooking the valley, with the flat and fertile tract of low lands stretching out into the dark and apparently interminable vista towards the coast, the elder of the sportsmen exclaimed—

"Now, Mortimer, mayhap you have never seen a storm in our wilds; but, if my judgment err not, this happy event is in a very auspicious train for accomplishment."

The speaker looked towards the south, where the grim clouds were already accumulated, evidently pouring out a copious blessing in their progress. From the direction of the wind they too were threatened with a speedy participation.

"These summer storms always make for the hills," continued he; "and, looking yonder, I apprehend that we are precisely in the very line of its path."

"I do like to watch the gathering of a storm, Pilkington," replied Mortimer. "Surely the outpouring vials of its wrath must be terrifically sublime in these regions. I would not miss so glorious a sight for the world."

"In a snug shelter maybe at our hostelrie below, with a mug of the right barley-bree buzzing at our elbow—oat-cake and cheese conformable thereto."

"Nay, here; with the sky opening above our heads, and the broad earth reeking and weltering under the wide grasp of the tempest. See! how the crooked lightning darts between the coiled clouds, like a swift messenger from yon dark treasure-house of wrath!"

This was said by a third individual, named Norton, a young man who lived in the neighbourhood; a friend and former school-fellow of the preceding speakers—only one of whom, Mortimer, resided in a distant county, and was on a visit with Norton for the first time.

"Like a train of gunpowder, perhaps, thou meanest, Norton?" said the less enthusiastic Pilkington, whose residence, too, was but a few miles distant; "and, furthermore, I warn ye all, that unless we can house, and that right speedily, we shall have the storm about our heads, and maybe lose our way if the mist comes on, or get soused over head and ears in some bog-trap. We'll climb yonder hill, Norton, whence we may survey the broil and commotion from our 'watch-tower in the skies,' under a tidy roof and a dry skin. Thou mayest tarry here an thou wilt, and offer thyself a sacrifice on these altars of Jupiter Pluvius."

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The whole party—dogs, helps, and servants—were soon sheltered in the little square tower upon the summit, and the predictions of the elder and more experienced of them were soon verified. Almost on the entrance of the last of the group came down the deluge in one broad sheet, an "even-down pour," so loud and terrible, accompanied by a burst of hail, that they were threatened with an immediate invasion of their citadel through several crevices in both roof and windows.

A peal of thunder, loud, long, and appalling, shook their shelter to its base. The very foundations of the hill seemed to rock with the concussion. Their lofty tabernacle hung suspended in the very bosom of the clouds, big with their forky terrors. The lightning began to hiss and quiver, and the sky to open its wide jaws above them, as though to devour its prey. The roar and rattle of the

wind and hail, mingled with the crash and roll of the contending elements, made the stoutest of them tremble, and silenced several loud tongues that were generally the foremost in jest and banter.

"Well, Norton," said Pilkington, "I reckon you are not in the mind to try a berth abroad in this rude atmosphere during such an angry and merciless disposition of your deity. 'Tis a *mêlée*, I imagine, to your heart's content."

"Norton is hearkening to these rude tongues that do speak so lustily!" said Mortimer. "He can, peradventure, interpret their mystic voice."

Norton was in the attitude of intense and earnest expectation or inquiry; his head slightly turned and depressed on one side, the opposite ear raised, so as to catch the most distinct impressions of sound. His eyes might have been listening too, yet his vision was absorbed, and apparently withdrawn from surrounding objects. He was standing near the window, and the workings of his countenance betrayed a strange and marvellous expression of wonder and anxiety. [Pg 327]

It grew still darker, and the rain came down in torrents. The thunder-cloud, as though attracted by the height of their situation, kept hovering over the hill, and often seemed to coil round, and wrap them in its terrific bosom. Night, they knew, was about setting in, but they were still unable to issue forth without imminent danger. The thick cloud by which they were enveloped would have rendered it a hazardous attempt to proceed under any circumstances.

"We are in excellent condition for a night's lodging in our good fortalice," said Pilkington: "it hath stood many a close siege from the elements, and will abide a stouter brush before it yields."

"But surely the storm is too violent to continue. I hope we may venture out ere it be long," said Mortimer, anxiously.

"Maybe the clouds will either be driven off or disperse. Should a breeze spring up from the west, which is not unusual after such a turbulent condition of the atmosphere, it will clear us rapidly from these lumbering masses of almost impregnable vapour. I think Norton is still in close communion with the elements. I can yet see his outline by the window. I thought the last flash lighted on his visage as though it would tarry there a while ere it departed!"

The servants were huddled in a corner by the door, sitting on the ground, with the dogs between their legs; the timid animals, terrified exceedingly at every thunder-peal, and shivering, as though from cold and distress. Suddenly one of them began to growl; and a short, sharp bark from another, with eyes and ears turned towards the entrance, seemed to announce the approach of an intruder.

The brutes now stuffed their officious noses in the crevice beneath the door, but immediately withdrew them, evidently in great terror, as they slunk back, trembling and dismayed, to the opposite side of the chamber, where they crouched, as if to screen themselves from correction.

"What ails the cowards?" exclaimed Norton, who had apparently observed their proceedings by the scanty light that was yet left.

"They are witch'd, I think," said one of the men; "or they've seen, or haply smelt, a boggart." [Pg 328]

"'Tis o'er soon for such like gear; they stir not abroad before the bats and owls be gone to bed," said another.

"Ay! your common everyday sort o' breein' darena' show their bits o' wizen cheeks by daylight; but there be some 'at will abroad at all hours, without fear o' being laid by the parson. The '*Spectre Horseman*' I think they ca' him. I've heard my granam tell as how it feared neither sunshine nor shade, but"——

Here the speaker's voice failed him, every eye and ear being turned towards the entrance. There seemed to come a sound from without, as though a horse were urged to the utmost of its speed, his clattering hoofs driven to the very threshold, and there he paused, awaiting some communication from those within.

"Nought living or breathing," cried Mortimer, "could come that bent. Perch'd as we are on this tall steep summit, 'tis not possible for"——

"Hush!" said Norton. "I verily think 'tis some adventure which I must achieve. What if I should turn giant-killer; this invisible steed being sent for mine especial use, whereon I may ride, like Amadis or Sir Lancelot, or any other knight or knave o' the pack, delivering damsels, slaying dragons and old wicked magicians, by virtue of this good right arm alone."

"Thou art a strange enthusiast, Norton," said Pilkington. "Thy love of the marvellous will sooner or later thrust thee into some ridiculous or perilous scrape, from which not all thy boasted prowess can deliver thee unshent."

"Hark!" said one of the servants in a whisper. Is not that a knock?"

The loud uproar of the elements had suddenly abated, and the sound, from whatever source it might arise, was distinctly audible to the whole group. A dull hollow blow seemed to vibrate round the walls, as if they had been struck with some heavy instrument. They seemed to breathe the very atmosphere of terror. A strange feeling, portentous and unaccountable, pervaded every bosom. The quadrupeds too crept behind their masters for protection. Fear, like other strong and

unreasonable impulses, rapidly becomes infectious. In all likelihood, the mere mention of the Spectre Horseman, together with their novel and somewhat dangerous situation, had disposed their minds for the reception of any stray marvels, however ridiculous or improbable. Yet this [Pg 329] impression could not extend to the trembling brutes, evidently under the influence of alarm, and from a similar source.

Another blow was heard, louder than before. Those who were nearest crept farther from the entrance; but Norton, as though bent on some wild exploit, approached the door. He raised the latch, and, as it swung slowly back, most of the party beheld a figure on horseback, motionless before the opening. From the height they occupied this mysterious visitor was depicted in a clear bold outline against a mass of red angry-looking clouds, towards the south-east, on the edge of which hung the broad disc of the moon breaking through "Alps" of clouds, her calm sweet glance fast dissipating the wrath that yet lowered on the brow of Heaven. The intruder wore a dark-coloured vestment; a low-crowned hat surmounted his figure. His steed was black and heavily built. Probably, from the position whence he was seen, both horse and rider looked almost gigantic. Not a word was spoken. The stranger stood apparently immovable, like some huge equestrian statue, in the dim and mystic twilight.

Norton's two friends were evidently astonished and alarmed, but he scarcely evinced any surprise; some superior and unknown source of excitement overpowered the fear he might otherwise have felt. Silence continued for a few moments, the strange figure remaining perfectly still. Pilkington approached nearer to his friend, who was yet standing near the threshold, gazing intently on the vision before him. He whispered a few words over Norton's shoulder.

"Knowest thou this stranger, Norton?"

"Yes," he replied with great earnestness and solemnity; "years have gone by since I saw him. Thou never knewest mine uncle; but that is he, or one sense hath turned traitor to the rest. This very night, twelve years ago—it was just before I left home for school"——His voice now became inaudible to his friend, who observed him, after a gaze of inquiry on the stranger, suddenly disappear through the opening. The door was immediately closed by a loud and violent gust. Flying open again with the rebound, the figure of Norton was seen rapidly descending the hill towards the south-east, preceded by the mysterious horseman. The light was too feeble for enabling them to ascertain the course they took; but it seemed probable that Norton was away [Pg 330] over the hills with the unknown messenger. Their first impulse was to follow; but the impossibility of overtaking the fugitives, and the near approach of night, would have rendered it a vain and probably a perilous attempt. Looking anxiously down the dark ravine where Norton had so strangely disappeared, Pilkington was startled by a voice from behind; turning, he saw it was the man who had previously dropped those mysterious hints about the "Spectre Horseman," which now vividly recurred to his memory and imagination.

"Master," said this personage, respectfully touching his cap, "you had better not follow."

"Follow!" said Pilkington, as though bewildered; and the words were but the echo of his thoughts; "follow!—I cannot—yet why should we not make the attempt?"

"Step in, if you please, sir. I should not like to speak of it here." He said this hurriedly, in a tone of deep anxiety and apprehension, looking wistfully around and over the dark hills, fearful, apparently, that others were listening. Pilkington obeyed, but with reluctance. The door was cautiously latched; and to prevent the wind, which now began to rise in louder gusts, from bursting this crazy barrier, a heavy stone was laid to the threshold.

"It is—let me see"—said Martin, counting the lapse upon his fingers; "ay,—ten—eleven—'tis twelve years ago, on this very night, St Bartlemy's Eve, my father, a hale old man at that time of day, some'at given, though, to hunting and fowling a bit o' moonlights—and a fine penny he made on't, for many a week, selling the birds at Manchester. Well, as I was saying;—one evening before dusk—the sun had but just cooled his chin i' the water away yonder—he trudged off wi' the dogs, Crab and Pincher—two as cunning brutes as ever ran afore a tail. They might ha' known the errand they were going on, sneakin' about wi' such hang-dog looks, which they always took care to put on when t' ould man began to get ready for a night's foraging. They would follow at his heels, almost on their bellies, for fear o' being seen by the Squire's men; but when fairly astart for the game, they could show as much breeding as the best-trained pointer i' the parish. I am getting sadly wide o' my story, your honour; but I used to like the cubs dearly, and many a time I have played with 'em when I wasn't a bit bigger than themselves. They came to a sad end, sir, [Pg 331] like most other rogues and thieves besides, and"——

"But we are not getting an inch nearer the end of the story all this time," said Pilkington.

"True, your honour; but I'll piece to it presently. I was a great lubberly lad, I know, and tented the cattle then upon the moors. Well, on this same night, as I was saying, my mother and the rest were gone to bed, my father was upon the hills, and I was watching at home, thinkin' maybe of the next Michaelmas fair, and many a fine bit of fun thereby. The fire was gone out, but I had lighted a scrap of candle, which sweeled sadly down, I remember, in the socket. Well, just as I was getting sleepy I heard a scratch, and then a whine at the door. 'What's to do now,' thinks I, 'that the dogs are here again so soon?' an' without more ado, I lifted the latch, when, sure enough, it was them, dirty draggled beasts, they might ha' bin possed through a slutch-pit. 'Where's yere master?' says I;—the things took no heed to me, but began licking themselves, an' tidying their nasty carcases, till the house verily reek'd again. 'So, friends,' says I, 'if ye're for that

gait, you may as well take a turn i' the yard,' an' without more ado, I bundled 'em off, with a sound kick into the bargain. Well, you see, I hearkened till my ears crack'd for my father's foot; but I heard nought except the crickets, and the little brook that runs behind the house, for everything was so still I could have heard a mouse stir. I opened the door, and looked out, I think, into as clear and mellow a night as ever gazed down from the sky upon our quiet hills. Then I went to the gate, and looked up the road which takes you into the little glen by a short path, away up to the high meadows; but I could neither see him, nor hear any likelihood of his coming. I could ha' told his footstep amongst a thousand, and his cough, too, for that matter. I felt myself growing all of a shake, an' the very hairs seemed crawling over my head; a pea might have knocked me down, and, for the life of me, I durst not venture farther—it was something so strange that the dogs should come back without their master—I was sure some mischief had happened to him. All at once it jumped into my head that he had stuck fast in some of these bogs or mosses, and the rascal curs had left him there instead of their own pitiful carcases; but that my father should be so forefoughten as to let himself be nabbed in one of these bog-traps I could [Pg 332] hardly believe. Yet the dogs—ay, there was the mischief—and the lurching ne'er-do-weels coming back in such dismal pickle. I went back to the house, for I durst not stay abroad; and yet, when I was indoors, I could not bide there neither; so I walked up and down the house-flags, like as I waur dazed. I durst not go to bed; so there I was, and for a couple of hours too, in a roarin' pickle, that I would not be steeped in again for a' the moorgates between here and Chorley."

"Go on;—we've no loitering time now," said Pilkington; "thy story sticks fast, I fear, like thy father i' the bog."

"Why, I was but rincing the evil thoughts out of my mind, as it were, for they come about me like a honey-swarm at the thoughts on't; and I don't just like their company at present, it minds me o' the time when this plaguy chance befell my father."

"He did not tarry away for good and all, I reckon?"

"You shall hear, sir, if you but gie me a taste o' the flask; for I feel just like to go into a swoon, or some tantrum or another."

Martin took a strong pull at the bottle, and, thus refreshed, he resumed his story.

"Well, you see as how I waited, and my mind was like as it might ha' been set on a pismire hillock, I waur so uneasy. The dogs, too, began to howl pitifully at the door, so I let the poor things in for a bit o' company. I had not waken'd mother; for I kept thinking I'd wait a while longer, and a while longer, as I never in all my life liked to bring bad news. Well, it might be about two or three hours I went on at that gait, an' just as I was pondering as to whether I should go up-stairs or not, I heard something come with a quick step through the gate and up the flags to the door. It was not like father's foot, neither; it was so terrible sharp and hasty. I felt as if I'd been strucken of a heap. My knees shook an' dither'd as if I'd had the ague. Up goes the latch; for I could not stir—I was holden fast to the floor. The door bangs open in a fearfu' hurry, and in comes my father, as though 'Legion' had been at his heels. He looked pale, and almost fleered out of his wits, so I made sure he had seen the bogle that my granam used to frighten us with. 'Father, father,' says I, as soon as I could speak, 'what's happened? ha' ye seen it?' He did not say a word, but sat down in the big rocking-chair by t' hob-end, when he tilted his head back, and [Pg 333] began swingin' back'ard and for'ard, moaning all the while as if he waur in great trouble. I looked at him, as well as I could, for I had lighted a whole candle a while before. I sat down, too, and not another word could I say. But, my conscience! what a racket the dogs made when they saw him! They jumped, and frisked, and almost cried for joy, as though they had gi'en him up for lost, and were desperately fain, poor things, at his return. The first word he spoke was to these dummies; for they whined, wriggled, and wagged their tails, and licked his fingers, enough to have drawn words from a stone wa'. 'Ay, ay, ye sneaking rascals,' said he, 'ye left me wi' yere tails down low enough, and as fast as your legs could lilt ye off, when I was forefoughten wi''——Here he looked round, with a face so dismal and disturbed that I verily think I should not forget it if I waur at my last shrift. Taking this opportunity, as I may say, I ventured a word or so. The old man gave me another of those terrible looks before he spoke—'Eh, me!' said he, 'my days are but few now, I reckon. I've seen the'——He stopped and looked round again; then he said, almost in a whisper —'I've seen him, Martin!' 'I thought so,' says I. 'I've seen the ould one, I believe,' says he; 'an' that's more nor I'll like to do again, or thee either. We've done wi' our night-work now, an' the dogs may just go where they can get an honest bellyful.' You may be sure I was sadly fear'd. I durst not ask him how it happened that he should have snappered upon old Sootypaws; but in a while he saved me the speerin', and, as well as I can think, this was the account of his misadventure:—

"'I was goin' up by the Pike,' said he, 'and a brave shower of moonlight there was, weltering on the side of the hill, when, just as I got behind it there in the shadow, I thought I saw somethin' big and black standing among a little clump of gorses afore me. I felt started a somehow, but I rubb'd my forehead and eyes, and looked again. It did not shift, so I thought I might as well make the best o' the matter, an' went for'ard without altering my speed. Well, what should I see when I got nearer, but a great spanking black horse, and a littleish man upon it, who seemed just waiting till I came up. I stood still when I got within a yard or two, expecting he would speak first, for I thought as how it might be some poor body belike that had lost his way in crossing the [Pg 334] moors. But he did not say a word, which I thought mighty uncouth and uncivil. So making my best speech for the once, though fearful it was some fellow watching to waylay me, I asked him civilly how he did, and so on. Then I asked if he waur in want of a guide over the hills any way.

The thing here set up a great rollickin' horse laugh, that frightened my father worse than anything he said; but he durst not turn back for fear he might follow, and happen to catch him as he ran, so he stood still, dithering like a top all the while.

"'Canst show me the road to the Two Lads?'[19] he ask'd, as soon as he had gotten his laugh out.

"'That can I,' says my father, 'as well as anybody i' the parish.' 'On with thee, then,' says the devilkin, 'and don't mind picking your way, friend, for my horse can tread a bog without wetting a hair of his foot.' My father walked on, but the dogs kept a wary eye towards the stranger, he thought, and hung their tails, an' slunk behind, like as they were mightily afeard on him. But it wasn't long afore my father began to wonder within himself what this unlikely thing could want there at the Two Lads, which, as you know, is scarcely two miles off yonder, and on the highest and ugliest part of the whole commoning; a place, too, which is always said to have a bad name sticking to it. He durst not ask him his business though, and they went on without speaking, until the Two Lads were just peeping out before them into the clear soft moonlight. 'There they are,' said my father; 'and now I'll bid your honour good-night.' 'Stay,' said his companion: 'I may want you a little while yet, so budge on, if you please.' Somehow my father felt as though he durst not refuse, and however loth to such company, he trudged away till they came together to the spot. 'Now,' says the little gentleman, 'lift up that big heap of stones there, and I'll tell you what to do with them.' 'Sir,' says my father, 'you are in jest, belike.' 'Not a bit of it,' replied the other; 'see, [Pg 335] 'tis easy as flying.' Wi' that he leaps off his horse, and at one stroke of his switch, up they went, jump, jump, jump, like a batch of crows from a corn-field. The dogs set up a fearful howl, and, without once turning to see what was behind them, set off helter-skelter through bog and bush for the nearest, and left my father to himself with the foul fiend. All at once it popped into his head the tales he had once heard about the '*Spectre Horseman*,' that was said to ramble about these hills, sometimes in the air, sometimes on the ground, like the dark clouds and their shadows upon the soft grass, without ever a footprint. My poor father could have wished the ground to gape and swallow him, he said, he was so frightened. Where the stones had been there was a great hole gaping, like one of the mouths of the bottomless pit, and try how he would, he could not turn away his eyes from it. 'That's the place,' said this fearful thing; but my father was ready to cower down with terror. He could not speak, but he thought he saw a great long black arm thrust out of the hole. 'Take what he gives thee,' says Blackface, 'and make haste.' But he might as well have spoken to the whins and gorses, for the chance of being obeyed. 'Take it!' said this ill-tongued limb of Old Harry, in a voice like thunder. But my father could not stir, and then there waur shrieks, yells, and moans, and such noises as he had never heard. The creature looked angry, and full of venom as a toad. 'I shall miss my time,' said he; and with that he began to listen, for there came the sound of footsteps on the dark heather, and then the ugly thing did laugh for very gladness. 'Go, fool,' he cried, 'here comes one better than thee;' and with that he lent my father a kick that might have sent him across the valley, at a moderate calculation, had he not remembered an old witch charm which he mumbled as he fell. How long he lay there, and what happened the while, he did not know, but when he awoke, he saw the heap was in its place again, the moon looking down bright and beautiful as ever, as if she thought nothing particular had taken place. He could hardly persuade himself that he had not dreamed an ugly dream, until he remembered the spot, and how he had been enticed, or rather forced there against his will. You may be sure he made the best of his way home again, where he came in the condition I have just told you. Not many days after we heard that a gentleman of no mean condition, that lived not [Pg 336] many miles off—I have forgotten his name—and who was supposed to be crossing the hills on that very night, was lost. He never appeared afterwards. It was generally thought he was swallowed up in some bog, but my father always believed that he had fallen into the clutches of that Evil One, from whom he himself had escaped but with the skin of his teeth. From that time to his dying day was he never known to ramble on the moors again; an altered man he became, sure enough, and our big Bible, with the pictures in it, was brushed fro' the dust. He might be seen with the book upon his knee at the doorstone on a summer's night, and the third bench from the Squire's pew at Blackrod church never missed a tenant till my father was laid quietly down in the churchyard."

During this recital there had been a close and almost breathless attention. As he concluded a buzz of agitation pervaded the group; not a word was spoken for a little while until Pilkington exclaimed, slowly passing one hand over his brow—

"A marvellous delivery, which I might have been disposed to treat like other marvels, had not our own senses in some measure left with us a show of truth, or probability at least, about the adventure, which, for my own part, I find it difficult to throw off. Exaggerated and full of improbabilities, I admit, yet the story hath some substratum of truth, no doubt by which it is supported. What it is, would be difficult to ascertain, but the mystery or misapprehension, whatever it be, shall be cleared up, and that speedily."

"Doubtless," said Mortimer; "but first let us return to our lodging. Marvels, being in the inverse ratio to truth, always appear greatest at a distance; and when the explanation comes, we may perhaps smile at our present embarrassment. The riddle is easy when solved."

"True; but how is that to be accomplished?"

"Let us return to our quarters; we may perhaps find that our companion has arrived there before us."

Pilkington shook his head incredulously. Indeed the whole affair had made a much greater impression upon him than he was willing to allow, even to himself.

The moon lighted them on their path as they took the nearest route to their temporary sojourn. Many a cautious glance was cast behind, and many a dark stone or bush—many a grotesque shadow—assumed the form they feared to encounter. They arrived at their dwelling without molestation, but—Norton was not there! [Pg 337]

"Here is foul play somewhere," said Mortimer thoughtfully. "Think you, Pilkington, that we could find out our way in this quiet moonshine to that same 'Two Lads' which Martin pointed out? I fancy the louts we have about us durst not venture thither. Indeed I think it may be prudent to go unattended on several accounts."

"That is my opinion," said Pilkington; "and as for poking out the way, I can do that readily. I cannot rest without making the attempt, at any rate."

"Let us not create any alarm, but steal quietly off when we have refreshed ourselves," said Mortimer; "we need not tell them of our intent."

"It were best," replied Pilkington, "that we give these knaves a caution first that they bruit not forth the adventure at present, or until we have more exact information as to the nature of the proceedings it may be needful to adopt."

It was not long ere they commenced their journey, traversing the hill-path in the requisite direction. By day, the pillars are easily seen from some parts of the valley below, and Pilkington had frequently passed them in crossing the moors. A pretty accurate notion of their bearing was thus formed from the point whence they started.

The greater part of the way was trodden in silence. The rivulets were swollen with the heavy rains, and great care was necessary to attain their object in safety. The path was not devoid of danger at any time, by reason of the spongy and uncertain nature of the bogs, accumulated masses of spumous unhealthy vegetation, showing patches of bright green verdure, holding water often to an unknown depth, and sometimes proving fatal to those who dare to venture upon this deceitful and perilous surface. By using great caution, and carefully ascertaining the nature of the ground before them, they passed on, without further inconvenience than that of wading through bogs and ditches, climbing stone-walls and embankments, aided by the uninterrupted light of a blazing harvest-moon.

They had now accomplished the most fatiguing part of the ascent, the dark heathery crown of the mountain, whereon the moonbeams lay so beautiful, as though nature were one vast region of universal silence, for ever unbroken and undisturbed. It was like gazing on a statue—there was the semblance of life, but all was silent and motionless, the very stillness startling like a spectre. [Pg 338]

Soon they had passed through the creaking heather-bushes on the summit, when they saw two rude pillars peeping up from the dark line of the horizon before them. A sensation, not unallied to fear, passed with a sudden thrill across the deep, unseen sources of feeling—the sealed fountains of the spirit. They felt as though entering on mysterious or forbidden ground. The hour—the circumstances which led to their present situation—their companion's recent and unaccountable disappearance, and the prevalent superstitions connected with this solitary spot—all contributed to their present alarms with a force and poignancy unusual, and even appalling. They almost expected the "*Spectre Horseman*" to rush by, or to rise up suddenly before them, and forbid their further progress into his domains.

"I am not prone to pay much heed either to marvels or superstitions, and yet"——said Mortimer, again pausing after a long silence.

"Why," said Pilkington, "the very air feels rank with mystery. Whatever may be the cause, I never felt more i' the mood for an hour of devotion in my life."

"We may both have need for the exercise ere we depart hence, or my thoughts misgive me," replied Mortimer.

"It may be the mystery connected with our expedition which operates in its own nature upon the mind," said Pilkington. "I feel, as it were, every faculty impressed with some fearful and indissoluble spell. An atmosphere, impervious, and almost impalpable, seems to oppress the spirit. Surely we are on the trail of some demon, and his subtle influence is about us."

"Ah!" said Mortimer, starting aside with a shudder, as though a serpent stung him.

"Heardest thou aught, Mortimer?"

"I thought there was a rushing past my ear."

"I heard it too," replied Pilkington, in a low and agitated tone; "but I heard more, Mortimer. A voice, methought, distinct as thine own, swept by: '*Go not*,' was faintly uttered. I am sure I heard the words."

"This place affects me strangely," said Mortimer; "but I will not go back, though the very jaws of the pit were to interpose." [Pg 339]

Suddenly a mist gathered about them, not an unusual circumstance in these mountain regions, but a sufficiently portentous one to fasten strongly upon their imaginations, already predisposed to invest every appearance, however trivial, or according to the common course of events, with supernatural terrors. A gust of wind soon curled the vapour into clouds, which swept rapidly on;

sometimes with the moonlight through their shattered rifts, then dark and impervious, shutting out the whole hemisphere, and wrapping them as with a cloak. Still they kept on their way, slowly, but in the direction, as near as they could ascertain, towards the place where they hoped to find some clue to their search. They felt convinced, though neither of them could state the nature of their convictions, that the mystery would here terminate.

The wind came on now in heavier and more continuous gusts, like the distant rumble of the ocean. They fancied other sounds were audible in the blast; yells and howlings that seemed to approach nearer with every successive impulse. A sound, like the rush of wings, brushed past them, and, instinctively, they grasped each other by the arm. A moan was distinctly heard; then another, louder and more terrible. A cry of agony succeeded, then a shriek, so loud and appalling that a cry of horror involuntarily burst from their lips.

"Save us, Father of Mercy!"

It was the cry of faith; a look fixed upon Him "who is not slow to hear, nor impotent to save." The cloud rolled suddenly away, unfolding, as though for the disclosure of some mighty pageant. They saw before them, and within a very few paces, the dark, heavy pillars, looking more black and hideous in the garish light by which they were seen. A cloud or mist seemed to have rolled, as suddenly, from their mental vision; a weight was removed from their apprehensions. They felt as though scarcely acting, previously, as free agents, but impelled by some unseen power, to which every faculty and every thought was in thraldom.

Beside one of the heaps lay a figure, prostrate and motionless. It was the death-like form of Norton! He was, to all appearance, lifeless, with hands clenched, and his whole attitude betokening some recently desperate and painful struggle. They tried to arouse him, and a cordial with which they moistened his lips produced some slight symptoms of returning consciousness; [Pg 340] but the spark disappeared with the breath that fanned it. The safest plan was evidently to attempt his removal. With as little delay as possible they bore him gently between them; and as the first streak of daylight was dawning over the hills, they had the satisfaction to see him safely disposed of in their little hostelrie, whither a surgeon was speedily summoned from the adjacent village. He was yet insensible, but life was not extinct; the medical attendant pronouncing him in great jeopardy, from some violent struggle and exertion, both of body and mind. Rest, and the most careful attention, were absolutely necessary, lest, with returning consciousness, reason should be disturbed, and the mind remain bewildered from the agitation previously undergone.

For several weeks this unfortunate victim, as they supposed, to his own vague and supernatural terrors, lay without showing the slightest symptom of recognition. Groans and incoherent murmurs, after long intervals of silence, proclaimed that life was yet lingering on the threshold of the tabernacle, unwilling for her flight. A cry of terror would sometimes break forth, and his whole frame become violently convulsed, while he seemed to exhaust himself in struggles to escape.

We will not prolong the recital, nor is it needful to relate how the first light glimpse broke through the clouds that had so long veiled his spirit. Fearful were the first awakenings of the soul. Like the last dread summons, it was not an awakening from oblivion. Every faculty wore the dark impress of terror, though he remained apparently unconscious of the interval that had passed.

Pilkington and his friend were unremitting in their attentions. The issue was long doubtful; but in the end he recovered from the dread hallucination under which he laboured.

With restored health, he disclosed, to them only, the events which had occurred in the brief interval of their separation.

"I think I before told you," said he, reluctantly commencing the narrative, "that the figure who appeared so mysteriously at the door of our temporary shelter on the hill wore the very image of my uncle, whom you never knew, Pilkington. You may conceive that my surprise was excessive, though I cannot say that I felt so; but it will, in some measure, account for my apparent rashness and eager determination to follow, when I inform you that it was just twelve years previously, on that self-same night, the eve of St Bartlemy, when his unaccountable disappearance on these [Pg 341] moors, of which I have before spoken, threw consternation and distress into the hitherto peaceful and happy community with which he was associated. I need not recount the family disasters and disagreements which his mysterious absence has originated. No trace was left of his disappearance; nor could his body ever be discovered. The night prior to our excursion I saw him; but it was in a dream. This circumstance, together with the place and the very time, twelve years since his departure, was the cause of my apparent thoughtfulness and abstraction prior to the appearance of our mysterious visitor. I felt an apathy; and, at the same time, a load upon my spirits for which I could not account. I remember that I was scarcely alarmed, or even surprised, when he presented himself; and that I felt as though I had been waiting for his arrival—more under the bewildering influence of a dream than the sober conceptions of waking truth. I made no doubt but that the mystery would now be elucidated. I followed the retreating horseman, who, I saw, beckoned me forward, and occasionally seemed to chide my tardiness and want of speed. I could not hear his voice, but I thought he pronounced my name. He descended the hill with considerable haste, and it was with difficulty that I could now keep him in sight. Fully bent on the discovery, I resolved, if possible, let the consequence be what it might, that I would follow. The storm had suddenly abated, and the clouds were rolling off in broken masses through the calm ether, from which the moon crept out, by whose aid I hoped to keep in view the object of my

pursuit.

"The path he now took led up the ascent on the opposite hill. I clambered up with some difficulty, but the flying horseman before me seemed to accomplish the work without either hesitation or inconvenience. He waited for me when he had surmounted the steepest part of the acclivity, and I grew more and more convinced that it was my uncle's form, as I had seen him in my boyhood. Memory was sufficiently tenacious on this head; and knowing the great need, as it concerned family affairs, that his fate should be clearly ascertained, I braved all hazards, and still followed this mysterious conductor. I do not recollect I felt any apprehension that I was following a supernatural guide; or that it might possibly be a phantom who was luring me on to misery and destruction. The mild, benevolent aspect of my relative was before me, and I could not associate [Pg 342] an idea of danger with the guide and protector of my youth.

"As I gained the brow of the hill I saw the dark form of the horseman dilated upon the wide, bare, uninterrupted horizon, in almost gigantic proportions. It might be the distance that caused this illusion, but the huge black horse appeared to wax in magnitude with every step, and to become more fiend-like and terrible. Still I followed, and ere long I beheld the two pillars unto which our course was evidently tending. They seemed to rise up from the earth like huge giants waiting for their prey. My guide, whom I had previously attempted to overtake, stood still when he reached them, awaiting my approach. With feelings strangely akin to those of an ill-fated victim, urged by some resistless fascination into the very jaws of his destroyer, I drew nearer to the object of my hopes and apprehensions. I recognised the very dress my uncle wore on ordinary occasions, and the strong square-built form that in my childhood I was accustomed to view with a parental regard. Yet was I disquieted with alarm and agitation. Horrible images rushed upon my brain. I seemed to be the sport and prey of some power I could not withstand—a power that apparently might wield my very faculties at his will, and had already taken the reins of self-government into his own keeping. I began to fancy that it was some terrible vision by which I was harassed; and I well remember it was the precise feeling that haunts us in our dreams when a horrible doom is approaching from which apparently there is no escape; and yet we feel as though assured some way will be opened for our deliverance. While we endure all the horrors of our situation, we know of a surety that our miseries shall soon terminate. Yet a cloud was gathering upon my soul, and objects assumed another hue seen through its wild and chaotic elements. With all the vagueness and uncertainty of a dream, I felt that I was awake!

"'Dost thou know me?' said the mysterious inquirer, in a tone which I immediately recognised. Still there was an awful and thrilling emphasis in the expression which alarmed me more than before.

"'I know you,' I replied, 'as the friend and guardian of my youth; but—to what end am I called hither, and why are you thus?'

"'My path is hidden!' said he, in a voice terrible and foreboding. [Pg 343]

"'Tell me, where have you been? Is this your habitation? unless'—shuddering, I added in a low but energetic tone—'unless you are some evil one that hath ta'en his semblance to lure me to my hurt.'

"'When the moon rides o'er the blue south 'tis midnight; I will then reveal what thou hast desired, and the purpose of my coming.'

"'Art thou really he whose form thou bearest? Answer truly, as thou dost hope for my stay.'

"'I am!' he replied, in a tone so like that of my uncle that I was now satisfied his very form was before me. Conjecture was vain as to the motives that prompted this long and extraordinary concealment.

"'Promise, Norton, that thou wilt tarry here until my return!'

"'I will; but give me some pledge, some proof that thy being is real; that thou comest not as a phantom to delude my hopes.'

"He stretched out his hand. I again felt the warm pressure of my earliest friend, whom I had so long mourned as dead. I would have embraced him, but he shrunk back, and I saw the black steed again preparing and impatient to depart.

"'Remember,' said he, in a hollow voice, 'at midnight I will return.'

"I leaned against the stone, determined to await the arrival of my mysterious relative, who would, I was convinced, on his return satisfactorily elucidate his proceedings. Occupied with vain surmises and reflections, time passed on almost unperceived; and ere I was aware the black steed was at my side. The rider suddenly dismounted. I drew back, instinctively, as he approached; for I saw, in the still clear light of the unclouded moon, his countenance hideously distorted and almost demoniacal in its expression.

"'Thou art mine!' said he, laying one hand upon my shoulder; 'and thou shall know too soon my terrible secret.' He came nearer; I felt his breath upon my face; it was hot and even scorching; I was unable to resist; he clung round me like a serpent; his eyes shot livid fire, and his lips—hideous, detestable thought—his lips met mine! His whole spirit seemed diffusing itself throughout my frame. I thought my body was destined to be the habitation of some accursed fiend—that I was undergoing the horrid process of demoniacal possession! Though gasping, [Pg 344]

almost suffocating, for I could not disengage myself from his deadly fangs, I exerted my utmost strength. One cry was to Heaven, but it was the last; the soul seemed to have exhausted herself with the effort. All subsequent and sensible impressions vanished; and I remember nothing save horrible incoherent dreams, wherein I was the sport and prey of demons, or my own body the dwelling-place of some ever-restless and malicious fiend! From the long night of insensibility that ensued I would be thankful that reason has awaked without injury; and though fearful beyond the common lot of mortals has been my destiny, yet I would render homage to that Power whose might rescued me from the very grasp of the Evil One!"

The listeners were appalled, horror-struck beyond measure, at this fearful narrative. Its mysteries they could not solve by any reference to the usual course of natural events; no key that nature holds would unlock this dark and diabolical mystery. To his dying day Norton firmly believed that his uncle's body was the abode of some foul spirit, permitted to sojourn upon earth only on the fearful condition that he should effect his entrance, at stated periods, into a living human frame, whose proper occupant he might be able to dispossess for this horrible purpose. Many circumstances would seem to corroborate this belief. The adventure of the old poacher, in particular, happening precisely on the night of his uncle's disappearance, led Norton to conclude that the foul fiend was obliged to renew his habitation upon every twelfth return of the holy festival of St Bartholomew. That a solution so inconsistent with our belief in the constant care and control of an all-wise and an all-powerful Providence was incorrect, we need not be at any pains to prove in this era of widely-disseminated knowledge and intelligence. Still, a mystery, inscrutable under the ordinary operations of nature, appears to hang over the whole proceeding, and though a legend only, yet the events bear a wonderful semblance and affinity to truth, even in their wildest details.

It is said that the "*Spectre Horseman*" appeared no more, and that having failed in fulfilling the terms by which his existence upon earth was, from time to time, permitted and prolonged, he was driven to his own place, where he must abide for ever the doom of those kindred and accursed spirits whose aim it is continually to seduce and to destroy.

MOTHER RED-CAP; [Pg 345]

OR, THE ROSICRUCIANS.

A LEGEND OF THE NORTH.

PART THE FIRST.

In the wild and mountainous region of East Lancashire, at the foot of the long line of hills called Blackstonedge, and not far from the town of Rochdale, stood one of those old grim-looking mansions, the abode of our Saxon ancestors; a quiet, sheltered nest, where ages and generations had alike passed by. The wave of time had produced no change; the name and the inheritance were the same, and seemingly destined to continue unaltered by the mutations, the common lot of all that man labours to perpetuate. This state of things existed at the date of our story; now, alas! the race of its former possessors is extinct, their name only remains a relic of things that were—their former mansion standing,[20] as if in mockery, amidst the hum of wheels, and in melancholy contrast with the toil and animation of this manufacturing, money-getting district.

Buckley Hall, to which we allude, is still an object of interest to the antiquary and the lover of romance, telling of days that are for ever departed, when the lords of these paternal acres were the occupants, not impoverishers, of the soil from unrecorded ages—constituting a tribe, a race of sturdy yeomanry attached to their country and to the lands on which they dwelt. But they are nigh extinct—other habits and other pursuits have prevailed. Profuse hospitality and rude benevolence have given place to habits of business as they are called, and to a more calculating and enterprising disposition. The most ancient families have become absorbed or overwhelmed by the mighty progress of this new element, this outpouring of wealth as from some unseen [Pg 346] source; and in many instances their names only are recognised in these old and rickety mansions, now the habitation of the mechanic and the plebeian.

Many of these dwellings remain—a melancholy contrast to the trim erections, the symbols of a new race, along with new habits and forms of existence, sufficiently testifying to the folly and the vain expectations of those who toil and labour hard for a long lease with posterity.

This mansion, like the rest of our ancestral dwellings of the better sort, was built of wood, on a stone basement. The outside structure curiously vandyked in a zigzag fashion with wooden partitions, the interstices were filled with wicker-work, plastered with well-tempered clay, to

which chopped straw imparted additional tenacity. When newly embellished, looking like the pattern, black and white, of some discreet magpie perched on the wooden pinnacles terminating each gable, or hopping saucily about the porch—that never-failing adjunct to these homely dwellings. Here, on a well-scoured bench, the master of the house would sit in converse with his family or his guests, enjoying the fresh and cheering breeze, without being fully exposed to its effects. The porch was universally adopted as a protection to the large flagged hall called the "house-part," which otherwise might have been seriously incommoded by the inclement atmosphere of these bleak districts. On one side of the hall, containing the great fireplace, was the "guest parlour." Here the best bed was usually fixed; and here, too, all great "occasions" took place. Births, christenings, burials—all emanated from, or were accomplished in, this family chamber. Every member was there transmitted from the cradle to the grave. The low wide oaken stairs, to the first bending of which an active individual might have leaped without any such superfluous media. The naked gallery, with its little quaint doors on each side, hatched in the usual fashion, this opening into the store-room, that into the servants' lodging, another into the closet where the choicest confections were kept. Opposite were the bed-chambers, and at the extremity of the gallery a ladder generally pointed the way to a loft, where, amongst heaps of winter stores, dried roots, and other vegetables, probably reposed one or two of the male servants on a straw mattress, well fortified from cold by an enormous quilt.

Our description will apply with little variation to all. We love these deserted mansion-houses that [Pg 347] speak of the olden time, its good cheer and its rude but pleasant intercourse; times and seasons that are for ever gone, though we crave pardon for indulging in what may perhaps find little favour in the eyes of this generation, whose hopes and desires are to the future, who say the past is but the childhood of our existence: it is gone, and shall not return. But there are yet some who love to linger on the remnants, the ruins of a former state, who look at these time-honoured relics but as links that bring them into closer communion with bygone ages, and would fain live in the twilight of other years rather than the meridian splendour of the present. But we must not be seduced any further by these reflections; our present business concerns the legend whose strange title stands at the head of this article.

In one of the upper chambers at Buckley Hall before named, and not long ago, was an iron ring fixed to a strong staple in the wall; and to this ring a fearful story is still attached. The legend, as it is often told, is one of those wild improbable fictions, based on facts distorted and embellished to suit the taste of the listener or the fancy of the narrator. It will be our task to make out from these imaginative materials a narrative divested as much as possible of the marvellous, but at the same time retaining so much as will interest and excite the reader and lover of legendary lore.

It was in one of those genial, mellow, autumnal evenings—so dear to all who can feel their influence, and so rare a luxury to the inhabitants of this weeping climate—when all living things wear the hue and warmth of the glowing atmosphere in which they are enveloped, that two lovers were sauntering by the rivulet, a "wimpling burn" that, rising among the bare and barren moorlands of this uncultivated region, runs past Buckley Hall into the valley of the Roch.

It was near the close of the sixteenth century, in the days of good Queen Bess, yet their apparel was somewhat homely even for this era of stuffed doublets and trunk-hose. Such unseemly fashions had hardly travelled into these secluded districts; and the plain, stout, woollen jacket of their forefathers, and the ruffs, tippets, stays, and stomachers of their grandmothers, formed the ordinary wear of the belles and beaux of the province. Fardingales, or hooped petticoats, we are happy to say, for the sake of our heroine, were unknown. [Pg 348]

"Be of good cheer," said the lover; "there be troubles enow, believe me, without building them up out of our own silly fears—like boys with their snow hobgoblins, terrible enough in the twilight of fancy, but a gleam of sunshine will melt and dissipate them. Thou art sad to-night without reason. Imaginary fears are the worst to cope withal; having nor shape nor substance, we cannot combat with them. 'Tis hard, indeed, fighting with shadows."

"I cannot smile to-night, Gervase; there's a mountain here—a foreboding of some deadly sort. I might as soon lift 'Robin Hood's Bed' yonder as remove it."

"No more of this, my dearest Grace; at least not now. Let us enjoy this bright and sunny landscape. How sharply cut are those crags yonder on the sky. Blackstonedge looks almost within a stride, or at least a good stone's-throw. Thou knowest the old legend of Robin Hood; how that he made yonder rocks his dormitory, and by way of amusement pitched or quoited huge stones at a mark on the hill just above us, being some four or five miles from his station. It is still visible along with several stones lying near, and which are evidently from the same rock as that on which it is said he slept."

"I've heard such silly tales often. Nurse had many of these old stories wherewith to beguile us o' winter nights. She used to tell, too, about Eleanor Byron, who loved a fay or elf, and went to meet him at the fairies' chapel away yonder where the Spodden gushes through its rocky cleft,—'tis a fearful story,—and how she was delivered from the spell. I sometimes think on't till my very flesh creeps, and I could almost fancy that such an invisible thing is about me."

With such converse did they beguile their evening walk, ever and anon making the subject bend to the burden of their own sweet ditty of mutual *unchanging* love!

Grace Ashton was the only daughter of a wealthy yeoman, one of the gentry of that district, residing at Clegg Hall, a mile or two distant. Its dark low gables and quiet smoke might easily be

distinguished from where they stood. It was said that the Cleggs, its original owners, had been beggared and dispossessed by vexatious and fraudulent lawsuits; and the Ashtons had achieved their purpose by dishonesty and chicane. However this might be, busy rumour gave currency and credit to the tale, though probably it had none other foundation than the idle and malevolent gossip of the envious and the unthinking.

[Pg 349]


View larger image

"THE THRUTCH," NEAR ROCHDALE.
"Drawn by G. Pickering."
"Engraved by Edw^{d} Finden."

They had toiled up a narrow pathway on the right of a woody ravine, where the stream had evidently formed itself a passage through the loose strata in its course. The brook was heard, though hidden by the tangled underwood, and they stopped to listen. Soothing but melancholy was the sound. Even the birds seemed to chirp there in a sad and pensive twitter, not unnoticed by the lovers, though each kept the gloomy and fanciful apprehensions untold.

Soon they gained the summit of a round heathery knoll, whence an extensive prospect rewarded their ascent. The squat, square tower of Rochdale Church might be seen above the dark trees nestling under its grey walls. The town was almost hidden by a glowing canopy of smoke gleaming in the bright sunset—towards the north the bare bleak hills, undulating in sterile loneliness, and associating only with images of barrenness and desolation. Easterly, a long, level burst of light swept across meadow, wood, and pasture; green slopes dotted with bright homesteads, to the very base apparently of, though at some distance from, Blackstonedge, now of the deepest, the most intense blue. Such a daring contrast of colour gave a force and depth to the landscape, which, had it been portrayed, would, to critical eyes perhaps, have outraged the modesty of Nature.

The sky was already growing cold and grey above the ridge opposed to the burning brightness of the western horizon, and Grace Ashton pointed out the beautiful but fleeting hues of the landscape around them. Her companion, however, was engrossed by another object. Before them was an eminence marking the horizon to the north-west, though not more than a good bowshot from where they stood. Between this and their present standing was a little grassy hollow, through which the brook we have described trickled rather than ran, amidst moss and rushes, rendering the ground swampy and unsafe. On this hill stood "Robin Hood's coit-stones;" and on the largest, called the "marking-stone," a wild-looking and haggard figure was crouched. Her garments, worn and tattered, were of a dingy red; and her cap, or *coiffure* as it was then called, was of the same colour. Her head was bent forward beyond the knee, as though she were [Pg 350] listening towards the ground, or was expecting the approach of the individuals who now came suddenly, and to themselves unexpectedly, in view. Her figure, in the glow of that rich autumnal sky, looked of the deepest crimson, and of a bloody and portentous aspect.

"What strange apparition is yonder," said Gervase Buckley, "on the hill-top there before us? Beshrew me, Grace, but it hath an evil and a rancorous look."

But Grace, along with a short scream of surprise, betrayed, too, her recognition of the object, and clung with such evident terror to her companion that he turned from the object of his inquiries to gaze on his mistress.

"What!" said he, "hath yonder unknown such power? Methinks it hath moved thee strangely. Speak, Grace; can that hideous appearance in any way be linked with our destiny?"

"I am ignorant as thou. But its coming, as I have heard, always forebodes disaster to our house. Hast not heard of a Red Woman that sometimes haunts this neighbourhood? I never saw her until now, but I've heard strange and fearful stories of her appearing some years ago, and blighting the corn, poisoning the cattle, with many other diabolical witcheries. She is best known by the name of 'Mother Red-Cap.'"

"I've heard of this same witch in my boyhood. But what should we fear? She is flesh and blood like ourselves; and, in spite of the prevailing belief, I could never suppose power would be granted to some, generally the most wicked and the most worthless, which from the rest of mankind is capriciously withholden."

"Hush, Gervase; thou knowest not how far the arch-enemy of mankind may be permitted to afflict bodily our guilty race. I could tell thee such tales of yonder creature as would stagger even the most stubborn of unbelievers."

"I will speak to her, nevertheless. Tarry here, I prithee, Grace. It were best I should go alone."

"Oh, do not—do not! None have sight of her, as I've heard, but mischief follows. What disaster, then, may we not expect from her evil tongue? I shudder at the anticipation. Stay here. I will not be left; and I cannot cross this dangerous swamp."

Buckley was, however, bent on the adventure. His natural curiosity, inflamed by forbidden longing after the occult and the mysterious, to which he was too prone, even though sceptical as to their existence, rendered him proof against his mistress' entreaties. [Pg 351]

Probably from situation, or rather, it might be, the distance was judged greater than in reality it proved, but the form before them looked preternaturally enlarged, and as she raised her head her arms were flung out high above it like withered and wasted branches on each side. Trembling in every limb, Grace clung to her lover, and it was after long persuasion that she suffered him to lift her over the morass, and was dragged unwillingly up the hill. As though she were the victim of some terrible fascination, her eyes were constantly riveted on the object. A raven wheeled round them, every moment narrowing the circle of its flight, and the malicious bird looked eager for mischief.

As they approached nearer to the summit, this ill-omened thing, after having brushed so close that they felt the very breath from its wings, alighted beside the Red Woman, who hardly seemed to notice, though well aware of their proximity.

They paused when several paces distant, and she rose up suddenly, extending both arms, apparently to warn them from a nearer approach. Her skinny lips, rapidly moving to and fro, and her dark withered, bony, and cadaverous features, gave her more the appearance of a living mummy or a resurrection from the charnel-house than aught instinct with the common attributes of humanity.

Buckley was for a moment daunted. The form was so unlike anything he had ever seen. He was almost persuaded of the possibility that it might be some animated corpse doomed to wander forth either for punishment or expiation. Her lips still moved. A wild glassy eye was fixed upon them, and as she yet stood with extended arms, Gervase, almost wrought to desperation, cried out—

"Who art thou? Thy business here?"

A hollow sound, hardly like the tones of a human voice, answered in a slow and solemn adjuration —

"Beware, rash fools! None approach the Red Woman but to their undoing."

"I know no hindrance to my free course in this domain. By whose authority am I forbidden?" said he, taking courage. [Pg 352]

"Away—mine errand is not to thee unless provoked."

"Unto whom is thy message?"

"To thy leman—thy ladye-love, whom thou wilt cherish to thine hurt. Leave her, ay, though both hearts break in the separation."

"I will not."

"Then be partaker of the wrath that is just ready to burst upon her doomed house."

"I told thee," said Grace, "she is the herald of misfortune! What woe does she denounce? What cruel judgment hast thou invoked upon our race?" cried she to this grim messenger of evil.

"Evil will—evil must! I will cling to ye till your last sustenance be dried up, and your inheritance be taken from ye."

"Her fate be mine," said Buckley, indignantly. "Her good or evil fortune I will share."

"Be it so. Thou hast made thy choice, and henceforth thou canst not complain."

She stretched out her two hands, one towards Clegg Hall, the abode of the maiden, and the other towards Buckley, her lover's paternal roof, from which a blue curl of smoke was just visible over the rising grounds beneath them.

"A doom and a curse to each," she muttered. "Your names shall depart, and your lands to the alien and the stranger. Your honours shall be trodden in the dust, and your hearths laid waste, and your habitations forsaken."

In this fearful strain she continued until Buckley cried out—

"Cease thy mumbling, witch. I'll have thee dealt with in such wise thy tongue shall find another use."

Turning upon him a look of scorn, she seemed to grow fiercer in her maledictions.

"Proud minion," she cried, "thou shall die childless and a beggar!"

The cunning raven flapped his great heavy wings and seemed to croak an assent. He then hopped on his mistress' shoulder, and apparently whispered in her ear.

"Sayest thou so?" said the witch. "Then give it to me, Ralph."

The bird held out his beak, and out popped a plain gold ring.

"Give this to thy mother, Dame Buckley. Say 'tis long since they parted company; and ask if she knows or remembers aught of the Red Woman. Away!" [Pg 353]

She threw the ring towards them. Both stooped to pick it up. They examined it curiously for a short space.

"'Tis a wedding-ring," said Buckley, "but not to wed bride of mine. Where was this"——

He stopped short in his inquiry, for lifting up his eyes he found the donor was gone!

Neither of them saw the least trace of her departure. The stone whereon she sat was again vacant. All was silent, undisturbed, save the night breeze that came sighing over the hill, moaning and whistling through the withered bent and rushes at their feet.

The shadows of evening were now creeping softly around them, and the valley below was already wrapped in mist. The air felt very chill. They shuddered, but it was in silence. This fearful vision, for such it now appeared to have been, filled them with unspeakable dread.

Gervase yet held the ring in his hand. He would have thrown it from him, but Grace Ashton forbade.

"Do her bidding in this matter," said she. "Give it thy mother, and ask counsel of the sage and the discreet. There is some fearful mystery—some evil impending, or my apprehensions are strangely misled."

They returned, but he was more disturbed than he cared to acknowledge. He felt as though some spell had been cast upon him, and cowed his hitherto undaunted spirit.

They again wound down beside the rivulet into the meadows below, where the mist alone pointed out the course of the stream. The bat and the beetle crossed their path. Evil things only were abroad. All they saw and felt seemed to be ominous of the future. As they passed through a little wicket to the hall-porch, Nicholas Buckley the father met them.

"Why, how now, loiterers? The cushat and the curlew have left the hill, and yet ye are abroad. 'Tis time the maiden were at home and looking after the household."

"We've been hindered, good sir. We will just get speech of our dame, and then away home with the gentle Grace. Half-an-hour's good speeding will see her safe."

"Ay—belike," said the old man. "Lovers and loiterers make mickle haste to part. Our dame is with the maids and the milkpans i' the dairy."

The elder Buckley was a hale hearty yeoman, of a ruddy and cheerful countenance. A few [Pg 354] wrinkles were puckered below the eyes; the rest of his face was sleek and comfortably disposed. A beard, once thick and glossy, was grown grey and thin, curling up short and stunted round his portly chin. Two bright twinkling eyes gave note of a stirring and restless temper—too sanguine, maybe, for success in the great and busy world, and not fitted either by education or disposition for its suspicions or its frauds. Yet he had the reputation of a clever merchant. Rochdale, even at that early period, was a well-known mart for the buyers and sellers of woollen stuffs and friezes. Many of the most wealthy merchants, too, indulged in foreign speculations and adventures, and amongst these the name of Nicholas Buckley was not the least conspicuous.

They passed on to the dairy, where Dame Eleanor scolded the maids and skimmed the cream at the same moment, by way of economy in time.

"What look ye for here?" was her first inquiry, for truly her temper was of a hasty and searching nature; somewhat prone, as well, to cavilling and dispute, requiring much of her husband's placidity to furnish oil for the turbulent waters of her disposition.

"Thou wert better at thy father's desk than idling after thine unthrifty pleasures: to-morrow, maybe, sauntering among the hills with hound and horn, beating up with all the rabble in the parish."

"Nay, mother, chide not: I was never made for merchandise and barter—the price of fleeces in Tod Lane, and the broad ells at Manchester market."

"And why not?" said the dame, sharply; "haven't I been the prop and stay of the house? Haven't I made bargains and ventures when thou hast been idling in hall and bower with love-ditties and

ladies' purfles?"

She was now moved to sudden choler, and Gervase did not dare to thwart her further—letting the passion spend itself by its own efforts, as he knew it were vain to check its torrent.

Now Dame Eleanor Buckley was of a sharp and florid countenance—short-necked and broad-shouldered, her nose and chin almost hiding a pair of thin severe lips, the two prominences being close neighbours, especially in anger. In truth she guided, or rather managed, the whole circle of affairs; aiding and counselling the speculations of her husband, who had happily been content [Pg 355] with the produce and profit of his paternal acres, had not his helpmate, who inherited this mercantile spirit from her family, urged her partner to such unwonted lust and craving for gain.

A huge bundle of keys hung at her girdle, which, when more than usually excited, did make a most discordant jingle to the tune that was a-going. Indeed, the height and violence of her passion might be pretty well guessed at by this index to its strength.

When the storm had in some degree subsided, Gervase held up the ring.

"What's that, silly one? A wedding-ring!"

She grew almost pale with wrath. "How darest thou?—thee!—a ring!—to wed ere thou hast a home for thy pretty one. Ye may go beg, for here ye shall not tarry. Go to the next buckle-beggar! A pretty wedding truly! When thou hast learned how to keep her honestly 'twill be time enough to wed. But thou hast not earned a doit to put beside her dower, and all our ready moneys, and more, be in trade; though, for the matter o' that, the pulling would be no great business either. But I tell thee again, thy father shall not portion an idler like thyself and pinch his trade. Marry, 'tis enough to do, what with grievous sums lost in shipwrecks, and the time we have now to wait our returns from o'er sea."

She went on at this rate for a considerable space, pausing at last, more for lack of breath than subject-matter of discourse.

"Mother," said he, when fairly run down; "'tis not a purchase—'tis a gift."

"By some one sillier than thyself, I warrant."

"I know not for that; I had it from a stranger."

"Stranger still," she replied sharply, chuckling at her own conceit.

"Look at it, mother. Know you such a one?"

The dame eyed it with no favour, but she turned it over with a curious look, at the same time lifting her eyes now and then towards the ceiling, as some train of recollection was awakening in her mind.

"Where gat ye this?" said Dame Eleanor, in a subdued but still querulous tone.

"On the hill-top yonder."

"Treasure-trove belongs to Sir John Byron.[21] The lord of the manor claims all from the finders." [Pg 356]

"It was a gift."

"Humph. Hast met gold-finders on the hills, or demons or genii that guard hidden treasure?"

"We've seen the Red Woman!"

Had a sudden thunder-clap burst over them, she could not have been more startled. She stood speechless, and seemingly incapable of reply. Holding the ring in one hand, her eyes were intently fixed upon it.

"What is it that troubles you?" said Gervase. "Yon strange woman bade me give you the ring, and ask if so be that you remembered her."

The dame looked up, her quick and saucy petulance exchanged for a subdued and melancholy air.

"Remember thee! thou foul witch? ay long, long years have passed; I thought thy persecutions at an end; thy prediction was nigh forgotten. It was my wedding-ring, Gervase!"

"More marvellous still."

"Peace, and I'll tell thee. Grace Ashton, come forward. I know thine ears are itching for the news. Well, well, it was when thou wast but a boy, Gervase, and I remember an evening just like this. I was standing by the draw-well yonder, looking, I now bethink me, at the dovecot, where I suspected thieves; and in a humour somewhat of the sharpest, I trow. By-and-by comes, what I thought, an impudent beggar-woman for an alms. Her dress was red and tattered, with a high red cap to match. I chided her it might be somewhat harshly, and I shall not soon forget the malicious look she put on. 'I ask not, I need not thy benison,' she said; 'I would have befriended thee, but I now curse thee altogether:' and stretching out her shrivelled arm, dry and bare, she shook it, threatening me with vengeance. Suddenly, or ere I was aware, she seized my left hand, drew off my wedding-ring; breathing upon it and mumbling a spell, she held it as though for me to take back, but with such a fiendish look of delight that I hesitated. All on a sudden I remembered to have heard my grandmother say that should a witch or warlock get your wedding-ring, and have

time to mutter over it a certain charm, *so long as that ring is above ground* so long misery and misfortune do afflict the owner. Lucky it was I knew of this, for instead of replacing it I threw it into the well, being the nearest hiding-place. And happy for me and thee it was so near; for, would you believe, though hardly a minute's space in my hand, the black heifer died, the red cow cast her calf, and a large venture of merchandise was wrecked in a fearful gale off the gulf. I had no sooner thrown it into the well than the witch looked more diabolical than ever. 'It will come again, dame,' said she, 'and then look to it;' and with this threat she departed. But what am I doing? If it be the ring, which I doubt not, I've had it o'er long in my keeping. Even now disaster may be a-brewing; and is there not a richly-freighted ship on its passage with silks and spices? I'll put it out of her reach this time anyhow. No! I'll hide it where never a witch in Christendom shall poke it out." [Pg 357]

Dame Eleanor went to the little burn below. Stooping, she scooped a hole in the gravel under water; there she laid the ring, and covered it over with stones.

"Thou'rt always after some of thy megrims, dame," said the elder Buckley, who had been watching her from the porch. "Some spell or counter-charm, I'se warrant."

With a look of great contempt for the incredulity of her spouse, she replied—

"Ay, goodman, sit there and scoff your fill. If't hadn't been for my care and endeavours you had been penniless ere now. But so it is, I may slave night and day, I reckon. The whole roof-tree, as a body may say, is on my shoulders, and what thanks? More hisses than thanks, more knocks than fair words."

Never so well pleased as when opportunity was afforded for grumbling, the dame addressed herself again to her evening avocations.

Pondering deeply what should be the issue of these things, Gervase set out with Grace Ashton to her house at Clegg Hall, a good mile distant. Evening had closed in—a chill wind blew from the hills. The west had lost its splendour, but a pure transparent brightness filled its place, across which the dark wavy outline of the high moorlands rested in deep unvarying shadow. In these bright depths a still brighter star hung, pure and of a diamond-like lustre, the precursor, the herald of a blazing host just rising into view. [Pg 358]

As they walked on, it may well be supposed that the strange occurrences of the last few hours were the engrossing theme of their discourse.

"My mother is a little too superstitious, I am aware," said Gervase; "but what I have witnessed to-night has rendered me something more credulous on this head than aforetime."

"I don't half like this neighbourhood," said his companion, looking round. "It hath an ill name, and I could almost fancy the Red Woman again, just yonder in our path."

She looked wistfully; it was only the mist creeping lazily on with the stream.

They were now ascending the hill towards Beil or Belfield, where the Knights Templars had formerly an establishment. Not a vestage now remains, though at that period a ruinous tower covered with ivy, a gateway, and an arch, existed as relics of their former grandeur.

"Here lived the Lady Eleanor Byron," said Grace, pointing to the old hall close by, and as though an unpleasant recollection had crossed her. She shuddered as they passed by the grim archway beneath the tower. Whether it was fancy or reality she knew not, but as she looked curiously through its ivied tracery she thought the Red Woman was peering out maliciously upon them. She shrank aside, and pointed to the spot; but there was nothing visible save the dark and crumbling ruins, from which their steps were echoed with a dull and sullen sound.

The night wind sighed round the grey battlements, and from its hidden recesses came moans and whispers—at least so it seemed to their heated imaginations.

"Let us hasten hence," said Grace; "I like not this lonely spot. There was always a fear and a mystery about it. The tale of the invisible sylphid and Eleanor Byron's elfish lover haunts me whenever I pass by, and I feel as though something was near, observing and influencing every movement and every thought."

"Come, come, adone I pray. Let not fear o'ermaster reason, else we shall see bogles in every bush."

Above the gateway, in the little square tower now pulled down, was a loophole, nearly concealed by climbing shrubs, which rendered it easy for a person within to look out without being observed. As they passed a low humming din was heard. Then a rude ditty trolled from some not unskilful performer. The lovers stayed to listen, when a dark figure issued out of the gateway singing— [Pg 359]

"The bat haunts the tower,
And the redbreast the bower,
And the merry little sparrow by the chimney hops,
Good e'en, hoots master owl,
To-whoo, to-whoo, his troll,
Sing heigho, swing the can with"——

"What, thee, Tim! Is that thy stupid face?" said Gervase, breaking in upon his ditty, and right glad

to be delivered from supernatural fears, though the object of them proved only this strolling minstrel. "Thou might as well kill us outright as frighten us to death."

He that stood before them was one of those wandering musicians that haunt fairs and merry-makings, wakes, and such like pastimes; playing the fiddle and jewtrump too at weddings and alehouses; in short, any sort of idleness never came amiss to these representatives of the old Troubadours. A tight oval cap covered his shaggy poll; he was clad in a coarse doublet or jerkin slashed in the fashion of the time, while his nether integuments were fastened in the primitive mode by a wooden skewer. He could conjure too, and play antics to set the folks agape; but as to his honesty, it was of that dubious sort that few cared to have it in trust. He was apt at these alehouse ditties—many of them his own invention. He knew all the choicest ballads too, so that his vocation was much akin to the *jogleurs* or *jongleurs* of more ancient times, when Richard of the Lion's Heart and other renowned monarchs disdained not "*the gentle craft of poesie*."

Wherever was a feast, let it be a wedding or a funeral, Tim, like the harpies of old, scented the meat, and some of his many vocations were generally in request.

This important functionary now stood whistling and singing by turns with the most admired unconcern.

"What's thy business here?" cried Gervase, approaching him.

"The maid was fair, and the maid was coy,
But the lover left, and the maid said 'Why?'
Sing O the green willow!"

"Answerest thou me with thy trumpery ditties? I'll have thee put i' the stocks, sirrah."

"Oh, ha' mercy, master! there's naught amiss 'at I know. I'm but takin' roost here wi' the owls an' jackdaws a bit, maybe for want o' better lyin'." [Pg 360]

"It were hard to have a better knack at lying than thou hast already. Hast gotten the weather into thy lodgings? When didst flit to thy new quarters?"

"Th' hay-mow at Clegg is ower savoured wi' the new crop, an' I want fresh air for my studies."

"Now art thou lying"——

"Like a lover to his sweetheart," said Tim, interrupting him, and finishing the sentence.

"Peace, knave! There's some mischief i' the wind. Thou'rt after no good, I trow."

"What te dickons do I ail here? Is't aught 'at a man can lift off but stone wa's an' ivy-boughs? Marry, my little poke man ha' summut else to thrive on nor these."

"There's been great outcry about poultry an' other farmyard appendances amissing of late, besides eggs and such like dainties enow to furnish pancakes and fritters for the whole parish. Hast gotten company in thy den above there?"

"Jacks an' ouzles, if ye like, Master Gervase. Clim' up, clim' up, lad, an there'll be a prial on us. Ha, ha! What! our little sweetheart there would liefer t' be gangin.' Weel, weel, 'tis natural, as a body may say—

"One is good, and two is good,
But three's no company."

"Answer me quick, thou rogue. Is there any other but thyself yonder above?"

"When I'm there I'm not here, an' when I'm here"——

"Sirrah, I'll flog the wind out o' thy worthless carcase. Hast any pilfering companions about thee? I do smell a savoury refection—victuals are cooking, or my nose belies its office."

"Fair speech, friend, wins a quiet answer; a soft word and a smooth tongue all the world over. What for mayn't I sup as well as my betters?"

"As well?—better belike. There's no such savour in our hall at eventide, nor in the best kitchen in the parish."

"It's not my fau't, is't?"

"By'r lady, there's somebody in the chamber there. I saw the leaves fluttering from the loophole. Villain, who bears thee company?" [Pg 361]

"Daft, daft. What fool would turn into roost wi' me? Clean gone crazy, sure as I'm livin'."

"Nay, nay, there's some plot here—some mischief hatching. I'll see, or"——

He was just going to make the attempt; but Tim withstood him, and in a peremptory manner barred the way.

"How! am I barred by thee, and to my face?"

"It's no business o' thine, Master Gervase. What's hatching there concerns not thee. Keep back, I say, or"——

"Ha! Thou jingle-pated rascal, stand off, or I'll wring thy neck round as I would a Jackdaw."

"Do not, do not, Gervase!" said Grace Ashton, fearful of some unlucky strife. "Let us begone. We are too late already, and 'tis no business of ours."

"What! and be o'erfoughten by this scurvy lack-wit. Once more, who is there above?"

"An' what if I shouldn't tell thee?"

"I'll baste thy carcase to a mummy; I'll make thee tender for the hounds."

"Another word to that, master, an' it's a bargain."

"Let me pass."

"Not without my company."

He whistled, and in a moment Gervase felt himself pinioned from behind. Looking round, he saw two stout fellows with their faces covered; and any other possibility of recognition was impracticable in the heavy twilight.

"Who's i' t' stocks now?" cried the malicious rogue, laughing.

"Unhand me, or ye'll rue that ever ye wrought this outrage."

"Nay, nay, that were a pretty stave, when we've gotten the bird, to open the trap," said Tim.

Gervase immediately saw that another party had seized Grace Ashton. He raved and stamped until his maledictions were put an end to by an effectual gag, and he did not doubt but she had suffered the same treatment, for a short sharp scream only was heard. Being immediately blindfolded, he could only surmise that her usage was of a similar nature.

He was so stupefied with surprise that for a short period he was hardly sensible to their further proceedings. When able to reflect, he found himself pinioned, and in a sitting posture. A damp chill was on his forehead. He had been dragged downwards, and, from the motion, steps were the medium of descent. A door or two had been raised or opened, a narrow passage previously [Pg 362] traversed, and a short time only elapsed from the cool freshness of the evening air to the damp and stifling atmosphere that he now breathed. What could be the cause of his seizure he was quite incompetent to guess. He could not recollect that he had either pique or grudge on his hands; and what should be the result he only bewildered and wearied himself by striving to anticipate.

It was surely a dream. He heard a voice of ravishing sweetness; such pure and silvery tones, that aught earthly could have produced it was out of the question; it was like the swell of some Æolian lyre—words, too, modifying and enhancing that liquid harmony. It was a hymn, but in a foreign tongue. He soon recognised the evening hymn to the Virgin—

"Mater amata, intemerata,
ora, ora, pro nobis."

So sweetly did the music melt into his soul, that he quite forgot his thrall, and every sense was attuned to the melody. When the sound ceased he made an effort to get free. He loosened his hands, and immediately tore off the bandage from his eyes. A few seconds elapsed, when he saw a light streaming through a crevice. Looking through, he saw a taper burning before a little shrine, where two females in white raiment, closely veiled, were kneeling.

The celebration of such rites, at that time strictly prohibited, sufficiently accounted for their concealment, and plainly intimated that the parties were not of the Reformed faith.

By the light which penetrated his cell from this source he saw it was furnished with a stone bench, and a narrow flight of steps in one corner communicated with a trap-door above.

The old mansion at Belfield, contiguous to these ruins, once belonging to the Knights of St John, had been for some years untenanted, and, as often happens to the lot of deserted houses, strange noises, sights, and other manifestations of ghostly occupants were heard and seen by passers-by, rendering it a neighbourhood not overliked by those who had business that way after nightfall.

Gervase Buckley was pretty well assured that he had been conveyed into some concealed subterranean chamber, but for what purpose he could not comprehend. He was not easily intimidated; and though in a somewhat sorry plight, he now felt little apprehension on the score of supernatural visitations: but his seizure did not hold out an immunity as regards corporeal [Pg 363] disturbers. He had not long to indulge these premonitory reflections ere a door was opened. A figure, completely enveloped in a black cloak, on which a red cross was conspicuously emblazoned, stood before him. He carried a torch, and Gervase saw a short naked sword glittering in his belt.

"Follow me," said the intruder; and, without further parley, pointed to where another door was concealed in the pavement. This being opened, Gervase beheld, not without serious apprehension, a flight of steps evidently communicating with a lower dungeon. His conductor pointed to the descent, and it would have been useless folly to disobey. A damp and almost suffocating odour prevailed, as though from some long-pent-up atmosphere, which did not give the prisoner any increasing relish or affection for the enterprise. He looked at his conductor, whose face and person were yet covered. Had he been a familiar of the Holy Inquisition, he could

not have been more careful of concealment. Gervase looked now and then with a wistful glance towards his companion's weapon. Being himself unarmed, it would have been madness to attempt escape. He merely inquired in his descent—

"Whence this outrage? I am unarmed, defenceless." But there was no reply. The guide, with an inclination of the head, pointed with his torch to the gulf his victim was about to enter. There was little use in disputation where the opposite party had so decided an advantage, and he thought it best to abide the issue without further impediment. He accordingly descended a few steps. His conductor fastened the door overhead, and they soon arrived at the bottom, at a low arched passage, where his guide dashed his flambeau against the wall, and it was immediately extinguished.

Gervase was left once more in doubt and darkness. There was little space for explanation. He felt himself seized by an invisible hand, hurried unresistingly on, till, without any preparation, a blaze of light burst upon him.

It was for a moment too overpowering to enable him to distinguish objects with any certainty. Soon, however, he saw a tolerably spacious vault or crypt, supported by massy pillars. He had often heard there existed many unexplored subterranean passages reaching to an incredible distance, made originally by the Knights Templars for their private use. One of these, it was said, extended even to the chantry just then dissolved at Milnrow, more than a mile distant. Many [Pg 364] strange stories he had been told of these warrior monks. But centuries had elapsed since their suppression. For a moment he almost believed they were permitted to reappear, doomed at stated periods to re-enact their unhallowed orgies, their cruelties, and their crimes. The chamber was lighted by three or four torches, their lurid unsteady life giving an ever-varying character to the surrounding objects.

Opposite the entrance was a stone bench, occupied by several figures attired in a similar manner to his conductor. An individual in the centre wore in addition a belt covered by some cabalistic devices. The scene was sufficiently inexplicable, and not at all elucidated by the following interrogation:—

"Thou hast been cited to our tribunal," said the chief inquisitor.

"I know ye not," said Gervase, with great firmness, though hardly aware of the position he occupied.

"Why hast thou not obeyed our summons?"

"I have not heard of any such; nor in good sooth should I have been careful to obey had your mandate been delivered."

"Croix Rouge," said the interrogator, "has this delinquent been cited?"

The person he addressed arose, bowed, and presented a written answer.

"I have here," continued the chief, "sufficient proof that our summons hath been conveyed to thee, and that hitherto thine answer hath been contumaciously withheld. What sayest thou?"

"I have yet to learn, firstly," said Gervase, with more indignation than prudence, "by what authority you would compel me to appear; and secondly, how and in what form such mandate had been sent?"

"Bethink thee, is our answer to the last: the first will be manifested in due time. We might indeed leave thee ignorant as to what we require, but pity for thy youth and inexperience forbids. Clegg Hall is, thou knowest, along with the estate, now unlawfully holden by the Ashtons."

"I know that sundry Popish recusants, plotting the overthrow of our most gracious Queen, do say that other and more legitimate rights are in abeyance only; but the present owners are too well fortified to be dispossessed by hearsay."

"In the porch at Clegg thou wast accosted not long ago by a mendicant who solicited an alms." [Pg 365]

"Probably so."

"Did he not hold out to thee the sign of the Rosy Cross, the token of our all-powerful fraternity of Rosicrucians?"

"I do remember such a signal; and furthermore, I drove him forth as an impostor and a pretender to forbidden arts."

"He showed thee the sign, and bade thee follow?"

"He did."

"And why was our summons disobeyed?"

"Because I have yet to learn what authority you possess either for my summons or detention."

"The brotherhood of the Red Cross are not disobeyed with impunity."

"I have heard of such a fraternity—as well too that they be idle cheats and lying impostors."

"We challenge not belief without sufficient testimony to the truth of our mission. In pity to man's

infirmity this indulgence is permitted. We unfold the hidden operations, the very arcana of Nature, whom we unclothe as it were to her very nakedness. Our doctrines thereby carry credence even to the most impious and unbelieving. Ere we command thy submission, it is permitted to behold some manifestation of our power. By means derived from the hidden essences of Nature, the first principles which renovate and govern all things, the very elements of which they consist, we arrive at the incorporeal essence called spirit, holding converse with it undebased, uninfluenced by the intervention of matter. Thus we converse in spirit with those that be absent, even though they were a thousand leagues apart."

"And what has this jargon to do with my being despatched hither?"

"Listen, and reply not; the purport will be vouchsafed to thee anon. We can compel the spirits even of the absent to come at our bidding by subtle spells that none have power to disobey. We too can renew and invigorate life, and by the universal solvent bring about the renovation of all things—renovation and decay being the two antagonist principles, as light and darkness. As we can make darkness light, and light darkness at our pleasure, so can we from decay bring forth life, and the contrary. Seest thou this dead body?"

A black curtain he had not hitherto observed was thrown aside, and he beheld the features of Grace Ashton, or he was strangely deceived. She was lying on a little couch, death visibly imprinted on her collapsed and sunken features. [Pg 366]

"Murderers! I will have ye dealt with for this outrage." Maddened almost to frenzy, he would have rushed towards her, but he was firmly holden by a power superior to his own.

"She is now in the first region of departed spirits," said the chief. "We have power to compel answer to our interrogatories. Listen, perverse mortal. We are well assured that a vast treasure is concealed hereabouts, hidden by the Knights of St John. 'Tis beyond our unassisted power to discover. We have asked counsel of one whom we dare not disobey, and she it is hath commanded that we cite thee and Grace Ashton to the tribunal of the Rosy Cross. This corporeal substance now before us, by reason of its intimate union with the spirit, purged from the dross of mortality, will answer any question that may be propounded, and will utter many strange and infallible prophecies. It will solve doubtful questions, and discourse of things past, present, and to come, seeing that she is now in spirit where all knowledge is perfect, and hath her eyes and understanding cleared from the gross film of our corruption. But as spirit only hath power over those of its own nature by the law of universal sympathy, so she answers but to those by whom she is bidden that are of the same temperament and affinity, which is shown by your affiance and love towards each other."

The prisoner heard this mystic harangue with a vacant and fixed expression, as though his mind were wandering, and he hardly understood the profundity of the discourse. Every feeling was absorbed in the conviction that some horrid incantation had for ever deprived him of his beloved. Then he fancied some imposition had been practised upon him. Being prevented from a closer examination, at length he felt some relief in the idea that the form he beheld might possibly be a counterfeit. He knew not what to say, and the speaker apparently waited his reply. Finding he was still silent, the former continued after a brief space:—

"Our questions to this purport must necessarily be propounded by thee. Art thou prepared?"

"Say on," said Gervase, determined to try the issue, however repugnant to his thoughts.

Two of them now arose and stood at each end of the couch. The superior first made the sign of the cross. He then drew a book from his girdle, and read therein a Latin exorcism against the intrusion of evil spirits into the body, commanding those only of a heavenly and benign influence to attend. He lighted a taper compounded of many strange ingredients emitting a fragrant odour, [Pg 367] and as the smoke curled heavily about him, flickering and indistinct, he looked like some necromancer about to perform his diabolical rites.

The occupant of that miserable couch lay still as death.

"The first question," cried out the chief; and he looked towards the prisoner, who was now suffered to approach within a few paces of the bed.

"Is there treasure in this place?"

Gervase tried to repeat the question, but his tongue clave to his mouth. For the first time probably in his life he felt the sensation of horrible, undefined, uncontrollable fear—that fear of the unknown and supernatural, that shrinking from spiritual intercourse even with those we have loved best. It seemed as though he were in communion with the invisible world—that awful, incomprehensible state of existence; and with beings whose power and essence are yet unknown, armed, in imagination, with attributes of terror and of vengeance.

With a desperate effort, however, he repeated the question. Breathless, and with intense agony, he awaited the response. It came! A voice, not from the lips of the recumbent victim, but as though it were some inward afflatus, hollow and sepulchral. The lips did not move, but the following reply was given:—

"There is."

Even the guilty confederates started back in alarm at the success of their own experiment. All

was, however, still—silent as before.

Taking courage, the next question was put in like manner.

"In what direction?"

"Under the main pillar of the south-eastern corner of the vault."

After another pause, the following questions were asked:—

"How may we obtain the treasure sought?"

"By diligence and perseverance."

"At what time?"

"When the moon hath trine to Mercury in the house of Saturn."

"Is it guarded?"

"It is."

"By whom?"

"By a power that shall crush you unless propitiated."

"Show us in what manner." [Pg 368]

"I may not; my lips are sealed. That power is superior to mine; the rest is hidden from me."

The treasure-seekers were silent, as though disappointed at this unexpected reply. Another attempt was, however, made.

"Shall we prosper in our undertaking?"

"My time is nigh spent. I beseech you that I may depart, for I am in great torment."

"Thou shall not, until thou answer."

"Beware!"

But this admonition was from another source, and in a different direction. The obscurity and smoke from the torches made it impossible to judge with any certainty whence the interruption proceeded.

Gervase started and turned round. It might be fancy, but he was confident the features of the Red Woman were present to his apprehension. Horrors were accumulating. Even the united brotherhood seemed to tremble as though in the presence of some being of whom they stood in awe. They awaited her approach in silence.

"Fool! Did I not warn thee to do *my* bidding only? And thou art hankering again, pampering thy cruel lust for gold. How darest thou question the maiden for this intent? Hence, and thank thy stars thou art not even now sent howling to thy doom!"

This terrible and mysterious woman came forward in great anger, and the Rosicrucian brotherhood were thereby in great alarm. "The maid is mine—begone!" said she, pointing the way.

Like slaves under their master's frown, they crouched before this fearful personification of their unhallowed and forbidden practices, and departed.

"Gervase Buckley," she cried, "thou art betrothed to the heiress of yon wide possessions."

"I am," said he, roused either to courage or desperation, even in the presence of a being whose power he felt conscious was not derived from one common source with his own.

"Dost thou confirm thy troth?"

"I do; in life and in death she is mine."

"Pledge thyself, body and soul, to her."

"I am hers whilst I live, body and soul. Nothing but death shall part us."

"On thy soul's hope thou wilt fulfil this pledge!" [Pg 369]

"I will." Gervase looked wistfully towards his beloved. The inanimate form was yet pale and still; but a vague hope possessed him that the witch would again quicken her.

"'Tis enough. But it must be sealed with blood!"

He felt her clammy hand on his arm, and a sharp pain as though from a puncture. He quickly withdrew it, and a blood-drop fell on the floor.

"Thou art mine—for ever!"

A loud yell rang through the vaults, and Gervase felt as though the doom of the lost spirits were his—that a whole troop of fiery demons had assailed him, and that he was borne away to the pit

of torment. Happily his recollection forsook him, and he became unconscious of future suffering.

PART THE SECOND.

Morning rose bright and ruddy above the hills. The elder Buckley was up and stirring betimes. Agreeably to his usual practice, he had retired early to bed, leaving the household cares and duties to his helpmate. He was sitting in the porch when his dame, with a disturbed and portentous aspect, accosted him:—

"I know not what hath come to the lad."

"Gervase—what of him?" said Nicholas, carelessly.

"He came home very late yesternight. But he did not speak, and he looked so wan and woe-begone that I verily thought he had seen a ghost or some uncanny thing yonder on his road home. I've just now been to rouse him, but he will not answer. Prithee go and get speech of him, good or bad. I think i' my heart the lad's bewitched."

Nicholas Buckley was a man of few words, especially in the presence of his helpmate, so he merely groaned out an incredulous wonder, and went off as he was bidden. He saw Gervase evidently under the influence of some stupefying spell. His eyes were open, but he noticed neither the question nor the person who accosted him. There was something so horrible and mysterious in his whole appearance that the good man felt alarmed, and went back to his dame with all possible expedition. What *could* have happened? They guessed, and made a thousand odd surmises, improbable enough the greater part, but all merging in the prevailing bugbear of the [Pg 370] day—witchcraft, which was resorted to as a satisfactory explanation under every possible difficulty. Had his malady any connection with the unexpected appearance of the Red Woman and the ring? It was safe buried, however, and that was a comfort. But after all, her thoughts always involuntarily recurred to this unpleasant subject. She could not shake off her suspicions, and there was little use in attempting further measures unless she could fight the Evil One with his own weapons. To this end, she began to cast about for some cunning wizard who might countervail the plots of this malicious witch.

Now at this period, Dr Dee, celebrated for his extraordinary revelations respecting the world of spirits, had been promoted by Queen Elizabeth (a firm believer in astrology and other recondite pursuits) to the wardenship of the Collegiate Church at Manchester. His fame had spread far and wide. He had not long been returned from his mission to the Emperor Rodolph at Prague, and his intercourse with invisible things was as firmly believed as the common occurrences of the day, and as well authenticated.

The character of Dee has both been underrated and misunderstood. By most, if not all, he has been looked upon merely as a visionary and an enthusiast—credulous and ambitious, without the power, though he had sufficient will, to compass the most mischievous designs. But under these outward weaknesses and superstitions, tinctured and modified by the prevailing belief in supernatural interferences, there was a bold and vigorous mind, frustrated, it is true, by circumstances which he could not control. Dee aimed at the entire change and subjugation of affairs, ecclesiastical and political, to the dominion of an unseen power—a theocracy or millennium—himself the sole medium of communication, the high priest and lawgiver. To this end he sought the alliance and support of foreign potentates; and his diary, published by Casaubon, the original of which is in the British Museum, is a remarkable and curious detail of the intrigues resorted to for this purpose. His mission to the Emperor Rodolph, offering him the sceptre of universal dominion, is told with great minuteness; and there is little doubt that Elizabeth herself did not disdain to converse and consult with him on this extraordinary project. Her visits to his house at Mortlake are well known. He had been consulted as to a favourable day for her coronation, and received many splendid promises of preferment that were never realised. At [Pg 371] length, disappointed and hopeless as to the success of his once daring expectations, he settled down to the only piece of preferment within his reach—to wit, the wardenship of the Collegiate Church of Manchester, where he arrived with his family in the beginning of February 1596. His advice and assistance were much resorted to, and particularly in cases of supposed witchcraft and demoniacal possession—articles of unshaken belief at that period with all but speculatists and optimists, the Sadducees of their day and generation. His chief colleague throughout his former revelations had been one Edward Kelly, born at Worcester, where he practised as an apothecary. In his diary Dee says they were brought together by the ministration of the angel Uriel. He was called Kelly the Seer. This faculty of "*seeing*" by means of a magic crystal not being possessed by the Doctor, he was obliged to have recourse to Kelly, who had, or pretended to have, this rare faculty. Afterwards, however, he found out that Kelly had deceived him; those spirits which ministered at his bidding not being messengers from the Deity, as he once supposed, but lying spirits sent to deceive and to betray.

Kelly was an undoubted impostor, though evidently himself a believer in magic and the black art. Addicted to diabolical and mischievous practices, he was a fearful ensample of those deluders

given up to their own inventions to believe the very lies wherewith they attempted to deceive.

He was a great treasure-hunter and invoker of demons, and it is said would not scruple to have recourse to the most disgusting brutalities for the gratification of his avarice and debauchery. In Weaver's *Funereal Monuments*, it is recorded that Kelly, in company with one Paul Waring, went to the churchyard of Walton-le-Dale, near Preston, where a person was interred at that time supposed to have hidden a large sum of money, and who had died without disclosing the secret. They entered precisely at midnight, the grave having been pointed out to them the preceding day. They dug down to the coffin, opened it, and exorcised the spirit of the deceased, until the body rose from the grave and stood upright before them. Having satisfied their inquiries, it is said that many strange predictions were uttered concerning divers persons in the neighbourhood, which were literally and remarkably fulfilled.

At the date of our legend Kelly had been parted from the Doctor for a considerable time. The [Pg 372] Doctor having found out his proneness to these evil courses, Kelly bore no good-will to his former patron and associate.

We have not space, or it would be an interesting inquiry, as connected with the superstitions of our ancestors, to trace the character and career of these individuals—men once famous amongst their contemporaries, forming part of the history of those times, and exerting a permanent influence immediately on the national character, and remotely on that of a future and indefinite period.

Dame Eleanor Buckley was morally certain, firstly, that her son was witched; and secondly, that no time should be lost in procuring relief. Nicholas therefore took horse for Manchester that very forenoon, with the intention of consulting the learned Doctor above-named on his son's malady. Ere he left, however, there came tidings that Grace Ashton had not returned home, and was supposed to have tarried at Buckley for the night.

Trembling at this unexpected news, the dame once more applied to her son. He was still wide awake on the couch, in the same position, and apparently unconscious of her presence. In great anxiety she conjured him to say if he knew what had befallen Grace Ashton.

"She is dead!" was his reply, in a voice strangely altered from his usual careless and happy tone. Nothing further, however, could be drawn from him, but shortly after there came one with additional tidings.

"Inquiry has been set on foot," said the messenger, "and Tim, well known at wakes and merry-makings, doth come forward with evidence which justifies a suspicion that is abroad—to wit, that she has met death by some unfair dealing; and further, he scruples not to throw out dark and mysterious hints that implicate your son as being privy to her disappearance."

At this unlooked-for intelligence the mother's fortitude gave way. Tribulation and anguish had indeed set in upon them like a flood. The ring, so unaccountably brought back by the Red Woman, was beyond doubt the cause of all their misfortunes—its reappearance, as she anticipated, being the harbinger of misery. What should be the next arrow from her quiver she trembled to forebode. But in the midst of this fever of doubt and apprehension one hope sustained her, and that was the result of her husband's mission to Dr Dee, who would doubtless find out the nature of the spell, and relieve them from its curse. [Pg 373]

Let us follow the traveller to Dee's lodgings in the Deanery, where at that time this renowned astrologer was located. Nicholas Buckley found him sitting in a small dismal-looking study, where he was introduced with little show either of formality or hesitation. The Doctor was now old, and his sharp, keen, grey eyes had suffered greatly by reason of rheum and much study. Pale, but of a pleasant countenance, his manner, if not so grave and sedate as became one of his deep and learned research, yet displaying a vigour and vivacity the sure intimation of that quenchless ardour, the usual concomitant of all who are destined to eminence, or to any conspicuous part in the age on which they are thrown;—not idle worthless weeds on the strand of time, but landmarks or beacons in the ocean of life, to warn or to direct.

He was short in stature, and somewhat thin. A rusty black velvet cap, without ornament, surmounted his forehead, from which a few straggling grey hairs crept forth, rivalling his pale, thoughtful brow in whiteness.

He sat in a curiously embossed chair, with a brown-black leathern cushion, beside an oaken table or tressel, groaning under the weight of many ponderous volumes of all hues and subjects. Divers and occult were the tractates there displayed, and unintelligible save to the initiated. Alchemy was just then his favourite research, and he was vainly endeavouring to master the jargon under which its worthlessness and folly were concealed.

Nicholas Buckley related his mishap, and, as far as he was able, the circumstances connected with it. The Doctor then erected a horoscope for the hour. After consulting this, he said—

"I will undertake for thee, if so be that my poor abilities, hitherto sorely neglected, and I may say despised, can bring thee any succour. Indeed the land groans by reason of the sin of witchcraft—a noisome plague now infesting this afflicted realm, and a grievous scandal to the members and ministers of our Reformed Church. The ring is of a surety bewitched, and by one more powerful and wicked than thou canst possibly imagine. I tell thee plainly, that unless the charm be broken, the recovery of the young man were vain—nay, in all likelihood, thine own ruin will be the result."

The merchant groaned audibly at this doleful news. He thought upon his merchandise and his adventures o'er sea—his treasures and his argosies, committed to the tender mercies of the deep; and he recounted them in brief. [Pg 374]

"Cannot these be rescued from such disaster?" inquired he dolefully.

"I know not yet," was the reply. "Saturn, that hath his location here, governing these expected treasures, now beholds the seventh house of the figure I have just erected with a quartile aspect. They be evil tokens, but as regards this same Mother Red-Cap or the Red Woman, who hath doubtless brought you into grievous trouble, I know her. Nay, look not incredulous. How, it is not needful to inquire. Suffice it that she hath great power, through from a different source from mine. She is of the Rosicrucian order, one of the sisters, of which there are five throughout Europe and Asia. They have intercourse with spirits, communicating too with each other, though at never so great a distance, by means of this mystical agency. She hath been here, ay, even in the very place where thou sittest."

The visitor started from his chair.

"And I am not ignorant of her devices. She is of a papistical breed; and the recusant priests, if I mistake not, are at the working of some diabolical plot; it may be against the life and government of our gracious Queen! They would employ the devil himself, if need were, to compass their intent. She hath travelled much, and doubtless hath learned marvellous secrets from the Moors and Arabian doctors. It is, however, little to the purpose at present that we continue this discourse. What more properly concerns thee is how to get rid of this grievous visitation, which, unless removed, will of a surety fall out to thine undoing. By prayer and fasting much may be accomplished, together with the use of all lawful means for thy release."

"Alas!" said Buckley, "I fear me there is little hope of a favourable issue, and I may not be delivered from this wicked one!"

"Be of good heart; we will set to work presently, and, if it be possible, counterplot this cunning witch. But to this end it is needful that I visit the young man, peradventure we may gather tidings of her. I know not any impediment to my journey this very day. Ay! even so," said he, poring over some unimaginable diagrams. "Good! there is a marvellous proper aspect for our enterprise thirty minutes after midnight. Thou hast doubtless taken horse with thy servant hither. I will take his place and bear thee company."

The Doctor was soon equipped for travel, much to the comfort of the afflicted applicant, who was like to have taken his departure with a sorry heart, and in great disquietude. On their arrival at Buckley, Dee would needs see the patient instantly. No change had taken place since morning, and he still refused any sustenance that might be offered. The Doctor examined him narrowly, but refrained from pronouncing on his case. [Pg 375]

It was now evening. The sun shot a languid and fitful ray athwart the vapours gathering to receive him, and its light shone on the full couch of the invalid. The astrologer was sitting apart, in profound meditation. Dame Eleanor suddenly roused him.

"He has just asked for the Red Woman," said she, "and I heard him bemoaning himself, saying that he is betrothed to her, and that she will come ere long to claim his pledge. Hark, he mutters again!"

Dee immediately went to the bedside.

"I did not kill her," said the victim, shuddering. He dashed the cold sweat from his forehead with some violence. He then started up. "Is she come?" said he in a low, hollow voice, and he sat up in the attitude of intense expectation. "Not yet, not yet," he uttered with great rapidity, and sank down again as though exhausted.

A stormy and lowering sky now gathered above the sun's track, and the chamber suddenly grew dark. The inmates looked as though expecting some terrific, some visible manifestation of their tormentor. Dee looked out through the window. There was nothing worthy of remark, save an angry heap of clouds, rolling and twisting together—the sure forerunner of a tempest.

"The whole country is astir," said Dame Eleanor. "They are seeking for the body of Grace Ashton in pits and secret places. Woe is me that I should live to see the day;—the poor lad there is loaden with curses, and fearful threatenings are uttered against us. We are verily in jeopardy of our lives."

Hereat she fell a-weeping, and truly it was piteous to behold.

"We must first get an answer from him," said the Doctor, "ere measures can be devised for his recovery."

"'Tis said there will be a warrant for his apprehension on the morrow," said the elder Buckley.

"There is some terrible perplexing mystery, if not knavery, in this matter," said Dee; "and I have been thinking—nay, I more than suspect—that rascal Kelly hath a hand in it. He is ever hankering after forbidden arts, and many have fallen the innocent victims to his diabolical intrigues. He hath become a great adept of late, too, as I am told, in this Rosicrucian philosophy; and if we have here a clue to our labyrinth, depend on it we'll get to the end speedily. To spite and frustrate that juggling cheat I will spare neither pains nor study; though of a surety we only use [Pg 376]

lawful and appointed means. Prayers and exorcisms must be resorted to, and help craved from a higher source than theirs."

At length the forms and usages generally resorted to on such occasions were entered upon. Loud and fervent were the responses, continuing even to a late hour, but without producing any change.

The wind, hitherto rushing only in short fierce gusts through the valley, now gathered in loud heavy lunges against the corner of the house, almost extinguishing the solitary light on the table near to which Dee sat; the casements rattled, and the whole fabric shook as they passed by. At length there came a lull, fearful in its very silence, as though the elements were gathering strength for one mighty onslaught. On it came like an overwhelming surge, and for a moment threatened them with immediate destruction. Dust, pebbles, and dead branches were flung on the window, as though bursting through, to the great terror of the inmates. Again it drew back, and there was stillness so immediate, it was even more appalling than the loudest assaults of the tempest. The household, too, were silent. Even Dee was evidently disturbed, and as though in expectation of some extraordinary occurrence.

A sharp quick tapping was heart at the casement.

"What is that?" was the general inquiry. Gervase evidently heard it too, and was apparently listening.

Dee arose. He went slowly towards the window, as if carefully scrutinising what might present itself. He put his face nearly close to the glass, and manifestly beheld some object which caused him to draw back. His forehead became puckered by intense emotion, either from surprise or alarm. He put one finger on his brow, as though taking counsel from his own thoughts, deliberating for a moment what course to pursue. At length, much to the astonishment of his companions, he opened the latch of the casement, when, with a dismal croak, a raven came hopping in. With outstretched wings he jumped down on the floor, and would have gone direct to the bed, but the Doctor caught him, and by main force held him back. [Pg 377]

Fluttering and screaming, the bird made every effort to escape, but not before Dee was aware of a label tied round his neck. This he quickly detached; after which the winged messenger flew back through the open window, either having finished his errand, or not liking his entertainment. Dee opened the billet—a bit of parchment—and out dropped the ring! In the envelope was a mystical scroll, encompassed with magic emblems, wherein was written the following doggerel, either in blood or coloured so as to represent it:—

"By this ring a charm is wound,
Rolling darkly round and round,
Ne'er beginning—ending never;
Woe betide this house for ever!
Thou art mine through life—in death
I'll receive thy latest breath.
Plighted is thy vow to me,
Mine thy doom, thy destiny,
Sealed with blood; this endless token,
Like the spell, shall ne'er be broken."

Alarm was but too legible on the Doctor's brow. He was evidently taken by surprise. He read it aloud, while fearful groans responded from the victim.

"'Tis a case of grievous perplexity," said he, "and I am sore distraught. If he have sworn his very soul to her, as this rhyme doth seem to intimate, I am miserably afflicted for his case. Doubtless 'tis some snare which hath unwillingly been thrown about him. Nevertheless, I will diligently and warily address myself to the task, and Heaven grant us a safe deliverance. Yet I freely own there is both danger and extremity in the attempt. She will doubtless appear and claim the fulfilment of his pledge. But I must cope with her alone; none else may witness the conflict. It is not the first time that I have battled with the powers of darkness."

"But what motive hath she for this persecution? it is not surely out of sheer malice," said the dame, weeping.

"Belike not," replied Dee thoughtfully. "It doth savour of those incantations whereof I oft read in diverse tractates, whereby she expects to gain advantage or deliverance if she sacrifice another victim to the demon whereunto she hath sold herself. Indeed, we hear of some whose tenure of life can only be renewed by the yearly substitution of another; and it is to this possible danger that our feeble efforts must be directed. But I trust in aid stronger than the united hosts of the Prince of Darkness. This very night, I doubt not, will come the final struggle." [Pg 378]

The wind was now still, but ever and anon bursts of hail hurtled on the window. Thunder growled in the distance, waxing louder and louder, until its roar might have appalled the stoutest heart.

With many anxious wishes and admonitions the distressed parents left the Doctor to himself.

He took from his pocket an hour-glass, a Bible, and a Latin translation from the Arabic, being a treatise on witches, genii, demons, and the like, together with their symbols, method of invocation, and many other subjects equally useful. Intent on his studies, he hardly looked aside save for the purpose of turning the glass, when he immediately became absorbed as before.

Now and then he cast a glance towards the bed. His patient lay perfectly quiet, but the Doctor fancied he was listening.

About midnight he heard a groan; he shut his book, and, looking aside, beheld the terrible eye and aspect of the Red Woman glaring fiercely upon him. She had in all likelihood been concealed somewhere within hearing; for a closet-door, on one side of the chamber, stood open as though she had just issued from it.

With great presence of mind he adjured her that she should declare her errand.

"I am here on my master's business; mine errand concerns not thee," was the reply. Her terrible eyes glanced, as she spoke, towards the bed where the unfortunate Gervase Buckley lay writhing as though in torment.

"By what compact or agreement is he thine, foul sorceress? Knowest thou not that there are bounds beyond which ye cannot prevail?"

"He hath sworn—the compact is sealed with blood, and must be fulfilled. I am here to claim mine own; and it is at thy peril thou prevent me."

"I fear thee not, but am prepared to withstand *thee* and all thy works."

"Beware! There's a black drop in thine own cup," said she. "Thou thyself hast sought counsel by forbidden arts, and I can crush thee in a moment."

Dee looked as though vanquished on the sudden. He was not altogether clear from this charge, having, though at Kelly's instigation, been led somewhat farther than was advisable into practices [Pg 379] which in his heart he condemned. He, however, now felt convinced that Kelly had some hand in the business, knowing, too, that he would associate with the most wicked and abandoned, if so be that he might compass his greedy and unhallowed desire.

"Depart whilst thou may," she continued. "I warn thee. Yonder inheritance is mine, though the silly damsel they have lost be the reputed heir. Aforetime I have told thee. Wronged of our rights, I have sold myself—ay, body and soul—for revenge! By unjust persecutions we have been proscribed, those of the true faith have been forced to fly, and even our lands and our patrimony given to yon graceless heretics."

"But why persecute this unoffending house?—they have not done *thee* wrong."

"It is commanded—the doom must be fulfilled. One condition only was appointed. A hard task, to wit—but what cannot power and ingenuity compass?—'When one shall pledge himself thine and for ever, then the inheritance thou seekest is thine also, which none shall take from thee. But he too must be rendered up to me.' This was the doom! 'Tis fulfilled. He hath pledged himself body and soul, and that ring, if need be, is witness to his troth."

"Is Grace Ashton living or dead?" inquired Dee, with a firm and penetrating glance.

"When he hath surrendered to his pledge it shall be told thee."

"Wicked sorceress," said the Doctor, rising in great anger, "he shall not be thy victim; thine arts shall be countervailed. The powers of darkness are not, in the end, permitted to prevail, though for a time their devices seem to prosper. Listen, and answer me truly, or I will compel thee in such wise that thou darest not disobey. Was there none other condition to thy bond?"

The weird woman here broke forth into a laugh so wild and scornful that the arch-fiend himself could hardly have surpassed it in malice.

"Fret not thyself," she said, "and I will tell thee. Know, then, I am scathless from all harm until that feeble ring shall be able to bind me; none other bonds may prevail."

"This ring bind thee?"

"Even so; and as a blade of grass I could rend it! Judge, then, of my safety. Fire, air, and water— [Pg 380] all the elements—cannot have the power to hurt me; I hold a charmed life. The price is paid!"

Dee looked curiously round the little thin ring which he held, and indeed it were hopeless to suppose so frail a fetter could restrain her.

"Thou hast told me the truth?"

"I have—on my hope of prospering in this pursuit of our patrimony."

"And what is thy purpose with the lad?"

"I have need of him. He is my hostage to him whom I serve."

"Thou wilt not take him by force!"

"I will not. He will follow whithersoever I lead. He has neither will nor power to disobey."

"Grant a little space, I prithee. 'Tis a doleful doom for one so young."

"To-morrow my time hath expired. Either he or I must be surrendered to"——Here she pointed downwards.

"Agreed. To-morrow at this hour. We will be prepared."

The witch unwillingly departed as she came. The closet-door was shut as with a violent gust of wind, after which Dee sat pondering deeply on the matter, but unable to come to any satisfactory conclusion. He never suspected for one moment what in this evil and matter-of-fact generation would have occurred even to the most credulous—to wit, that either insanity or fanaticism, aided by fortuitous events, if we may so speak, was the cause of this delusion, at least to the unhappy woman now the object of Dee's most abstruse speculations. His thoughts, however, would often recur to his quondam associate, Kelly, and, if in the neighbourhood, which he suspected, an interview with him might possibly be of use, and afford some clue to guide their proceedings.

Committing himself to a short repose, he determined to make diligent search for this mischievous individual—having comforted in some measure the unhappy couple below stairs, who were in a state of great apprehension lest their son had already fallen a victim, and were ready to give up all for lost.

Early on the ensuing day the Doctor bent his steps towards Clegg Hall, whence the old family of that name had been dispossessed, and from whom that mysterious individual, the Red Woman, claimed descent.

The air was fresh and bracing after the night's tempest. Traces of its fury, however, were plainly [Pg 381] visible. Huge trees had been swept down, as though some giant hand had crushed them. Rising the hill towards Belfield, he stayed a moment to look round him. There was something in the loneliness and desertion of the spot that was congenial to his thoughts. The rooks cawed round their ancient inheritance, but all was ruin and disorder. His curiosity was excited; he had sufficient local knowledge to remember it was once an establishment of the Knights of St John some centuries before, and he remembered too, that according to vulgar tradition, great riches were buried somewhere in the vaults. A thought struck him that it was not an unlikely spot for the operations of Master Kelly. Impressed with this idea, a notion was soon engendered that his errand need not carry him farther. He drew near to the ivied archway beneath the tower. The mavis whistled for its mate, and the sparrow chirped amongst the foliage. All else was silent and apparently deserted. He entered the gateway. Inside, on the right hand, was a narrow flight of steps, and, impelled by curiosity, he clambered, though with some difficulty, into a dilapidated chamber above. Here the loopholes were covered with ivy, but it was unroofed, and the floor was strewn with rubbish, the accumulation of ages. Through a narrow breach at one corner he saw what had once been a concealed passage, evidently piercing the immense thickness of the walls, and leading probably to some secret chambers not ordinarily in use. He now heard voices below, and taking advantage thereby, crept into the passage, probably expecting to gather some news by listening to the visitors if they approached. Two of these ascended the broken steps, and every word was audible from his place of concealment. He instantly recognised the voice of Kelly. The other was a stranger.

"Ah, ah! old Mother Red-Cap, I tell thee, says we can never get the treasure. By this good spade, and a willing arm to wit, the gold is mine ere two hours older," said Kelly.

"I am terribly afeard o' these same boggarts," replied his companion. "T'owd an—'ll come sure enough among us, sure as my name's Tim, some time or another."

"Never fear, nunkey; thee knows what a lump I've promised thee; an' as for the old one, trust me for that; I can lay him in the Red Sea at any time. Haven't I and that old silly Doctor, who pretends, forsooth, to have conscience qualms when there's aught to be gotten, though as fond o' the stuff as any of us—haven't we, I say, by conjurations and fumigations, raised and laid a whole [Pg 382] legion o' them? Why, man, I'm as well acquainted with the kingdom of Beelzebub, and his ministers to boot, as I am with my own."

"Don't make sich an ugly talk about 'em, prithee, good sir. I thought I heard some'at there i' the passage, an' I think i' my heart I darna face 'em again for a' th' gowd i' th' monk's cellar."

"Tush, fool! If we get hold on 't now it shall be ours, and none o' the rest of our brethren o' the Red Cross need share, thee knows. But thou be'st but newly dubbed an' hardly initiated yet in our sublime mysteries. Nevertheless, I will be indifferent honest too, and for thy great services to us and to our cause I do promise thee a largess when it comes to our fingers—that is to say, one-fifth to thee, and one-fifth to me; the other three shares do go to the general treasure-house of the community, of which I take half."

"A goodly portion, marry—but I'd liefer 't not gang ony farther."

"Villain! thou art bent on treachery; if thou draw back I'll ha' thee hanged or otherwise punished for what thou hast done. Remember, knave, thou art in my power."

The guilty victim groaned piteously, but he was irretrievably entangled. The toils had been spread by a master-hand. He saw the gulf to which he was hurried, but could not extricate himself.

"Yonder women, plague take 'em," said Tim; "what's up now? I know this owd witch who's sold hersel' to—to—Blackface I'm afeard, is th' owner o' many a good rood o' land hereabout, an' t'owd Ha' too, wi' its 'purtenances. But she's brought fro' Spain or Italy, as I be tou'd, a main lot o' these same priest gear; an' they're lurkin' hereabout like, loike rabbits in a warren, till she can get rid o' these Ashtons. Mony a year long past I've seen her prowling about, but she never could

get her ends greadly till now."

"By my help she shall," said Kelly; "it's a bargain between us. She's brought her grandchildren too, who left England in their youth, being educated in a convent o'er seas. They're just ready to drop into possession."

"But poor Grace Ashton; she's gi'en me mony a dish of hot porritch an' bannocks. She shauna be hurt if I can help it."

"Fool!—the wench must be provided for. Look thee—if she get away, she'll spoil all. When dead, young Buckley must be charged with the murder." [Pg 383]

"Weel, weel; but I'll ha' nought more to do wi 't. E'en tak' your own fling—I'll wash my hands on't altogether, an' so"——

"I want help, thou chicken-faced varlet—come, budge—to thy work; we may have helpers to the booty, if time be lost."

"Mercy on us!" said Tim, in great dolour, "I wish I had ne'er had aught to do wi' treasure-hunting an' sich-like occupation. If ever I get rid of this job, if I don't stick to my old trade, hang me up to dry."

"Hold thy peace, carrion! and remember, should a whisper even escape thee, I will have thee hanged in good earnest."

"Ay, ay; just like Satan 'ticing to iniquity, an' then, biggest rogue al'ays turns retriever."

"None o' thy pretences: thou hast as liquorish a longing after the gold as any miser in the parish, and when the broad pieces and the silver nobles jingle in thy fob, thoul't forget thy qualms, and thank me into the bargain. Now to work. Let me see, what did the sleeping beauty say? Humph—'Under the main pillar at the south-east corner.' Good. Nay, man, don't light up yet. Let us get fairly underground first, for fear of accidents."

To the great alarm of Dr Dee, who heard every word, these two worthies came straight towards the opening. He drew on one side at a venture. Luckily it proved the right one; they proceeded up the passage in the opposite direction. He heard them groping at the further end. A trap-door was evidently raised, and he was pretty well convinced they had found the way to the vaults; probably it had been blocked up for ages until recently, and in all likelihood Tim had pointed it out, as well as the notion that treasure was concealed somewhere in these labyrinths.

How to make this discovery in some way subservient to his mission was the next consideration; and with a firm conviction, generally the forerunner of success, he determined to employ some bold stratagem for their detection. They were now fairly in the trap, and he hoped to make sure of the vermin. For this end he cautiously felt his way to the opposite extremity of the passage, where he found the floor emitted a hollow sound. This was assuredly the entrance; but he tried in vain—it resisted every effort. Here, however, he determined to keep watch and seize them if possible on their egress, trusting to his good fortune or his courage for help in any emergency that might ensue. At times he laid his ear to the ground, but nothing was audible as to their [Pg 384] operations below. This convinced him they were at a considerable distance from the entry, but he felt assured that ere long they must emerge from their den, when, taken by surprise, he should have little difficulty in securing the first that came forth, keeping fast the door until he had made sure of his captive.

He watched patiently for some time, when all on a sudden he heard a rumbling subterraneous noise, and he plainly felt the ground tremble under his feet. A loud shriek was heard below, and presently footsteps approaching the entrance. He had scarcely time to draw aside ere the door was burst open, and some one rushed forth. The Doctor seized him by the throat, and ere he had recovered from his consternation, dragged him out of the passage.

"Villain! what is it ye are plotting here about? Confess, or I'll have thee dealt with after thy deserts."

"Oh!—I'll—tell—all—I will"—sobbed out the delinquent, gasping with terror. Tim, for it was none other, fell on his knees crying for mercy. "Whoever thou art," continued he, "come and help—help for one that's fa'n under a heavy calamity. Bad though he be, we maunna let him perish for lack o' lookin' after."

"Hast got a light, knave?"

"I'll run an' fetch one."

"Nay, nay; we part not company until better acquainted. Is there not a candle below?"

"Alas! 'tis put out—and—oh! I'd forgotten; here's t' match-box i' my pocket."

He drew forth the requisite materials, and they were soon equipped, exploring the concealed chambers we have before described. With difficulty they now found their way, by reason of the dust arising from the recent catastrophe. Dee followed cautiously on, keeping a wary eye on his leader lest some deceit or stratagem should be intended.

They now approached a heap of ruins almost choking the entrance to the larger vault. He thought groans issued from beneath.

"He's not dead yet," said Tim. "Here, here, good sir; help me to shift this stone first."

They set to work in good earnest, and, with no little difficulty and delay, at length succeeded in releasing the unfortunate treasure-hunter. Eager to possess the supposed riches, they had [Pg 385] incautiously undermined one of the main supports of the roof, and Kelly was buried under the ruins. Fortunately he lay in the hollow he had made, otherwise nothing but a miracle could have saved him from immediate death. He was terribly bruised, nevertheless, and presented a pitiable spectacle. Bleeding and sore wounded, he was hardly sensible as they bore him out into the fresh air. Apparently unable to move, they laid him on the ground until help could be obtained. In a while he recovered.

"Thou art verily incorrigible," said the Doctor to his former associate. "Where is the maiden ye have so cruelly conveyed away?"

But Kelly was dogged, and would not answer.

"I have heard and know all," continued Dee; "so that, unless thou wilt confess, assuredly I will have thee lodged in the next jail on accusation of the murder. Thy diabolical practices will sooner or later bring thee to punishment."

"Promise not to molest me," said Kelly, who feared nothing but the strong arm of the law, so utterly was he given over to a reprobate mind, even to commit iniquity with greediness.

"What! and let thee forth to compass other and maybe more heinous mischief! I promise nothing, save that thou be prevented from such pursuits. Thou hast entered into covenant with the woman whom it is our purpose in due time to deliver up to the secular arm. You think to compass your mutual ends by this compact; but be assured your schemes shall be frustrated, and that speedily."

At this Kelly again fell into a sulky mood, maimed and helpless though he was; and revenge, dark and deadly, distorted his visage.

Tim here stepped forward.

"I do repent me of this iniquity, an' if ever I'm catched meddling wi' sich tickle gear again, I'll gie ye leave to hang me up without judge or jury."

"The best proof of repentance is restitution," said the Doctor. "Knowest thou aught of the maiden?"

"I'll find her, if ye can keep that noisome wizard frae hurting me. He swears that if I tell, e'en by nods, winks, or otherwise, he'll send me to —— in a whirlwind."

"I will give thee my pledge, not a hair of thy head shall be damaged."

"He has the key in his pocket."

"What of that?" [Pg 386]

"It's the key to the old house door yonder, an' she's either there or but lately fetched away."

The Doctor proceeded, though not without opposition, to the search. The key was soon produced, and accompanied by the repentant ballad-monger, he approached the mansion, which, as we have before noticed, was near at hand, apparently untenanted.

"Yonder knave, I think, cannot escape," said Dee.

"No, no," said his conductor, "unless some'at fetches him; he's too well hampered for that. His legs are aw smashed wi' that downfa'."

They entered a little court almost choked up with leaves and long grass. The door was unlocked, and a desolate scene presented itself. The hall was covered with damp and mildew—all was rotting in ruin and decay. Tim led the way up-stairs. The same appearances were still manifest. The dark shadow of death seemed to brood there—an interminable silence. They entered a small closet, nearly dark; and here, on a miserable pallet, lay the form of Grace Ashton, now, alas! pale and haggard. She seemed altogether unconscious of their presence. The horrible events of the preceding night had brought on mental as well as bodily disease. It was the practice of these treasure-seekers either to raise up a dead body for the desired information, or to throw the living into such a state of mental hallucination that they should answer dark and difficult questions whilst in that condition. It not unfrequently happened, however, that the unfortunate victims to these horrid rites either lost their lives or their reason during the experiment.

We will not pursue the recital in the present case: suffice it to say, that Grace Ashton was immediately removed and placed under the care of her friends; the Doctor went back to Kelly for further disclosures, but what was his surprise to find that by some means or another he had escaped. He now lost no time in returning to Buckley, communicating the painful, though in some degree welcome, intelligence that Grace Ashton had been rescued from her persecutors.

It was now time to adopt measures for their reception of the witch, who would doubtless not fail in her appointment.

Dee was yet in doubt as to the issue, and he thought it needful to acquaint them with the only method by which the spell could be broken. How it were possible that the ring should ever bind

her was a mystery that at present he could not solve. Dame Eleanor listened very attentively, then sharply replied— [Pg 387]

"I have heard o' this charm aforetime, or——By'r lady, but I have it!"

She almost capered for joy.

We will not, however, anticipate the result, but entreat our readers to suspend their guesses, and again accompany us to the chamber where lay the heir of Buckley, still grievously tormented.

Midnight again approached. Dee was sitting at the table, apparently in deep study. He had examined the closet, and found it communicated by another passage to an outer door; and it was through this that the Red Woman had contrived to enter without being observed. The learned Doctor was evidently awaiting her approach with no little anxiety. Once or twice he fancied some one tapped at the casement, but it was only the wind rushing by in stormy gusts, increasing in strength and frequency as the time drew nigh.

Hark! was not that a distant shriek? It might be the creaking of the boughs and the old yew-tree by the door, thought Dee; and again, in a while, he relapsed into a profound reverie. Another! He heard the jarring of rusty hinges; a heavy step; and—the Red Woman stood beside him; but with such a malevolent aspect that he was somewhat startled and uneasy at her presence.

"I am beguiled of my prey!—mocked—thwarted. But beware, old man; thy meddling may prove dangerous. I will possess the inheritance, though every earthly power withstood me! That boy is mine. He hath sworn it—sealed it with his heart's blood—and I demand the pledge." The victim groaned. "Hearest thou that response? 'Tis an assent. He is mine in spite of your stratagems."

This was probably but the raving of a disordered intellect, but Dee was too deeply imbued with the superstitions of the age to suppose for a moment that it was not a case of undisguised witchcraft, or that this wicked hag was not invested with sufficient power to execute whatever either anger or caprice might suggest.

"What is thy will with the wretched victim thou hast ensnared?" he inquired.

"I have told thee."

"Thou wilt not convey him away bodily to his tormentors?"

"Unless they have a victim the inheritance may not be mine." She said this with such a fiendish malice that made even the exorcist tremble. His presence of mind, however, did not forsake him. [Pg 388]

"The ring—I remember—there was a condition in the bond. In all such compacts there is ever a loophole for escape."

"None that thou canst creep through," she said, with a look of scorn.

"It is not permitted that the children of men be tempted above measure."

"When that ring shall have strength to bind me, and not till then. All other bonds I rend asunder. Even adamant were as flaming tow."

"Here is a ring of stout iron," said Dee, pointing to an iron ring fixed by a stout staple in the wall. "I think it would try thy boasted strength."

"I could break it as the feeble reed."

The Doctor shook his head incredulously.

"Try me. Thou shall find it no empty boast."

She seemed proud that her words should be put to the test; and even proposed that her arms should be pinioned, and her body fastened with stout cords to the iron ring which had been prepared for this purpose.

"Thou shalt soon find which is the strongest," said she, exultingly. "I have broken bonds ere now to which these are but as a thread."

She looked confident of success, and surveyed the whole proceeding with a look of unutterable scorn.

"Now do thy worst, thou wicked one," said Dee, when he had finished.

But lo! a shriek that might have wakened the dead. She was unable to extricate herself, being held in spite of the most desperate efforts to escape. With a loud yell she cried out—

"Thou hast played me false, demon!"

"'Tis not thy demon," said Dee; "it is I that have circumvented thee. In that iron ring is concealed the charmed one, wrought out by a cunning smith to this intent—to wit, the deliverance of a persecuted house."

The Red Woman now appeared shorn of her strength. Her charms and her delusions were dispelled. She sank into the condition of a hopeless, wretched maniac, and was for some time closely confined to this chamber.

Buckley, recovering soon after, was united to Grace Ashton, who, it is confidently asserted, and perhaps believed, was restored to immediate health when the charm was broken.

THE DEATH-PAINTER;

[Pg 389]

OR, THE SKELETON'S BRIDE.

"This will hardly keep body and soul together," said Conrad Bergmann, as he eyed with a dissatisfied countenance some score of dingy kreutzers thrust into his palm by a "patron of early genius,"—one of those individuals who take great merit to themselves by just keeping their victims in that enviable position between life and death, between absolute starvation and hopeless, abject poverty, which effectually represses all efforts to excel, controls and quenches all but longings after immortality—who just fan the flame to let it smoke and quiver in the socket, but sedulously prevent it rising to any degree of steadiness and brilliance.

Conrad that morning had taken home a picture, his sole occupation for two months, and this patron, a dealer in the "fine arts," dwelling in the good, quiet city of Mannheim, had given him a sum equivalent to thirty-six shillings sterling for his labour. Peradventure, it was not in the highest style of art; but what Schwartzen Bären or Weisse Rösse—Black Bears, White Horses, Spread Eagles, and the like, the meanest, worst-painted signs in the city—would not have commanded a higher price?

In fact, Conrad had just genius enough to make himself miserable—to wit, by aspiring after those honours it was impossible to attain, keeping him thereby in a constant fret and disappointment, instead of being content with his station, or striving for objects within his reach. Could he have drudged on as some dauber of sign-posts, or taken to useful employment, he might doubtless have earned a comfortable sustenance. He had, however, like many another child of genius, a soul above such vulgarities; yearning after the ideal and the vain; having too much genius for himself and too little for the world; suspended in a sort of Mahomet's coffin between earth and heaven—contemned, rejected, by "gods, men, and columns."

Conrad Bergmann was about two-and-twenty, of good figure and well-proportioned features, complexion fair, bright bluish-grey eyes, whiskers well matched with a pale, poetical, it might be [Pg 390] sickly hue of countenance, and an expression more inclining to melancholy than persons of such mean condition have a right to assume. His father had brought him up to a trade—an honest thriving business—to wit, that of *knopfmacher* (button-maker). But Conrad, the youngest, and his mother's favourite, happened to be indulged with more idle time than the rest, which, for the most part, was laudably expended in scrawling sundry hideous representations—all manner of things on walls and wainscots. Persevering in this occupation he was forthwith pronounced a genius. About the age of fifteen, Conrad saw a huge "St Christopher," by a native artist, and straightway his destiny was fixed. He struggled on for some years with little success save being pronounced by the gossips "marvellously clever." His performances wanted that careful and elaborate course of study indispensable even to the most exalted genius. They were not only glaring, tawdry, and ill-drawn, but worse conceived; flashy, crude accumulations of colour only rendering their defects more apparent. He was in a great measure self-taught. His impetuous, ardent imagination could not endure the labour requisite to form an artist. He would fain have read ere he had learned to spell; and the result might easily have been foretold.

His father died, and the family were but scantily provided for. Conrad was now forced to make, out a livelihood by what was previously an amusement, not having "a trade in his fingers;" and he toiled on, selling his productions for the veriest trifle. He had now no leisure for improvement in the first elements of his art.

"Better starve or beg, better be errand-boy or lackey, than waste my talents on such an ungrateful world. I'll turn conjurer—fire-eater—mountebank; set the fools agape at fairs and pastimes. Anything rather than killing—starving by inches. Why, the criminals at hard labour in the fortress have less work and better fare. I wish—I wish"——

"What dost wish, honest youth?" said a tall, heavy-eyed, beetle-browed, swarthy personage, who poked his face round from behind, close to that of the unfortunate artist, with great freedom and familiarity.

"I wish thou hadst better manners, or wast i' the stocks, where every prying impertinent should be," replied Conrad, being in no very placable humour with his morning's work. The stranger [Pg 391] laughed, not at all abashed by this ill-mannered, testy rebuke, replying good-humouredly—

"Ah, ah! master canvas-spoiler. Wherefore so hasty this morning? My legs befit not the gyves any more than thine own. But many a man thrusts his favours where they be more rare than welcome. I would do thee a service."

"'Tis the hangman's, then, for that seems the only favour that befits my condition."

"Thou art cynical, bitter at thy disappointment. Let us discourse together hard by. A flask of good Rhenish will soften and assuage thy humours. A drop of *kirchenwasser*, too, might not be taken amiss this chill morning."

Nothing loth, Conrad followed the stranger, and they were soon imbibing some excellent *vin du pays* in a neighbouring tavern.

"Conrad Bergmann," began the stranger. "Ay, thou art surprised; but I know more than thy name. Wilt that I do thee a good office?"

"Not the least objection, friend, if the price be within reach. Nothing pay, nothing have, I reckon."

"The price? Nothing. At least nothing thou need care for. Thou art thirsting for fame, riches; for the honours of this world; for—for—the hand—the heart of thy beloved."

Amongst the rest of Conrad's calamities he had the misfortune to be in love.

"Thou art mighty fluent with thy guesses," replied he, not at all relishing these unpleasant truths; "and what if I am doomed to pine after the good I can never attain? I will bear my miseries, if not without repining, at least without thy pity;" and he arose to depart.

"All that thou pinest after is thine. All!" said the stranger.

"Mine! By what process?—whose the gift? Ha, ha!" and he drained the brimming glass, waiting a solution of his interrogatory.

"I will be thy instructor. Behold the renowned Doctor Gabriel Ras Mousa, who hath studied all arts and sciences in the world, who hath unveiled Nature in her most secret operations, and can make her submissive as a menial to his will. In a period incredibly short I engage to make thee the most renowned painter in Christendom."

"And the time requisite to perform this?"

"One month! Ay, by the wand of Hermes, in one month, under my teaching, shalt thou have thy desire. I watched thy bargain with the dealer yonder, and have had pity on thy youth and misfortunes." [Pg 392]

"Humph—compassion! And the price?" again inquired Conrad, with an anxious yet somewhat dubious expression of tone.

"The price? Once every month shalt thou paint me a picture."

"Is that all?"

"All."

Now Conrad began to indulge some pleasant fancies. Dreams of hope and ambition hovered about him; but he soon grew gloomy and desponding as heretofore. He waxed incredulous.

"One month? Nothing less than a miracle! The time is too short. Impossible!"

"That is my business. I have both the will and the power. Is it a bargain?"

Conrad again drained the cup, and things looked brighter. He felt invigorated. His courage came afresh, and he answered firmly—

"A bargain."

"Give me thy hand."

"O mein Herr—not so hard. Thy grip is like a smithy vice."

"Beg pardon of thy tender extremities. To-morrow then, at this hour, we begin." Immediately after which intimation the stranger departed.

Conrad returned to his own dwelling. He felt restless, uneasy. Apprehensions of coming evil haunted him. Night was tenfold more appalling. Horrid visions kept him in continual alarm.

He arose feverish and unrefreshed. Yesterday's bargain did not appear so pleasant in his eyes; but fear gave way apace, and ere the appointed hour he was in his little workroom, where the mysterious instructor found him in anxious expectation. He drew the requisite materials from under his cloak, a well-primed canvas already prepared. The pallet was covered, and Conrad sat down to obey his master's directions.

"What shall be our subject?" inquired the pupil.

"A head. Proceed."

"A female?"

"Yes. But follow my instructions implicitly."

Conrad chalked out the outline. It was feebly, incorrectly drawn: but the stranger took his crayon, and by a few spirited touches gave life, vigour, and expression to the whole. Conrad was

in despair. [Pg 393]

"Oh that it were in my power to have done this!" he cried, putting one hand on his brow, and looking at the picture as though he would have devoured it.

"Now for colour," said the stranger; and he carefully directed his pupil how to lay in the ground, to mingle and contrast the different tints, in a manner so far superior to his former process, that Conrad soon began to feel a glow of enthusiasm. His fervour increased, the latent spark of genius was kindled. In short, the unknown seemed to have imbued him with some hitherto unfelt attributes—invested him either with new powers, or awakened his hitherto dormant faculties. As before, by a few touches, the crude, spiritless mass became living and breathing under the master's hand. Not many hours elapsed ere a pretty head, respectably executed, appeared on the canvas. Conrad was in high spirits.

He felt a new sense, a new faculty, as it were, created within him. He worked industriously. Every hour seemed to condense the labour and experience of years. He made prodigious advances. His master came daily at the same time, and at length his term of instruction drew to a close. The last morning of the month arrived; and Conrad, unknown to his neighbours, had attained to the highest rank in his profession. His paintings, all executed under the immediate superintendence of the stranger, were splendid specimens of art.

In the year ——, all Paris was moved with the extraordinary performances of a young artist, whose portraits were the most wonderful, and his miniatures the most exquisite, that eyes ever beheld. They looked absolutely as though endowed with life—real flesh and blood to all appearance; and happy were those who could get a painting from his hand. The price was enormous, and the marvellous facility with which they were despatched was not the least extraordinary part of the business. There was a mystery, too, about him, provokingly delightful, especially to the female portion of the community. In place of living in a gay and fashionable part of the city, his lodging was in a miserable garret, overlooking one of the gloomiest streets of the metropolis. His manners, too, were forbidding and reserved. Instead of exhibiting the natural buoyancy of his years, he looked careworn and dejected; nor was he ever known to smile.

After a period whispers got abroad that several of his female subjects came to strange and untimely deaths. They were seized with some dangerous malady, accompanied by frightful [Pg 394] delusions. In general they fancied themselves possessed. Wailings, shrieks, and horrible blasphemies proceeded from the lips of the sufferers. These reports were doubtless exaggerated, the marvellous being a prodigiously accumulative and inventive faculty; yet enough remained, apparently authentic, to justify the most unfavourable suspicions.

About this time a young Italian lady of a noble house arrived on a visit to her brother in the suite of the Florentine embassy. This princely dame, possessed of great wealth and beauty, was not long unprovided with lovers; one especially, a handsome official in the royal household, De Vessey by name, and as gallant a cavalier as ever lady looked upon. But her term of absence being nigh expired, the lovers were in great perplexity; and nothing seemed so likely to contribute to their comfort during such unavoidable separation as a miniature portrait of each from the hands of this inimitable painter. Leonora sat first, and the lover was in raptures. Hour by hour he watched the progress of his work in a little gloomy chamber, where the artist, like some automaton fixture, was always found in the same place, occupied too as it might seem without intermission.

"The gaze of that strange painter distresses me inexpressibly," said Leonora to her companion, as they went for the last time to his apartment. "I have borne it hitherto without a murmur, but words cannot describe the reluctance with which I endure his glance; yet while I feel as though my very soul abhorred it, it penetrates—nay, drinks up and withers my spirit. Though I shrink from it, some influence or fascination, call it as thou wilt, prevents escape; I cannot turn away my eyes from his terrible gaze."

"Thou art fanciful, my love," said De Vessey; "the near prospect of our parting makes thee apt to indulge these gloomy impressions. Be of good cheer; nothing shall harm thee in my presence. 'Tis the last sitting; put on a well-favoured aspect, I beseech thee. Remember, this portraiture will be my only solace during the long long hours of thine absence."

As they entered the artist's chamber, the picture lay before him, which he seemed to contemplate with such absorbing intensity that he was hardly aware of their entrance. He did not weep, but grief and pity were strangely mingled in his glance. It was but for a moment; he quickly resumed his usual attitude and expression. Whether the previous conversation had made her lover liable [Pg 395] to take the tone and character of her own thoughts, we know not; but for the first time he fancied Leonora's apprehensions were not entirely without excuse. He looked on the artist, and it excited almost a thrill of apprehension. But speedily chiding himself for these untoward fancies, he felt that little was apparent either in look or manner but what the painter's peculiar and unexampled genius might sufficiently explain.

Suddenly his attention was riveted on the lady. He saw her lips quiver and turn pale as though she would have swooned. In a moment he was at her side. The support seemed to re-animate the fainting maiden, her head drooping on his shoulder. Almost gasping for utterance, she whispered, "Take me hence, I want breath—air, air!" De Vessey lifted her in his arms and bore her forth into the open doorway. Trembling, shuddering, and looking round, the first words she uttered were—

"We are watched—by some unseen being in yonder chamber, I am persuaded. Didst not mark an antique, dismal-looking ebony cabinet immediately behind the painter?"

"I did, and admired its exquisite workmanship, as though wrought by some cunning hand."

"As I fixed my eyes on those little traceries, it might be fancy, but methought I saw the bright flash of a human eye gazing on me."

"Oh! my Leonora, indulge not these gloomy impressions. Throw off thy wayward fancies. 'Tis but the reflex image the mind mistakes for outward realities. When disordered she discerns not the substance from the shadow. Thou art well-nigh recovered. Come, come, let us in. To-day is the last of our task; prithee take courage and return."

"On one condition only; if thou take the chair first, and note well an open scroll to the right where those fawns and satyrs are carved."

"Agreed. And now shake off thy fears, my love."

De Vessey led her again to the apartment, and as though without consideration sat down, his face directly towards the cabinet. He fixed his eyes thereon a few seconds only, when Leonora saw him start up suddenly with a troubled aspect and grasp the hilt of his sword. Then turning to the painter he said, sternly—

"So!—We have intruders here, I trow."

"Intruders? None!" was the artist's reply, without betraying either surprise or alarm.

"That we'll see presently," said the cavalier, hastening to the cabinet; which, with hearty good- [Pg 396]
will, he essayed to open.

"Why this outrage?" inquired the painter, colouring with a hectic flush.

"Because 'tis my good pleasure," was the haughty reply. The door resisted his utmost efforts. "Doubtless held by some one within. Open, or by this good sword I'll make a passage through both door and carcase."

The hinges slowly gave way, the folding-doors swung open, and displayed a grinning skeleton.

"Ah! what lodger is this?"

"Mine art requires it," said the painter, with a ghastly smile; but in that smile was an expression so fearful, yet mysterious, that even De Vessey quailed before it. Another miniature portrait, a precise copy of the one in hand, hung from the neck of the skeleton.

Leonora, with a loud shriek, covered her face; but the lover, though far from satisfied himself, strove to assure his mistress, and besought her not to indulge any apprehension.

"You are disturbed, lady," said the artist. "'Tis but a harmless piece of earth, a mouldering fabric of dust, a thing, a form we must all one day assume. But to-morrow, to-morrow, if you will, we resume our work."

Leonora, relieved by the intimation, gladly consented, fain for a while to escape from this terrible chamber.

"Nought living was there, of a truth," said the cavalier, in evident perplexity, as they regained their coach. "But I saw plain enough, or imagination played me the prank, a semblance of a bright and flashing eye on the spot pointed out. Something incomprehensible hangs about the whole!"

Leonora agreed in this conclusion, expressing a fear lest harm should happen to themselves thereby. They were not ignorant of the whispers afloat, but hitherto treated them either with ridicule or indifference. Suspicion, however, once awake, mystery once apprehended, every circumstance, even the most trivial, is seized upon, the mind bending all to one grand object which haunts and excites the imagination.

Having left his companion at her brother's dwelling, De Vessey came to his own, moody and dispirited. A vague sense of some grievous but impending misfortune hung heavily upon him. Night brought no mitigation of his fears. Spectres, skeletons, and demon-painters haunted his slumbers. He awoke in greater torment than ever. The duplicate portrait was brought to his [Pg 397]
remembrance with a vividness, an intensity so appalling, that he almost expected to behold the skeleton wearer at his bedside.

Involved in a labyrinth of inextricable surmises, and not knowing what course to pursue, he arose early, and walked forth without aim or design towards the church of Notre Dame.

The red sun was just bursting through a thick atmosphere of mist, illuminating its two dark western towers, which looked even more gloomy under a bright and glowing sky, like melancholy

in immediate contrast with hilarity and joy.

He passed the Morgue, or dead-house, where bodies found in the Seine are exposed, in order that they may be owned or recognised. Impelled by curiosity, he entered. One space alone was occupied. He could not surely be deceived when he saw the body of the unfortunate painter! Those features were too well remembered to be mistaken. Here was new ground for conjecture, fresh wonder and perplexity. He left this melancholy exhibition and entered the cathedral. Mass was celebrating at one of the altars. De Vessey joined in adoration, strolling away afterwards towards the vaults: one of them was open. From some vague, unaccountable impulse, he thus accosted the sexton:—

"Whose grave is this, friend?"

"A maid's—mayhap."

"Her name?"

"The only remaining descendant of the Barons Montargis."

"I have some knowledge of that noble gentlewoman; she was just about to be married. What might be the nature of her malady?"

"Why, verily there be as many guesses as opinions. The doctors were all at fault, and, 'tis said, even now in great dispute. The king's physician tried hard to save her. Old Frère Jeronymo, the confessor, will have it she was possessed; but all his fumigations, exorcisms, paters, and holy water could not cast out the foul fiend. She died raving mad!"

"A miserable portion for one so young and high-born. Was there no visible cause?"

"Cause!—Ay, marry; if common gossip be not an arrant jade. Her portrait had been taken by that same limner who, they say, has been taught in the devil's school, and can despatch a likeness with the twirl of his brush." [Pg 398]

"And what of that?" cried De Vessey, in an agony of impatience.

"Why, the same fate has happened to several of our city dames. That is all."

"What has happened?"

"They have gone mad, and either felt or fancied some demon had gotten them in keeping. For my part, I pretend not to a knowledge of the matter. But you seem strangely moved, methinks."

The cavalier was nigh choking with emotion. Sick at heart, and with a fearful presentiment of impending evil, he turned suddenly away.

His next visit, as may be supposed, was to his mistress. He found her in great agitation. The portrait had been sent home the preceding night, and completely finished, lay before her—an exquisite—nay, marvellous—specimen of art. She was gazing on her own radiant counterpart as he entered. They both agreed that something more than ordinary ran through the whole proceedings, though unable to comprehend their meaning. De Vessey related his discovery in the Morgue, but not his subsequent interview with the sexton.

Ere night, Leonora was seized with a strange and frightful disease. Symptoms of insanity were soon developed. She uttered fearful cries; calling on the painter in language wild and incoherent, but of terrific import.

The lover was at his wits' end. He vowed to spare no efforts to save her, though scarcely knowing what course to pursue, or in what quarter to apply for help.

His first care was to seek the dwelling of a certain renowned doctor, a German, whose extraordinary cures and mode of treatment had won for him great wealth and reputation. Though by some accounted a quack and impostor, nevertheless De Vessey hoped, as a last resource, so cunning a physician might be able to point at once to the source and cure of this occult malady.

Doctor Herman Sichel lived in one of those high, antique, dreary-looking habitations, now pulled down, situate in the Rue d'Enfer. A common staircase conducted to several suites of apartments, tenanted by various occupants, and at the very summit dwelt this exalted personage.

A pull at the ponderous bell-handle gave notice of De Vessey's approach, when, after due deliberation, it might seem, and a long trial to the impatient querent, a little wicket was cautiously slid back, behind a grating in the door. A face, partially exhibited, demanded his errand. [Pg 399]

"Thy master, knave!"

"He is in the very entrails of a sublime study. Not for my beard, grey though it be, dare I break in upon him."

"Mine errand is urgent," said De Vessey; "and, look thee, say a noble cavalier hath great need of succour at his hands."

"Grammercy, Sir Cavalier, and hath not everybody an errand of like moment?—thy business, peradventure, less urgent than fifty others whose suit I have denied this blessed day. I tell thee,

my master may not be disturbed!"

De Vessey held up a coin temptingly before the grating. It would not go through, and the crusty Cerberus gently undid a marvellous array of chains, bars, and other ingenious devices, opening a slit wide enough for its insertion.

"Wider! thou trusty keeper," said the artful suitor outside. "I cannot fly through a key-hole!"

A hand was carefully protruded. The cavalier, espying his opportunity, thrust first his sword, afterwards himself, through the aperture, in spite of curses and entreaties from the greedy porter. He was immediately within a dark entrance or vestibule; the astonished and angry menial venting his wrath in no measured phrases on the intruder. De Vessey, in a peremptory tone, demanded to be led forthwith into the doctor's presence. The old man delayed for a while, almost speechless from several causes. His breath was nigh spent. Wrath on the one hand, fear of his master's displeasure on the other, kept him, like antagonistic forces, perpetually midway between both.

"Lead the way, knave, or, by the beard of St Louis, I'll seek him through the house! Quick! thou hast legs; if not, speak! Mine errand is urgent, and will not wait."

A stout and determined cavalier, with a strong gripe, and a sword none of the shortest, was not to be trifled with; and, after many expostulations, warnings, threats, had failed of their effect, he at length doggedly consented.

"Thou wilt give me the coin, then, Sir Cavalier?"

"Ay, when thou hast earned it. Away!"

Passing through a narrow passage, lighted from above, his conductor paused before a curiously-carved oaken door, at which three taps announced a message.

"Now enter, and pray for us both a safe deliverance. But, prithee, tell him it was not my fault thou hast gotten admission." [Pg 400]

The door slowly opened, as though without an effort, and De Vessey was immediately in the presence of the physician, evidently to the surprise of the learned doctor himself, who angrily demanded his business and the ground of his intrusion.

"Mine hour is not yet come, young man. Wherefore shouldst thou, either by stratagem or force, thrust thyself, unbidden, into our presence?"

"To buy or beg thine aid, if it be possible. The case admits not of delay. I crave thy pardon, most reverend doctor, if that content thee; and, rest assured, no largess, no reward shall be too great, if thou restore one, I fear me, beyond earthly aid."

"Thus am I ever solicited," replied the sage, with a portentous scowl. He was clad in a gown of dark stuff, with slippers to match; his poll surmounted by a small black velvet skull-cap, from which his white, intensely white, hair escaped in great profusion. His visage was not swarthy, but of a leaden, pale complexion, where little could be discerned of the wondrous misrocosm within. Books, and manuscripts of ancient form and character, emblazoned in quaint and mystic devices, lay open on a long oak table, on which rested one elbow of the wise man; the other was thrown over an arm of the high-backed chair whereon he sat. The room contained plenty of litter in the shape of phials, boxes, and other strange furniture. A cupola furnace was just heated, the doctor apparently concocting some subtle compound.

"I am expected to wrest these helpless mortals even from the ravening jaws of the grave! My skill never tried until beyond other aid!"

"But this disorder is of a sudden emergency. A lady of high birth and lineage, a few hours since, was seized with a raging frenzy."

"A female, then?"

"Ay, and of such sweet temper and excellent parts, there be none to match with her, body or mind, in Christendom."

"When did this malady attack her?"

"Almost immediately after a portrait, made by the celebrated painter, was finished. Of him thou hast doubtless heard."

"The painter—ay! There be more than thou have rued his skill. Young man, thy pretty one is lost!"

"Lost? Oh, say not so! I will give thee thine utmost desire—riches—wealth thou hast never possessed, if thou restore her!" [Pg 401]

"She is beyond my skill. Hast visited him since?"

"I have seen him. She is the last victim, if such be her fate. This very morning, betimes, I saw his body in the Morgue."

"They have found him, then?" said the doctor, sharply. "Yet our bodies are but exuviæ. When cast off, this thinking, sentient principle within has another tabernacle assigned to it, until the great

consummation of all things. But these are fables, idle tales, to the unlearned. Nevertheless, I pity thy cruel fate, and, if aid can be afforded, will call another to thine help. Hence! Thou shalt hear from me anon."

"And without loss of time; for every moment, methinks, our succour may come too late."

"I will forthwith seek out one whom I have heretofore taken knowledge of. Every science has its votaries—its adepts; and this evil case hath its remedy only by those skilled in arts called, however falsely, supernatural. Even now there be intelligences around us which the corporeal eye seeth not, nor can see, unless purged from the dross, the fumes of mortality. Some, peradventure, by long and patient study, have arrived on the very borders, the confines that separate visible from invisible things, and become, as it were, the medium of intercourse for mortals, who are by this means mightily aided in matters beyond ordinary research. Put thine ear to this shell. Mark its voice, like the sound of many waters. Are not these the invisible source, the essence of its being? Has not everything in like manner, even the most inanimate, a tongue, a language, peculiar to itself—a soul, a spirit, pervading its form, which moulds and fashions every substance according to its own nature? Now, this voice thou canst not interpret, being unskilled—knowing not the languages peculiar to every form and modification of matter; else would this beautiful type of the ever-rolling sea discourse marvellously to thine ear. But thou hast not the key to unclose its mystic tongue; hence, like any other unknown speech, 'tis but a confused jumble of unmeaning sound. I have little more knowledge than thyself, but there be those who can interpret. Vain man—presumptuous, ignorant—scoffs at knowledge beyond his reach, and thinks his own dim, nay, darkened reason, glimmering as in a dungeon, the narrow horizon that circumscribes his vision, the utmost boundary of all knowledge and existence, while beyond lies the infinite and unknown, utterly transcending his capacity and comprehension." [Pg 402]

De Vessey drank up every word of this harangue; and something akin to hope rose in his bosom as he withdrew.

"Thou wilt have a message ere nightfall. An awful trial awaits thee ere the spell can be countervailed."

The cavalier withdrew, suffering many wistful remarks from the old doorkeeper, who marvelled greatly at the interview so graciously conceded by his master; while at the same time holding out his palm for the promised largess.

De Vessey waited impatiently at his own dwelling for the expected message. Evening drew on, dark and stormy. The wind roared along the narrow streets in sharp and irregular gusts; while, pacing his chamber in an agony of suspense, he fancied every sound betokened the approaching communication. At length, when expectation was almost weary, a louder rumbling was heard; a coach drew up at the door; a hasty knock, and a heavy tramp; then footsteps ascending the staircase. The door opened, and two *gens-d'armes* entered.

"We have authority and instructions for the arrest of one Sigismund de Vessey, on a charge of murder, made this day by deposition before the Mayor and Prefecture of the Ville de Paris. The individual so named, we apprehend, is before us."

"The same; though assuredly there is some mistake. Of whose death am I accused?"

"Of one Conrad Bergmann, a painter, whose body, last night thrown into the Seine, was to-day exposed in the Morgue. The rest will be explained anon."

"But an engagement—one, too, of a most important nature—demands my presence."

"No discretion is allowed us in this matter. The carriage waits."

However reluctant, De Vessey was forced to obey. Though confident of a speedy release, this arrest at so important a juncture was provoking enough. Leonora's recovery might probably depend on his exertions for the next few hours, which were now suddenly wrested from him.

Leaving word that he would shortly return, the cavalier stept into the vehicle, which immediately drove off.

In a little space the coach stopped, and De Vessey was invited to alight. He was led up a narrow staircase; a door flew open. He entered. Could it be; surely imagination betrayed his senses! He could scarcely believe himself once more in the apartment of the painter! Yet there was no [Pg 403] mistaking what he saw. The ebony cabinet, the easel, table, chair—all left as he saw them yesterday. But the living occupants were strangely diverse. Two or three functionaries of the civil power; and in one corner a black cloth, spread on the floor, concealed some unknown object. The whole was lighted by a feeble lamp from the ceiling. A dusky haze from the damp, foggy atmosphere rendered objects ill-defined, indistinct, almost terrific to an excited imagination. In addition to the usual articles of furniture was a desk, with writing materials, at which one of the officers of justice appeared dictating something to his secretary.

On De Vessey's entrance, the scribe made some minute preparatory to his examination, which commenced as follows:—

"Sigismund de Vessey?"

"The same."

"Being accused upon oath before us of murder, thou art brought hither to confront thine accusers, and to answer this heinous charge. First, let the body be produced."

The cloth was removed, and De Vessey beheld the corpse lying on a mattress.

"Knowest thou this body?"

"I do," said the cavalier, firmly.

"When was he seen by thee alive, the last time?"

"Yesterday, about noon."

"Where?"

"In this chamber."

"Not since?"

"Yes, but not living."

"Dead, sayest thou?"

"This morning in the Morgue."

"Not previously?"

"I have not. But pray to what purport this examination?"

"This will appear presently. When taken out of the river marks were found upon the throat, as though from strangulation. Knowest thou aught of these?"

"I do not," said the accused, indignantly.

This answer being written down, the examination was resumed.

"We have testimony that the unfortunate victim and thyself were seen together about midnight; and, further, a short but violent struggle was heard, and a heavy plunge; afterwards an individual, with whom thou art identified, was seen departing in great haste, and entering the house well known as thy residence in the Rue de"——

[Pg 404]

"A most foul and wicked fabrication, for purposes of which as yet I am ignorant. Of such charges I hardly need affirm that I am innocent."

"Let the accuser stand forth."

To the surprise and horror of De Vessey there appeared from a recess the German doctor, Hermann Sichel, who, without flinching, recapitulated the foregoing accusation. Moreover, he swore in the most positive terms to his identity, and that not a doubt rested on his mind but De Vessey was the murderer.

"In this very apartment," said the witness, "he, De Vessey, drew his sword upon the painter yesterday, doubtless either from grudge or jealousy; being enamoured of a fair Italian dame, Leonora da Rimini."

"Most abominable of liars!" said the accused, eyeing him with a furious look. "How darest thou to my face bring this foul accusation. Thou shalt answer for it with thy blood!"

"Hear him! What need of further testimony? His own betrays him," said the doctor, with unblushing effrontery.

"We have other witness thou wilt not dare to gainsay," said the presiding officer. "This learned person is amply corroborated by evidence that must effectually silence all denial. He hath referred us to her who was present, Leonora da Rimini."

"Leonora! what, my own—my betrothed? She my accuser?"

"Spare thy speech and listen. We could not bring the maiden hither, insomuch as the nature of her malady admits not of removal: but her evidence and accusation are duly attested, taken at her own request, not many hours ago. The substance of her deposition is as follows:—A confession to her of thine intention to murder Conrad Bergmann, the artist aforesaid, being jealous of his attentions; and furthermore, in the agony of guilt, thou didst confess in her presence, having first strangled, and afterwards thrown him into the river, hoping thereby to conceal thy crime; then forcing her to swear she would keep the matter secret, and threatening her life in case it were divulged. This outrage, and this alone, hath nigh driven her frantic; her life being in jeopardy from thy violence. What sayest thou, Sigismund de Vessey?"

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"A lie, most foul and audacious, trumped up by that impostor! Leonora? Impossible. I would not believe though it were from her own lips. Some demon hath possessed her. This disorder is more than common madness."

He looked around. The whole was like the phantasma of some terrible dream. Bewildered, and hardly knowing what course to pursue, in vain he attempted to shake the testimony of the hoary villain before him; and having at present none other means of rebutting the accusation, he was ordered into close custody until the morrow.

Utterly unprepared with evidence, he knew not where to apply. That he was the victim of some foul plot so far appeared certain; but for what purpose, and at whose instigation, was inexplicable.

Ere an hour had elapsed De Vessey found himself in one of the cells of a public dungeon, with ample leisure to form plans for proving his innocence. He determined early on the morrow to acquaint his friends, and employ a celebrated advocate to expose this villainous doctor, who no doubt had designs either on his purse or person.

In a while the prisoner fell asleep from fatigue and exhaustion. He was awakened by a sudden glare across his eyelids. At first, imagining he was under the influence of some extravagant dream, he made little effort to arouse himself. A figure stood beside the couch, a lamp lifted above his head. A friar's cowl concealed his features; his person, too, was enveloped in a coarse garment, with a huge rosary at his girdle.

"Mortal, awake and listen," said the unknown visitor. "Art weary of life, or does this present world content thee?"

"Who art thou?" said De Vessey, scarcely raising himself from the pallet.

"I am thy friend, thy deliverer, an' thou wilt."

"Thanks!" said the knight, springing from his recumbent posture.

"Stay!" replied the intruder; "there be conditions ere thou pass hence. Miserable offspring of Adam, ye still cling to your prison and your clay. Wherefore shrink from the separation, afraid to shake off your bonds, your loathsome carcase, and spring forth at once to life? Art thou prepared to fulfil one—but one condition for thy release?"

"Name it. Manifest my innocence; and if it be gold, thou shalt have thy desire. No hired advocate e'er yet held such a fee." [Pg 406]

"Keep thy gold for baser uses; it buyeth not my benefits. But remember, thy life is not worth a week's purchase, neither is thy mistress's, forsooth, shouldest thou be witless enough to refuse. An ignominious death, a base exit for thyself—for her, madness and a speedy grave. One fate awaits ye both. Life and health, if thou consent, are yours."

"Thou speakest riddles. It were vain trying to comprehend their import. Name thy conditions. Aught that honour may purchase will I give."

The stranger threw back his cowl, displaying the features of the renowned Doctor Hermann Sichel. A gleam of lurid intelligence lighted his grim grey eyes, that might betoken either insanity or excitement.

Without reflecting for one moment on the hazard or imprudence of his conduct, De Vessey immediately rushed forward, grappled with his adversary, and threw him.

"Now will I have deadly vengeance, fiend! Take that!" said he, drawing forth a concealed poniard and thrusting with all his might. Scorn puckered the features of the pretended monk. The weapon's point was driven back, refusing to enter, as though his enemy held a charmed existence.

"Put back thy weapon; thou wilt have need of it elsewhere, silly one."

De Vessey was confounded at this unlooked-for result. His foe seemed invulnerable, and he slunk back.

"I forgive thee, poor fool! Put it back, I say. There—there; now to work—time hastens, and there is little space for parley."

"What is thy will?"

"Thy welfare, thy life: listen. Yonder unhappy wretch I have loaden with benefits, rescued from poverty, disgrace; lifted him to the pinnacle of his ambition—the highest rank in art. Base ingrate, he threatened to betray, to denounce, and I crushed the reptile. He is now what thou shalt be shortly unless my power be put forth for thy rescue. Not all the united efforts of man can deliver thee. Beyond earthly aid, thou diest the death of a dog!"

"Why dost thou accuse me of a crime, knowing that I am innocent?" [Pg 407]

"To drive thee, helpless, into my power. Think not to escape save on one condition."

"Name it," said De Vessey.

"Self-preservation is the great, the paramount law of our nature; the most powerful impulse implanted in our being. All, all obey this impulse; and who can control or forbid its operation? Will not the most timid, the most scrupulous, if no alternative be afforded, slay the adversary who seeks his life; and does not the law both of earth and heaven hold him guiltless? Thou art now denounced. Innocent, thy life must be sacrificed. Thou diest, or another; there is no choice."

"But shall *I* murder the innocent?"

"And suppose it be. What thinkest thou? Two persons, equally guiltless, one of them must die.

Self-preservation will prompt instinctively to action. Does not the drowning man cling to his companions; nay, rescue himself at the expense of another's life?"

De Vessey felt bewildered, if not convinced. Need we wonder if he yielded. Life or death; honour, disgrace. His mistress restored; his innocence proved. Life, with him, had scarcely been tasted. A glorious career awaited him; his lady-love smiling through the bright vista of the future; and—— The tempter prevailed!

But who must be the victim? The appalling truth was not then disclosed. De Vessey promised to obey.

"But remember, no power, not even flight, can screen thee from my vengeance shouldst break thy vow. Take warning by the painter; the poor fool but hesitated, and his doom was swift as it was sure. Take this cowl and friar's garment; I was admitted by the jailer for thy shrift. The lamp will guide thee. Be bold, and fear not. I will remain; to-morrow they will find out their mistake, but I have other means of escape."

"And Leonora. How shall she be recovered?"

"That is a work of peril, and will need thine utmost vigilance. Rememberest thou the skeleton?"

"In the ebony cabinet?" inquired the cavalier, with a cold shudder.

"He hath her portrait, and will not lightly be persuaded to give his prey. *Every month I am bound to furnish him a bride!* My own life pays the forfeit of omission. Leonora is the next victim, unless thou prevail, betrothed to that grisly type of death!" [Pg 408]

"Oh, horrible! Mine the bride of a loathsome skeleton! Of an atomy! A fiend! Monster, I will denounce thee. I care not for my own life. Of what worth if torn from hers. Wretch, give back my bride or"——

"Spare these transports. I am now thine only friend. Thou art now cut off from thy kin, shunned by mankind. To whom, then, wilt thou turn for help? Mine thou art for ever!"

De Vessey gasped for utterance.

"Nevertheless," continued his tormentor, "I will direct and help thee in this matter also. But 'tis a fearful venture. Hast thou courage?"

"If to rescue her, aught that human arm can achieve shall be done."

"He holds the portrait, I tell thee, with a steady gripe. Those skeleton fingers will be hard to unloose."

"I will break them or perish. This good"——

"Touch them not for thy life. Death, sure but lingering, awaits whomsoever they fasten upon. Take this key. It will admit thee to the apartment. To-night the deed must be accomplished, or to-morrow the maiden is beyond succour."

"And how is this charmed picture to be wrested from him?"

"An ebony wand lies at his feet; he will obey its touch. But whatsoever thou seest, be nothing daunted, nor let any silly terror scare thee from thy purpose. Now to thy task. But keep these marvels to thyself. If thou whisper—ay, to the winds—our compact, thou art not safe."

Soon De Vessey, enveloped in his disguise, found egress without difficulty. Once outside the prison, he hurried on, scarcely giving himself time for reflection.

The night was dark and stormy. Torches, distributed about the streets, rocked and swung to and fro in their sockets, the flames, with a strange and flickering glare, giving an unnatural distorted appearance to objects within reach; and to some solitary individual, at this late hour hurrying alone, the grim aspect of a demon or a spectre to the disturbed imagination of the lover. His courage, at times on the point of deserting him, revived when he remembered that another's life, dearer than his own, depended on his exertions. The streets, almost deserted, swam with continually accumulating torrents; but he felt not that terrible tempest; the turmoil, the conflict within, was louder than the roar and tumult of outward elements. [Pg 409]

Almost ere he was aware he found himself opposite the entrance of the painter's habitation; a shudder, like a death-chill, shot through his frame. He applied his key. A distant gleam, a dim lurid light, seemed to quiver before him. He heard the quick jar, the withdrawing bolt, that gave him admittance, as though it were a spectral voice warning him to desist.

The unknown dangers he anticipated, rendered more terrific by their vague indefinite character, were enough to appal a stouter bosom. De Vessey would have faced and defied earthly perils, but these were almost beyond his fortitude to endure. Love, however, gave excitement, if not courage, and he resolved either to succeed or perish in the attempt. The stairs were partially illumined by an uncertain glimmer from a narrow window into the street. He felt his way, and every step sent the life-blood curdling to his heart. He reached the topmost stair; laid one hand on the latch. He listened; all was still save the hollow gusts that rumbled round the dwelling.

With a feeling somewhat akin to desperation he entered. A lamp, yet burning, emitted a feeble glare, but was well-nigh spent, giving a more dismal aspect to this lonely chamber. It was

apparently unoccupied. The chair, the black funeral pall left by the officers of justice over the pallet, the mysterious cabinet, the desk where the painter usually sat, all remained undisturbed. De Vessey's attention was more particularly directed towards the cabinet; there alone, according to his instructions, were the means of deliverance. A cold, clammy perspiration, a freezing shiver, came upon him as he approached. He laid one hand on the latch; it resisted as before. He tried force, a loud groan was heard in the chamber. Every fibre of his frame seemed to grow rigid; every limb stiffened with horror; and he drew back.

This was a sorry beginning to the adventure, and he inwardly repented of his rashness. Looking round in extreme agony, his eyes rested on the black pall. Could it be, or was it from the expiring glimmer of the lamp? The drapery appeared to move. Another and a deeper groan! De Vessey for a space was unable to move; but his courage came apace, inasmuch as it was some relief, and a diversion from the awful mysteries of that grim cabinet. He approached the pallet hastily, throwing off the heavy coverlet. The recumbent body was yet beneath, but convulsed, as though struggling to free itself from an oppressive burden. De Vessey watched, while his blood froze [Pg 410] with terror. Gradually these convulsive movements extended to the features. The lips quivered as though essaying to speak; the eye-balls rolling rapidly under their lids. A slight flush dawned upon the cheek; the hands were tightly closed, and another groan preceded one desperate attempt to throw off the load which prevented returning animation. At length the eyes opened with a ghastly stare; but evidently conveying no outward impression to the inward sense. With a loud shriek the body started up; then, uttering a wild and piercing cry, rolled on the floor, foaming and struggling for life as though with some powerful adversary.

"Save me!—save me!" was uttered in a tone so harrowing and dreadful, more than mortal agony, that De Vessey would have fled, but his limbs refused their office.

"He strangles me! Fiend—have—have mercy! Wilt thou not? Oh, mercy, mercy, Heaven!" His senses, though evidently bewildered, resumed their functions. With a glare of intense anguish he appeared as though supplicating help and deliverance.

"Who art thou?" was the first inquiry and symptom of returning reason. "I know thee, De Vessey. But why art thou here? Another victim. Yes, to torture me. Where am I? In my own chamber! Oh —that horrid cabinet! Yet—yet these cruel torments. Will they never end?"

De Vessey immediately perceived there was no delusion; the mortal form of the artist was really before him. Terrible though it were, yet it was a relief to have companionship with his kind, a being of flesh and blood beside him. He might now peradventure accomplish his task. Providence, maybe, had opened a way for his deliverance, and hope once more dawned on his spirit. He helped the miserable artist to regain his couch, and sought to soothe him, beseeching the helpless victim not to give way to frenzy, doubtless resulting from his strange and emaciated condition. A miracle or a spell had been wrought for his resuscitation; but the events of the last few hours were alike enigmas, beyond the common operations of nature to explain.

"Yesterday I attempted suicide," said the artist, "taking poison to escape a life insupportable to me. Fain would I have broken the chain which binds me to this miserable existence. But yon tyrant hath given me a charmed life. I cannot even die!" [Pg 411]

"Thy body was dragged from the Seine."

"How?" inquired the artist, with an incredulous look.

"And exposed this morning in the Morgue," continued De Vessey.

"When will my sufferings cease? How have I prayed for deliverance from this infernal thraldom!"

"Yon deceiver hath doubtless thrown thee into the river, and supposing thou wert dead, he designs me to supply thy place; to carry on the dark mystery of iniquity, a glimpse of which hath already been revealed."

"Would that I had been left to perish—that my doom were ended. Avarice—ambition—how enslaved are your victims! How have I longed for my miserable cottage, my poverty, my obscurity —cold and pinching want, but a quiet conscience to season my scanty meal! I bartered all for gold, for fame and—misery! A cruel bondage! compared to which I could envy the meanest thing that crawls on this abject earth. In my trance I dreamed of green fields and babbling streams; of my brethren, my playmates, my days of innocence and sport, when all was freshness and anticipation—life one bright vista beyond, opening to sunny regions of rapture and delight. And now, what am I?—a wretch, degraded, undone—a spectacle of misery beyond what human thought can conceive. Doomed to years, ages it may be, of woe—to scenes of horror such as tongue ne'er told, and even imagination might scarce endure, and my miseries but a foretaste of that hereafter!"

Here the guilty victim writhed in a paroxysm of agony; his veins swollen almost to bursting. Whether real or imaginary, whether a victim to insanity or of some supernatural agent, its influence was not the less terrible in its effects. Starting suddenly from his grovelling posture, he cried, fixing his eyes on De Vessey with a searching glance—

"What brings thee hither?"

"Leonora is in jeopardy by your spells. I seek her deliverance."

"She is beyond rescue. Leonora da Rimini is THE SKELETON'S BRIDE."

Here the painter threw such a repulsive glance towards the cabinet that the cavalier shrank back as though expecting some grisly spectre from its portals; yet, himself the subject of an extraordinary fascination, he could not withdraw his gaze. [Pg 412]

"Fly, fly, or thou art lost! My tormentor will be here anon—I would have saved her, and he fixed his burning gripe here, I feel it still; not a night passes that he comes not hither. Away! shouldest thou meet him thy doom is fixed, and for ever. I would not that another fell into his toils. Couldest thou know, ay, but as a whisper, the secrets of this prison-house, thy spirit would melt, thy flesh would shrink as though the hot wind of the desert had passed over it. What I have endured, and what I must endure, are alike unutterable."

"Thy keeper comes not to-night. He hath sent me to this chamber of death instead. He knows not thou art alive."

"Thee!—to—but I must not reveal; my tongue cleaves to my mouth. Nay, nay, it cannot be; none but a fiend could do his behest. Away! for thy life, away!"

De Vessey related the events of the last few hours. The artist ruminated awhile, then abruptly exclaimed—

"He hath some diabolical design thereupon which I am not yet able to fathom. That it is for thine undoing, Sir Knight, for thy misery here and hereafter, doubt not. Thou hast promised, but not yet offered him a victim. Thus far thou art safe; but he will pursue thee; and think not to escape his vengeance. How to proceed is beyond my counsel. Should midnight come, thou wouldest see horrors in this chamber that might quail the stoutest heart. Thou art bereft of life or reason if thou tarry."

"I leave not without an attempt, even should I fail, to wrench her, who is dearer to me than either, from that demon's grasp. I will not hence alone."

"Alas! I fear there is little hope; yet shall he not escape yonder prison before to-morrow. Even his arts cannot convey him through its walls; the magician's body, if such he be, is subject to like impediments with our own. This night, for good or ill, is thine."

"To work, then, to work," said De Vessey, as though inspired with new energy, "to the rescue, and by this good cross," kissing the handle of his sword, "I defy ye!"

By main force he attempted, and in the end tore open the door of the cabinet. The grinning skeleton was before him, the miniature in its grasp. A moment's pause. The cavalier carefully surveyed his prize. Suspended by an iron chain, the links entwined round its bony arm, rendered the picture difficult, if not impossible, to detach without touching the limbs. Gathering fresh [Pg 413] courage from the countenance and smile of his beloved, he snatched the portrait, but the wearer was too tenacious of the charmed treasure, and resisted his utmost efforts. He thought a savage, a malicious grin crept upon his features. A smile more than usually hideous mocked him. From those hollow sockets too, or his imagination played strange antics, a faint glare shot forth. A dizzy terror crept over him. His brain reeled. His energies were becoming prostrate; and unless one desperate attempt could be made, all hopes of rescue were past. He sought the ebony wand, but forgetful or incautious, laid hold of the chain which encircled the skeleton's wrist. A bell answered to the pressure,—a deep hollow reverberation, like a death-knell, in his ear.

"Hark! that iron tongue—lost—lost! Oh! mercy, mercy!" shrieked the death-painter, covering his eyes.

At this moment De Vessey heard a noise like the jarring of bolts and hinges. Ere he was aware the skeleton's arms were fastened round him; the doors closed; the floor gave way under his feet. He felt the pressure relaxing; he fell; the hissing wind rushed in his ears. Stunned with his fall, he lay for a while in the dark, scarcely able to move. It was not long ere he was able to grope about. Rotting carcases and bones met his touch—a noisome charnel-house gorged with human bodies in all the various stages of decay. His heart sickened with a fearful apprehension that he was left to perish by a lingering death, like those around him. Despair for the first time benumbed his faculties. His courage gave way at the dreadful anticipation, and he grasped the very carcase on which he trod for succour.

Suddenly, a loud yell burst above him. A blaze of burning timbers flashed forth—crackling, they hissed, and fell into the vault. Through an opening overhead he saw the skeleton seized by devouring flames. They twined, they clung round it. Their forky tongues licked the bones that appeared to writhe and crawl in living agony.

Soon the chain which held the portrait gave way, and it dropped at his feet unhurt. A shriek issued from the flaming cabinet, and he saw the painter with a burning torch above. A maniac joy lighted up his features; he shouted to De Vessey, and with frantic gestures beckoned that he should escape. [Pg 414]

"If thou canst climb yonder stair," he cried, "before the flames cut off thy retreat, thou art safe. See, Leonora is already free. Haste—this way—there—there—now leap—mind thy footing—'tis too frail—creep round—those rafters are unbroken; another spring, and thou mayest reach them in safety."

The flames were close upon him. He was nigh suffocated. A perilous attempt; but at length he gained the upper floor, and his deliverer exclaimed—

"Thanks, thanks, he is safe! By this good hand, too, that wrought your misery. Oh! that a life of penitence and prayer might atone for my guilt. It was a thought inspired by Heaven, prompted me to set on fire that insatiate demon, to whom my taskmaster offered those wretched victims, and every month a bride, on pain of his own destruction. What might be the nature of that skeleton form, or their compact, thou canst neither know nor understand. Even I, though nightly witnessing horrors which have given to youth the aspect and decrepitude of age, cannot explain. A connection, if not inseparable, yet intimate as body and soul, existed between those demon-haunted bones and yon monster who sought and accomplished my ruin. What I have seen must not, cannot be told. My lips are for ever sealed. But the flames are fast gaining on us. Let us hasten ere they prevent our retreat. The whole fabric will shortly be enveloped, and every record of this diabolical confederacy consumed. Go to thy lady-love. She is recovered, and as one newly-awakened from some terrific dream. With the earliest dawn hie thee to the prison lest *he* escape. Let him be instantly secured. When summoned, I will not fail to confront, to denounce the wretch. He cannot penetrate yonder walls save by fraud or stratagem. How I have escaped death is one of the mysteries which time perchance may never develop. One might fancy the cunning leech who supplied the drug did play me false. Instead of poison, mayhap, one of those potions of which we have heard, that so benumb and stupify the faculties that for a space they mimic death, nor can anything rouse or recover from its influence until the appointed time be past."

They hurried away as he spoke. De Vessey could scarcely wait until daylight. His first care was to secure the old sorcerer. He sought aid from the police, and, as far as might be, revealed the dreadful secret. [Pg 415]

An immediate visit was made to the cell. On entering, its inmate was in bed—a scorched, a blackened corpse!

It may be supposed the lover was not long in attending on his mistress. She was free from disorder, and happily unconscious of what had passed during the interval, save that an ugly dream had troubled her. Nor was she aware that more than one night had elapsed. In a few days afterwards De Vessey led her to the altar.

The mystery was never fully penetrated. That imposture and partial insanity might be involved, and have the greatest share in its development, is beyond doubt; but they cannot explain the whole of these diabolical proceedings. That the powers of darkness may have power over the bodies of wicked and abandoned men cannot be denied.

Whether this narration discloses another instance of such mysterious agency our readers must determine.

What the painter knew was buried in eternal silence. The monks of La Trappe received a brother whose vows were never broken!

THE CRYSTAL GOBLET. [Pg 416]

A TALE OF THE EMPEROR SEVERUS.[22]

It was midnight—yet a light was burning in a small chamber situated in one of the narrowest and least frequented streets of Eboracum, then the metropolis of the world. York at that period being the residence of the Emperor Severus, his court and family were conveyed hither; and the government of the world transferred to an obscure island in the west, once the *ultima Thule*[vi] of civilisation, its native inhabitants hardly yet emerged from a state of barbarism, and addicted to the most gross and revolting superstitions.

A lamp of coarse earthenware was fastened on a bronze stand, having several beaks, and of a boat-like shape. Near it stood the oil-vase for replenishing, almost empty—while the wicks, charred and heavy with exuviæ, looked as though for some time untrimmed. On the same table was a Greek and a Coptic manuscript, an inkhorn, and the half of a silver penny, the Roman *symbolum*. Breaking a peace of money as a keepsake between two friends was, even at that period, a very ancient custom. A brass rhombus, used by magicians, lay on a *cathedra* or easy chair, which stood as though suddenly pushed aside by its occupier in rising hastily from his studies. An iron chest was near, partly open, wherein papers and parchments lay tumbled about in apparent disorder. Vellum, so white and firm as to curl even with the warmth of the hand; purple skins emblazoned in gold and silver, and many others, of rare workmanship, were scattered about with unsparing profusion. It was evidently the study, the *librarium* of some distinguished person, and consisted of an inner chamber beyond the court, having one window

near the roof, and another opening into a small garden behind. From the ceiling there hung a dried ape, a lizard, and several uncouth, unintelligible reptiles, put together in shapes that nature's most fantastic forms never displayed. Vases of ointments, and unguents of strange odours, stood in rows upon a marble slab on one side of the apartment. *Scrinia*, or caskets for the admission of rolls and writing materials, were deposited on shelves, forming a library of reference to the individual whose *sanctum* we are now describing: it was apparently undisturbed by any living occupant save a huge raven, now roosting on a wooden perch, his head buried under a glossy tissue of feathers, and to all appearance immovable as the grinning and hideous things that surrounded him. A magpie, confined in a cage above the door, was taught to salute those who entered with the word "χαῖρε" (chaire), a Grecian custom greatly in vogue amongst the most opulent of the Romans. [Pg 417]

Ere long there came a footstep and a gentle summons at the door. The bird gave the usual response; and straightway entered a stout muscular figure, wrapped in a *chlamys*, fastened on the shoulder with a richly-embossed *fibula*. Beneath was the usual light leathern cuirass, covered with scales of shining metal; the centre, over the abdomen, ornamented with a gorgon's head and other warlike devices; a short sword being stuck in his girdle. From the lowest part hung leathern straps, or *lambrequins*, highly wrought and embellished. He wore breeches or drawers reaching to the knees, and his feet and the lower part of the leg were covered with the *cothurnus*, a sort of traveller's half-boot. A sumptuous mantle, made of leopard skin, was thrown carelessly about his head, hardly concealing his features, for the folds, relaxing in some measure as he entered, showed a youthful countenance, yet dark and ferocious, indicating a character of daring and vindictive energy, and a disposition where forgiveness or remorse rarely tempered the fiercer passions. As he looked round the raven raised his head on a sudden, and peering at him with that curious and familiar eye so characteristic of the tribe, gave a loud and hollow croak, which again arrested the notice of the intruder.

"Most auspicious welcome truly, ill-omened bird. Is thy master visible?"

There was no reply; and the inquirer, after a cautious glance round the chamber, sat down, evidently disconcerted by this unexpected reception. Scarcely seated, he felt the clasp on his shoulder suddenly risen, as though by an intruder from behind. Looking round, he saw the raven with the bauble in his beak, hopping off with great alacrity to his perch. The magpie set up a loud scream, as though vexed he was not a participator in the spoil. The owner, angry at his loss, pursued the thief, who defied every attempt to regain it, getting far above his reach; ever and anon the same ominous croak sounding dismally through the gloom by which he was concealed. Finding it fruitless, the stranger gave up the pursuit, and again sat down, examining carelessly the papers which lay open for perusal. But it might seem these feathered guardians were entrusted with the care of their master's chamber during his absence. [Pg 418]

"Beware!" said the same querulous voice that before accosted him. Looking up, he saw the magpie, his neck stretched to the utmost through the bars of his cage, and in the act of repeating the injunction.

"'Tis an ill augur to my suit," he muttered, hastily. "Destiny!" Starting up at the word, which he spoke aloud, he clenched his hand.

"The inexorable gods may decree, but would it not be worthy of my purpose to brave them; to render even fate itself subservient to me!"

He hurried to and fro across the chamber with an agitated step. Suddenly he stood still in the attitude of listening. He drew the folds of his mantle closer about his head, when, by another entrance, there approached a tall majestic figure, clad in dark vestments, who, without speaking, came near and stood before him. A veil of rich net-work fell gracefully below his mantle, being in that era the distinctive garb of soothsayers and diviners. His hair, for he was an Asiatic, was twisted in the shape of a mitre, investing his form with every advantage from outward appearances.

"I would know," said he, "by what right thou art at this untimely hour an intruder on my privacy?"

"By a will which even thou darest not disobey," was the answer.

"It is past midnight. Knowest thou of my long watching, and the dark portents of the stars?"

"Nay. But passing, I saw the door of the vestibule partly open. The fates are propitious. I crossed the court, intending to consult the most famous soothsayer in the emperor's dominions." [Pg 419]

"Peradventure 'tis no accidental meeting. To-night I have read the stars, the book of heaven. Comest thou not, blind mortal, at their bidding?"

"I have neither skill nor knowledge in the art"——

The stranger hesitated, as though he had as lief the conversation was resumed by the diviner himself.

"Thy father. What of him?" said the Chaldean, with a look as though he had penetrated his inmost thoughts.

"True, 'tis mine errand," said the intruder. "But the event?"

"The augury is not complete!"

"Thine auguries are like my good fortune—long in compassing. The best augur, I trow, is this good steel. I would sooner trust it than the best thou canst bestow."

"Rash mortal! Impatience will be thy destruction. Listen!"

The raven hopped down upon his shoulder. A low guttural sound appeared to come from this ill-omened bird. The augur bent his ear. Sounds shaped themselves into something like articulation, and the following couplet was distinctly heard:—

"While the eagle is in his nest, the eaglet shall not prevail;
Nor shall the eagle be smitten in his eyrie."

"Azor," said the warrior, clenching his sword, "these three times hast thou mocked me, and by the immortal gods thou diest!"

"Impious one! I could strike thee powerless as the dust thou treadest on. Give me the bauble," said he, addressing the raven. The bird immediately gave the clasp he had purloined into his master's hand.

"This shall witness between us," continued he. "Dare to lift thy hand, the very palace shall bear testimony to thy treason—that thou hast sought me for purposes too horrible even for thy tongue to utter. Hence! When least expected I may meet thee. If it had not been for thy mother's sake, and for my vow, the emperor ere this had been privy to it."

Stung with rage and disappointment, he put back his weapon, and with threats and imprecations departed.

On a couch inlaid with ivory and pearl, within a vaulted chamber in the Prætorian Palace of the royal city, lay the emperor, in a coverlid of rich stuff. Disease had crushed his body, but the indomitable spirit was unquenched. Tossing and disturbed, at length he started from his bed. Calling to his chamberlain, he demanded if there had not been footsteps in the apartment. The [Pg 420] ruler of the world, whose nod could shake the nations, and whose word was the arbiter of life or death to millions of his fellow-men, lay here—startled at the passing of a sound, the falling of a shadow! His face, whose chief characteristic was power—that strength and determination of spirit which all acknowledge, and but few comprehend—was furrowed with deeper marks than care had wrought. Sixty years had moulded the steady and inflexible purpose of his soul in lines too palpable to be misunderstood. His beard was short and grizzled; and a swarthy hue, betraying his African birth, was now become sallow, and even sickly in the extreme; but an eagle eye still beamed in all its fierceness and rapacity from under his scanty brows. His nose was not of the Roman sort, like the beak of that royal bird, but thick and even clumsy, lacking that sharp and predacious intellect generally associated with forms of this description.

Such was Septimus Severus, then styled on a coin just struck "Britannicvs Maximvs," in commemoration of a great victory gained over the Caledonians, whom he had driven beyond Adrian's Wall. Though suffering from severe illness, he was carried in a horse-litter; and, marching from York at the head of his troops, penetrated almost to the extremity of the island, where he subdued that fierce and intractable nation the Scots. Returning, he left his son Caracalla to superintend the building of a stone wall across the island in place of the earthen ramparts called Adrian's; a structure, when completed, that effectually resisted the inroads of those barbarians for a considerable period.

He called a third time to Virius Lupus, one, the most confidential of his attendants, to whom many of the most important secrets of the state were entrusted.

"Thrice have I heard it, Virius. Again and again it seems to mock and elude my grasp." He paused, the officer yet listening with becoming reverence. The emperor continued, more like one whose thoughts had taken utterance than as if he were addressing the individual before him.

"When I led the Pannonian legions to victory; when Rome opened her gates at my command; when I fought my way through blood to the throne—I quailed not then! Now—satiated with power, careless of fame, the prospects of life closed, and for ever—when all that is left for me to do is to die—behold, I tremble at the shaking of a leaf! I start even at the footstep that awakes [Pg 421] me!"

"Long live the emperor!" said the cringing secretary. Interrupting him, as he would have proceeded with the customary adulations, the emperor again continued as though hardly noticing his presence—

"Caracalla yet remains with the army. Once I censured the misguided clemency of Marcus, who by an act of justice might have prevented the miseries that his son Caligula brought upon the empire; and yet I, even I," said the haughty monarch, bitterly, "nourish the very weakness that in others I despise!"

He dashed away the sweat from his brow, ashamed of the weakness he could not quell.

"He hath sought your life," said the wily sycophant.

"He hath. Traitor! parricide! the distinctions he would have earned. But my better genius triumphed, and history hath been spared this infamy. It may be, this temporary exile from our court with the northern army shall tame his spirit to submission. My life or his, once the bitter alternative, may yet be avoided."

"But may not his presence with the army be impolitic, should he turn the weapon wherewith you have girded him to your own hurt?"

"'Tis an evil choice; whichever way I turn, mischief is before me."

"Were it not best that he be recalled?"

"What? To plot and practise against my life! To mount upon my reeking body to the throne! He will not reign with Geta. The proud boy disdains a divided empire. And was not mine own soul fashioned in the same mould? When Niger would have ruled in Syria, and Albinus in Britain, I scattered their legions to the winds, and levelled their hopes with their pride. 'Tis nature; and shall I, the author of his being, punish him for mine own gift?"

He raised himself on his couch. The fierce blaze of ambition broke the dark cloud of bodily infirmities, and the monarch and the tyrant again dilated his almost savage features.

The secretary, used to these fiery moods, stood awaiting his commands. The emperor, as though exhausted, sank down on his pillow, exclaiming—

"I have governed the world, but I cannot govern a wayward heart!" [Pg 422]

Thus did he often lament, and provoke himself the more with these vain regrets; forgetting that, if he had exercised the same firmness in his private as public capacity, the government of his own house would have been easy as the government of the world.

"Virius Lupus, there is danger—and to-night. As I have told thee, the stars do betoken mischief. But the peril is at my threshold. Let Caracalla remain; so shall we avert his weapon. Should the assassin come, it will not be with the blow of a parricide. Thou mayest retire to thy couch, but first let the guards be doubled, the watchword and countersign changed. And, hark thee, tell the tribune that he look well to the *tessera*, and have the right count from the inspectors. Should despatches come from Rome, let the messenger have immediate audience."

Again the emperor stretched himself on the couch, and again his slumbers were interrupted. A murmur was heard along the halls and passages where the guards were stationed. The noise grew louder, approaching the very door of the royal chamber. The monarch started as from a dream, and the door at that moment opened. The Chaldean soothsayer stood before him.

"Azor!" said the emperor, "at this hour? What betides such unseemly greeting?"

"Cæsar trembles on his throne; but the world quakes not! The angel of death is at thy door. Caracalla hath returned."

"Returned? Surely thy wits are disturbed. Caracalla! Ay, even yesterday, we had despatches from the camp."

"Howbeit, he is at thy threshold. The sound of his feet is behind me."

"Impossible! the mischief is not from him."

"Even now I looked in the crystal, and behold"——The soothsayer paused. Horror was gathering on his features. The light suspended above him began to quiver; and as it waved to and fro his countenance assumed a tremulous and distorted expression.

Severus watched the result with no little anxiety. The magician drew a crystal cup from his girdle. Looking in apparently with great alarm, he presented it at arm's length to the emperor, who beheld a milky cloud slowly undulating within the vessel.

"Take this," said the soothsayer, "and tell me what thou seest." [Pg 423]

The monarch took it at his bidding. The cloud seemed to be clearing away, as the morning mist before the sun.

"I see nothing," said the emperor, "but a silver clasp at the bottom."

"And the owner?"

"As I live," said the astonished parent, drawing forth a curiously-embossed clasp from the goblet, and holding it out to the light, "this token of rare workmanship did the empress present to Caracalla ere he departed. Whence came it? and wherefore hast thou brought it hither?"

"A silent witness to my word. Within the hour thy son returns; and"——The seer's voice grew more ominous whilst he spake. "Beware! there's mischief in the wind. The raven scents his prey afar off!"

"If in this thou art a true prophet I will give thee largess; but if a lying spirit of divination possess thee, my power is swift to punish as to reward."

"I heed not either. Do I serve thee for lucre? Look thee, in less time than I would occupy in telling thee on't I could fill thy palace with gold and silver!—and do I covet thy paltry treasures? The kingdoms of this world are his whom I serve, and shall I seek thy perishing honours? Behold, I leave this precious goblet as my pledge. I must away. Thou shalt render it back on my return. I would not part with that treasure for the dominion of the Cæsars. Beware thou let it not forth from thy sight, for there be genii who are bound to serve its possessor, and peradventure it shall

give thee warning when evil approaches."

The soothsayer departed, and the emperor laid the crystal goblet on a table opposite his couch. He clapped his hands, and the chief secretary approached.

"What said our messenger from the north? Read again the despatch they brought yesterday."

The secretary drew forth a roll from his cabinet, and read as follows:—

"Again the supreme gods have granted victory to our legions. Favoured by the darkness and their boats, the barbarians attacked us from three separate points. Led on by Fingal and his warriors, whom beforetime we erroneously reported to be slain, they crossed over to the station where we had pitched our tents. But the Roman eagle was yet watchful. Though retreating behind our last [Pg 424] defences, we left not the field until a thousand, the choicest of our foes, bit the dust. Morning showed us the red-haired chief and his bards, but they were departing, and their spears were glittering on the mountains."

"Enough!" said the emperor. "Caracalla tarries yet with the camp. Our person is not menaced by his hand. Prithee, send a brasier hither. The night is far spent, and slumber will not again visit these eyelids."

A bronze tripod was brought supported by sphinxes, the worship of Isis being a fashionable idolatry at that period. Charred wood was then placed in a round dish pierced with holes, and perfumes thrown in to correct the smell. The emperor commanded that he should be left alone. Covering his shoulders with a richly-embroidered mantle, he took from behind his pillow a Greek treatise on the occult sciences, to the study of which he was passionately addicted.

It is said of him by historians that he was guided by his skill in judicial astrology to the choice of the reigning empress, having lost his first wife when governor of the Lyonnese Gaul. Finding that a lady of Emesa in Syria, one Julia Domna, had what was termed "a royal nativity," he solicited and obtained her hand, thus making the prophecy the means of its accomplishment.

A woman of great beauty and strong natural acquirements, she was at the same time the patron of all that was noble and distinguished in the philosophy and literature of the age. It was even said that secretly she was a favourer of the Christians. Be this as it may, we do not find she ever became a professor of the faith.

Sleep, that capricious guest which comes unbidden but not invited, was just stealing over the monarch's eyelids when the roll fell from his grasp. The unexpected movement startled him. His eye fell on the bright crystal opposite. He thought a glimmer was moving in the glass. He remembered the words of the sage, and his eye was riveted on the mystic goblet. A sudden flash was reflected from it. He started forward, when a naked sword fell on the couch: the stroke he only escaped by having so accidentally changed his place! The glass had revealed the glitter of the blade behind him, and he was indebted to a few inches of space for his life!

Looking round, he beheld a masked figure preparing to repeat the stroke. Severus, with his usual [Pg 425] courage and presence of mind, threw his mantle across the assassin's sword. He cried out, and the chamber was immediately filled with guards; but whether from treachery or inadvertence, the traitor was nowhere to be found. He had escaped, leaving his weapon entangled in the folds of the mantle. On examination, the emperor's surprise was visibly increased when he recognised the sword as one belonging to Caracalla! The soothsayer's prediction was apparently fulfilled. To the emperor's superstitious apprehensions the crystal goblet was charged with his safety. But lo! on being sought for, the charmed cup was gone!

The next morning, as the sun was just rising over the green wolds, and the fresh air came brisk and sharply on the traveller's cheek, a stranger was noticed loitering through the narrow streets of the imperial city. He had passed the great Galcarian or western gate, from which the statue of the reigning emperor on that memorable morning was found razed from its pedestal. The outer and inner faces of the gate were whitened for the writing of edicts and proclamations by the government scribes, and likewise for the public notices of minor import, these being daubed on the walls with various degrees of skill, in red or black pigments, according to the nature of the decrees that were issued by the prætor, and the caprice of the artist.

On that morning a number of idlers had assembled about the gate. The statue of the emperor, fallen prostrate, had been removed, and an edict promptly supplied, to the purport that an impious hand, having attempted the life of the monarch, a reward of one hundred thousand *sestertia* would be the price of his apprehension. Another reward of the like sum was offered for the discovery of a crystal goblet stolen from the emperor's chamber.

The individual we have just noticed wore the common sleeved tunic of coarse wool; over it was a cloak buckled on the right shoulder, the yarn being dyed in such wise that, when woven, it might resemble the skin of a brindled ox—such was the dress of the ancient Britons. His head was covered with a close cap, but his feet were naked; and the only weapon he bore was a two-

handed sword, stuck in his girdle.

Ere he passed the gate it might be supposed that his business and credentials would have been rigidly scrutinised by the guards; but he merely showed a large signet-ring to the superior [Pg 426] officer, and was immediately allowed to pass. He soon came to the wooden bridge over the river, now kept by a body of the Prætorian guards. Here, on attempting to pass, he was immediately seized. With an air of stupid or affected concern, the prisoner drew the same signet from his hand, the sight of which again procured him immediate access. The bridge was crossed, and after passing along the narrow winding streets he came to a small triumphal arch leading into the Forum. This was an area of but mean extent, surrounded by a colonnade, serving as a market for all sorts of wares, and the trades carried on under its several porticoes. The outer walls behind the columns were painted in compartments, black and red, and here a number of citizens were assembled. There was hurrying to and fro. Soldiers and messengers, even so early, were bustling about with ominous activity. The stranger looked on for a while with a vacant sort of curiosity, then, turning to the left hand, went forward towards the gate of the palace. On a corner of the building he saw another edict to the same purport as before. Near it was the announcement of a spectacle at the theatre, the gift of a wealthy patrician for the amusement and gratification of the people. Still the stranger passed on, apparently uninterested by all, until he came to the outer gate, where he merely paused a few moments, as though to observe the movements of the soldiers and the changing of the guard. The sound of the trumpet seemed to attract especial notice from this barbarian, whose uncouth air and rude manners drew upon him the gaze of many as they passed by. He now turned into a narrower street behind the palace, and here he sought out a common tavern, where the chequers newly painted on the door-posts betokened good entertainment for travellers. Having entered, the hostess, whose tucked-up dress and general appearance Martial, in his epigrams, so cunningly describes, brought him a vase or flagon of wine. It was not of the true Falernian flavour, as may be readily surmised, but a mixture of stuff which can hardly be described, of nauseous taste, smelling abominably of resin or pitch, and flavoured with myrrh and other bitters. Both hot and cold refections solicited the taste and regaled the sight of the visitor. Flitches of bacon were suspended from above, and firewood stuffed between the rafters, black and smoky with the reeking atmosphere below. At his own request, the stranger was installed in a small chamber behind the public room, where stood a [Pg 427] couch, a three-footed table, and a lavatory. Here he was served with radishes, cheese, and roasted eggs in earthen vessels, with a relish of cornels in pickle. Ere this refection was brought in the table was rubbed over with a sprig of mint, and the coarse pottery betrayed an exquisite odour of thyme and garlic.

After the needful refreshments and ablutions he sallied forth, first inquiring for the residence of the Chaldean soothsayer, before whose door, in due time, he arrived. The gate leading to the vestibule was open, and he entered by a narrow passage terminated by a small inner court. He paused, and looked round. No fountain played in the centre; a clump of rank, unwholesome grass was the only decoration; but the object of his search was a crooked wooden staircase, which led to a sort of gallery above. After a little hesitation he ascended; his country manners showing a determination to persevere, until fairly delivered of his errand. A door at the extremity of the gallery stood ajar, and through this he made bold to enter. A Numidian slave, dwarfish and deformed, was sweeping his master's chamber. He stopped short as the barbarian, with a stupid and wondering look, entered the apartment. After surveying the new comer with an air of deliberate scrutiny, the dwarf burst forth into a violent fit of laughter.

"Mercury hath sent us precious handsel this morning, truly," said he, when his diversion was concluded. "A pretty hound to scent out master's lost goods. The gods do verily mock us in thy most gracious person."

The visitor looked on with dismay during this ungracious and taunting speech. At length he stammered forth—

"Thy master, is he not the Chaldean to whom my mistress, knowing I was bound for the city, hath sent me privily with a message?"

The Briton spoke this in a sort of guttural and broken Latin, which the apish dwarf mimicked in the most mischievous and provoking way imaginable. The messenger, irritated beyond endurance, placed both hands on his weapon, but his antagonist, with little ado, tripped up his heels, and the poor aborigine was completely at the mercy of this grotesque specimen of humanity.

Grinning over him with spite and mischief in his looks, the dwarf stamped on the floor; presently [Pg 428] there came two slaves, who, without further notice than a blow now and then when resistance was offered, bound him with stout cords, and bade him lie there until he should be further disposed of. Inquiry was vain as to the cause of this treatment. Bound hand and foot, he was then tossed with little ceremony and less compunction into a corner of the room, and there left to bemoan his hard fate. Perched just above his head sat the cunning raven, who eyed him as though with serious intentions of pecking at him in his present defenceless condition. He was soon aware of this additional source of alarm, and as the bird's eye brightened and twinkled with greedy anticipation, he rubbed his rapacious beak on the perch, apparently whetting it for the feast. He then jumped down on the floor, and hopping close to his victim, gave a hoarse and dismal croak, a death-warning, it might be, to the unfortunate captive. He tried to burst his bonds, and shrieked out in the extremity of his alarm. His struggles kept the bird at a distance, but it continued to survey him with such a longing, liquorish eye, that the poor culprit felt himself

already writhing, like another Prometheus, under the beak of his destroyer. His terror increased. It might be some demon sent to torment him; and this conviction strengthened when he saw the dismal and hideous things that surrounded him. Just as his agony was wrought to the highest pitch he heard footsteps. Even the sound was some relief. He knew not what further indignities—not to say violence—he might expect; but at all events there would be a change, and it was hailed as an alleviation to his misery.

The soothsayer presented himself, attended by the ugly dwarf.

"A stupid barbarian thou sayest the Fates have sent us?" said the Chaldean, as he entered. "Bridle thine impious tongue, Merodac; what the dweller in immortal fire hath decreed will be accomplished, though by weak and worthless creatures such as these. What ho! stranger, whence art thou? and why art thou moved so early across our threshold?"

"My lord," said the prisoner, in a tone of entreaty, "these bonds are unlawful—I am a freed man. Though a Briton, I am no slave; and I beseech you to visit this indignity on that rogue who hath so scurvily entreated me."

"I was privy to it, else would he not have dared this."

"And to what end, good master?" [Pg 429]

"That we may have an answer propitious to our suit."

"What! are ye about to sacrifice me to your infernal deities?" cried the captive, almost frantic with the anticipation.

"My friend, thou art bound for another purpose—to wit, that through thy instrumentality we may discover the divining cup the emperor hath lost. Knowest thou aught of this precious crystal?" inquired the Chaldean, with a searching look.

But it were vain to describe the astonishment of the victim. He looked almost in doubt of his own identity, or as if he were trying to shake off the impression of some hideous dream. At length he replied—

"'Tis some device surely that ye may slay me!"

He wept; and the tears trickling down his cheek were indeed piteous to behold. "I know not," said he, "your meaning. Let me depart."

"Nay, said the soothsayer, "thou mayest content thyself as thou list, but the cup shall be found, and that by thy ministry. The emperor hath offered rewards nigh to the value of three silver talents for the recovery, and assuredly thou shalt be held in durance until it be regained."

"And by whose authority?" inquired the Briton.

"Why, truly, it becometh thee to ask, seeing thou art a party interested in the matter. The emperor in whose care the jewel was left, hath sworn by the river Styx that unless the cup be brought back to the palace ere to-morrow's dawn, he will punish the innocent with the guilty, and that with no sparing hand. He hath already laid hands on some of the more wealthy citizens, and amerced them in divers sums; others are detained as hostages for suspected persons who are absent from the city. The loss of this cup being connected with a daring attempt on the emperor's life by some unknown hand, he doth suspect that the very palace wants purging from treason; yet where to begin, or on whom to fasten suspicion, he knoweth not. Mine art has hitherto failed me in the matter. The tools they work with baffle my skill, save that the oracle I consult commanded that I should lay hold on the first male person that came hither to-day, and by his ministry the lost treasure should be restored. Shouldst thou refuse, thou art lost; for assuredly the emperor will not be slow to punish thy contumacy." [Pg 430]

The miserable captive fell into great perplexity at this discourse. He vowed he knew no more of the lost cup than the very stones he trod on; that he had come since nightfall from his master, Lucius Claudius, lieutenant and standard-bearer of the sixth legion, then at Isurium,[23] on a mere casual errand to the city; and that his mistress, who was a British lady of noble birth, had instructed him, at the same time, to consult the soothsayer on some matters relative to her nativity, which the sage had calculated some years back. Almost a stranger in these parts, how could he pretend to begin the search? He begged piteously for his release; promising, and with great sincerity, that he would never set foot in this inhospitable region again. The magician inquired his name.

"Cedric with the ready foot," was the reply. Unmoved by his entreaties, the soothsayer said he had the emperor's command for the use of every method he could devise for the recovery of this precious and priceless jewel; and that, furthermore, the safety and even lives of many innocent persons depended on the stranger's exertions, and the speedy execution of his mission. But how to begin, or in what quarter to commence the search, was a riddle worthy of the Sphinx. A most unexpected and novel situation for this rude dweller in woods and morasses, to be suddenly thrust forth into a mighty city, without guide or direction, more ignorant of his errand than any of its inhabitants. Besides, he was not without a sort of incipient and instinctive dread that the catastrophe might procure him an interview with the emperor; and he was filled with apprehension lest his own carcase might afford a special treat, a sacrifice to the brutal appetite of the spectators in the amphitheatre, after the manner of the *bestiarii*, or gladiators, of whom he

had often heard. Even could he have gotten word of this mishap to his master, he was by no means certain it would be attended with any beneficial result. The time was too short, and the will and mandate of the emperor would render futile any attempt to obtain deliverance from this quarter.

A few moments sufficed for these considerations. The glance of the mind, when on the rack for expedients, is peculiarly keen, and hath an eagle-like perception that appears as though it could pierce to the dim and distant horizon of its hopes and apprehensions. [Pg 431]

"Unbind these withes," said the captive; "I cannot begin the search in this extremity."

"Merodac, undo these bonds; and see thou guard thy prisoner strictly; thy life answers for his safe keeping."

The dwarf, who seemed never so well pleased as when tormenting the more fortunate and better shapen of his species, unloosed the cords with something of the like feeling and intention as a cat when liberating some unfortunate mouse from her talons.

"There's a chance of rare sport i' the shows to-morrow," said the ugly jailer. "We are sure of *thee*, anyhow. Didst ever see the criminals fight with wolves, Hyrcanian bears, and such like? I would not miss the sight for the best feather in my cap."

The cruel slave here rubbed his hands, and his yellow eyes glistened with the horrible anticipation. His victim groaned aloud.

"I'll tell thee a rare device," continued he, "whereby thou mayest escape being eaten at least a full hour; and we shall have the longer sport. Mind thee, the beasts do not always get the carcases for dinner. If they be cowardly and show little fight, we give the dead bestiarii to the dogs. I remember me well the last we threw into the emperor's kennel, the dogs made such a fighting for the carrion that he ordered each of us a flagellation for the disturbance. Let me see, there was—ay"——Here the knave began to count the number of shows and human sacrifices he had seen, recounting every particular with the most horrible minuteness. Cedric felt himself already in the gripe of the savages, and his flesh verily quivered on his bones.

Brutal and demoralising were those horrid spectacles. The people of Rome, it has been well observed by a modern writer, were generally more corrupt by many degrees than has been usually supposed possible. Many were the causes which had been gradually operating towards this result, and amongst the rest the continual exhibition of scenes where human blood was poured forth like water. The continual excitement of the populace demanded fresh sacrifices, until even these palled upon the cruel appetites of the multitude. Even the more innocent exhibitions, where brutes were the sufferers, could not but tend to destroy all the finer sensibilities of the nature. "Five thousand wild animals, torn from their native abodes in the [Pg 432] wilderness and the forest," have been turned out for mutual slaughter in one single exhibition at the amphitheatre. Sometimes the *lanista*, or person who exhibited the shows and provided the necessary supplies, by way of administering specially to the gratification of the populace, made it known, as a particular favour, that the whole of these should be slaughtered. These, however, soon ceased to stimulate the appetite for blood. From such combats "the transition was inevitable to those of men, whose nobler and more varied passions spoke directly, and by the intelligible language of the eye, to human spectators; and from the frequent contemplation of these authorised murders, in which a whole people—women as much as men, and children intermingled with both—looked on with leisurely indifference, with anxious expectation, or with rapturous delight, whilst below them were passing the direct sufferings of humanity, and not seldom its dying pangs, it was impossible to expect a result different from that which did, in fact, take place—universal hardness of heart, obdurate depravity, and a twofold degradation of human nature, the natural sensibility and the conscientious principle." "Here was a constant irritation, a system of provocation to the appetite for blood, such as in other nations are connected with the rudest stages of society, and with the most barbarous modes of warfare."

"Whither wilt thou that we direct our steps?" inquired Merodac, with mock submission, when the cords were unloosed.

"Lead the way—I care not," said his moody victim; "'tis as well that I follow."

A bitter and scornful laugh accompanied the reply of the dwarf.

"That were a pretty device truly—to let thee lag behind, and without thy tether. Ah, ah," chuckled the squire as they left the chamber, "Diogenes and his lantern was a wise man's search compared with ours."

How the slave came to be so learned in Grecian lore we know not. His further displays of erudition were cut short by the soothsayer, who cried out to him as they departed—

"Remember, thy carcase for his if he return not."

Now, in York, at this day, may be observed, where an angle of the walls abuts on the "Mint Yard," a building named "the Multangular Tower," and supposed to have been one of the principal [Pg 433] fortifications of the city. However this might be, its structure has puzzled not a little even those most conversant with antiquities. The area was not built up all round, but open towards the city. The foundations of a wall have latterly been discovered, dividing it lengthwise through the centre, and continued for some distance into the town; so that the whole may not inaptly be

represented by a Jewtrump—the tongue being the division, the circular end the present Multangular Tower, continued by walls on each side. This building, we have every reason to conjecture, was the Greek *stadium* or Roman circus, which authors tell us was a narrow piece of ground shaped like a staple; the round end called the barrier. The wall dividing it lengthwise is the *spina*, or flat ridge running through the middle, which was generally a low wall, and sometimes merely a mound of earth. This was usually decorated with statues of gods, columns, votive altars, and the like. As a corroboration of this opinion, there have been found here several small statues, altars, and other figures, betokening a place of public resort or amusement.

The circus was not used merely for horse and chariot races, but likewise for wrestling—the *cæstus*, and other athletic games. It was noted as the haunt of fortune-tellers, and thither the poorer people used to resort and hear their fortunes told.[24]

Near this place stood the barracks, or *castra*. Long ranges of rooms divided into several storeys, the doors of each chamber opening into one common gallery, ascended by a wooden staircase.

Hither we must conduct our readers at the close of the day on whose inauspicious morning "Cedric with the ready-foot" was placed in such jeopardy.

The whole city meanwhile had been astir. The emperor's wrath and desire of revenge were excited to the utmost pitch. He suspected treachery even amongst the Prætorian guards—his favourite and best-disciplined troops; and there was an apprehension of some terrible disgrace attaching even to them. Still, nothing further transpired implicating the soldiery, save that the assassin had escaped, and apparently through the very midst of the guard; yet no one chose to accuse his fellow, or say by whose means this mysterious outlet was contrived. Not even to his most confidential minister did the emperor reveal the discovery of his son's weapon. Neither that [Pg 434] son, nor his guilty accomplices, if any, could be found; and the day was fast closing upon the monarch's threat, that on the morrow his vengeance should have its full work unless the crystal goblet was restored.

There had been a public spectacle at the theatre, but the emperor was not present; and such was the consternation of the whole city that the performance was but scantily attended. The city was apparently on the eve of some sad catastrophe, and the whole population foreboding some fearful event.

In the circus were yet some stray groups, who, having little employment of their own, were listening for news, and loitering about either for mischief or amusement.

In one part was exhibited a narrow wooden box, not unlike to our puppet-show, wherein a person was concealed having figures made of wood and earthenware that seemed to act and speak, to the great wonder and diversion of the audience.

As the rays of the declining sun smote upon the city walls and the white sails of the barks below, there came into the circus the dwarf who had charge of Cedric. The captive now looked like a sort of appendage to his person—being strapped to his arm by a stout thong of bull's hide, such as was used for correcting refractory slaves. The hours allotted for search were nearly gone. Day was drawing to a close, and Cedric had done little else than bemoan his hard fate. The whole day had been spent in wandering from place to place, urged on by the scoffs and jeers of his companion. Some furtive attempts to escape had been the cause of his present bondage. Hither, at length, they arrived. Tired and distressed, he sat down on one of the vacant benches, and gave vent to his sorrows in no very careful or measured language.

"What can I do?" said he, "a stranger in this great city—to set me a-finding what I never knew? A grain of wheat in a barn full of chaff, mayhap—a needle in a truss of hay—anything I might find but what was sheer impossible. And now am I like to be thrown to the dogs, like a heap of carrion!"

"But the oracle, friend."

"Plague on the oracle, for"——Here his speech was interrupted; for happening to look up, he saw, as he fancied, the eyes of one of the little figures in the show-box ogling him, and making mouths in such wise as to draw upon him the attention of the spectators, now roaring with laughter at his [Pg 435] expense. Reckless of consequences, and almost furious from sufferings, he suddenly jumped up, and dragging the dwarf along with him, made a desperate blow at the mimic, which, in a moment, laid sprawling a whole company of little actors, together with the prime mover himself, and the showman outside to boot. The fray, as may readily be conceived, waxed loud and furious. The owners and bystanders not discriminating as to the main cause of the attack, would have handled both the keeper and the captive very roughly, had not the noise awakened the attention of the soldiers in the neighbouring barracks. Hearing the affray, a party ran to ascertain the cause of the disturbance, and seeing two men whom a whole crowd had combined to attack, concluded they were culprits, and forthwith haled them before the captain of the guard, a centurion, Diogenes Verecundus by name.

Cedric and the dwarf being rescued from a sound beating, began to abuse one another as the cause of the disturbance; but the officer, by dint of threats and inquiries, soon learned the truth of the matter.

"Thank the stars, I shall be rid of this pestilence to-morrow," said Merodac; "my master could not have found me such another; and how the Fates could pitch upon such a sorry cur for the

business seems passing strange. If he find the cup I'll be beaten to a jelly in it. Thy carcase will be meat for the emperor's hounds to-morrow."

"If, as thou sayest," said the centurion, "thou art so mightily weary of thy charge, leave him to my care; I would fain have some discourse with him privily touching what thou hast spoken."

The slave hesitated.

"On the word of a Roman soldier he shall be forthcoming. Tell thy master that Verecundus the centurion hath taken thy prisoner captive. Here is money for thee."

The Ethiop showed his teeth like ivory studs on a coral band, while the rings shook in his wrinkled ears as he took the largess. Yet his brow contracted, and he hung his head. He hesitated to unloose the bonds.

"By what token?" he at length inquired.

"By this!" said the centurion, taking up a thong for his correction. "Stay," continued he, laying it down, "I will not punish thee undeservedly. Take these; they will bear thee harmless with thy master." [Pg 436]

The dwarf took the writing thankfully, and made the best of his way to the dwelling of the soothsayer.

The officer now beckoned Cedric that he should follow. In a low room by the guard-chamber at the gate the following conversation took place.

"There is evil denounced us of a truth," said Verecundus; "but it may be the gods have sent thee hither for our rescue, as the oracle hath said."

The Briton fixed his wondering eyes on the soldier whilst he continued.

"I have pondered the words well, and if thou prove trusty, ere this night pass the plot shall be discovered and the ringleaders secured. We have need of such a one as thou—a stranger, whom they will not suspect, and will use the intelligence he obtains with a vigilant and cunning eye. There is work for thee, which, if well done, may bring thee to great wealth and honour. If thou fail, we fall together in the same ruin. There is a plot against the emperor; and one which hath its being, ay in the very secrets of the palace. Those nearest him I am well assured are the chief movers in the conspiracy. 'Tis this makes it so perilous to discover, and without a fitting agent the mischief will not be overcome. I have thought to throw myself at the emperor's feet, but having no proof withal to support my suspicions, I should in all likelihood fall a sacrifice to my own fidelity."

"But how," asked the bewildered Cedric, "shall I discover them? Verily it doth seem that to-day I am destined to work out impossibilities. How it comes to pass that a poor ignorant wretch like myself should compass these things, it faileth my weak fancy to discover!"

"The soothsayer's speech is not lightly to be regarded. Hark thee, knave! Is life precious unto thee?"

"Yea, truly is it. I have a wife and children, besides a few herds and other live stock, likewise sundry beeves i' the forest. But unless I can find favour in your eyes, my goods, alas! I am not like to see again."

"Nor wilt thou peradventure again behold the light of yon blessed sun which hath just gone down. The shades of evening are upon us, and the shadows of death are upon thine eyelids; for, hark thee, I do suspect some treasonable message in thine errand to the city." [Pg 437]

Cedric, with a look of terror and incredulity, stammered out—

"As I live, I know not thy meaning!"

"Thou art in my power; and unless thou servest me faithfully, thou diest a cruel and fearful death. What was the exact message wherewith thou was entrusted?"

The Briton's countenance brightened as he replied—

"I give it to thee with right good-will. No treason lurks there, I trow. 'Take this,' said my master, yesternight, giving me a signet ring; 'take it to York by daybreak. At the gate show it to the guard. If they let thee pass, well. If not, return, for there is mischief in the city. At the bridge, shouldest thou get so far, again show it, where, I doubt not, thou shalt find thereby a ready passage. Seek thee out some by-tavern where thou mayest refresh; then about mid-day go into the street called the Goldsmiths', and there inquire for one Caius Lupus, the empress' jeweller. Show him the signet, and mark what he shall tell thee.'"

"Thou hast given him the signet, then?" said the centurion, sharply.

"Nay. For my mistress, as ill-luck would have it, hearing of my journey, and she having had some knowledge of the soothsayer's art aforetime, bade me consult him ere my errand was ready with the goldsmith, and deliver a pressing request for the horoscope which had been long promised. What passed then, as thou knowest, is the cause of my calamity."

"But didst thou not search out the dwelling of this same Caius, and do thine errand?"

"I did. But in the straits which I endured I was not careful to note the time. An hour past mid-day I sought out his dwelling; but he was gone to the palace on urgent business with the empress, nor was it known when he might return."

"Sayest thou so, friend? I would like to look at this same potent talisman."

Cedric drew forth the ring. It was a beautiful onyx, on which, engraven with exquisite workmanship, was a head of the youthful Caracalla encircled by a laurel wreath, showing marks of the most consummate skill.

"Was thine errand told to the soothsayer?" was the next inquiry.

"Verily, nay," said the messenger; "there was little space for parley ere I was thrust forth."

"He saw not the signet, then?" [Pg 438]

"Of a truth it has not been shown save to the guards for my passport."

"Now, knave, thy life hangs on a thread so brittle that a breath shall break it. This same goldsmith I do suspect; but thou shalt see him, and whatsoever he showeth I will be at hand that thou mayest tell me privily. I will then instruct thee what thou shalt do. If thou fail not in thy mission, truly thou shalt have great rewards from the emperor. But if thou whisper—ay to the walls—of our meeting, thou diest! Remember thou art watched. Think not to escape."

The poor wretch caught hold on this last hope of deliverance, and promised to obey.

There was a narrow vault beneath the women's apartments in the palace, communicating by many intricate passages with an outlet into the Forum. Here, on this eventful night, was an unusual assemblage. The vault was deep, even below the common foundations of the city, and where the light of day never came. An iron lamp hung from one of the massy arches of the roof; the damp and stagnant vapours lending an awful indistinctness to the objects they surrounded. Chill drops lay on the walls and on the slippery floor. The stone benches were green with mildew; and it seemed as though the foot of man had rarely passed its threshold.

In this chamber several individuals were now assembled in earnest discourse, their conversation whispered rather than spoken; yet their intrepid and severe looks, and animated gestures, ever and anon betrayed some deep and resolute purpose more than usually portentous.

"An untoward event truly," said one of the speakers, Virius Lupus himself, the emperor's private secretary. "If the old magician could have been won, it had been well."

"He might have saved the encounter and hazard we must now undergo. But let him hold his fealty. We have stout hearts and resolute hands enow to bring the matter to a successful issue." Thus spoke Caracalla, the unnatural eldest born of his father.

"And yet," replied the secretary, "he hath a ready admittance to his person, and a great sway over thy father's councils."

"I heed him not, now that brave men work. It were time that our trusty servant, the commander at Isurium, had sent the message, with the token I left him on my departure. Ere this we ought to [Pg 439] have known the hour we may expect his troops to move on the capital. I had thought to have made all safe—to have put it beyond the power of fate to frustrate our purpose; but I was foiled like a beardless boy at his weapons." He gnashed his teeth as he spoke; and this monster of cruelty breathed a horrible threat against the life even of a parent and a king.

"Here is the roll," said one, who from his inkhorn and reed-pen seemed to be the scribe, and whose ambition had been lured by a promise that he should have the office of sextumvir in the imperial city.

"Here be the names and disposition of the troops; the avenues and gates to which they are appointed."

"We but wait a messenger from Isurium to make our plans complete," said Caracalla. "By the same courier I send back this cypher. Examine it, Fabricius. The troops of Lucius Claudius are to march directly on the Forum, and slay all who attempt resistance. Thou, Virius Lupus, wilt guide them through the secret passage into the palace."

The secretary bowed assent.

"Though the empress knows not our high purpose, it is by her connivance we are here, safe from the emperor's spies. Under her mantle we are hidden. Suspicion hath crossed her that I am about to head the troops; that my father, oppressed with age and infirmities, will retire to Rome; and that I, Caracalla, rule in Britain."

"Then she knows not the mishap of yesternight?"

"She knows of the attempt, but not the agent. I would the messenger were come. 'Tis an unforeseen delay. I pray the gods there be not treachery somewhere. The officers and guards at the Calcarian gate and the bridge are ours; they were instructed to obey the signet."

"We will vouch for the fidelity," said two or three of the conspirators.

"Should he not arrive before midnight we must strike," said Fabricius.

"Ay, as before," said the more cautious secretary. "But we may now get a broken head for our pains."

"The time brooks not delay," said Caracalla. "Every moment now is big with danger to our enterprise."

"Be not again too hasty," replied the secretary; "there be none that will divulge our plans. Let every part be complete before we act. We cannot succeed should there be a disjointed purpose." [Pg 440]

Caracalla, vehement, and unused to the curb, was about to reply, when the door opened and a dumb slave slowly entered. He crossed his hands, and pointed to the door.

"A messenger," said they all.

"The gods are at last propitious," said Caracalla. "Let him approach."

Soon one was led in by the sentinel, blindfolded, and the latter immediately withdrew.

"The sign," cried the secretary.

The stranger, without hesitation, presented a ring.

"'Tis the same," said Caracalla. He touched a concealed spring in the signet, and from underneath the gem drew forth a little paper with a scrap of writing in cypher. It was held before the lamp, and the intelligence it contained rendered their plot complete. Ere break of day, the deed would be accomplished. The morning would see Caracalla proclaimed, and Severus deposed.

"Have ye any token to my master?" inquired the messenger.

"Take back this writing," said Virius Lupus. "Thou wilt find him not far from the city. We wait his coming."

"This leaden-heeled Mercury should have a largess," said the chief, "but in this den we have not wherewithal to give him. Hold! here is a good recompense, methinks," continued he, taking the crystal goblet from a recess. "Take this to thy mistress, and tell her to buy it from thee. We will see her anon. That charmed cup hath foiled me once, but I will foil thee now, and the powers thou servest. Thou shall not again cross my path!"

Cedric took the gift, wrapping it beneath his cloak.

"Thou mayest depart."

The dumb sentinel again took charge of him, and led him away by many intricate passages towards the entrance, where it seems the goldsmith had directed him on presenting the signet of Caracalla. The person who took charge of him was a dumb eunuch, a slave in the service of the empress.

But the terrors of death were upon the wretched victim. He knew the centurion would assuredly be at hand to receive his report, and he could not escape. He had not brought back one word of intelligence; and being blindfolded, he knew not whither he had been taken. The writing he [Pg 441] carried would assuredly be unintelligible save to those for whom it was intended. His mission, he could perceive, had utterly failed. The centurion would not be able to profit by anything he had brought back, and must inevitably, according to his pledge, at once render him up to the soothsayer. Whilst ruminating on his hard fate a sudden thought crossed him. There was little probability of success, but at all events it might operate as a diversion in his favour, and the design was immediately executed. Skulking for a moment behind the slave, he tore off the bandage, and tripped up the heels of his conductor. Before the latter could recover himself the Briton's gripe was on his throat.

"Now, slave, thou art my prisoner! Lead on, or by this good sword, thou diest!"

The torch he carried was luckily not extinguished in the fall. The eunuch, almost choking, made a sign that he would obey. With the drawn blade at his throat, the slave went on; but Cedrick, ever wary, and with that almost instinctive sagacity peculiar to man in his half-civilised state, kept a tiger-like watch on every movement of his prisoner, which enabled him to detect the fingers of the slave suddenly raised to his lips, and a shrill whistle would have consigned him over to certain and immediate destruction; but he struck down the uplifted hand with a blow which made his treacherous conductor crouch and cringe almost to the ground.

"Another attempt," said Cedric, "and we perish together!"

The wily slave looked all penitence and submission. Silently proceeding, apparently through the underground avenues of the palace, Cedric was momentarily expecting his arrival at the place where the centurion kept watch. A flight of steps now brought them to a spacious landing-place. Suddenly a lamp was visible, and beneath it sat a number of soldiers, the emperor's body-guard. They gave way as the eunuch passed by, followed by Cedric, his sword still drawn. Several of these groups were successively cleared: the guide, by a countersign, was enabled to thread his way through every obstacle that presented itself. The Briton's heart misgave him as they approached a vestibule, before which a phalanx of the guards kept watch. Here he thought it prudent to sheath his weapon, though he still followed the eunuch, as his only remaining chance of escape. Even here they were instantly admitted, and without any apparent hesitation. The door [Pg 442]

turned slowly on its pivot, and Cedric found himself in a richly-decorated chamber, where, by the light of a single lamp, and with the smell of perfumed vapour in his nostrils, he saw a figure in costly vestments reclining on a couch. The slave prostrated himself.

"What brings thee from thy mistress at this untimely hour? A message from the empress?"

Here the speaker raised himself from the couch, and the slave, with great vehemence, made certain signs, which the wondering Briton understood not.

"Ah!" said the emperor, his eyes directly levelled at the supposed culprit; "thou hast found the thief who, in the confusion of yesternight, bore away the magic cup. Bring him hither that I may question him ere his carcase be sent to the beasts."

The doomed wretch was now fairly in the paws of the very tyrant he had so long dreaded. The death which by every stratagem he had striven to avoid was now inevitable. He was betrayed by means of the very device he had, as he thought, so craftily adopted; but still his natural sagacity did not forsake him even in this unexpected emergency. As he prostrated himself, presenting the cup he had stowed away safely in his cloak, he still kept a wary eye on the slave who had betrayed him. He saw him preparing to depart; and knowing that his only hope of deliverance lay in preventing his guide from giving warning to the conspirators they had just left, Cedric, with a sudden spring, leaped upon him like a tiger, even in the presence of the monarch.

The latter, astounded at this unexpected act of temerity, was for a few moments inactive. This pause was too precious to be lost. Desperation gave him courage, and Cedric addressed the dread ruler of the world even whilst he clutched the gasping traitor.

"Here, great monarch, here is the traitor; and if I prove him not false, on my head be the recompense!"

He said this in a tone of such earnestness and anxiety that the emperor was suddenly diverted from his purpose of summoning his attendants. He saw the favourite slave of the empress writhing in the gripe of the barbarian; but the events of the last few hours had awakened suspicions which the lightest accusations might confirm. He remembered his son's guilt; the facility of his escape; and it might be that treason stood on the very threshold, ready to strike. He determined to sift the matter; and the guard now summoned, the parties were separated—each awaiting the fiat of the monarch. [Pg 443]

"Where is Virius Lupus?" was the emperor's first inquiry.

"He hath not returned from the apartments of the empress."

"Let this slave be bound," cried Cedric. "Force him to conduct you even to the place whence, blindfold, he hath just led me; and if you find not a nest of traitors, my own head shall be the forfeit."

Dark and fearful was the flash that shot from the emperor's eye on the devoted eunuch. Pale and trembling he fell on his knees, supplicating with uplifted hands for mercy. He knew it was vain to dissemble.

"And what wert thou doing in such perilous company?" inquired the emperor, turning to Cedric, and in a voice which made him shrink.

"Let the centurion, Diogenes Verecundus, be sought out. He waits my return by the Forum gate. To him the city owes a discovery of this plot, and Rome her monarch!"

The faithful centurion was soon found. The eunuch conducted them secretly to the vault. The conspirators were seized in the very height of their anticipated success. The roll containing the names of the leaders, the plan of attack, and the disposition of the rebellious troops, was discovered; and the morning sun darted a fearful ray on the ghastly and bleeding heads uplifted on the walls and battlements of the imperial palace.

But with misplaced clemency the monster Caracalla was again pardoned. The centurion Diogenes Verecundus was raised to the dignity of Sexumvir. The only reward claimed by the generous and sturdy Briton was an act of immunity for his master, who was merely dismissed from his post and banished the kingdom.

Footnote 1: Whitaker's *Hist. Whalley*, p. 441. [1]

Footnote 2: Corry's *Lancashire*. [2]

Footnote 3: *Mag. Britan.* York, p. 391. [3]

Footnote 4: Here vulgarly called the Tearn Barn (tithe-barn) in Wales; distinctly seen in showery weather, but invisible in a settled season. [4]

Footnote 5: On a bleak moor, called Monstone Edge, in this hamlet, is a huge moor-stone or

outlier, which (though part of it was broken off and removed some years ago) still retains the name of Monstone. It is said to have been quoited thither by Robin Hood, from his bed on the top of Blackstone Edge, about six miles off. After striking the mote or mark aimed at, the stone bounced off a few hundred yards and settled there. These stones, however, in all probability, if not Druidical, were landmarks, the ancient boundary of the hamlet of Healey; and, as was once customary, the marvellous story of this ancient outlaw might be told to the urchins who accompanied the perambulators, with the addition, probably, of a few kicks and cuffs, to make them remember the spot. [5]

Footnote 6: "Thomas, first Earl of Derby, as a compliment to his royal relative, Henry VII., on his visit to Lathom and Knowsley in 1496, built the bridge at Warrington; and by this munificent act conferred a benefit upon the two palatine counties, the value of which it is not easy to estimate."—Baines's *Lancashire*. [6]

Footnote 7: The Butlers, it is conjectured, were patrons of the priory of the hermit friars of St Augustine, founded before 1379, near the bridge. In 32 Henry VIII., this institution was dissolved, and its possessions were granted to the great monastic grantee, Thomas Holcroft. —*Vide* Tanner's *Not. Mon.* About forty years ago the remains of a gateway of the priory stood on Friar's Green, and some years after that period a stone coffin was dug up near the same place. [7]

Footnote 8: Hume. [8]

Footnote 9: Clarendon. [9]

Footnote 10: Hume.] [10]

Footnote 11: Her marriage-gift was £500, nineteen cows, and a bull,—a magnificent portion in those days. [11]

Footnote 12: We are sorry that this remark should come from the historian of Whalley; but our respect for the author even will not suffer us to let it pass unnoticed. The passage, indeed, refutes itself, and we need refer to none other than the very terms of the accusation. The circumstance of Bath "going out under the Bartholomew Act," that master-movement of spiritual tyranny, issued by an ill-advised and sensual monarch, when two thousand and upwards of conscientious clergymen were driven from their flocks and deprived of their benefices in one day, is a sufficient denial of what the learned doctor has insinuated, as it respects complying "with all changes" from mere self-interest and worldly lucre. For what could have hindered this conscientious and self-denying minister from conforming to the terms of the act, and securing his goodly benefice thereby, if it were not a zealous and honest regard to the vows he had taken, and the future welfare of his flock; which the very fact of his subsequent preaching to crowded auditories at his own house sufficiently corroborates. We know the persecutions, the malice, and the poverty, which would assail this unlicensed administration of ordinances; and nothing but a reverential awe for the sacred and responsible functions he had undertaken could have stimulated him to "endure the cross and despise the shame," when a very different line of conduct would have left him in the undisturbed possession of both wealth and patronage. But, we are afraid, the unpardonable offence of preaching in the church under the authority and protection of the Commonwealth, and his leaving her pale and preaching to "crowded auditories," when the wicked decree of St Bartholomew went forth, is ungrateful to the spirit of many, who ought not to stigmatise as sectaries and malignants all who have dared to think for themselves, and at anytime to oppose "spiritual wickedness" in "high places." The very principles which made Bath an outcast for conscience' sake are those which originated and led on the work of our Protestant Reformation, and placed the historian of Whalley where his sacred functions should have led him to respect the rights and consciences even of those from whom he might differ, and not hold them up to unmerited obloquy and reprehension. [12]

Footnote 13: This interesting and curious relic is now in the possession of the Rev. J. Clowes of Broughton, whose ancestor, Samuel Clowes, Esq., about the year 1690, married Mary Cheetham, a descendant of Humphrey Cheetham, founder of the Manchester Blue Coat School. In 1713, after the death of James Holt, whose faithful rebuke from the Bishop of Chester we have noticed in the introduction, Castleton came into possession of the Cheethams until the death of Edward Cheetham, in 1769.

The screen is now made into a side-board, and is most fancifully and beautifully wrought with crests, ciphers, and cognisances, belonging to the Holts and many of the neighbouring families. [13]

Footnote 14: Brand's *Popular Antiquities*, ii. 86-96. [14]

Footnote 15: *Vide* West's *Antiquities of Furness*. [15]

Footnote 16: Many a fertile acre has been covered with sand and rendered useless which might have been preserved by sowing on its confines the seeds of this plant. The Dutch have profited by a knowledge of its efficacy; Queen Elizabeth prohibited the extirpation of it. As soon as it takes root a sandhill gathers round it; so that wherever it is planted it gives a peculiar character to the coast. This grass or reed is manufactured into mats, baskets, &c.A legislative enactment, however, in 1742, was issued for its preservation. The Scottish Parliament likewise protected it, together with *Elymus arenarius*, or upright sea-lyme grass. [16]

Footnote 17: *Vide* Baines's *Lancashire*, vol. i. p. 78. [17]

Footnote 18: *Vide* Baines's *Lancashire*, vol. ii. p. 504. [18]

Footnote 19: The Two Lads are heaps of loose stones, about ten or twelve feet in height, set up, as the story goes, to commemorate the death of two shepherd boys, who were found on the spot after a long search, missing their way during a heavy fall of snow. The tale is most

probably incorrect; these mural monuments have been gradually accumulated by the passers-by;—a custom handed down from the most remote ages, and still observed as an act of religious worship in the East. There is little doubt but they are remnants yet lingering amongst us of the "altars upon every high hill," once dedicated to Baal, or Bel, the great object of Carthaginian or Phoenician worship, from which our Druidical rites were probably derived. [19]

Footnote 20: Within the last few years, since this story was written, the old house itself has been levelled with the ground. [20]

Footnote 21: In the 39th of Eliz. Sir John Biron held the manor of Rochdale, subsequently held by the Ramsays; but in the 13th of Charles I. it was reconveyed. The Biron family is more ancient than the Conquest. Gospatrick held lands of Ernais de Buron in the county of York, as appears by Domesday Book. Sir Nicholas Byron distinguished himself in the civil wars of Charles I.; and in consequence of his zeal in the royal cause the manor of Rochdale was sequestered. After the Restoration it reverted to the Byrons. Sir John, during these troubles, was made a peer, by the title of Baron Byron of Rochdale. In 1823 the late Lord Byron sold the manor, after having been in possession of the family for nearly three centuries. [21]

Footnote 22: This tale was written for the *Traditions of the County of York*. It appeared by permission in an Annual entitled *The White Rose of York*: but having only had a local circulation at the time, and having been carefully revised by the author during the last winter of his life, it finds a place here. [22]

Footnote 23: Aldborough. [23]

Footnote 24: Lubinus in Juven. p. 294. [24]

Transcriber's note i: Pile or Peel of Foundrey, both names are used. (See also page 44). [i]

Transcriber's note ii: This seems to be a slight misquote. Oliver Goldsmith's poem starts with "For still I tried each fickle art" and not "And". [ii]

Transcriber's note iii: The usual present-day form seems to be: "Non omnes qui habent citharam sunt citharoedi." [iii]

Transcriber's note iv: According to the OED one definition of "prog" could conceivably apply: a slang term for food. It also may be a typo for "grog". [iv]

Transcriber's note v: Probably "coranto", a baroque/renaissance dance style according to Wikipedia. [v]

Transcriber's note vi: The spelling of "ultima Thule" instead of "Ultima Thule" has been noted, but not corrected. [vi]

END OF VOL. II.

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