THE LANCASHIRE WITCHES VOLUME I

BY

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Freeditorial

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CHAPTER I.—THE BEACON ON PENDLE HILL.

There were eight watchers by the beacon on Pendle Hill in Lancashire. Two were stationed on either side of the north-eastern extremity of the mountain. One looked over the castled heights of Clithero; the woody eminences of Bowland; the bleak ridges of Thornley; the broad moors of Bleasdale; the Trough of Bolland, and Wolf Crag; and even brought within his ken the black fells overhanging Lancaster. The other tracked the stream called Pendle Water, almost from its source amid the neighbouring hills, and followed its windings through the leafless forest, until it united its waters to those of the Calder, and swept on in swifter and clearer current, to wash the base of Whalley Abbey. But the watcher's survey did not stop here. Noting the sharp spire of Burnley Church, relieved against the rounded masses of timber constituting Townley Park; as well as the entrance of the gloomy mountain gorge, known as the Grange of Cliviger; his far-reaching gaze passed over Todmorden, and settled upon the distant summits of Blackstone Edge.

Dreary was the prospect on all sides. Black moor, bleak fell, straggling forest, intersected with sullen streams as black as ink, with here and there a small tarn, or moss-pool, with waters of the same hue—these constituted the chief features of the scene. The whole district was barren and thinly-populated. Of towns, only Clithero, Colne, and Burnley—the latter little more than a village—were in view. In the valleys there were a few hamlets and scattered cottages, and on the uplands an occasional "booth," as the hut of the herdsman was termed; but of more important mansions there were only six, as Merley, Twistleton, Alcancoats, Saxfeld, Ightenhill, and Gawthorpe. The "vaccaries" for the cattle, of which the herdsmen had the care, and the "lawnds," or parks within the forest, appertaining to some of the halls before mentioned, offered the only evidences of cultivation. All else was heathy waste, morass, and wood.

Still, in the eye of the sportsman—and the Lancashire gentlemen of the sixteenth century were keen lovers of sport—the country had a strong interest. Pendle forest abounded with game. Grouse, plover, and bittern were found upon its moors; woodcock and snipe on its marshes; mallard, teal, and widgeon upon its pools. In its chases ranged herds of deer, protected by the terrible forest-laws, then in full force: and the hardier huntsman might follow the wolf to his lair in the mountains; might spear the boar in the oaken glades, or the otter on the river's brink; might unearth the badger or the fox, or smite the fierce cat-a-mountain with a quarrel from his bow. A nobler victim sometimes, also, awaited him in the shape of a wild mountain bull, a denizen of the forest, and a

remnant of the herds that had once browsed upon the hills, but which had almost all been captured, and removed to stock the park of the Abbot of Whalley. The streams and pools were full of fish: the stately heron frequented the meres; and on the craggy heights built the kite, the falcon, and the kingly eagle.

There were eight watchers by the beacon. Two stood apart from the others, looking to the right and the left of the hill. Both were armed with swords and arquebuses, and wore steel caps and coats of buff. Their sleeves were embroidered with the five wounds of Christ, encircling the name of Jesus—the badge of the Pilgrimage of Grace. Between them, on the verge of the mountain, was planted a great banner, displaying a silver cross, the chalice, and the Host, together with an ecclesiastical figure, but wearing a helmet instead of a mitre, and holding a sword in place of a crosier, with the unoccupied hand pointing to the two towers of a monastic structure, as if to intimate that he was armed for its defence. This figure, as the device beneath it showed, represented John Paslew, Abbot of Whalley, or, as he styled himself in his military capacity, Earl of Poverty.

There were eight watchers by the beacon. Two have been described. Of the other six, two were stout herdsmen carrying crooks, and holding a couple of mules, and a richly-caparisoned war-horse by the bridle. Near them stood a broad-shouldered, athletic young man, with the fresh complexion, curling brown hair, light eyes, and open Saxon countenance, best seen in his native county of Lancaster. He wore a Lincoln-green tunic, with a bugle suspended from the shoulder by a silken cord; and a silver plate engraved with the three luces, the ensign of the Abbot of Whalley, hung by a chain from his neck. A hunting knife was in his girdle, and an eagle's plume in his cap, and he leaned upon the but-end of a crossbow, regarding three persons who stood together by a peat fire, on the sheltered side of the beacon. Two of these were elderly men, in the white gowns and scapularies of Cistertian monks, doubtless from Whalley, as the abbey belonged to that order. The third and last, and evidently their superior, was a tall man in a riding dress, wrapped in a long mantle of black velvet, trimmed with minever, and displaying the same badges as those upon the sleeves of the sentinels, only wrought in richer material. His features were strongly marked and stern, and bore traces of age; but his eye was bright, and his carriage erect and dignified.

The beacon, near which the watchers stood, consisted of a vast pile of logs of timber, heaped upon a circular range of stones, with openings to admit air, and having the centre filled with fagots, and other quickly combustible materials. Torches were placed near at hand, so that the pile could be lighted on the instant.

The watch was held one afternoon at the latter end of November, 1536. In that year had arisen a formidable rebellion in the northern counties of England, the members of

which, while engaging to respect the person of the king, Henry VIII., and his issue, bound themselves by solemn oath to accomplish the restoration of Papal supremacy throughout the realm, and the restitution of religious establishments and lands to their late ejected possessors. They bound themselves, also, to punish the enemies of the Romish church, and suppress heresy. From its religious character the insurrection assumed the name of the Pilgrimage of Grace, and numbered among its adherents all who had not embraced the new doctrines in Yorkshire and Lancashire. That such an outbreak should occur on the suppression of the monasteries, was not marvellous. The desecration and spoliation of so many sacred structures—the destruction of shrines and images long regarded with veneration—the ejection of so many ecclesiastics, renowned for hospitality and revered for piety and learning—the violence and rapacity of the commissioners appointed by the Vicar-General Cromwell to carry out these severe measures—all these outrages were regarded by the people with abhorrence, and disposed them to aid the sufferers in resistance. As yet the wealthier monasteries in the north had been spared, and it was to preserve them from the greedy hands of the visiters, Doctors Lee and Layton, that the insurrection had been undertaken. A simultaneous rising took place in Lincolnshire, headed by Makarel, Abbot of Barlings, but it was speedily quelled by the vigour and skill of the Duke of Suffolk, and its leader executed. But the northern outbreak was better organized, and of greater force, for it now numbered thirty thousand men, under the command of a skilful and resolute leader named Robert Aske.

As may be supposed, the priesthood were main movers in a revolt having their especial benefit for its aim; and many of them, following the example of the Abbot of Barlings, clothed themselves in steel instead of woollen garments, and girded on the sword and the breastplate for the redress of their grievances and the maintenance of their rights. Amongst these were the Abbots of Jervaux, Furness, Fountains, Rivaulx, and Salley, and, lastly, the Abbot of Whalley, before mentioned; a fiery and energetic prelate, who had ever been constant and determined in his opposition to the aggressive measures of the king. Such was the Pilgrimage of Grace, such its design, and such its supporters.

Several large towns had already fallen into the hands of the insurgents. York, Hull, and Pontefract had yielded; Skipton Castle was besieged, and defended by the Earl of Cumberland; and battle was offered to the Duke of Norfolk and the Earl of Shrewsbury, who headed the king's forces at Doncaster. But the object of the Royalist leaders was to temporise, and an armistice was offered to the rebels and accepted. Terms were next proposed and debated.

During the continuance of this armistice all hostilities ceased; but beacons were reared upon the mountains, and their fires were to be taken as a new summons to arms. This signal the eight watchers expected.

Though late in November, the day had been unusually fine, and, in consequence, the whole hilly ranges around were clearly discernible, but now the shades of evening were fast drawing on.

"Night is approaching," cried the tall man in the velvet mantle, impatiently; "and still the signal comes not. Wherefore this delay? Can Norfolk have accepted our conditions? Impossible. The last messenger from our camp at Scawsby Lees brought word that the duke's sole terms would be the king's pardon to the whole insurgent army, provided they at once dispersed—except ten persons, six named and four unnamed."

"And were you amongst those named, lord abbot?" demanded one of the monks.

"John Paslew, Abbot of Whalley, it was said, headed the list," replied the other, with a bitter smile. "Next came William Trafford, Abbot of Salley. Next Adam Sudbury, Abbot of Jervaux. Then our leader, Robert Aske. Then John Eastgate, Monk of Whalley—"

"How, lord abbot!" exclaimed the monk. "Was my name mentioned?"

"It was," rejoined the abbot. "And that of William Haydocke, also Monk of Whalley, closed the list."

"The unrelenting tyrant!" muttered the other monk. "But these terms could not be accepted?"

"Assuredly not," replied Paslew; "they were rejected with scorn. But the negotiations were continued by Sir Ralph Ellerker and Sir Robert Bowas, who were to claim on our part a free pardon for all; the establishment of a Parliament and courts of justice at York; the restoration of the Princess Mary to the succession; the Pope to his jurisdiction; and our brethren to their houses. But such conditions will never be granted. With my consent no armistice should have been agreed to. We are sure to lose by the delay. But I was overruled by the Archbishop of York and the Lord Darcy. Their voices prevailed against the Abbot of Whalley—or, if it please you, the Earl of Poverty."

"It is the assumption of that derisive title which has drawn upon you the full force of the king's resentment, lord abbot," observed Father Eastgate.

"It may be," replied the abbot. "I took it in mockery of Cromwell and the ecclesiastical commissioners, and I rejoice that they have felt the sting. The Abbot of Barlings called himself Captain Cobbler, because, as he affirmed, the state wanted mending like old shoon. And is not my title equally well chosen? Is not the Church smitten with poverty?

Have not ten thousand of our brethren been driven from their homes to beg or to starve? Have not the houseless poor, whom we fed at our gates, and lodged within our wards, gone away hungry and without rest? Have not the sick, whom we would have relieved, died untended by the hedge-side? I am the head of the poor in Lancashire, the redresser of their grievances, and therefore I style myself Earl of Poverty. Have I not done well?"

"You have, lord abbot," replied Father Eastgate.

"Poverty will not alone be the fate of the Church, but of the whole realm, if the rapacious designs of the monarch and his heretical counsellors are carried forth," pursued the abbot. "Cromwell, Audeley, and Rich, have wisely ordained that no infant shall be baptised without tribute to the king; that no man who owns not above twenty pounds a year shall consume wheaten bread, or eat the flesh of fowl or swine without tribute; and that all ploughed land shall pay tribute likewise. Thus the Church is to be beggared, the poor plundered, and all men burthened, to fatten the king, and fill his exchequer."

"This must be a jest," observed Father Haydocke.

"It is a jest no man laughs at," rejoined the abbot, sternly; "any more than the king's counsellors will laugh at the Earl of Poverty, whose title they themselves have created. But wherefore comes not the signal? Can aught have gone wrong? I will not think it. The whole country, from the Tweed to the Humber, and from the Lune to the Mersey, is ours; and, if we but hold together, our cause must prevail."

"Yet we have many and powerful enemies," observed Father Eastgate; "and the king, it is said, hath sworn never to make terms with us. Tidings were brought to the abbey this morning, that the Earl of Derby is assembling forces at Preston, to march upon us."

"We will give him a warm reception if he comes," replied Paslew, fiercely. "He will find that our walls have not been kernelled and embattled by licence of good King Edward the Third for nothing; and that our brethren can fight as well as their predecessors fought in the time of Abbot Holden, when they took tithe by force from Sir Christopher Parsons of Slaydburn. The abbey is strong, and right well defended, and we need not fear a surprise. But it grows dark fast, and yet no signal comes."

"Perchance the waters of the Don have again risen, so as to prevent the army from fording the stream," observed Father Haydocke; "or it may be that some disaster hath befallen our leader."

"Nay, I will not believe the latter," said the abbot; "Robert Aske is chosen by Heaven to be our deliverer. It has been prophesied that a 'worm with one eye' shall work the redemption of the fallen faith, and you know that Robert Aske hath been deprived of his left orb by an arrow."

"Therefore it is," observed Father Eastgate, "that the Pilgrims of Grace chant the following ditty:—

"'Forth shall come an Aske with one eye,
He shall be chief of the company—
Chief of the northern chivalry.'"
"What more?" demanded the abbot, seeing that the monk appeared to hesitate.

"Nay, I know not whether the rest of the rhymes may please you, lord abbot," replied Father Eastgate.

"Let me hear them, and I will judge," said Paslew. Thus urged, the monk went on:—

"'One shall sit at a solemn feast,
Half warrior, half priest,
The greatest there shall be the least.'"
"The last verse," observed the monk, "has been added to the ditty by Nicholas Demdike. I heard him sing it the other day at the abbey gate."

"What, Nicholas Demdike of Worston?" cried the abbot; "he whose wife is a witch?"

"The same," replied Eastgate.

"Hoo be so ceawnted, sure eno," remarked the forester, who had been listening attentively to their discourse, and who now stepped forward; "boh dunna yo think it. Beleemy, lort abbut, Bess Demdike's too yunk an too protty for a witch."

"Thou art bewitched by her thyself, Cuthbert," said the abbot, angrily. "I shall impose a penance upon thee, to free thee from the evil influence. Thou must recite twenty paternosters daily, fasting, for one month; and afterwards perform a pilgrimage to the shrine of our Lady of Gilsland. Bess Demdike is an approved and notorious witch, and hath been seen by credible witnesses attending a devil's sabbath on this very hill—Heaven shield us! It is therefore that I have placed her and her husband under the ban of the Church; pronounced sentence of excommunication against them; and commanded all my clergy to refuse baptism to their infant daughter, newly born."

"Wea's me! ey knoas 't reet weel, lort abbut," replied Ashbead, "and Bess taks t' sentence sore ta 'ert!"

"Then let her amend her ways, or heavier punishment will befall her," cried Paslew, severely. "'Sortilegam non patieris vivere' saith the Levitical law. If she be convicted she shall die the death. That she is comely I admit; but it is the comeliness of a child of sin. Dost thou know the man with whom she is wedded—or supposed to be wedded—for I have seen no proof of the marriage? He is a stranger here."

"Ey knoas neawt abowt him, lort abbut, 'cept that he cum to Pendle a twalmont agoa," replied Ashbead; "boh ey knoas fu' weel that t'eawtcumbling felly robt me ot prettiest lass i' aw Lonkyshiar—aigh, or i' aw Englondshiar, fo' t' matter o' that."

"What manner of man is he?" inquired the abbot.

"Oh, he's a feaw teyke—a varra feaw teyke," replied Ashbead; "wi' a feace as black as a boggart, sooty shiny hewr loike a mowdywarp, an' een loike a stanniel. Boh for running, rostling, an' throwing t' stoan, he'n no match i' this keawntry. Ey'n triet him at aw three gams, so ey con speak. For't most part he'n a big, black bandyhewit wi' him, and, by th' Mess, ey canna help thinkin he meys free sumtoimes wi' yor lortship's bucks."

"Ha! this must be looked to," cried the abbot. "You say you know not whence he comes? 'Tis strange."

"T' missmannert carl'll boide naw questionin', odd rottle him!" replied Ashbead. "He awnsurs wi' a gibe, or a thwack o' his staff. Whon ey last seet him, he threatened t' raddle me booans weel, boh ey sooan lowert him a peg."

"We will find a way of making him speak," said the abbot.

"He can speak, and right well if he pleases," remarked Father Eastgate; "for though ordinarily silent and sullen enough, yet when he doth talk it is not like one of the hinds with whom he consorts, but in good set phrase; and his bearing is as bold as that of one who hath seen service in the field."

"My curiosity is aroused," said the abbot. "I must see him."

"Noa sooner said than done," cried Ashbead, "for, be t' Lort Harry, ey see him stonding be yon moss poo' o' top t' hill, though how he'n getten theer t' Dule owny knoas."

And he pointed out a tall dark figure standing near a little pool on the summit of the mountain, about a hundred yards from them.

"Talk of ill, and ill cometh," observed Father Haydocke. "And see, the wizard hath a black hound with him! It may be his wife, in that likeness."

"Naw, ey knoas t' hount reet weel, Feyther Haydocke," replied the forester; "it's a Saint Hubert, an' a rareun fo' fox or badgert. Odds loife, feyther, whoy that's t' black bandyhewit I war speaking on."

"I like not the appearance of the knave at this juncture," said the abbot; "yet I wish to confront him, and charge him with his midemeanours."

"Hark; he sings," cried Father Haydocke. And as he spoke a voice was heard chanting,—

"One shall sit at a solemn feast,
Half warrior, half priest,
The greatest there shall be the least."
"The very ditty I heard," cried Father Eastgate; "but list, he has more of it." And the voice resumed,—

"He shall be rich, yet poor as me,
Abbot, and Earl of Poverty.
Monk and soldier, rich and poor,
He shall be hang'd at his own door."
Loud derisive laughter followed the song.

"By our Lady of Whalley, the knave is mocking us," cried the abbot; "send a bolt to silence him, Cuthbert."

The forester instantly bent his bow, and a quarrel whistled off in the direction of the singer; but whether his aim were not truly taken, or he meant not to hit the mark, it is certain that Demdike remained untouched. The reputed wizard laughed aloud, took off his felt cap in acknowledgment, and marched deliberately down the side of the hill.

"Thou art not wont to miss thy aim, Cuthbert," cried the abbot, with a look of displeasure. "Take good heed thou producest this scurril knave before me, when these troublous times are over. But what is this?—he stops—ha! he is practising his devilries on the mountain's side."

It would seem that the abbot had good warrant for what he said, as Demdike, having paused at a broad green patch on the hill-side, was now busied in tracing a circle round it with his staff. He then spoke aloud some words, which the superstitious beholders construed into an incantation, and after tracing the circle once again, and casting some tufts of dry heather, which he plucked from an adjoining hillock, on three particular spots, he ran quickly downwards, followed by his hound, and leaping a stone wall, surrounding a little orchard at the foot of the hill, disappeared from view.

"Go and see what he hath done," cried the abbot to the forester, "for I like it not."

Ashbead instantly obeyed, and on reaching the green spot in question, shouted out that he could discern nothing; but presently added, as he moved about, that the turf heaved like a sway-bed beneath his feet, and he thought—to use his own phraseology—would "brast." The abbot then commanded him to go down to the orchard below, and if he could find Demdike to bring him to him instantly. The forester did as he was bidden, ran down the hill, and, leaping the orchard wall as the other had done, was lost to sight.

Ere long, it became quite dark, and as Ashbead did not reappear, the abbot gave vent to his impatience and uneasiness, and was proposing to send one of the herdsmen in search of him, when his attention was suddenly diverted by a loud shout from one of the sentinels, and a fire was seen on a distant hill on the right.

"The signal! the signal!" cried Paslew, joyfully. "Kindle a torch!—quick, quick!"

And as he spoke, he seized a brand and plunged it into the peat fire, while his example was followed by the two monks.

"It is the beacon on Blackstone Edge," cried the abbot; "and look! a second blazes over the Grange of Cliviger—another on Ightenhill—another on Boulsworth Hill—and the last on the neighbouring heights of Padiham. Our own comes next. May it light the enemies of our holy Church to perdition!"

With this, he applied the burning brand to the combustible matter of the beacon. The monks did the same; and in an instant a tall, pointed flame, rose up from a thick cloud of smoke. Ere another minute had elapsed, similar fires shot up to the right and the left, on the high lands of Trawden Forest, on the jagged points of Foulridge, on the summit of Cowling Hill, and so on to Skipton. Other fires again blazed on the towers of Clithero, on Longridge and Ribchester, on the woody eminences of Bowland, on Wolf Crag, and on fell and scar all the way to Lancaster. It seemed the work of enchantment, so suddenly and so strangely did the fires shoot forth. As the beacon flame increased, it lighted up the whole of the extensive table-land on the summit of Pendle Hill; and a long

lurid streak fell on the darkling moss-pool near which the wizard had stood. But when it attained its utmost height, it revealed the depths of the forest below, and a red reflection, here and there, marked the course of Pendle Water. The excitement of the abbot and his companions momently increased, and the sentinels shouted as each new beacon was lighted. At last, almost every hill had its watch-fire, and so extraordinary was the spectacle, that it seemed as if weird beings were abroad, and holding their revels on the heights.

Then it was that the abbot, mounting his steed, called out to the monks—"Holy fathers, you will follow to the abbey as you may. I shall ride fleetly on, and despatch two hundred archers to Huddersfield and Wakefield. The abbots of Salley and Jervaux, with the Prior of Burlington, will be with me at midnight, and at daybreak we shall march our forces to join the main army. Heaven be with you!"

"Stay!" cried a harsh, imperious voice. "Stay!"

And, to his surprise, the abbot beheld Nicholas Demdike standing before him. The aspect of the wizard was dark and forbidding, and, seen by the beacon light, his savage features, blazing eyes, tall gaunt frame, and fantastic garb, made him look like something unearthly. Flinging his staff over his shoulder, he slowly approached, with his black hound following close by at his heels.

"I have a caution to give you, lord abbot," he said; "hear me speak before you set out for the abbey, or ill will befall you."

"Ill will befall me if I listen to thee, thou wicked churl," cried the abbot. "What hast thou done with Cuthbert Ashbead?"

"I have seen nothing of him since he sent a bolt after me at your bidding, lord abbot," replied Demdike.

"Beware lest any harm come to him, or thou wilt rue it," cried Paslew. "But I have no time to waste on thee. Farewell, fathers. High mass will be said in the convent church before we set out on the expedition to-morrow morning. You will both attend it."

"You will never set out upon the expedition, lord abbot," cried Demdike, planting his staff so suddenly into the ground before the horse's head that the animal reared and nearly threw his rider.

"How now, fellow, what mean you?" cried the abbot, furiously.

"To warn you," replied Demdike.

"Stand aside," cried the abbot, spurring his steed, "or I will trample you beneath my horse's feet."

"I might let you ride to your own doom," rejoined Demdike, with a scornful laugh, as he seized the abbot's bridle. "But you shall hear me. I tell you, you will never go forth on this expedition. I tell you that, ere to-morrow, Whalley Abbey will have passed for ever from your possession; and that, if you go thither again, your life will be forfeited. Now will you listen to me?"

"I am wrong in doing so," cried the abbot, who could not, however, repress some feelings of misgiving at this alarming address. "Speak, what would you say?"

"Come out of earshot of the others, and I will tell you," replied Demdike. And he led the abbot's horse to some distance further on the hill.

"Your cause will fail, lord abbot," he then said. "Nay, it is lost already."

"Lost!" cried the abbot, out of all patience. "Lost! Look around. Twenty fires are in sight—ay, thirty, and every fire thou seest will summon a hundred men, at the least, to arms. Before an hour, five hundred men will be gathered before the gates of Whalley Abbey."

"True," replied Demdike; "but they will not own the Earl of Poverty for their leader."

"What leader will they own, then?" demanded the abbot, scornfully.

"The Earl of Derby," replied Demdike. "He is on his way thither with Lord Mounteagle from Preston."

"Ha!" exclaimed Paslew, "let me go meet them, then. But thou triflest with me, fellow. Thou canst know nothing of this. Whence gott'st thou thine information?"

"Heed it not," replied the other; "thou wilt find it correct. I tell thee, proud abbot, that this grand scheme of thine and of thy fellows, for the restitution of the Catholic Church, has failed—utterly failed."

"I tell thee thou liest, false knave!" cried the abbot, striking him on the hand with his scourge. "Quit thy hold, and let me go."

"Not till I have done," replied Demdike, maintaining his grasp. "Well hast thou styled thyself Earl of Poverty, for thou art poor and miserable enough. Abbot of Whalley thou art no longer. Thy possessions will be taken from thee, and if thou returnest thy life also will be taken. If thou fleest, a price will be set upon thy head. I alone can save thee, and I will do so on one condition."

"Condition! make conditions with thee, bond-slave of Satan!" cried the abbot, gnashing his teeth. "I reproach myself that I have listened to thee so long. Stand aside, or I will strike thee dead."

"You are wholly in my power," cried Demdike with a disdainful laugh. And as he spoke he pressed the large sharp bit against the charger's mouth, and backed him quickly to the very edge of the hill, the sides of which here sloped precipitously down. The abbot would have uttered a cry, but surprise and terror kept him silent.

"Were it my desire to injure you, I could cast you down the mountain-side to certain death," pursued Demdike. "But I have no such wish. On the contrary, I will serve you, as I have said, on one condition."

"Thy condition would imperil my soul," said the abbot, full of wrath and alarm. "Thou seekest in vain to terrify me into compliance. Vade retro, Sathanas. I defy thee and all thy works."

Demdike laughed scornfully.

"The thunders of the Church do not frighten me," he cried. "But, look," he added, "you doubted my word when I told you the rising was at an end. The beacon fires on Boulsworth Hill and on the Grange of Cliviger are extinguished; that on Padiham Heights is expiring—nay, it is out; and ere many minutes all these mountain watch-fires will have disappeared like lamps at the close of a feast."

"By our Lady, it is so," cried the abbot, in increasing terror. "What new jugglery is this?"

"It is no jugglery, I tell you," replied the other.

"The waters of the Don have again arisen; the insurgents have accepted the king's pardon, have deserted their leaders, and dispersed. There will be no rising to-night or on the morrow. The abbots of Jervaux and Salley will strive to capitulate, but in vain. The Pilgrimage of Grace is ended. The stake for which thou playedst is lost. Thirty years hast thou governed here, but thy rule is over. Seventeen abbots have there been of Whalley—the last thou!—but there shall be none more."

"It must be the Demon in person that speaks thus to me," cried the abbot, his hair bristling on his head, and a cold perspiration bursting from his pores.

"No matter who I am," replied the other; "I have said I will aid thee on one condition. It is not much. Remove thy ban from my wife, and baptise her infant daughter, and I am content. I would not ask thee for this service, slight though it be, but the poor soul hath set her mind upon it. Wilt thou do it?"

"No," replied the abbot, shuddering; "I will not baptise a daughter of Satan. I will not sell my soul to the powers of darkness. I adjure thee to depart from me, and tempt me no longer."

"Vainly thou seekest to cast me off," rejoined Demdike. "What if I deliver thine adversaries into thine hands, and revenge thee upon them? Even now there are a party of armed men waiting at the foot of the hill to seize thee and thy brethren. Shall I show thee how to destroy them?"

"Who are they?" demanded the abbot, surprised.

"Their leaders are John Braddyll and Richard Assheton, who shall divide Whalley Abbey between them, if thou stayest them not," replied Demdike.

"Hell consume them!" cried the abbot.

"Thy speech shows consent," rejoined Demdike. "Come this way."

And, without awaiting the abbot's reply, he dragged his horse towards the but-end of the mountain. As they went on, the two monks, who had been filled with surprise at the interview, though they did not dare to interrupt it, advanced towards their superior, and looked earnestly and inquiringly at him, but he remained silent; while to the men-at-arms and the herdsmen, who demanded whether their own beacon-fire should be extinguished as the others had been, he answered moodily in the negative.

"Where are the foes you spoke of?" he asked with some uneasiness, as Demdike led his horse slowly and carefully down the hill-side.

"You shall see anon," replied the other.

"You are taking me to the spot where you traced the magic circle," cried Paslew in alarm. "I know it from its unnaturally green hue. I will not go thither."

"I do not mean you should, lord abbot," replied Demdike, halting. "Remain on this firm ground. Nay, be not alarmed; you are in no danger. Now bid your men advance, and prepare their weapons."

The abbot would have demanded wherefore, but at a glance from Demdike he complied, and the two men-at-arms, and the herdsmen, arranged themselves beside him, while Fathers Eastgate and Haydocke, who had gotten upon their mules, took up a position behind.

Scarcely were they thus placed, when a loud shout was raised below, and a band of armed men, to the number of thirty or forty, leapt the stone wall, and began to scale the hill with great rapidity. They came up a deep dry channel, apparently worn in the hill-side by some former torrent, and which led directly to the spot where Demdike and the abbot stood. The beacon-fire still blazed brightly, and illuminated the whole proceeding, showing that these men, from their accoutrements, were royalist soldiers.

"Stir not, as you value your life," said the wizard to Paslew; "but observe what shall follow."

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CHAPTER II.—THE ERUPTION.

Demdike went a little further down the hill, stopping when he came to the green patch. He then plunged his staff into the sod at the first point where he had cast a tuft of heather, and with such force that it sank more than three feet. The next moment he plucked it forth, as if with a great effort, and a jet of black water spouted into the air; but, heedless of this, he went to the next marked spot, and again plunged the sharp point of the implement into the ground. Again it sank to the same depth, and, on being drawn out, a second black jet sprung forth.

Meanwhile the hostile party continued to advance up the dry channel before mentioned, and shouted on beholding these strange preparations, but they did not relax their speed. Once more the staff sank into the ground, and a third black fountain followed its extraction. By this time, the royalist soldiers were close at hand, and the features of their two leaders, John Braddyll and Richard Assheton, could be plainly distinguished, and their voices heard.

"'Tis he! 'tis the rebel abbot!" vociferated Braddyll, pressing forward. "We were not misinformed. He has been watching by the beacon. The devil has delivered him into our hands."

"Ho! ho!" laughed Demdike.

"Abbot no longer—'tis the Earl of Poverty you mean," responded Assheton. "The villain shall be gibbeted on the spot where he has fired the beacon, as a warning to all traitors."

"Ha, heretics!—ha, blasphemers!—I can at least avenge myself upon you," cried Paslew, striking spurs into his charger. But ere he could execute his purpose, Demdike had sprung backward, and, catching the bridle, restrained the animal by a powerful effort.

"Hold!" he cried, in a voice of thunder, "or you will share their fate."

As the words were uttered, a dull, booming, subterranean sound was heard, and instantly afterwards, with a crash like thunder, the whole of the green circle beneath slipped off, and from a yawning rent under it burst forth with irresistible fury, a thick inky-coloured torrent, which, rising almost breast high, fell upon the devoted royalist soldiers, who were advancing right in its course. Unable to avoid the watery eruption, or

to resist its fury when it came upon them, they were instantly swept from their feet, and carried down the channel.

A sight of horror was it to behold the sudden rise of that swarthy stream, whose waters, tinged by the ruddy glare of the beacon-fire, looked like waves of blood. Nor less fearful was it to hear the first wild despairing cry raised by the victims, or the quickly stifled shrieks and groans that followed, mixed with the deafening roar of the stream, and the crashing fall of the stones, which accompanied its course. Down, down went the poor wretches, now utterly overwhelmed by the torrent, now regaining their feet only to utter a scream, and then be swept off. Here a miserable struggler, whirled onward, would clutch at the banks and try to scramble forth, but the soft turf giving way beneath him, he was hurried off to eternity.

At another point where the stream encountered some trifling opposition, some two or three managed to gain a footing, but they were unable to extricate themselves. The vast quantity of boggy soil brought down by the current, and which rapidly collected here, embedded them and held them fast, so that the momently deepening water, already up to their chins, threatened speedy immersion. Others were stricken down by great masses of turf, or huge rocky fragments, which, bounding from point to point with the torrent, bruised or crushed all they encountered, or, lodging in some difficult place, slightly diverted the course of the torrent, and rendered it yet more dangerous.

On one of these stones, larger than the rest, which had been stopped in its course, a man contrived to creep, and with difficulty kept his post amid the raging flood. Vainly did he extend his hand to such of his fellows as were swept shrieking past him. He could not lend them aid, while his own position was so desperately hazardous that he did not dare to quit it. To leap on either bank was impossible, and to breast the headlong stream certain death.

On goes the current, madly, furiously, as if rejoicing in the work of destruction, while the white foam of its eddies presents a fearful contrast to the prevailing blackness of the surface. Over the last declivity it leaps, hissing, foaming, crashing like an avalanche. The stone wall for a moment opposes its force, but falls the next, with a mighty splash, carrying the spray far and wide, while its own fragments roll onwards with the stream. The trees of the orchard are uprooted in an instant, and an old elm falls prostrate. The outbuildings of a cottage are invaded, and the porkers and cattle, divining their danger, squeal and bellow in affright. But they are quickly silenced. The resistless foe has broken down wall and door, and buried the poor creatures in mud and rubbish.

The stream next invades the cottage, breaks in through door and window, and filling all the lower part of the tenement, in a few minutes converts it into a heap of ruin. On goes

the destroyer, tearing up more trees, levelling more houses, and filling up a small pool, till the latter bursts its banks, and, with an accession to its force, pours itself into a mill-dam. Here its waters are stayed until they find a vent underneath, and the action of the stream, as it rushes downwards through this exit, forms a great eddy above, in which swim some living things, cattle and sheep from the fold not yet drowned, mixed with furniture from the cottages, and amidst them the bodies of some of the unfortunate men-at-arms which have been washed hither.

But, ha! another thundering crash. The dam has burst. The torrent roars and rushes on furiously as before, joins its forces with Pendle Water, swells up the river, and devastates the country far and wide.[1]

The abbot and his companions beheld this work of destruction with amazement and dread. Blanched terror sat in their cheeks, and the blood was frozen in Paslew's veins; for he thought it the work of the powers of darkness, and that he was leagued with them. He tried to mutter a prayer, but his lips refused their office. He would have moved, but his limbs were stiffened and paralysed, and he could only gaze aghast at the terrible spectacle.

Amidst it all he heard a wild burst of unearthly laughter, proceeding, he thought, from Demdike, and it filled him with new dread. But he could not check the sound, neither could he stop his ears, though he would fain have done so. Like him, his companions were petrified and speechless with fear.

After this had endured for some time, though still the black torrent rushed on impetuously as ever, Demdike turned to the abbot and said,—

"Your vengeance has been fully gratified. You will now baptise my child?"

"Never, never, accursed being!" shrieked the abbot. "Thou mayst sacrifice her at thine own impious rites. But see, there is one poor wretch yet struggling with the foaming torrent. I may save him."

"That is John Braddyll, thy worst enemy," replied Demdike. "If he lives he shall possess half Whalley Abbey. Thou hadst best also save Richard Assheton, who yet clings to the great stone below, as if he escapes he shall have the other half. Mark him, and make haste, for in five minutes both shall be gone."

"I will save them if I can, be the consequence to myself what it may," replied the abbot.

And, regardless of the derisive laughter of the other, who yelled in his ears as he went, "Bess shall see thee hanged at thy own door!" he dashed down the hill to the spot where a small object, distinguishable above the stream, showed that some one still kept his head above water, his tall stature having preserved him.

"Is it you, John Braddyll?" cried the abbot, as he rode up.

"Ay," replied the head. "Forgive me for the wrong I intended you, and deliver me from this great peril."

"I am come for that purpose," replied the abbot, dismounting, and disencumbering himself of his heavy cloak.

By this time the two herdsmen had come up, and the abbot, taking a crook from one of them, clutched hold of the fellow, and, plunging fearlessly into the stream, extended it towards the drowning man, who instantly lifted up his hand to grasp it. In doing so Braddyll lost his balance, but, as he did not quit his hold, he was plucked forth from the tenacious mud by the combined efforts of the abbot and his assistant, and with some difficulty dragged ashore.

"Now for the other," cried Paslew, as he placed Braddyll in safety.

"One-half the abbey is gone from thee," shouted a voice in his ears as he rushed on.

Presently he reached the rocky fragment on which Ralph Assheton rested. The latter was in great danger from the surging torrent, and the stone on which he had taken refuge tottered at its base, and threatened to roll over.

"In Heaven's name, help me, lord abbot, as thou thyself shall be holpen at thy need!" shrieked Assheton.

"Be not afraid, Richard Assheton," replied Paslew. "I will deliver thee as I have delivered John Braddyll."

But the task was not of easy accomplishment. The abbot made his preparations as before; grasped the hand of the herdsman and held out the crook to Assheton; but when the latter caught it, the stream swung him round with such force that the abbot must either abandon him or advance further into the water. Bent on Assheton's preservation, he adopted the latter expedient, and instantly lost his feet; while the herdsman, unable longer to hold him, let go the crook, and the abbot and Assheton were swept down the stream together.

Down—down they went, destruction apparently awaiting them; but the abbot, though sometimes quite under the water, and bruised by the rough stones and gravel with which he came in contact, still retained his self-possession, and encouraged his companion to hope for succour. In this way they were borne down to the foot of the hill, the monks, the herdsmen, and the men-at-arms having given them up as lost. But they yet lived—yet floated—though greatly injured, and almost senseless, when they were cast into a pool formed by the eddying waters at the foot of the hill. Here, wholly unable to assist himself, Assheton was seized by a black hound belonging to a tall man who stood on the bank, and who shouted to Paslew, as he helped the animal to bring the drowning man ashore, "The other half of the abbey is gone from thee. Wilt thou baptise my child if I send my dog to save thee?"

"Never!" replied the other, sinking as he spoke.

Flashes of fire glanced in the abbot's eyes, and stunning sounds seemed to burst his ears. A few more struggles, and he became senseless.

But he was not destined to die thus. What happened afterwards he knew not; but when he recovered full consciousness, he found himself stretched, with aching limbs and throbbing head, upon a couch in a monastic room, with a richly-painted and gilded ceiling, with shields at the corners emblazoned with the three luces of Whalley, and with panels hung with tapestry from the looms of Flanders, representing divers Scriptural subjects.

"Have I been dreaming?" he murmured.

"No," replied a tall man standing by his bedside; "thou hast been saved from one death to suffer another more ignominious."

"Ha!" cried the abbot, starting up and pressing his hand to his temples; "thou here?"

"Ay, I am appointed to watch thee," replied Demdike. "Thou art a prisoner in thine own chamber at Whalley. All has befallen as I told thee. The Earl of Derby is master of the abbey; thy adherents are dispersed; and thy brethren are driven forth. Thy two partners in rebellion, the abbots of Jervaux and Salley, have been conveyed to Lancaster Castle, whither thou wilt go as soon as thou canst be moved."

"I will surrender all—silver and gold, land and possessions—to the king, if I may die in peace," groaned the abbot.

"It is not needed," rejoined the other. "Attainted of felony, thy lands and abbey will be forfeited to the crown, and they shall be sold, as I have told thee, to John Braddyll and Richard Assheton, who will be rulers here in thy stead."

"Would I had perished in the flood!" groaned the abbot.

"Well mayst thou wish so," returned his tormentor; "but thou wert not destined to die by water. As I have said, thou shalt be hanged at thy own door, and my wife shall witness thy end."

"Who art thou? I have heard thy voice before," cried the abbot. "It is like the voice of one whom I knew years ago, and thy features are like his—though changed—greatly changed. Who art thou?"

"Thou shalt know before thou diest," replied the other, with a look of gratified vengeance. "Farewell, and reflect upon thy fate."

So saying, he strode towards the door, while the miserable abbot arose, and marching with uncertain steps to a little oratory adjoining, which he himself had built, knelt down before the altar, and strove to pray.

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CHAPTER III.—WHALLEY ABBEY.

A sad, sad change hath come over the fair Abbey of Whalley. It knoweth its old masters no longer. For upwards of two centuries and a half hath the "Blessed Place"[2] grown in beauty and riches. Seventeen abbots have exercised unbounded hospitality within it, but now they are all gone, save one!—and he is attainted of felony and treason. The grave monk walketh no more in the cloisters, nor seeketh his pallet in the dormitory. Vesper or matin-song resound not as of old within the fine conventual church. Stripped are the altars of their silver crosses, and the shrines of their votive offerings and saintly relics. Pyx and chalice, thuribule and vial, golden-headed pastoral staff, and mitre embossed with pearls, candlestick and Christmas ship of silver; salver, basin, and ewer—all are gone—the splendid sacristy hath been despoiled.

A sad, sad change hath come over Whalley Abbey. The libraries, well stored with reverend tomes, have been pillaged, and their contents cast to the flames; and thus long laboured manuscript, the fruit of years of patient industry, with gloriously illuminated missal, are irrecoverably lost. The large infirmary no longer receiveth the sick; in the locutory sitteth no more the guest. No longer in the mighty kitchens are prepared the prodigious supply of meats destined for the support of the poor or the entertainment of the traveller. No kindly porter stands at the gate, to bid the stranger enter and partake of the munificent abbot's hospitality, but a churlish guard bids him hie away, and menaces him if he tarries with his halbert. Closed are the buttery-hatches and the pantries; and the daily dole of bread hath ceased. Closed, also, to the brethren is the refectory. The cellarer's office is ended. The strong ale which he brewed in October, is tapped in March by roystering troopers. The rich muscadel and malmsey, and the wines of Gascoigne and the Rhine, are no longer quaffed by the abbot and his more honoured guests, but drunk to his destruction by his foes. The great gallery, a hundred and fifty feet in length, the pride of the abbot's lodging, and a model of architecture, is filled not with white-robed ecclesiastics, but with an armed earl and his retainers. Neglected is the little oratory dedicated to Our Lady of Whalley, where night and morn the abbot used to pray. All the old religious and hospitable uses of the abbey are foregone. The reverend stillness of the cloisters, scarce broken by the quiet tread of the monks, is now disturbed by armed heel and clank of sword; while in its saintly courts are heard the ribald song, the profane jest, and the angry brawl. Of the brethren, only those tenanting the cemetery are left. All else are gone, driven forth, as vagabonds, with stripes and curses, to seek refuge where they may.

A sad, sad change has come over Whalley Abbey. In the plenitude of its pride and power has it been cast down, desecrated, despoiled. Its treasures are carried off, its ornaments sold, its granaries emptied, its possessions wasted, its storehouses sacked, its cattle slaughtered and sold. But, though stripped of its wealth and splendour; though deprived of all the religious graces that, like rich incense, lent an odour to the fane, its external beauty is yet unimpaired, and its vast proportions undiminished.

A stately pile was Whalley—one of the loveliest as well as the largest in the realm. Carefully had it been preserved by its reverend rulers, and where reparations or additions were needed they were judiciously made. Thus age had lent it beauty, by mellowing its freshness and toning its hues, while no decay was perceptible. Without a struggle had it yielded to the captor, so that no part of its wide belt of walls or towers, though so strongly constructed as to have offered effectual resistance, were injured.

Never had Whalley Abbey looked more beautiful than on a bright clear morning in March, when this sad change had been wrought, and when, from a peaceful monastic establishment, it had been converted into a menacing fortress. The sunlight sparkled upon its grey walls, and filled its three great quadrangular courts with light and life, piercing the exquisite carving of its cloisters, and revealing all the intricate beauty and combinations of the arches. Stains of painted glass fell upon the floor of the magnificent conventual church, and dyed with rainbow hues the marble tombs of the Lacies, the founders of the establishment, brought thither when the monastery was removed from Stanlaw in Cheshire, and upon the brass-covered gravestones of the abbots in the presbytery. There lay Gregory de Northbury, eighth abbot of Stanlaw and first of Whalley, and William Rede, the last abbot; but there was never to lie John Paslew. The slumber of the ancient prelates was soon to be disturbed, and the sacred structure within which they had so often worshipped, up-reared by sacrilegious hands. But all was bright and beauteous now, and if no solemn strains were heard in the holy pile, its stillness was scarcely less reverential and awe-inspiring. The old abbey wreathed itself in all its attractions, as if to welcome back its former ruler, whereas it was only to receive him as a captive doomed to a felon's death.

But this was outward show. Within all was terrible preparation. Such was the discontented state of the country, that fearing some new revolt, the Earl of Derby had taken measures for the defence of the abbey, and along the wide-circling walls of the close were placed ordnance and men, and within the grange stores of ammunition. A strong guard was set at each of the gates, and the courts were filled with troops. The bray of the trumpet echoed within the close, where rounds were set for the archers, and martial music resounded within the area of the cloisters. Over the great north-eastern gateway, which formed the chief entrance to the abbot's lodging, floated the royal

banner. Despite these warlike proceedings the fair abbey smiled beneath the sun, in all, or more than all, its pristine beauty, its green hills sloping gently down towards it, and the clear and sparkling Calder dashing merrily over the stones at its base.

But upon the bridge, and by the river side, and within the little village, many persons were assembled, conversing gravely and anxiously together, and looking out towards the hills, where other groups were gathered, as if in expectation of some afflicting event. Most of these were herdsmen and farming men, but some among them were poor monks in the white habits of the Cistertian brotherhood, but which were now stained and threadbare, while their countenances bore traces of severest privation and suffering. All the herdsmen and farmers had been retainers of the abbot. The poor monks looked wistfully at their former habitation, but replied not except by a gentle bowing of the head to the cruel scoffs and taunts with which they were greeted by the passing soldiers; but the sturdy rustics did not bear these outrages so tamely, and more than one brawl ensued, in which blood flowed, while a ruffianly arquebussier would have been drowned in the Calder but for the exertions to save him of a monk whom he had attacked.

This took place on the eleventh of March, 1537—more than three months after the date of the watching by the beacon before recorded—and the event anticipated by the concourse without the abbey, as well as by those within its walls, was the arrival of Abbot Paslew and Fathers Eastgate and Haydocke, who were to be brought on that day from Lancaster, and executed on the following morning before the abbey, according to sentence passed upon them.

The gloomiest object in the picture remains to be described, but yet it is necessary to its completion. This was a gallows of unusual form and height, erected on the summit of a gentle hill, rising immediately in front of the abbot's lodgings, called the Holehouses, whose rounded, bosomy beauty it completely destroyed. This terrible apparatus of condign punishment was regarded with abhorrence by the rustics, and it required a strong guard to be kept constantly round it to preserve it from demolition.

Amongst a group of rustics collected on the road leading to the north-east gateway, was Cuthbert Ashbead, who having been deprived of his forester's office, was now habited in a frieze doublet and hose with a short camlet cloak on his shoulder, and a fox-skin cap, embellished with the grinning jaws of the beast on his head.

"Eigh, Ruchot o' Roaph's," he observed to a bystander, "that's a fearfo sect that gallas. Yoan been up to t' Holehouses to tey a look at it, beloike?"

"Naw, naw, ey dunna loike such sects," replied Ruchot o' Roaph's; "besoide there wor a great rabblement at t' geate, an one o' them lunjus archer chaps knockt meh o' t' nob wi'

his poike, an towd me he'd hong me wi' t' abbut, if ey didna keep owt ot wey."

"An sarve te reet too, theaw craddinly carl!" cried Ashbead, doubling his horny fists. "Odds flesh! whey didna yo ha' a tussle wi' him? Mey honts are itchen for a bowt wi' t' heretic robbers. Walladey! walladey! that we should live to see t' oly feythers driven loike hummobees owt o' t' owd neest. Whey they sayn ot King Harry hon decreet ot we're to ha' naw more monks or friars i' aw Englondshiar. Ony think o' that. An dunna yo knoa that t' Abbuts o' Jervaux an Salley wor hongt o' Tizeday at Loncaster Castle?"

"Good lorjus bless us!" exclaimed a sturdy hind, "we'n a protty king. Furst he chops off his woife's heaod, an then hongs aw t' priests. Whot'll t' warlt cum 'to?

"Eigh by t' mess, whot win it cum to?" cried Ruchot o' Roaph's. "But we darrna oppen owr mows fo' fear o' a gog."

"Naw, beleady! boh eyst oppen moine woide enuff," cried Ashbead; "an' if a dozen o' yo chaps win join me, eyn try to set t' poor abbut free whon they brinks him here."

"Ey'd as leef boide till to-morrow," said Ruchot o'Roaph's, uneasily.

"Eigh, thou'rt a timmersome teyke, os ey towd te efore," replied Ashbead. "But whot dust theaw say, Hal o' Nabs?" he added, to the sturdy hind who had recently spoken.

"Ey'n spill t' last drop o' meh blood i' t' owd abbut's keawse," replied Hal o' Nabs. "We winna stond by, an see him hongt loike a dog. Abbut Paslew to t' reskew, lads!"

"Eigh, Abbut Paslew to t' reskew!" responded all the others, except Ruchot o' Roaph's.

"This must be prevented," muttered a voice near them. And immediately afterwards a tall man quitted the group.

"Whoa wor it spoake?" cried Hal o' Nabs. "Oh, ey seen, that he-witch, Nick Demdike."

"Nick Demdike here!" cried Ashbead, looking round in alarm. "Has he owerheert us?"

"Loike enow," replied Hal o' Nabs. "But ey didna moind him efore."

"Naw ey noather," cried Ruchot o' Roaph's, crossing himself, and spitting on the ground. "Owr Leady o' Whalley shielt us fro' t' warlock!"

"Tawkin o' Nick Demdike," cried Hal o' Nabs, "yo'd a strawnge odventer wi' him t' neet o' t' great brast o' Pendle Hill, hadna yo, Cuthbert?"

"Yeigh, t' firrups tak' him, ey hadn," replied Ashbead. "Theawst hear aw abowt it if t' will. Ey wur sent be t' abbut down t' hill to Owen o' Gab's, o' Perkin's, o' Dannel's, o' Noll's, o' Oamfrey's orchert i' Warston lone, to luk efter him. Weel, whon ey gets ower t' stoan wa', whot dun yo think ey sees! twanty or throtty poikemen stonding behint it, an they deshes at meh os thick os leet, an efore ey con roor oot, they blintfowlt meh, an clap an iron gog i' meh mouth. Weel, I con noather speak nor see, boh ey con use meh feet, soh ey punses at 'em reet an' laft; an be mah troath, lads, yood'n a leawght t' hear how they roart, an ey should a roart too, if I couldn, whon they began to thwack me wi' their raddling pows, and ding'd meh so abowt t' heoad, that ey fell i' a swownd. Whon ey cum to, ey wur loyin o' meh back i' Rimington Moor. Every booan i' meh hoide wratcht, an meh hewr war clottert wi' gore, boh t' eebond an t' gog wur gone, soh ey gets o' meh feet, and daddles along os weel os ey con, whon aw ot wunce ey spies a leet glenting efore meh, an dawncing abowt loike an awf or a wull-o'-whisp. Thinks ey, that's Friar Rush an' his lantern, an he'll lead me into a quagmire, soh ey stops a bit, to consider where ey'd getten, for ey didna knoa t' reet road exactly; boh whon ey stood still, t' leet stood still too, on then ey meyd owt that it cum fro an owd ruint tower, an whot ey'd fancied wur one lantern proved twanty, fo' whon ey reacht t' tower an peept in thro' a brok'n winda, ey beheld a seet ey'st neer forgit—apack o' witches—eigh, witches!—sittin' in a ring, wi' their broomsticks an lanterns abowt em!"

"Good lorjus deys!" cried Hal o' Nabs. "An whot else didsta see, mon?"

"Whoy," replied Ashbead, "t'owd hags had a little figure i' t' midst on 'em, mowded i' cley, representing t' abbut o' Whalley,—ey knoad it be't moitre and crosier,—an efter each o' t' varment had stickt a pin i' its 'eart, a tall black mon stepped for'ard, an teed a cord rownd its throttle, an hongt it up."

"An' t' black mon," cried Hal o' Nabs, breathlessly,—"t' black mon wur Nick Demdike?"

"Yoan guest it," replied Ashbead, "'t wur he! Ey wur so glopp'nt, ey couldna speak, an' meh blud fruz i' meh veins, when ey heerd a fearfo voice ask Nick wheere his woife an' chilt were. 'The infant is unbaptised,' roart t' voice, 'at the next meeting it must be sacrificed. See that thou bring it.' Demdike then bowed to Summat I couldna see; an axt when t' next meeting wur to be held. 'On the night of Abbot Paslew's execution,' awnsert t' voice. On hearing this, ey could bear nah lunger, boh shouted out, 'Witches! devils! Lort deliver us fro' ye!' An' os ey spoke, ey tried t' barst thro' t' winda. In a trice, aw t' leets went out; thar wur a great rash to t' dooer; a whirrin sound i' th' air loike a covey o' partriches fleeing off; and then ey heerd nowt more; for a great stoan fell o' meh

scoance, an' knockt me down senseless. When I cum' to, I wur i' Nick Demdike's cottage, wi' his woife watching ower me, and th' unbapteesed chilt i' her arms."

All exclamations of wonder on the part of the rustics, and inquiries as to the issue of the adventure, were checked by the approach of a monk, who, joining the assemblage, called their attention to a priestly train slowly advancing along the road.

"It is headed," he said, "by Fathers Chatburne and Chester, late bursers of the abbey. Alack! alack! they now need the charity themselves which they once so lavishly bestowed on others."

"Waes me!" ejaculated Ashbead. "Monry a broad merk han ey getten fro 'em."

"They'n been koind to us aw," added the others.

"Next come Father Burnley, granger, and Father Haworth, cellarer," pursued the monk; "and after them Father Dinkley, sacristan, and Father Moore, porter."

"Yo remember Feyther Moore, lads," cried Ashbead.

"Yeigh, to be sure we done," replied the others; "a good mon, a reet good mon! He never sent away t' poor—naw he!"

"After Father Moore," said the monk, pleased with their warmth, "comes Father Forrest, the procurator, with Fathers Rede, Clough, and Bancroft, and the procession is closed by Father Smith, the late prior."

"Down o' yer whirlybooans, lads, as t' oly feythers pass," cried Ashbead, "and crave their blessing."

And as the priestly train slowly approached, with heads bowed down, and looks fixed sadly upon the ground, the rustic assemblage fell upon their knees, and implored their benediction. The foremost in the procession passed on in silence, but the prior stopped, and extending his hands over the kneeling group, cried in a solemn voice,

"Heaven bless ye, my children! Ye are about to witness a sad spectacle. You will see him who hath clothed you, fed you, and taught you the way to heaven, brought hither a prisoner, to suffer a shameful death."

"Boh we'st set him free, oly prior," cried Ashbead. "We'n meayed up our moinds to 't. Yo just wait till he cums."

"Nay, I command you to desist from the attempt, if any such you meditate," rejoined the prior; "it will avail nothing, and you will only sacrifice your own lives. Our enemies are too strong. The abbot himself would give you like counsel."

Scarcely were the words uttered than from the great gate of the abbey there issued a dozen arquebussiers with an officer at their head, who marched directly towards the kneeling hinds, evidently with the intention of dispersing them. Behind them strode Nicholas Demdike. In an instant the alarmed rustics were on their feet, and Ruchot o' Roaph's, and some few among them, took to their heels, but Ashbead, Hal o' Nabs, with half a dozen others, stood their ground manfully. The monks remained in the hope of preventing any violence. Presently the halberdiers came up.

"That is the ringleader," cried the officer, who proved to be Richard Assheton, pointing out Ashbead; "seize him!"

"Naw mon shall lay honts o' meh," cried Cuthbert.

And as the guard pushed past the monks to execute their leader's order, he sprang forward, and, wresting a halbert from the foremost of them, stood upon his defence.

"Seize him, I say!" shouted Assheton, irritated at the resistance offered.

"Keep off," cried Ashbead; "yo'd best. Loike a stag at bey ey'm dawngerous. Waar horns! waar horns! ey sey."

The arquebussiers looked irresolute. It was evident Ashbead would only be taken with life, and they were not sure that it was their leader's purpose to destroy him.

"Put down thy weapon, Cuthbert," interposed the prior; "it will avail thee nothing against odds like these."

"Mey be, 'oly prior," rejoined Ashbead, flourishing the pike: "boh ey'st ony yield wi' loife."

"I will disarm him," cried Demdike, stepping forward.

"Theaw!" retorted Ashbead, with a scornful laugh, "Cum on, then. Hadsta aw t' fiends i' hell at te back, ey shouldna fear thee."

"Yield!" cried Demdike in a voice of thunder, and fixing a terrible glance upon him.

"Cum on, wizard," rejoined Ashbead undauntedly. But, observing that his opponent was wholly unarmed, he gave the pike to Hal o' Nabs, who was close beside him, observing, "It shall never be said that Cuthbert Ashbead feawt t' dule himsel unfairly. Nah, touch me if theaw dar'st."

Demdike required no further provocation. With almost supernatural force and quickness he sprung upon the forester, and seized him by the throat. But the active young man freed himself from the gripe, and closed with his assailant. But though of Herculean build, it soon became evident that Ashbead would have the worst of it; when Hal o' Nabs, who had watched the struggle with intense interest, could not help coming to his friend's assistance, and made a push at Demdike with the halbert.

Could it be that the wrestlers shifted their position, or that the wizard was indeed aided by the powers of darkness? None could tell, but so it was that the pike pierced the side of Ashbead, who instantly fell to the ground, with his adversary upon him. The next instant his hold relaxed, and the wizard sprang to his feet unharmed, but deluged in blood. Hal o' Nabs uttered a cry of keenest anguish, and, flinging himself upon the body of the forester, tried to staunch the wound; but he was quickly seized by the arquebussiers, and his hands tied behind his back with a thong, while Ashbead was lifted up and borne towards the abbey, the monks and rustics following slowly after; but the latter were not permitted to enter the gate.

As the unfortunate keeper, who by this time had become insensible from loss of blood, was carried along the walled enclosure leading to the abbot's lodging, a female with a child in her arms was seen advancing from the opposite side. She was tall, finely formed, with features of remarkable beauty, though of a masculine and somewhat savage character, and with magnificent but fierce black eyes. Her skin was dark, and her hair raven black, contrasting strongly with the red band wound around it. Her kirtle was of murrey-coloured serge; simply, but becomingly fashioned. A glance sufficed to show her how matters stood with poor Ashbead, and, uttering a sharp angry cry, she rushed towards him.

"What have you done?" she cried, fixing a keen reproachful look on Demdike, who walked beside the wounded man.

"Nothing," replied Demdike with a bitter laugh; "the fool has been hurt with a pike. Stand out of the way, Bess, and let the men pass. They are about to carry him to the cell under the chapter-house."

"You shall not take him there," cried Bess Demdike, fiercely. "He may recover if his wound be dressed. Let him go to the infirmary—ha, I forgot—there is no one there now."

"Father Bancroft is at the gate," observed one of the arquebussiers; "he used to act as chirurgeon in the abbey."

"No monk must enter the gate except the prisoners when they arrive," observed Assheton; "such are the positive orders of the Earl of Derby."

"It is not needed," observed Demdike, "no human aid can save the man."

"But can other aid save him?" said Bess, breathing the words in her husband's ears.

"Go to!" cried Demdike, pushing her roughly aside; "wouldst have me save thy lover?"

"Take heed," said Bess, in a deep whisper; "if thou save him not, by the devil thou servest! thou shalt lose me and thy child."

Demdike did not think proper to contest the point, but, approaching Assheton, requested that the wounded man might be conveyed to an arched recess, which he pointed out. Assent being given, Ashbead was taken there, and placed upon the ground, after which the arquebussiers and their leader marched off; while Bess, kneeling down, supported the head of the wounded man upon her knee, and Demdike, taking a small phial from his doublet, poured some of its contents clown his throat. The wizard then took a fold of linen, with which he was likewise provided, and, dipping it in the elixir, applied it to the wound.

In a few moments Ashbead opened his eyes, and looking round wildly, fixed his gaze upon Bess, who placed her finger upon her lips to enjoin silence, but he could not, or would not, understand the sign.

"Aw's o'er wi' meh, Bess," he groaned; "but ey'd reyther dee thus, wi' thee besoide meh, than i' ony other wey."

"Hush!" exclaimed Bess, "Nicholas is here."

"Oh! ey see," replied the wounded man, looking round; "but whot matters it? Ey'st be gone soon. Ah, Bess, dear lass, if theawdst promise to break thy compact wi' Satan—to repent and save thy precious sowl—ey should dee content."

"Oh, do not talk thus!" cried Bess. "You will soon be well again."

"Listen to me," continued Ashbead, earnestly; "dust na knoa that if thy babe be na bapteesed efore to-morrow neet, it'll be sacrificed to t' Prince o' Darkness. Go to some o' t' oly feythers—confess thy sins an' implore heaven's forgiveness—an' mayhap they'll save thee an' thy infant."

"And be burned as a witch," rejoined Bess, fiercely. "It is useless, Cuthbert; I have tried them all. I have knelt to them, implored them, but their hearts are hard as flints. They will not heed me. They will not disobey the abbot's cruel injunctions, though he be their superior no longer. But I shall be avenged upon him—terribly avenged."

"Leave meh, theaw wicked woman." cried Ashbead; "ey dunna wish to ha' thee near meh. Let meh dee i' peace."

"Thou wilt not die, I tell thee, Cuthbert," cried Bess; "Nicholas hath staunched thy wound."

"He stawncht it, seyst to?" cried Ashbead, raising. "Ey'st never owe meh loife to him."

And before he could be prevented he tore off the bandage, and the blood burst forth anew.

"It is not my fault if he perishes now," observed Demdike, moodily.

"Help him—help him!" implored Bess.

"He shanna touch meh," cried Ashbead, struggling and increasing the effusion. "Keep him off, ey adjure thee. Farewell, Bess," he added, sinking back utterly exhausted by the effort.

"Cuthbert!" screamed Bess, terrified by his looks, "Cuthbert! art thou really dying? Look at me, speak to me! Ha!" she cried, as if seized by a sudden idea, "they say the blessing of a dying man will avail. Bless my child, Cuthbert, bless it!"

"Give it me!" groaned the forester.

Bess held the infant towards him; but before he could place his hands upon it all power forsook him, and he fell back and expired.

"Lost! lost! for ever lost!" cried Bess, with a wild shriek.

At this moment a loud blast was blown from the gate-tower, and a trumpeter called out,

"The abbot and the two other prisoners are coming."

"To thy feet, wench!" cried Demdike, imperiously, and seizing the bewildered woman by the arm; "to thy feet, and come with me to meet him!"

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CHAPTER IV.—THE MALEDICTION.

The captive ecclesiastics, together with the strong escort by which they were attended, under the command of John Braddyll, the high sheriff of the county, had passed the previous night at Whitewell, in Bowland Forest; and the abbot, before setting out on his final journey, was permitted to spend an hour in prayer in a little chapel on an adjoining hill, overlooking a most picturesque portion of the forest, the beauties of which were enhanced by the windings of the Hodder, one of the loveliest streams in Lancashire. His devotions performed, Paslew, attended by a guard, slowly descended the hill, and gazed his last on scenes familiar to him almost from infancy. Noble trees, which now looked like old friends, to whom he was bidding an eternal adieu, stood around him. Beneath them, at the end of a glade, couched a herd of deer, which started off at sight of the intruders, and made him envy their freedom and fleetness as he followed them in thought to their solitudes. At the foot of a steep rock ran the Hodder, making the pleasant music of other days as it dashed over its pebbly bed, and recalling times, when, free from all care, he had strayed by its wood-fringed banks, to listen to the pleasant sound of running waters, and watch the shining pebbles beneath them, and the swift trout and dainty umber glancing past.

A bitter pang was it to part with scenes so fair, and the abbot spoke no word, nor even looked up, until, passing Little Mitton, he came in sight of Whalley Abbey. Then, collecting all his energies, he prepared for the shock he was about to endure. But nerved as he was, his firmness was sorely tried when he beheld the stately pile, once his own, now gone from him and his for ever. He gave one fond glance towards it, and then painfully averting his gaze, recited, in a low voice, this supplication:—

"Miserere mei, Deus, secundum magnam misericordiam tuam. Et secundum multitudinem miserationum tuarum, dele iniquitatem meam. Amplius lava me ab iniquitate meâ, et à peccato meo munda me."

But other thoughts and other emotions crowded upon him, when he beheld the groups of his old retainers advancing to meet him: men, women, and children pouring forth loud lamentations, prostrating themselves at his feet, and deploring his doom. The abbot's fortitude had a severe trial here, and the tears sprung to his eyes. The devotion of these poor people touched him more sharply than the severity of his adversaries.

"Bless ye! bless ye! my children," he cried; "repine not for me, for I bear my cross with resignation. It is for me to bewail your lot, much fearing that the flock I have so long and

so zealously tended will fall into the hands of other and less heedful pastors, or, still worse, of devouring wolves. Bless ye, my children, and be comforted. Think of the end of Abbot Paslew, and for what he suffered."

"Think that he was a traitor to the king, and took up arms in rebellion against him," cried the sheriff, riding up, and speaking in a loud voice; "and that for his heinous offences he was justly condemned to death."

Murmurs arose at this speech, but they were instantly checked by the escort.

"Think charitably of me, my children," said the abbot; "and the blessed Virgin keep you steadfast in your faith. Benedicite!"

"Be silent, traitor, I command thee," cried the sheriff, striking him with his gauntlet in the face.

The abbot's pale check burnt crimson, and his eye flashed fire, but he controlled himself, and answered meekly,—

"Thou didst not speak in such wise, John Braddyll, when I saved thee from the flood."

"Which flood thou thyself caused to burst forth by devilish arts," rejoined the sheriff. "I owe thee little for the service. If for naught else, thou deservest death for thy evil doings on that night."

The abbot made no reply, for Braddyll's allusion conjured up a sombre train of thought within his breast, awakening apprehensions which he could neither account for, nor shake off. Meanwhile, the cavalcade slowly approached the north-east gateway of the abbey—passing through crowds of kneeling and sorrowing bystanders;—but so deeply was the abbot engrossed by the one dread idea that possessed him, that he saw them not, and scarce heard their woful lamentations. All at once the cavalcade stopped, and the sheriff rode on to the gate, in the opening of which some ceremony was observed. Then it was that Paslew raised his eyes, and beheld standing before him a tall man, with a woman beside him bearing an infant in her arms. The eyes of the pair were fixed upon him with vindictive exultation. He would have averted his gaze, but an irresistible fascination withheld him.

"Thou seest all is prepared," said Demdike, coming close up the mule on which Paslew was mounted, and pointing to the gigantic gallows, looming above the abbey walls; "wilt them now accede to my request?" And then he added, significantly—"on the same terms as before."

The abbot understood his meaning well. Life and freedom were offered him by a being, whose power to accomplish his promise he did not doubt. The struggle was hard; but he resisted the temptation, and answered firmly,—

"No."

"Then die the felon death thou meritest," cried Bess, fiercely; "and I will glut mine eyes with the spectacle."

Incensed beyond endurance, the abbot looked sternly at her, and raised his hand in denunciation. The action and the look were so appalling, that the affrighted woman would have fled if her husband had not restrained her.

"By the holy patriarchs and prophets; by the prelates and confessors; by the doctors of the church; by the holy abbots, monks, and eremites, who dwelt in solitudes, in mountains, and in caverns; by the holy saints and martyrs, who suffered torture and death for their faith, I curse thee, witch!" cried Paslew. "May the malediction of Heaven and all its hosts alight on the head of thy infant—"

"Oh! holy abbot," shrieked Bess, breaking from her husband, and flinging herself at Paslew's feet, "curse me, if thou wilt, but spare my innocent child. Save it, and we will save thee."

"Avoid thee, wretched and impious woman," rejoined the abbot; "I have pronounced the dread anathema, and it cannot be recalled. Look at the dripping garments of thy child. In blood has it been baptised, and through blood-stained paths shall its course be taken."

"Ha!" shrieked Bess, noticing for the first time the ensanguined condition of the infant's attire. "Cuthbert's blood—oh!"

"Listen to me, wicked woman," pursued the abbot, as if filled with a prophetic spirit. "Thy child's life shall be long—beyond the ordinary term of woman—but it shall be a life of woe and ill."

"Oh! stay him—stay him; or I shall die!" cried Bess.

But the wizard could not speak. A greater power than his own apparently overmastered him.

"Children shall she have," continued the abbot, "and children's children, but they shall be a race doomed and accursed—a brood of adders, that the world shall flee from and crush. A thing accursed, and shunned by her fellows, shall thy daughter be—evil reputed and evil doing. No hand to help her—no lip to bless her—life a burden; and death—long, long in coming—finding her in a dismal dungeon. Now, depart from me, and trouble me no more."

Bess made a motion as if she would go, and then turning, partly round, dropped heavily on the ground. Demdike caught the child ere she fell.

"Thou hast killed her!" he cried to the abbot.

"A stronger voice than mine hath spoken, if it be so," rejoined Paslew. "Fuge miserrime, fuge malefice, quia judex adest iratus."

At this moment the trumpet again sounded, and the cavalcade being put in motion, the abbot and his fellow-captives passed through the gate.

Dismounting from their mules within the court, before the chapter-house, the captive ecclesiastics, preceded by the sheriff were led to the principal chamber of the structure, where the Earl of Derby awaited them, seated in the Gothic carved oak chair, formerly occupied by the Abbots of Whalley on the occasions of conferences or elections. The earl was surrounded by his officers, and the chamber was filled with armed men. The abbot slowly advanced towards the earl. His deportment was dignified and firm, even majestic. The exaltation of spirit, occasioned by the interview with Demdike and his wife, had passed away, and was succeeded by a profound calm. The hue of his cheek was livid, but otherwise he seemed wholly unmoved.

The ceremony of delivering up the bodies of the prisoners to the earl was gone through by the sheriff, and their sentences were then read aloud by a clerk. After this the earl, who had hitherto remained covered, took off his cap, and in a solemn voice spoke:—

"John Paslew, somewhile Abbot of Whalley, but now an attainted and condemned felon, and John Eastgate and William Haydocke, formerly brethren of the same monastery, and confederates with him in crime, ye have heard your doom. To-morrow you shall die the ignominious death of traitors; but the king in his mercy, having regard not so much to the heinous nature of your offences towards his sovereign majesty as to the sacred offices you once held, and of which you have been shamefully deprived, is graciously pleased to remit that part of your sentence, whereby ye are condemned to be quartered alive, willing that the hearts which conceived so much malice and violence against him should cease to beat within your own bosoms, and that the arms which were raised in

rebellion against him should be interred in one common grave with the trunks to which they belong."

"God save the high and puissant king, Henry the Eighth, and free him from all traitors!" cried the clerk.

"We humbly thank his majesty for his clemency," said the abbot, amid the profound silence that ensued; "and I pray you, my good lord, when you shall write to the king concerning us, to say to his majesty that we died penitent of many and grave offences, amongst the which is chiefly that of having taken up arms unlawfully against him, but that we did so solely with the view of freeing his highness from evil counsellors, and of re-establishing our holy church, for the which we would willingly die, if our death might in anywise profit it."

"Amen!" exclaimed Father Eastgate, who stood with his hands crossed upon his breast, close behind Paslew. "The abbot hath uttered my sentiments."

"He hath not uttered mine," cried Father Haydocke. "I ask no grace from the bloody Herodias, and will accept none. What I have done I would do again, were the past to return—nay, I would do more—I would find a way to reach the tyrant's heart, and thus free our church from its worst enemy, and the land from a ruthless oppressor."

"Remove him," said the earl; "the vile traitor shall be dealt with as he merits. For you," he added, as the order was obeyed, and addressing the other prisoners, "and especially you, John Paslew, who have shown some compunction for your crimes, and to prove to you that the king is not the ruthless tyrant he hath been just represented, I hereby in his name promise you any boon, which you may ask consistently with your situation. What favour would you have shown you?"

The abbot reflected for a moment.

"Speak thou, John Eastgate," said the Earl of Derby, seeing that the abbot was occupied in thought.

"If I may proffer a request, my lord," replied the monk, "it is that our poor distraught brother, William Haydocke, be spared the quartering block. He meant not what he said."

"Well, be it as thou wilt," replied the earl, bending his brows, "though he ill deserves such grace. Now, John Paslew, what wouldst thou?"

Thus addressed, the abbot looked up.

"I would have made the same request as my brother, John Eastgate, if he had not anticipated me, my lord," said Paslew; "but since his petition is granted, I would, on my own part, entreat that mass be said for us in the convent church. Many of the brethren are without the abbey, and, if permitted, will assist at its performance."

"I know not if I shall not incur the king's displeasure in assenting," replied the Earl of Derby, after a little reflection; "but I will hazard it. Mass for the dead shall be said in the church at midnight, and all the brethren who choose to come thither shall be permitted to assist at it. They will attend, I doubt not, for it will be the last time the rites of the Romish Church will be performed in those Walls. They shall have all required for the ceremonial."

"Heaven's blessings on you, my lord," said the abbot.

"But first pledge me your sacred word," said the earl, "by the holy office you once held, and by the saints in whom you trust, that this concession shall not be made the means of any attempt at flight."

"I swear it," replied the abbot, earnestly.

"And I also swear it," added Father Eastgate.

"Enough," said the earl. "I will give the requisite orders. Notice of the celebration of mass at midnight shall be proclaimed without the abbey. Now remove the prisoners."

Upon this the captive ecclesiastics were led forth. Father Eastgate was taken to a strong room in the lower part of the chapter-house, where all acts of discipline had been performed by the monks, and where the knotted lash, the spiked girdle, and the hair shirt had once hung; while the abbot was conveyed to his old chamber, which had been prepared for his reception, and there left alone.

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CHAPTER V.—THE MIDNIGHT MASS.

Dolefully sounds the All Souls' bell from the tower of the convent church. The bell is one of five, and has obtained the name because it is tolled only for those about to pass away from life. Now it rings the knell of three souls to depart on the morrow. Brightly illumined is the fane, within which no taper hath gleamed since the old worship ceased, showing that preparations are made for the last service. The organ, dumb so long, breathes a low prelude. Sad is it to hear that knell—sad to view those gloriously-dyed panes—and to think why the one rings and the other is lighted up.

Word having gone forth of the midnight mass, all the ejected brethren flock to the abbey. Some have toiled through miry and scarce passable roads. Others have come down from the hills, and forded deep streams at the hazard of life, rather than go round by the far-off bridge, and arrive too late. Others, who conceive themselves in peril from the share they have taken in the late insurrection, quit their secure retreats, and expose themselves to capture. It may be a snare laid for them, but they run the risk. Others, coming from a yet greater distance, beholding the illuminated church from afar, and catching the sound of the bell tolling at intervals, hurry on, and reach the gate breathless and wellnigh exhausted. But no questions are asked. All who present themselves in ecclesiastical habits are permitted to enter, and take part in the procession forming in the cloister, or proceed at once to the church, if they prefer it.

Dolefully sounds the bell. Barefooted brethren meet together, sorrowfully salute each other, and form in a long line in the great area of the cloisters. At their head are six monks bearing tall lighted candles. After them come the quiristers, and then one carrying the Host, between the incense-bearers. Next comes a youth holding the bell. Next are placed the dignitaries of the church, the prior ranking first, and the others standing two and two according to their degrees. Near the entrance of the refectory, which occupies the whole south side of the quadrangle, stand a band of halberdiers, whose torches cast a ruddy glare on the opposite tower and buttresses of the convent church, revealing the statues not yet plucked from their niches, the crosses on the pinnacles, and the gilt image of Saint Gregory de Northbury, still holding its place over the porch. Another band are stationed near the mouth of the vaulted passage, under the chapter-house and vestry, whose grey, irregular walls, pierced by numberless richly ornamented windows, and surmounted by small turrets, form a beautiful boundary on the right; while a third party are planted on the left, in the open space, beneath the dormitory, the torchlight flashing ruddily upon the hoary pillars and groined arches sustaining the vast structure above them.

Dolefully sounds the bell. And the ghostly procession thrice tracks the four ambulatories of the cloisters, solemnly chanting a requiem for the dead.

Dolefully sounds the bell. And at its summons all the old retainers of the abbot press to the gate, and sue for admittance, but in vain. They, therefore, mount the neighbouring hill commanding the abbey, and as the solemn sounds float faintly by, and glimpses are caught of the white-robed brethren gliding along the cloisters, and rendered phantom-like by the torchlight, the beholders half imagine it must be a company of sprites, and that the departed monks have been permitted for an hour to assume their old forms, and revisit their old haunts.

Dolefully sounds the bell. And two biers, covered with palls, are borne slowly towards the church, followed by a tall monk.

The clock was on the stroke of twelve. The procession having drawn up within the court in front of the abbot's lodging, the prisoners were brought forth, and at sight of the abbot the whole of the monks fell on their knees. A touching sight was it to see those reverend men prostrate before their ancient superior,—he condemned to die, and they deprived of their monastic home,—and the officer had not the heart to interfere. Deeply affected, Paslew advanced to the prior, and raising him, affectionately embraced him. After this, he addressed some words of comfort to the others, who arose as he enjoined them, and at a signal from the officer, the procession set out for the church, singing the "Placebo." The abbot and his fellow captives brought up the rear, with a guard on either side of them. All Souls' bell tolled dolefully the while.

Meanwhile an officer entered the great hall, where the Earl of Derby was feasting with his retainers, and informed him that the hour appointed for the ceremonial was close at hand. The earl arose and went to the church attended by Braddyll and Assheton. He entered by the western porch, and, proceeding to the choir, seated himself in the magnificently-carved stall formerly used by Paslew, and placed where it stood, a hundred years before, by John Eccles, ninth abbot.

Midnight struck. The great door of the church swung open, and the organ pealed forth the "De profundis." The aisles were filled with armed men, but a clear space was left for the procession, which presently entered in the same order as before, and moved slowly along the transept. Those who came first thought it a dream, so strange was it to find themselves once again in the old accustomed church. The good prior melted into tears.

At length the abbot came. To him the whole scene appeared like a vision. The lights streaming from the altar—the incense loading the air—the deep diapasons rolling

overhead—the well-known faces of the brethren—the familiar aspect of the sacred edifice—all these filled him with emotions too painful almost for endurance. It was the last time he should visit this holy place—the last time he should hear those solemn sounds—the last time he should behold those familiar objects—ay, the last! Death could have no pang like this! And with heart wellnigh bursting, and limbs scarcely serving their office, he tottered on.

Another trial awaited him, and one for which he was wholly unprepared. As he drew near the chancel, he looked down an opening on the right, which seemed purposely preserved by the guard. Why were those tapers burning in the side chapel? What was within it? He looked again, and beheld two uncovered biers. On one lay the body of a woman. He started. In the beautiful, but fierce features of the dead, he beheld the witch, Bess Demdike. She was gone to her account before him. The malediction he had pronounced upon her child had killed her.

Appalled, he turned to the other bier, and recognised Cuthbert Ashbead. He shuddered, but comforted himself that he was at least guiltless of his death; though he had a strange feeling that the poor forester had in some way perished for him.

But his attention was diverted towards a tall monk in the Cistertian habit, standing between the bodies, with the cowl drawn over his face. As Paslew gazed at him, the monk slowly raised his hood, and partially disclosed features that smote the abbot as if he had beheld a spectre. Could it be? Could fancy cheat him thus? He looked again. The monk was still standing there, but the cowl had dropped over his face. Striving to shake off the horror that possessed him, the abbot staggered forward, and reaching the presbytery, sank upon his knees.

The ceremonial then commenced. The solemn requiem was sung by the choir; and three yet living heard the hymn for the repose of their souls. Always deeply impressive, the service was unusually so on this sad occasion, and the melodious voices of the singers never sounded so mournfully sweet as then—the demeanour of the prior never seemed so dignified, nor his accents so touching and solemn. The sternest hearts were softened.

But the abbot found it impossible to fix his attention on the service. The lights at the altar burnt dimly in his eyes—the loud antiphon and the supplicatory prayer fell upon a listless ear. His whole life was passing in review before him. He saw himself as he was when he first professed his faith, and felt the zeal and holy aspirations that filled him then. Years flew by at a glance, and he found himself sub-deacon; the sub-deacon became deacon; and the deacon, sub-prior, and the end of his ambition seemed plain before him. But he had a rival; his fears told him a superior in zeal and learning: one who, though many years younger than he, had risen so rapidly in favour with the

ecclesiastical authorities, that he threatened to outstrip him, even now, when the goal was full in view. The darkest passage of his life approached: a crime which should cast a deep shadow over the whole of his brilliant after-career. He would have shunned its contemplation, if he could. In vain. It stood out more palpably than all the rest. His rival was no longer in his path. How he was removed the abbot did not dare to think. But he was gone for ever, unless the tall monk were he!

Unable to endure this terrible retrospect, Paslew strove to bend his thoughts on other things. The choir was singing the "Dies Iræ," and their voices thundered forth:—

Rex tremendæ majestatis,
Qui salvandos salvas gratis,
Salva me, fons pietatis!
Fain would the abbot have closed his ears, and, hoping to stifle the remorseful pangs that seized upon his very vitals with the sharpness of serpents' teeth, he strove to dwell upon the frequent and severe acts of penance he had performed. But he now found that his penitence had never been sincere and efficacious. This one damning sin obscured all his good actions; and he felt if he died unconfessed, and with the weight of guilt upon his soul, he should perish everlastingly. Again he fled from the torment of retrospection, and again heard the choir thundering forth—

Lacrymosa dies illa,
Quâ resurget ex favillâ
Judicandus homo reus.
Huic ergo parce, Deus!
Pie Jesu Domine!
Dona eis requiem.
"Amen!" exclaimed the abbot. And bowing his head to the ground, he earnestly repeated—

"Pie Jesu Domine!
Dona eis requiem."
Then he looked up, and resolved to ask for a confessor, and unburthen his soul without delay.

The offertory and post-communion were over; the "requiescant in pace"—awful words addressed to living ears—were pronounced; and the mass was ended.

All prepared to depart. The prior descended from the altar to embrace and take leave of the abbot; and at the same time the Earl of Derby came from the stall.

"Has all been done to your satisfaction, John Paslew?" demanded the earl, as he drew near.

"All, my good lord," replied the abbot, lowly inclining his head; "and I pray you think me not importunate, if I prefer one other request. I would fain have a confessor visit me, that I may lay bare my inmost heart to him, and receive absolution."

"I have already anticipated the request," replied the earl, "and have provided a priest for you. He shall attend you, within an hour, in your own chamber. You will have ample time between this and daybreak, to settle your accounts with Heaven, should they be ever so weighty."

"I trust so, my lord," replied Paslew; "but a whole life is scarcely long enough for repentance, much less a few short hours. But in regard to the confessor," he continued, filled with misgiving by the earl's manner, "I should be glad to be shriven by Father Christopher Smith, late prior of the abbey."

"It may not be," replied the earl, sternly and decidedly. "You will find all you can require in him I shall send."

The abbot sighed, seeing that remonstrance was useless.

"One further question I would address to you, my lord," he said, "and that refers to the place of my interment. Beneath our feet lie buried all my predecessors—Abbots of Whalley. Here lies John Eccles, for whom was carved the stall in which your lordship hath sat, and from which I have been dethroned. Here rests the learned John Lyndelay, fifth abbot; and beside him his immediate predecessor, Robert de Topcliffe, who, two hundred and thirty years ago, on the festival of Saint Gregory, our canonised abbot, commenced the erection of the sacred edifice above us. At that epoch were here enshrined the remains of the saintly Gregory, and here were also brought the bodies of Helias de Workesley and John de Belfield, both prelates of piety and wisdom. You may read the names where you stand, my lord. You may count the graves of all the abbots. They are sixteen in number. There is one grave yet unoccupied—one stone yet unfurnished with an effigy in brass."

"Well!" said the Earl of Derby.

"When I sat in that stall, my lord," pursued Paslew, pointing to the abbot's chair; "when I was head of this church, it was my thought to rest here among my brother abbots."

"You have forfeited the right," replied the earl, sternly. "All the abbots, whose dust is crumbling beneath us, died in the odour of sanctity; loyal to their sovereigns, and true to their country, whereas you will die an attainted felon and rebel. You can have no place amongst them. Concern not yourself further in the matter. I will find a fitting grave for you,—perchance at the foot of the gallows."

And, turning abruptly away, he gave the signal for general departure.

Ere the clock in the church tower had tolled one, the lights were extinguished, and of the priestly train who had recently thronged the fane, all were gone, like a troop of ghosts evoked at midnight by necromantic skill, and then suddenly dismissed. Deep silence again brooded in the aisles; hushed was the organ; mute the melodious choir. The only light penetrating the convent church proceeded from the moon, whose rays, shining through the painted windows, fell upon the graves of the old abbots in the presbytery, and on the two biers within the adjoining chapel, whose stark burthens they quickened into fearful semblance of life.

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CHAPTER VI.—TETER ET FORTIS CARCER.

Left alone, and unable to pray, the abbot strove to dissipate his agitation of spirit by walking to and fro within his chamber; and while thus occupied, he was interrupted by a guard, who told him that the priest sent by the Earl of Derby was without, and immediately afterwards the confessor was ushered in. It was the tall monk, who had been standing between the biers, and his features were still shrouded by his cowl. At sight of him, Paslew sank upon a seat and buried his face in his hands. The monk offered him no consolation, but waited in silence till he should again look up. At last Paslew took courage and spoke.

"Who, and what are you?" he demanded.

"A brother of the same order as yourself," replied the monk, in deep and thrilling accents, but without raising his hood; "and I am come to hear your confession by command of the Earl of Derby."

"Are you of this abbey?" asked Paslew, tremblingly.

"I was," replied the monk, in a stern tone; "but the monastery is dissolved, and all the brethren ejected."

"Your name?" cried Paslew.

"I am not come here to answer questions, but to hear a confession," rejoined the monk. "Bethink you of the awful situation in which you are placed, and that before many hours you must answer for the sins you have committed. You have yet time for repentance, if you delay it not."

"You are right, father," replied the abbot. "Be seated, I pray you, and listen to me, for I have much to tell. Thirty and one years ago I was prior of this abbey. Up to that period my life had been blameless, or, if not wholly free from fault, I had little wherewith to reproach myself—little to fear from a merciful judge—unless it were that I indulged too strongly the desire of ruling absolutely in the house in which I was then only second. But Satan had laid a snare for me, into which I blindly fell. Among the brethren was one named Borlace Alvetham, a young man of rare attainment, and singular skill in the occult sciences. He had risen in favour, and at the time I speak of was elected sub-prior."

"Go on," said the monk.

"It began to be whispered about within the abbey," pursued Paslew, "that on the death of William Rede, then abbot, Borlace Alvetham would succeed him, and then it was that bitter feelings of animosity were awakened in my breast against the sub-prior, and, after many struggles, I resolved upon his destruction."

"A wicked resolution," cried the monk; "but proceed."

"I pondered over the means of accomplishing my purpose," resumed Paslew, "and at last decided upon accusing Alvetham of sorcery and magical practices. The accusation was easy, for the occult studies in which he indulged laid him open to the charge. He occupied a chamber overlooking the Calder, and used to break the monastic rules by wandering forth at night upon the hills. When he was absent thus one night, accompanied by others of the brethren, I visited his chamber, and examined his papers, some of which were covered with mystical figures and cabalistic characters. These papers I seized, and a watch was set to make prisoner of Alvetham on his return. Before dawn he appeared, and was instantly secured, and placed in close confinement. On the next day he was brought before the assembled conclave in the chapter-house, and examined. His defence was unavailing. I charged him with the terrible crime of witchcraft, and he was found guilty."

A hollow groan broke from the monk, but he offered no other interruption.

"He was condemned to die a fearful and lingering death," pursued the abbot; "and it devolved upon me to see the sentence carried out."

"And no pity for the innocent moved you?" cried the monk. "You had no compunction?"

"None," replied the abbot; "I rather rejoiced in the successful accomplishment of my scheme. The prey was fairly in my toils, and I would give him no chance of escape. Not to bring scandal upon the abbey, it was decided that Alvetham's punishment should be secret."

"A wise resolve," observed the monk.

"Within the thickness of the dormitory walls is contrived a small singularly-formed dungeon," continued the abbot. "It consists of an arched cell, just large enough to hold the body of a captive, and permit him to stretch himself upon a straw pallet. A narrow staircase mounts upwards to a grated aperture in one of the buttresses to admit air and light. Other opening is there none. 'Teter et fortis carcer' is this dungeon styled in our

monastic rolls, and it is well described, for it is black and strong enough. Food is admitted to the miserable inmate of the cell by means of a revolving stone, but no interchange of speech can be held with those without. A large stone is removed from the wall to admit the prisoner, and once immured, the masonry is mortised, and made solid as before. The wretched captive does not long survive his doom, or it may be he lives too long, for death must be a release from such protracted misery. In this dark cell one of the evil-minded brethren, who essayed to stab the Abbot of Kirkstall in the chapter-house, was thrust, and ere a year was over, the provisions were untouched—and the man being known to be dead, they were stayed. His skeleton was found within the cell when it was opened to admit Borlace Alvetham."

"Poor captive!" groaned the monk.

"Ay, poor captive!" echoed Paslew. "Mine eyes have often striven to pierce those stone walls, and see him lying there in that narrow chamber, or forcing his way upwards, to catch a glimpse of the blue sky above him. When I have seen the swallows settle on the old buttress, or the thin grass growing between the stones waving there, I have thought of him."

"Go on," said the monk.

"I scarce can proceed," rejoined Paslew. "Little time was allowed Alvetham for preparation. That very night the fearful sentence was carried out. The stone was removed, and a new pallet placed in the cell. At midnight the prisoner was brought to the dormitory, the brethren chanting a doleful hymn. There he stood amidst them, his tall form towering above the rest, and his features pale as death. He protested his innocence, but he exhibited no fear, even when he saw the terrible preparations. When all was ready he was led to the breach. At that awful moment, his eye met mine, and I shall never forget the look. I might have saved him if I had spoken, but I would not speak. I turned away, and he was thrust into the breach. A fearful cry then rang in my ears, but it was instantly drowned by the mallets of the masons employed to fasten up the stone."

There was a pause for a few moments, broken only by the sobs of the abbot. At length, the monk spoke.

"And the prisoner perished in the cell?" he demanded in a hollow voice.

"I thought so till to-night," replied the abbot. "But if he escaped it, it must have been by miracle; or by aid of those powers with whom he was charged with holding commerce."

"He did escape!" thundered the monk, throwing back his hood. "Look up, John Paslew. Look up, false abbot, and recognise thy victim."

"Borlace Alvetham!" cried the abbot. "Is it, indeed, you?"

"You see, and can you doubt?" replied the other. "But you shall now hear how I avoided the terrible death to which you procured my condemnation. You shall now learn how I am here to repay the wrong you did me. We have changed places, John Paslew, since the night when I was thrust into the cell, never, as you hoped, to come forth. You are now the criminal, and I the witness of the punishment."

"Forgive me! oh, forgive me! Borlace Alvetham, since you are, indeed, he!" cried the abbot, falling on his knees.

"Arise, John Paslew!" cried the other, sternly. "Arise, and listen to me. For the damning offences into which I have been led, I hold you responsible. But for you I might have died free from sin. It is fit you should know the amount of my iniquity. Give ear to me, I say. When first shut within that dungeon, I yielded to the promptings of despair. Cursing you, I threw myself upon the pallet, resolved to taste no food, and hoping death would soon release me. But love of life prevailed. On the second day I took the bread and water allotted me, and ate and drank; after which I scaled the narrow staircase, and gazed through the thin barred loophole at the bright blue sky above, sometimes catching the shadow of a bird as it flew past. Oh, how I yearned for freedom then! Oh, how I wished to break through the stone walls that held me fast! Oh, what a weight of despair crushed my heart as I crept back to my narrow bed! The cell seemed like a grave, and indeed it was little better. Horrible thoughts possessed me. What if I should be wilfully forgotten? What if no food should be given me, and I should be left to perish by the slow pangs of hunger? At this idea I shrieked aloud, but the walls alone returned a dull echo to my cries. I beat my hands against the stones, till the blood flowed from them, but no answer was returned; and at last I desisted from sheer exhaustion. Day after day, and night after night, passed in this way. My food regularly came. But I became maddened by solitude; and with terrible imprecations invoked aid from the powers of darkness to set me free. One night, while thus employed, I was startled by a mocking voice which said,

"'All this fury is needless. Thou hast only to wish for me, and I come.'

Alvetham and John Paslew.
"It was profoundly dark. I could see nothing but a pair of red orbs, glowing like flaming carbuncles.

"'Thou wouldst be free,' continued the voice. 'Thou shalt be so. Arise, and follow me.'

"At this I felt myself grasped by an iron arm, against which all resistance would have been unavailing, even if I had dared to offer it, and in an instant I was dragged up the narrow steps. The stone wall opened before my unseen conductor, and in another moment we were upon the roof of the dormitory. By the bright starbeams shooting down from above, I discerned a tall shadowy figure standing by my side.

"'Thou art mine,' he cried, in accents graven for ever on my memory; 'but I am a generous master, and will give thee a long term of freedom. Thou shalt be avenged upon thine enemy—deeply avenged.'

"'Grant this, and I am thine,' I replied, a spirit of infernal vengeance possessing me. And I knelt before the fiend.

"'But thou must tarry for awhile,' he answered, 'for thine enemy's time will be long in coming; but it will come. I cannot work him immediate harm; but I will lead him to a height from which he will assuredly fall headlong. Thou must depart from this place; for it is perilous to thee, and if thou stayest here, ill will befall thee. I will send a rat to thy dungeon, which shall daily devour the provisions, so that the monks shall not know thou hast fled. In thirty and one years shall the abbot's doom be accomplished. Two years before that time thou mayst return. Then come alone to Pendle Hill on a Friday night, and beat the water of the moss pool on the summit, and I will appear to thee and tell thee more. Nine and twenty years, remember!'

"With these words the shadowy figure melted away, and I found myself standing alone on the mossy roof of the dormitory. The cold stars were shining down upon me, and I heard the howl of the watch-dogs near the gate. The fair abbey slept in beauty around me, and I gnashed my teeth with rage to think that you had made me an outcast from it, and robbed me of a dignity which might have been mine. I was wroth also that my vengeance should be so long delayed. But I could not remain where I was, so I clambered down the buttress, and fled away."

"Can this be?" cried the abbot, who had listened in rapt wonderment to the narration. "Two years after your immurement in the cell, the food having been for some time untouched, the wall was opened, and upon the pallet was found a decayed carcase in mouldering, monkish vestments."

"It was a body taken from the charnel, and placed there by the demon," replied the monk. "Of my long wanderings in other lands and beneath brighter skies I need not tell

you; but neither absence nor lapse of years cooled my desire of vengeance, and when the appointed time drew nigh I returned to my own country, and came hither in a lowly garb, under the name of Nicholas Demdike."

"Ha!" exclaimed the abbot.

"I went to Pendle Hill, as directed," pursued the monk, "and saw the Dark Shape there as I beheld it on the dormitory roof. All things were then told me, and I learnt how the late rebellion should rise, and how it should be crushed. I learnt also how my vengeance should be satisfied."

Paslew groaned aloud. A brief pause ensued, and deep emotion marked the accents of the wizard as he proceeded.

"When I came back, all this part of Lancashire resounded with praises of the beauty of Bess Blackburn, a rustic lass who dwelt in Barrowford. She was called the Flower of Pendle, and inflamed all the youths with love, and all the maidens with jealousy. But she favoured none except Cuthbert Ashbead, forester to the Abbot of Whalley. Her mother would fain have given her to the forester in marriage, but Bess would not be disposed of so easily. I saw her, and became at once enamoured. I thought my heart was seared; but it was not so. The savage beauty of Bess pleased me more than the most refined charms could have done, and her fierce character harmonised with my own. How I won her matters not, but she cast off all thoughts of Ashbead, and clung to me. My wild life suited her; and she roamed the wastes with me, scaled the hills in my company, and shrank not from the weird meetings I attended. Ill repute quickly attended her, and she became branded as a witch. Her aged mother closed her doors upon her, and those who would have gone miles to meet her, now avoided her. Bess heeded this little. She was of a nature to repay the world's contumely with like scorn, but when her child was born the case became different. She wished to save it. Then it was," pursued Demdike, vehemently, and regarding the abbot with flashing eyes—"then it was that I was again mortally injured by you. Then your ruthless decree to the clergy went forth. My child was denied baptism, and became subject to the fiend."

"Alas! alas!" exclaimed Paslew.

"And as if this were not injury enough," thundered Demdike, "you have called down a withering and lasting curse upon its innocent head, and through it transfixed its mother's heart. If you had complied with that poor girl's request, I would have forgiven you your wrong to me, and have saved you."

There was a long, fearful silence. At last Demdike advanced to the abbot, and, seizing his arm, fixed his eyes upon him, as if to search into his soul.

"Answer me, John Paslew!" he cried; "answer me, as you shall speedily answer your Maker. Can that malediction be recalled? Dare not to trifle with me, or I will tear forth your black heart, and cast it in your face. Can that curse be recalled? Speak!"

"It cannot," replied the abbot, half dead with terror.

"Away, then!" thundered Demdike, casting him from him. "To the gallows!—to the gallows!" And he rushed out of the room.

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CHAPTER VII.—THE ABBEY MILL.

For a while the abbot remained shattered and stupefied by this terrible interview. At length he arose, and made his way, he scarce knew how, to the oratory. But it was long before the tumult of his thoughts could be at all allayed, and he had only just regained something like composure when he was disturbed by hearing a slight sound in the adjoining chamber. A mortal chill came over him, for he thought it might be Demdike returned. Presently, he distinguished a footstep stealthily approaching him, and almost hoped that the wizard would consummate his vengeance by taking his life. But he was quickly undeceived, for a hand was placed on his shoulder, and a friendly voice whispered in his ears, "Cum along wi' meh, lort abbut. Get up, quick—quick!"

Thus addressed, the abbot raised his eyes, and beheld a rustic figure standing beside him, divested of his clouted shoes, and armed with a long bare wood-knife.

"Dunna yo knoa me, lort abbut?" cried the person. "Ey'm a freent—Hal o' Nabs, o' Wiswall. Yo'n moind Wiswall, yeawr own birthplace, abbut? Dunna be feert, ey sey. Ey'n getten a steigh clapt to yon windaw, an' you con be down it i' a trice—an' along t' covert way be t' river soide to t' mill."

But the abbot stirred not.

"Quick! quick!" implored Hal o' Nabs, venturing to pluck the abbot's sleeve. "Every minute's precious. Dunna be feert. Ebil Croft, t' miller, is below. Poor Cuthbert Ashbead would ha' been here i'stead o' meh if he couldn; boh that accursed wizard, Nick Demdike, turned my hont agen him, an' drove t' poike head intended for himself into poor Cuthbert's side. They clapt meh i' a dungeon, boh Ebil monaged to get me out, an' ey then swore to do whot poor Cuthbert would ha' done, if he'd been livin'—so here ey am, lort abbut, cum to set yo free. An' neaw yo knoan aw abowt it, yo con ha nah more hesitation. Cum, time presses, an ey'm feert o' t' guard owerhearing us."

"I thank you, my good friend, from the bottom of my heart," replied the abbot, rising; "but, however strong may be the temptation of life and liberty which you hold out to me, I cannot yield to it. I have pledged my word to the Earl of Derby to make no attempt to escape. Were the doors thrown open, and the guard removed, I should remain where I am."

"Whot!" exclaimed Hal o' Nabs, in a tone of bitter disappointment; "yo winnaw go, neaw aw's prepared. By th' Mess, boh yo shan. Ey'st nah go back to Ebil empty-handed. If yo'n sworn to stay here, ey'n sworn to set yo free, and ey'st keep meh oath. Willy nilly, yo shan go wi' meh, lort abbut!"

"Forbear to urge me further, my good Hal," rejoined Paslew. "I fully appreciate your devotion; and I only regret that you and Abel Croft have exposed yourselves to so much peril on my account. Poor Cuthbert Ashbead! when I beheld his body on the bier, I had a sad feeling that he had died in my behalf."

"Cuthbert meant to rescue yo, lort abbut," replied Hal, "and deed resisting Nick Demdike's attempt to arrest him. Boh, be aw t' devils!" he added, brandishing his knife fiercely, "t' warlock shall ha' three inches o' cowd steel betwixt his ribs, t' furst time ey cum across him."

"Peace, my son," rejoined the abbot, "and forego your bloody design. Leave the wretched man to the chastisement of Heaven. And now, farewell! All your kindly efforts to induce me to fly are vain."

"Yo winnaw go?" cried Hal o'Nabs, scratching his head.

"I cannot," replied the abbot.

"Cum wi' meh to t' windaw, then," pursued Hal, "and tell Ebil so. He'll think ey'n failed else."

"Willingly," replied the abbot.

And with noiseless footsteps he followed the other across the chamber. The window was open, and outside it was reared a ladder.

"Yo mun go down a few steps," said Hal o' Nabs, "or else he'll nah hear yo."

The abbot complied, and partly descended the ladder.

"I see no one," he said.

"T' neet's dark," replied Hal o' Nabs, who was close behind him. "Ebil canna be far off. Hist! ey hear him—go on."

The abbot was now obliged to comply, though he did so with, reluctance. Presently he found himself upon the roof of a building, which he knew to be connected with the mill by a covered passage running along the south bank of the Calder. Scarcely had he set foot there, than Hal o' Nabs jumped after him, and, seizing the ladder, cast it into the stream, thus rendering Paslew's return impossible.

"Neaw, lort abbut," he cried, with a low, exulting laugh, "yo hanna brok'n yor word, an ey'n kept moine. Yo're free agen your will."

"You have destroyed me by your mistaken zeal," cried the abbot, reproachfully.

"Nowt o't sort," replied Hal; "ey'n saved yo' fro' destruction. This way, lort abbut—this way."

And taking Paslew's arm he led him to a low parapet, overlooking the covered passage before described. Half an hour before it had been bright moonlight, but, as if to favour the fugitive, the heavens had become overcast, and a thick mist had arisen from the river.

"Ebil! Ebil!" cried Hal o' Nabs, leaning over the parapet.

"Here," replied a voice below. "Is aw reet? Is he wi' yo?"

"Yeigh," replied Hal.

"Whot han yo dun wi' t' steigh?" cried Ebil.

"Never yo moind," returned Hal, "boh help t' abbut down."

Paslew thought it vain to resist further, and with the help of Hal o' Nabs and the miller, and further aided by some irregularities in the wall, he was soon safely landed near the entrance of the passage. Abel fell on his knees, and pressed the abbot's hand to his lips.

"Owr Blessed Leady be praised, yo are free," he cried.

"Dunna stond tawking here, Ebil," interposed Hal o' Nabs, who by this time had reached the ground, and who was fearful of some new remonstrance on the abbot's part. "Ey'm feerd o' pursuit."

"Yo' needna be afeerd o' that, Hal," replied the miller. "T' guard are safe enough. One o' owr chaps has just tuk em up a big black jack fu' o' stout ele; an ey warrant me they winnaw stir yet awhoile. Win it please yo to cum wi' me, lort abbut?"

With this, he marched along the passage, followed by the others, and presently arrived at a door, against which he tapped. A bolt being withdrawn, it was instantly opened to admit the party, after which it was as quickly shut, and secured. In answer to a call from the miller, a light appeared at the top of a steep, ladder-like flight of wooden steps, and up these Paslew, at the entreaty of Abel, mounted, and found himself in a large, low chamber, the roof of which was crossed by great beams, covered thickly with cobwebs, whitened by flour, while the floor was strewn with empty sacks and sieves.

The person who held the light proved to be the miller's daughter, Dorothy, a blooming lass of eighteen, and at the other end of the chamber, seated on a bench before a turf fire, with an infant on her knees, was the miller's wife. The latter instantly arose on beholding the abbot, and, placing the child on a corn bin, advanced towards him, and dropped on her knees, while her daughter imitated her example. The abbot extended his hands over them, and pronounced a solemn benediction.

"Bring your child also to me, that I may bless it," he said, when he concluded.

"It's nah my child, lort abbut," replied the miller's wife, taking up the infant and bringing it to him; "it wur brought to me this varry neet by Ebil. Ey wish it wur far enough, ey'm sure, for it's a deformed little urchon. One o' its een is lower set than t' other; an t' reet looks up, while t' laft looks down."

And as she spoke she pointed to the infant's face, which was disfigured as she had stated, by a strange and unnatural disposition of the eyes, one of which was set much lower in the head than the other. Awakened from sleep, the child uttered a feeble cry, and stretched out its tiny arms to Dorothy.

"You ought to pity it for its deformity, poor little creature, rather than reproach it, mother," observed the young damsel.

"Marry kem eawt!" cried her mother, sharply, "yo'n getten fine feelings wi' your larning fro t' good feythers, Dolly. Os ey said efore, ey wish t' brat wur far enough."

"You forget it has no mother," suggested Dorothy, kindly.

"An naw great matter, if it hasn't," returned the miller's wife. "Bess Demdike's neaw great loss."

"Is this Bess Demdike's child?" cried Paslew, recoiling.

"Yeigh," exclaimed the miller's wife. And mistaking the cause of Paslew's emotion, she added, triumphantly, to her daughter, "Ey towd te, wench, ot t' lort abbut would be of my way o' thinking. T' chilt has got the witch's mark plain upon her. Look, lort abbut, look!"

But Paslew heeded her not, but murmured to himself:—

"Ever in my path, go where I will. It is vain to struggle with my fate. I will go back and surrender myself to the Earl of Derby."

"Nah,—nah!—yo shanna do that," replied Hal o' Nabs, who, with the miller, was close beside him. "Sit down o' that stoo' be t' fire, and take a cup o' wine t' cheer yo, and then we'n set out to Pendle Forest, where ey'st find yo a safe hiding-place. An t' ony reward ey'n ever ask for t' sarvice shan be, that yo'n perform a marriage sarvice fo' me and Dolly one of these days." And he nudged the damsel's elbow, who turned away, covered with blushes.

The abbot moved mechanically to the fire, and sat down, while the miller's wife, surrendering the child with a shrug of the shoulders and a grimace to her daughter, went in search of some viands and a flask of wine, which she set before Paslew. The miller then filled a drinking-horn, and presented it to his guest, who was about to raise it to his lips, when a loud knocking was heard at the door below.

The knocking continued with increased violence, and voices were heard calling upon the miller to open the door, or it would be broken down. On the first alarm Abel had flown to a small window whence he could reconnoitre those below, and he now returned with a face white with terror, to say that a party of arquebussiers, with the sheriff at their head, were without, and that some of the men were provided with torches.

"They have discovered my evasion, and are come in search of me," observed the abbot rising, but without betraying any anxiety. "Do not concern yourselves further for me, my good friends, but open the door, and deliver me to them."

"Nah, nah, that we winnaw," cried Hal o' Nabs, "yo're neaw taen yet, feyther abbut, an' ey knoa a way to baffle 'em. If y'on let him down into t' river, Ebil, ey'n manage to get him off."

"Weel thowt on, Nab," cried the miller, "theawst nah been mey mon seven year fo nowt. Theaw knoas t' ways o' t' pleck."

"Os weel os onny rotten abowt it," replied Hal o' Nabs. "Go down to t' grindin'-room, an ey'n follow i' a troice."

And as Abel snatched up the light, and hastily descended the steps with Paslew, Hal whispered in Dorothy's ears—

"Tak care neaw one fonds that chilt, Dolly, if they break in. Hide it safely; an whon they're gone, tak it to't church, and place it near t' altar, where no ill con cum to it or thee. Mey life may hong upon it."

And as the poor girl, who, as well as her mother, was almost frightened out of her wits, promised compliance, he hurried down the steps after the others, muttering, as the clamour without was redoubled—

"Eigh, roar on till yo're hoarse. Yo winnaw get in yet awhile, ey'n promise ye."

Meantime, the abbot had been led to the chief room of the mill, where all the corn formerly consumed within the monastery had been prepared, and which the size of the chamber itself, together with the vastness of the stones used in the operation of grinding, and connected with the huge water-wheel outside, proved to be by no means inconsiderable. Strong shafts of timber supported the flooring above, and were crossed by other boards placed horizontally, from which various implements in use at the mill depended, giving the chamber, imperfectly lighted as it now was by the lamp borne by Abel, a strange and almost mysterious appearance. Three or four of the miller's men, armed with pikes, had followed their master, and, though much alarmed, they vowed to die rather than give up the abbot.

By this time Hal o' Nabs had joined the group, and proceeding towards a raised part of the chamber where the grinding-stones were set, he knelt down, and laying hold of a small ring, raised up a trapdoor. The fresh air which blew up through the aperture, combined with the rushing sound of water, showed that the Calder flowed immediately beneath; and, having made some slight preparation, Hal let himself down into the stream.

At this moment a loud crash was heard, and one of the miller's men cried out that the arquebussiers had burst open the door.

"Be hondy, then, lads, and let him down!" cried Hal o' Nabs, who had some difficulty in maintaining his footing on the rough, stony bottom of the swift stream.

Passively yielding, the abbot suffered the miller and one of the stoutest of his men to assist him through the trapdoor, while a third held down the lamp, and showed Hal o' Nabs, up to his middle in the darkling current, and stretching out his arms to receive the burden. The light fell upon the huge black circle of the watershed now stopped, and upon the dripping arches supporting the mill. In another moment the abbot plunged into the water, the trapdoor was replaced, and bolted underneath by Hal, who, while guiding his companion along, and bidding him catch hold of the wood-work of the wheel, heard a heavy trampling of many feet on the boards above, showing that the pursuers had obtained admittance.

Encumbered by his heavy vestments, the abbot could with difficulty contend against the strong current, and he momently expected to be swept away; but he had a stout and active assistant by his side, who soon placed him under shelter of the wheel. The trampling overhead continued for a few minutes, after which all was quiet, and Hal judged that, finding their search within ineffectual, the enemy would speedily come forth. Nor was he deceived. Shouts were soon heard at the door of the mill, and the glare of torches was cast on the stream. Then it was that Hal dragged his companion into a deep hole, formed by some decay in the masonry, behind the wheel, where the water rose nearly to their chins, and where they were completely concealed. Scarcely were they thus ensconced, than two or three armed men, holding torches aloft, were seen wading under the archway; but after looking carefully around, and even approaching close to the water-wheel, these persons could detect nothing, and withdrew, muttering curses of rage and disappointment. By-and-by the lights almost wholly disappeared, and the shouts becoming fainter and more distant, it was evident that the men had gone lower down the river. Upon this, Hal thought they might venture to quit their retreat, and accordingly, grasping the abbot's arm, he proceeded to wade up the stream.

Benumbed with cold, and half dead with terror, Paslew needed all his companion's support, for he could do little to help himself, added to which, they occasionally encountered some large stone, or stepped into a deep hole, so that it required Hal's utmost exertion and strength to force a way on. At last they were out of the arch, and though both banks seemed unguarded, yet, for fear of surprise, Hal deemed it prudent still to keep to the river. Their course was completely sheltered from observation by the mist that enveloped them; and after proceeding in this way for some distance, Hal stopped to listen, and while debating with himself whether he should now quit the river, he fancied he beheld a black object swimming towards him. Taking it for an otter, with which voracious animal the Calder, a stream swarming with trout, abounded, and knowing the creature would not meddle with them unless first attacked, he paid little

attention to it; but he was soon made sensible of his error. His arm was suddenly seized by a large black hound, whose sharp fangs met in his flesh. Unable to repress a cry of pain, Hal strove to disengage himself from his assailant, and, finding it impossible, flung himself into the water in the hope of drowning him, but, as the hound still maintained his hold, he searched for his knife to slay him. But he could not find it, and in his distress applied to Paslew.

"Ha yo onny weepun abowt yo, lort abbut," he cried, "wi' which ey con free mysel fro' this accussed hound?"

"Alas! no, my son," replied Paslew, "and I fear no weapon will prevail against it, for I recognise in the animal the hound of the wizard, Demdike."

"Ey thowt t' dule wur in it," rejoined Hal; "boh leave me to fight it owt, and do you gain t' bonk, an mey t' best o' your way to t' Wiswall. Ey'n join ye os soon os ey con scrush this varment's heaod agen a stoan. Ha!" he added, joyfully, "Ey'n found t' thwittle. Go—go. Ey'n soon be efter ye."

Feeling he should sink if he remained where he was, and wholly unable to offer any effectual assistance to his companion, the abbot turned to the left, where a large oak overhung the stream, and he was climbing the bank, aided by the roots of the tree, when a man suddenly came from behind it, seized his hand, and dragged him up forcibly. At the same moment his captor placed a bugle to his lips, and winding a few notes, he was instantly answered by shouts, and soon afterwards half a dozen armed men ran up, bearing torches. Not a word passed between the fugitive and his captor; but when the men came up, and the torchlight fell upon the features of the latter, the abbot's worst fears were realised. It was Demdike.

"False to your king!—false to your oath!—false to all men!" cried the wizard. "You seek to escape in vain!"

"I merit all your reproaches," replied the abbot; "but it may he some satisfaction, to you to learn, that I have endured far greater suffering than if I had patiently awaited my doom."

"I am glad of it," rejoined Demdike, with a savage laugh; "but you have destroyed others beside yourself. Where is the fellow in the water? What, ho, Uriel!"

But as no sound reached him, he snatched a torch from one of the arquebussiers and held it to the river's brink. But he could see neither hound nor man.

"Strange!" he cried. "He cannot have escaped. Uriel is more than a match for any man. Secure the prisoner while I examine the stream."

With this, he ran along the bank with great quickness, holding his torch far over the water, so as to reveal any thing floating within it, but nothing met his view until he came within a short distance of the mill, when he beheld a black object struggling in the current, and soon found that it was his dog making feeble efforts to gain the bank.

"Ah recreant! thou hast let him go," cried Demdike, furiously.

Seeing his master the animal redoubled its efforts, crept ashore, and fell at his feet, with a last effort to lick his hands.

Demdike held down the torch, and then perceived that the hound was quite dead. There was a deep gash in its side, and another in the throat, showing how it had perished.

"Poor Uriel!" he exclaimed; "the only true friend I had. And thou art gone! The villain has killed thee, but he shall pay for it with his life."

And hurrying back he dispatched four of the men in quest of the fugitive, while accompanied by the two others he conveyed Paslew back to the abbey, where he was placed in a strong cell, from which there was no possibility of escape, and a guard set over him.

Half an hour after this, two of the arquebussiers returned with Hal o' Nabs, whom they had succeeded in capturing after a desperate resistance, about a mile from the abbey, on the road to Wiswall. He was taken to the guard-room, which had been appointed in one of the lower chambers of the chapter-house, and Demdike was immediately apprised of his arrival. Satisfied by an inspection of the prisoner, whose demeanour was sullen and resolved, Demdike proceeded to the great hall, where the Earl of Derby, who had returned thither after the midnight mass, was still sitting with his retainers. An audience was readily obtained by the wizard, and, apparently well pleased with the result, he returned to the guard-room. The prisoner was seated by himself in one corner of the chamber, with his hands tied behind his back with a leathern thong, and Demdike approaching him, told him that, for having aided the escape of a condemned rebel and traitor, and violently assaulting the king's lieges in the execution of their duty, he would be hanged on the morrow, the Earl of Derby, who had power of life or death in such cases, having so decreed it. And he exhibited the warrant.

"Soh, yo mean to hong me, eh, wizard?" cried Hal o' Nabs, kicking his heels with great apparent indifference.

"I do," replied Demdike; "if for nothing else, for slaying my hound."

"Ey dunna think it," replied Hal. "Yo'n alter your moind. Do, mon. Ey'm nah prepared to dee just yet."

"Then perish in your sins," cried Demdike, "I will not give you an hour's respite."

"Yo'n be sorry when it's too late," said Hal.

"Tush!" cried Demdike, "my only regret will be that Uriel's slaughter is paid for by such a worthless life as thine."

"Then whoy tak it?" demanded Hal. "'Specially whon yo'n lose your chilt by doing so."

"My child!" exclaimed Demdike, surprised. "How mean you, sirrah?"

"Ey mean this," replied Hal, coolly; "that if ey dee to-morrow mornin' your chilt dees too. Whon ey ondertook this job ey calkilated mey chances, an' tuk precautions eforehond. Your chilt's a hostage fo mey safety."

"Curses on thee and thy cunning," cried Demdike; "but I will not be outwitted by a hind like thee. I will have the child, and yet not be baulked of my revenge."

"Yo'n never ha' it, except os a breathless corpse, 'bowt mey consent," rejoined Hal.

"We shall see," cried Demdike, rushing forth, and bidding the guards look well to the prisoner.

But ere long he returned with a gloomy and disappointed expression of countenance, and again approaching the prisoner said, "Thou hast spoken the truth. The infant is in the hands of some innocent being over whom I have no power."

"Ey towdee so, wizard," replied Hal, laughing. "Hoind os ey be, ey'm a match fo' thee,—ha! ha! Neaw, mey life agen t' chilt's. Win yo set me free?"

Demdike deliberated.

"Harkee, wizard," cried Hal, "if yo're hatching treason ey'n dun. T' sartunty o' revenge win sweeten mey last moments."

"Will you swear to deliver the child to me unharmed, if I set you free?" asked Demdike.

"It's a bargain, wizard," rejoined Hal o' Nabs; "ey swear. Boh yo mun set me free furst, fo' ey winnaw tak your word."

Demdike turned away disdainfully, and addressing the arquebussiers, said, "You behold this warrant, guard. The prisoner is committed to my custody. I will produce him on the morrow, or account for his absence to the Earl of Derby."

One of the arquebussiers examined the order, and vouching for its correctness, the others signified their assent to the arrangement, upon which Demdike motioned the prisoner to follow him, and quitted the chamber. No interruption was offered to Hal's egress, but he stopped within the court-yard, where Demdike awaited him, and unfastened the leathern thong that bound together his hands.

"Now go and bring the child to me," said the wizard.

"Nah, ey'st neaw bring it ye myself," rejoined Hal. "Ey knoas better nor that. Be at t' church porch i' half an hour, an t' bantlin shan be delivered to ye safe an sound."

And without waiting for a reply, he ran off with great swiftness.

At the appointed time Demdike sought the church, and as he drew near it there issued from the porch a female, who hastily placing the child, wrapped in a mantle, in his arms, tarried for no speech from him, but instantly disappeared. Demdike, however, recognised in her the miller's daughter, Dorothy Croft.

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CHAPTER VIII.—THE EXECUTIONER.

Dawn came at last, after a long and weary night to many within and without the abbey. Every thing betokened a dismal day. The atmosphere was damp, and oppressive to the spirits, while the raw cold sensibly affected the frame. All astir were filled with gloom and despondency, and secretly breathed a wish that, the tragical business of the day were ended. The vast range of Pendle was obscured by clouds, and ere long the vapours descended into the valleys, and rain began to fall; at first slightly, but afterwards in heavy continuous showers. Melancholy was the aspect of the abbey, and it required no stretch of imagination to fancy that the old structure was deploring the fate of its former ruler. To those impressed with the idea—and many there were who were so—the very stones of the convent church seemed dissolving into tears. The statues of the saints appeared to weep, and the great statue of Saint Gregory de Northbury over the porch seemed bowed down with grief. The grotesquely carved heads on the spouts grinned horribly at the abbot's destroyers, and spouted forth cascades of water, as if with the intent of drowning them. So deluging and incessant were the showers, that it seemed, indeed, as if the abbey would be flooded. All the inequalities of ground within the great quadrangle of the cloisters looked like ponds, and the various water-spouts from the dormitory, the refectory, and the chapter-house, continuing to jet forth streams into the court below, the ambulatories were soon filled ankle-deep, and even the lower apartments, on which they opened, invaded.

Surcharged with moisture, the royal banner on the gate drooped and clung to the staff, as if it too shared in the general depression, or as if the sovereign authority it represented had given way. The countenances and deportment of the men harmonized with the weather; they moved about gloomily and despondently, their bright accoutrements sullied with the wet, and their buskins clogged with mire. A forlorn sight it was to watch the shivering sentinels on the walls; and yet more forlorn to see the groups of the abbot's old retainers gathering without, wrapped in their blue woollen cloaks, patiently enduring the drenching showers, and awaiting the last awful scene. But the saddest sight of all was on the hill, already described, called the Holehouses. Here two other lesser gibbets had been erected during the night, one on either hand of the loftier instrument of justice, and the carpenters were yet employed in finishing their work, having been delayed by the badness of the weather. Half drowned by the torrents that fell upon them, the poor fellows were protected from interference with their disagreeable occupation by half a dozen well-mounted and well-armed troopers, and by as many halberdiers; and this company, completely exposed to the weather, suffered severely from wet and cold. The rain beat against the gallows, ran down its tall naked

posts, and collected in pools at its feet. Attracted by some strange instinct, which seemed to give them a knowledge of the object of these terrible preparations, two ravens wheeled screaming round the fatal tree, and at length one of them settled on the cross-beam, and could with difficulty be dislodged by the shouts of the men, when it flew away, croaking hoarsely. Up this gentle hill, ordinarily so soft and beautiful, but now abhorrent as a Golgotha, in the eyes of the beholders, groups of rustics and monks had climbed over ground rendered slippery with moisture, and had gathered round the paling encircling the terrible apparatus, looking the images of despair and woe.

Even those within the abbey, and sheltered from the storm, shared the all-pervading despondency. The refectory looked dull and comfortless, and the logs on the hearth hissed and sputtered, and would not burn. Green wood had been brought instead of dry fuel by the drowsy henchman. The viands on the board provoked not the appetite, and the men emptied their cups of ale, yawned and stretched their arms, as if they would fain sleep an hour or two longer. The sense of discomfort, was heightened by the entrance of those whose term of watch had been relieved, and who cast their dripping cloaks on the floor, while two or three savage dogs, steaming with moisture, stretched their huge lengths before the sullen fire, and disputed all approach to it.

Within the great hall were already gathered the retainers of the Earl of Derby, but the nobleman himself had not appeared. Having passed the greater part of the night in conference with one person or another, and the abbot's flight having caused him much disquietude, though he did not hear of it till the fugitive was recovered; the earl would not seek his couch until within an hour of daybreak, and his attendants, considering the state of the weather, and that it yet wanted full two hours to the time appointed for the execution, did not think it needful to disturb him. Braddyll and Assheton, however, were up and ready; but, despite their firmness of nerve, they yielded like the rest to the depressing influence of the weather, and began to have some misgivings as to their own share in the tragedy about to be enacted. The various gentlemen in attendance paced to and fro within the hall, holding but slight converse together, anxiously counting the minutes, for the time appeared to pass on with unwonted slowness, and ever and anon glancing through the diamond panes of the window at the rain pouring down steadily without, and coming back again hopeless of amendment in the weather.

If such were the disheartening influence of the day on those who had nothing to apprehend, what must its effect have been on the poor captives! Woful indeed. The two monks suffered a complete prostration of spirit. All the resolution which Father Haydocke had displayed in his interview with the Earl of Derby, failed him now, and he yielded to the agonies of despair. Father Eastgate was in little better condition, and gave vent to unavailing lamentations, instead of paying heed to the consolatory discourse of the monk who had been permitted to visit him.

The abbot was better sustained. Though greatly enfeebled by the occurrences of the night, yet in proportion as his bodily strength decreased, his mental energies rallied. Since the confession of his secret offence, and the conviction he had obtained that his supposed victim still lived, a weight seemed taken from his breast, and he had no longer any dread of death. Rather he looked to the speedy termination of existence with hopeful pleasure. He prepared himself as decently as the means afforded him permitted for his last appearance before the world, but refused all refreshment except a cup of water, and being left to himself was praying fervently, when a man was admitted into his cell. Thinking it might be the executioner come to summon him, he arose, and to his surprise beheld Hal o' Nabs. The countenance of the rustic was pale, but his bearing was determined.

"You here, my son," cried Paslew. "I hoped you had escaped."

"Ey'm i' nah dawnger, feyther abbut," replied Hal. "Ey'n getten leef to visit ye fo a minute only, so ey mun be brief. Mey yourself easy, ye shanna dee be't hongmon's honds."

"How, my son!" cried Paslew. "I understand you not."

"Yo'n onderstond me weel enough by-and-by," replied Hal. "Dunnah be feart whon ye see me next; an comfort yoursel that whotever cums and goes, your death shall be avenged o' your warst foe."

Paslew would have sought some further explanation, but Hal stepped quickly backwards, and striking his foot against the door, it was instantly opened by the guard, and he went forth.

Not long after this, the Earl of Derby entered the great hall, and his first inquiry was as to the safety of the prisoners. When satisfied of this, he looked forth, and shuddered at the dismal state of the weather. While he was addressing some remarks on this subject, and on its interference with the tragical exhibition about to take place, an officer entered the hall, followed by several persons of inferior condition, amongst whom was Hal o' Nabs, and marched up to the earl, while the others remained standing at a respectful distance.

"What news do you bring me, sir?" cried the earl, noticing the officer's evident uneasiness of manner. "Nothing hath happened to the prisoners? God's death! if it hath, you shall all answer for it with your bodies."

"Nothing hath happened to them, my lord," said the officer,—"but—"

"But what?" interrupted the earl. "Out with it quickly."

"The executioner from Lancaster and his two aids have fled," replied the officer.

"Fled!" exclaimed the earl, stamping his foot with rage; "now as I live, this is a device to delay the execution till some new attempt at rescue can be made. But it shall fail, if I string up the abbot myself. Death! can no other hangmen be found? ha!"

"Of a surety, my lord; but all have an aversion to the office, and hold it opprobrious, especially to put churchmen to death," replied the officer.

"Opprobrious or not, it must be done," replied the earl. "See that fitting persons are provided."

At this moment Hal o' Nabs stepped forward.

"Ey'm willing t' ondertake t' job, my lord, an' t' hong t' abbut, without fee or rewort," he said.

"Thou bears't him a grudge, I suppose, good fellow," replied the earl, laughing at the rustic's uncouth appearance; "but thou seem'st a stout fellow, and one not likely to flinch, and may discharge the office as well as another. If no better man can be found, let him do it," he added to the officer.

"Ey humbly thonk your lortship," replied Hal, inwardly rejoicing at the success of his scheme. But his countenance fell when he perceived Demdike advance from behind the others.

"This man is not to be trusted, my lord," said Demdike, coming forward; "he has some mischievous design in making the request. So far from bearing enmity to the abbot, it was he who assisted him in his attempt to escape last night."

"What!" exclaimed the earl, "is this a new trick? Bring the fellow forward, that I may examine him."

But Hal was gone. Instantly divining Demdike's purpose, and seeing his chance lost, he mingled with the lookers-on, who covered his retreat. Nor could he be found when sought for by the guard.

"See you provide a substitute quickly, sir," cried the earl, angrily, to the officer.

"It is needless to take further trouble, my lord," replied Demdike "I am come to offer myself as executioner."

"Thou!" exclaimed the earl.

"Ay," replied the other. "When I heard that the men from Lancaster were fled, I instantly knew that some scheme to frustrate the ends of justice was on foot, and I at once resolved to undertake the office myself rather than delay or risk should occur. What this man's aim was, who hath just offered himself, I partly guess, but it hath failed; and if your lordship will intrust the matter to me, I will answer that no further impediment shall arise, but that the sentence shall be fully carried out, and the law satisfied. Your lordship can trust me."

"I know it," replied the earl. "Be it as you will. It is now on the stroke of nine. At ten, let all be in readiness to set out for Wiswall Hall. The rain may have ceased by that time, but no weather must stay you. Go forth with the new executioner, sir," he added to the officer, "and see all necessary preparations made."

And as Demdike bowed, and departed with the officer, the earl sat down with his retainers to break his fast.

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CHAPTER IX.—WISWALL HALL.

Shortly before ten o'clock a numerous cortège, consisting of a troop of horse in their full equipments, a band of archers with their bows over their shoulders, and a long train of barefoot monks, who had been permitted to attend, set out from the abbey. Behind them came a varlet with a paper mitre on his head, and a lathen crosier in his hand, covered with a surcoat, on which was emblazoned, but torn and reversed, the arms of Paslew; argent, a fess between three mullets, sable, pierced of the field, a crescent for difference. After him came another varlet bearing a banner, on which was painted a grotesque figure in a half-military, half-monastic garb, representing the "Earl of Poverty," with this distich beneath it:—

Priest and warrior—rich and poor,
He shall be hanged at his own door.

Next followed a tumbrel, drawn by two horses, in which sat the abbot alone, the two other prisoners being kept back for the present. Then came Demdike, in a leathern jerkin and blood-red hose, fitting closely to his sinewy limbs, and wrapped in a houppeland of the same colour as the hose, with a coil of rope round his neck. He walked between two ill-favoured personages habited in black, whom he had chosen as assistants. A band of halberdiers brought up the rear. The procession moved slowly along,—the passing-bell tolling each minute, and a muffled drum sounding hollowly at intervals.

Shortly before the procession started the rain ceased, but the air felt damp and chill, and the roads were inundated. Passing out at the north-eastern gateway, the gloomy train skirted the south side of the convent church, and went on in the direction of the village of Whalley. When near the east end of the holy edifice, the abbot beheld two coffins borne along, and, on inquiry, learnt that they contained the bodies of Bess Demdike and Cuthbert Ashbead, who were about to be interred in the cemetery. At this moment his eye for the first time encountered that of his implacable foe, and he then discovered that he was to serve as his executioner.

At first Paslew felt much trouble at this thought, but the feeling quickly passed away. On reaching Whalley, every door was found closed, and every window shut; so that the spectacle was lost upon the inhabitants; and after a brief halt, the cavalcade get out for Wiswall Hall.

Sprung from an ancient family residing in the neighbourhood Of Whalley, Abbot Paslew was the second son of Francis Paslew Of Wiswall Hall, a great gloomy stone mansion, situated at the foot of the south-western side of Pendle Hill, where his brother Francis still resided. Of a cold and cautious character, Francis Paslew, second of the name, held aloof from the insurrection, and when his brother was arrested he wholly abandoned him. Still the owner of Wiswall had not altogether escaped suspicion, and it was probably as much with the view of degrading him as of adding to the abbot's punishment, that the latter was taken to the hall on the morning of his execution. Be this as it may, the cortège toiled thither through roads bad in the best of seasons, but now, since the heavy rain, scarcely passable; and it arrived there in about half an hour, and drew up on the broad green lawn. Window and door of the hall were closed; no smoke issued from the heavy pile of chimneys; and to all outward seeming the place was utterly deserted. In answer to inquiries, it appeared that Francis Paslew had departed for Northumberland on the previous day, taking all his household with him.

In earlier years, a quarrel having occurred between the haughty abbot and the churlish Francis, the brothers rarely met, whence it chanced that John Paslew had seldom visited the place of his birth of late, though lying so near to the abbey, and, indeed, forming part of its ancient dependencies. It was sad to view it now; and yet the house, gloomy as it was, recalled seasons with which, though they might awaken regret, no guilty associations were connected. Dark was the hall, and desolate, but on the fine old trees around it the rooks were settling, and their loud cawings pleased him, and excited gentle emotions. For a few moments he grew young again, and forgot why he was there. Fondly surveying the house, the terraced garden, in which, as a boy, he had so often strayed, and the park beyond it, where he had chased the deer; his gaze rose to the cloudy heights of Pendle, springing immediately behind the mansion, and up which he had frequently climbed. The flood-gates of memory were opened at once, and a whole tide of long-buried feelings rushed upon his heart.

From this half-painful, half-pleasurable retrospect he was aroused by the loud blast of a trumpet, thrice blown. A recapitulation of his offences, together with his sentence, was read by a herald, after which the reversed blazonry was fastened upon the door of the hall, just below a stone escutcheon on which was carved the arms of the family; while the paper mitre was torn and trampled under foot, the lathen crosier broken in twain, and the scurril banner hacked in pieces.

While this degrading act was performed, a man in a miller's white garb, with the hood drawn over his face, forced his way towards the tumbrel, and while the attention of the guard was otherwise engaged, whispered in Paslew's ear,

"Ey han failed i' mey scheme, feyther abbut, boh rest assured ey'n avenge you. Demdike shan ha' mey Sheffield thwittle i' his heart 'efore he's a day older."

"The wizard has a charm against steel, my son, and indeed is proof against all weapons forged by men," replied Paslew, who recognised the voice of Hal o' Nabs, and hoped by this assertion to divert him from his purpose.

"Ha! say yo so, feythur abbut?" cried Hal. "Then ey'n reach him wi' summot sacred." And he disappeared.

At this moment, word was given to return, and in half an hour the cavalcade arrived at the abbey in the same order it had left it.

Though the rain had ceased, heavy clouds still hung overhead, threatening another deluge, and the aspect of the abbey remained gloomy as ever. The bell continued to toll; drums were beaten; and trumpets sounded from the outer and inner gateway, and from the three quadrangles. The cavalcade drew up in front of the great northern entrance; and its return being announced within, the two other captives were brought forth, each fastened upon a hurdle, harnessed to a stout horse. They looked dead already, so ghastly was the hue of their cheeks.

The abbot's turn came next. Another hurdle was brought forward, and Demdike advanced to the tumbrel. But Paslew recoiled from his touch, and sprang to the ground unaided. He was then laid on his back upon the hurdle, and his hands and feet were bound fast with ropes to the twisted timbers. While this painful task was roughly performed by the wizard's two ill-favoured assistants, the crowd of rustics who looked on, murmured and exhibited such strong tokens of displeasure, that the guard thought it prudent to keep them off with their halberts. But when all was done, Demdike motioned to a man standing behind him to advance, and the person who was wrapped in a russet cloak complied, drew forth an infant, and held it in such way that the abbot could see it. Paslew understood what was meant, but he uttered not a word. Demdike then knelt down beside him, as if ascertaining the security of the cords, and whispered in his ear:—

"Recall thy malediction, and my dagger shall save thee from the last indignity."

"Never," replied Paslew; "the curse is irrevocable. But I would not recall it if I could. As I have said, thy child shall be a witch, and the mother of witches—but all shall be swept off—all!"

"Hell's torments seize thee!" cried the wizard, furiously.

"Nay, thou hast done thy worst to me," rejoined Paslew, meekly, "thou canst not harm me beyond the grave. Look to thyself, for even as thou speakest, thy child is taken from thee."

And so it was. While Demdike knelt beside Paslew, a hand was put forth, and, before the man who had custody of the infant could prevent it, his little charge was snatched from him. Thus the abbot saw, though the wizard perceived it not. The latter instantly sprang to his feet.

"Where is the child?" he demanded of the fellow in the russet cloak.

"It was taken from me by yon tall man who is disappearing through the gateway," replied the other, in great trepidation.

"Ha! he here!" exclaimed Demdike, regarding the dark figure with a look of despair. "It is gone from me for ever!"

"Ay, for ever!" echoed the abbot, solemnly.

"But revenge is still left me—revenge!" cried Demdike, with an infuriated gesture.

"Then glut thyself with it speedily," replied the abbot; "for thy time here is short."

"I care not if it be," replied Demdike; "I shall live long enough if I survive thee."

The Lancashire Witches Volume I by William Harrison Ainsworth

CHAPTER X.—THE HOLEHOUSES.

At this moment the blast of a trumpet resounded from the gateway, and the Earl of Derby, with the sheriff on his right hand, and Assheton on the left, and mounted on a richly caparisoned charger, rode forth. He was preceded by four javelin-men, and followed by two heralds in their tabards.

To doleful tolling of bells—to solemn music—to plaintive hymn chanted by monks—to roll of muffled drum at intervals—the sad cortège set forth. Loud cries from the bystanders marked its departure, and some of them followed it, but many turned away, unable to endure the sight of horror about to ensue. Amongst those who went on was Hal o' Nabs, but he took care to keep out of the way of the guard, though he was little likely to be recognised, owing to his disguise.

Despite the miserable state of the weather, a great multitude was assembled at the place of execution, and they watched the approaching cavalcade with moody curiosity. To prevent disturbance, arquebussiers were stationed in parties here and there, and a clear course for the cortège was preserved by two lines of halberdiers with crossed pikes. But notwithstanding this, much difficulty was experienced in mounting the hill. Rendered slippery by the wet, and yet more so by the trampling of the crowd, the road was so bad in places that the horses could scarcely drag the hurdles up it, and more than one delay occurred. The stoppages were always denounced by groans, yells, and hootings from the mob, and these neither the menaces of the Earl of Derby, nor the active measures of the guard, could repress.

At length, however, the cavalcade reached its destination. Then the crowd struggled forward, and settled into a dense compact ring, round the circular railing enclosing the place of execution, within which were drawn up the Earl of Derby, the sheriff, Assheton, and the principal gentlemen, together with Demdike and his assistants; the guard forming a circle three deep round them.

Paslew was first unloosed, and when he stood up, he found Father Smith, the late prior, beside him, and tenderly embraced him.

"Be of good courage, Father Abbot," said the prior; "a few moments, and you will be numbered with the just."

"My hope is in the infinite mercy of Heaven, father," replied Paslew, sighing deeply. "Pray for me at the last."

"Doubt it not," returned the prior, fervently. "I will pray for you now and ever."

Meanwhile, the bonds of the two other captives were unfastened, but they were found wholly unable to stand without support. A lofty ladder had been placed against the central scaffold, and up this Demdike, having cast off his houppeland, mounted and adjusted the rope. His tall gaunt figure, fully displayed in his tight-fitting red garb, made him look like a hideous scarecrow. His appearance was greeted by the mob with a perfect hurricane of indignant outcries and yells. But he heeded them not, but calmly pursued his task. Above him wheeled the two ravens, who had never quitted the place since daybreak, uttering their discordant cries. When all was done, he descended a few steps, and, taking a black hood from his girdle to place over the head of his victim, called out in a voice which had little human in its tone, "I wait for you, John Paslew."

"Are you ready, Paslew?" demanded the Earl of Derby.

"I am, my lord," replied the abbot. And embracing the prior for the last time, he added, "Vale, carissime frater, in æternum vale! et Dominus tecum sit in ultionem inimicorum nostrorum!"

"It is the king's pleasure that you say not a word in your justification to the mob, Paslew," observed the earl.

"I had no such intention, my lord," replied the abbot.

"Then tarry no longer," said the earl; "if you need aid you shall have it."

"I require none," replied Paslew, resolutely.

With this he mounted the ladder, with as much firmness and dignity as if ascending the steps of a tribune.

Hitherto nothing but yells and angry outcries had stunned the ears of the lookers-on, and several missiles had been hurled at Demdike, some of which took effect, though without occasioning discomfiture; but when the abbot appeared above the heads of the guard, the tumult instantly subsided, and profound silence ensued. Not a breath was drawn by the spectators. The ravens alone continued their ominous croaking.

Hal o' Nabs, who stood on the outskirts of the ring, saw thus far but he could bear it no longer, and rushed down the hill. Just as he reached the level ground, a culverin was fired from the gateway, and the next moment a loud wailing cry bursting from the mob told that the abbot was launched into eternity.

Hal would not look back, but went slowly on, and presently afterwards other horrid sounds dinned in his ears, telling that all was over with the two other sufferers. Sickened and faint, he leaned against a wall for support. How long he continued thus, he knew not, but he heard the cavalcade coming down the hill, and saw the Earl of Derby and his attendants ride past. Glancing toward the place of execution, Hal then perceived that the abbot had been cut down, and, rousing himself, he joined the crowd now rushing towards the gate, and ascertained that the body of Paslew was to be taken to the convent church, and deposited there till orders were to be given respecting its interment. He learnt, also, that the removal of the corpse was intrusted to Demdike. Fired by this intelligence, and suddenly conceiving a wild project of vengeance, founded upon what he had heard from the abbot of the wizard being proof against weapons forged by men, he hurried to the church, entered it, the door being thrown open, and rushing up to the gallery, contrived to get out through a window upon the top of the porch, where he secreted himself behind the great stone statue of Saint Gregory.

The information he had obtained proved correct. Ere long a mournful train approached the church, and a bier was set down before the porch. A black hood covered the face of the dead, but the vestments showed that it was the body of Paslew.

At the head of the bearers was Demdike, and when the body was set down he advanced towards it, and, removing the hood, gazed at the livid and distorted features.

"At length I am fully avenged," he said.

"And Abbot Paslew, also," cried a voice above him.

Demdike looked up, but the look was his last, for the ponderous statue of Saint Gregory de Northbury, launched from its pedestal, fell upon his head, and crushed him to the ground. A mangled and breathless mass was taken from beneath the image, and the hands and visage of Paslew were found spotted with blood dashed from the gory carcass. The author of the wizard's destruction was suspected, but never found, nor was it positively known who had done the deed till years after, when Hal o' Nabs, who meanwhile had married pretty Dorothy Croft, and had been blessed by numerous offspring in the union, made his last confession, and then he exhibited no remarkable or becoming penitence for the act, neither was he refused absolution.

Thus it came to pass that the abbot and his enemy perished together. The mutilated remains of the wizard were placed in a shell, and huddled into the grave where his wife had that morning been laid. But no prayer was said over him. And the superstitious believed that the body was carried off that very night by the Fiend, and taken to a witch's sabbath in the ruined tower on Rimington Moor. Certain it was, that the unhallowed grave was disturbed. The body of Paslew was decently interred in the north aisle of the parish church of Whalley, beneath a stone with a Gothic cross sculptured upon it, and bearing the piteous inscription:—"Miserere mei."

But in the belief of the vulgar the abbot did not rest tranquilly. For many years afterwards a white-robed monastic figure was seen to flit along the cloisters, pass out at the gate, and disappear with a wailing cry over the Holehouses. And the same ghostly figure was often seen to glide through the corridor in the abbot's lodging, and vanish at the door of the chamber leading to the little oratory. Thus Whalley Abbey was supposed to be haunted, and few liked to wander through its deserted cloisters, or ruined church, after dark. The abbot's tragical end was thus recorded:—

Johannes Paslew: Capitali Effectus Supplicio.
12º Mensis Martii, 1537.

As to the infant, upon whom the abbot's malediction fell, it was reserved for the dark destinies shadowed forth in the dread anathema he had uttered: to the development of which the tragic drama about to follow is devoted, and to which the fate of Abbot Paslew forms a necessary and fitting prologue. Thus far the veil of the Future may be drawn aside. That infant and her progeny became the LANCASHIRE WITCHES.


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