THE LANCASHIRE WITCHES
VOLUME II
BY
WILLIAM HARRISON AINSWORTH

Freeditorial

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Alizon Device.

CHAPTER I.—THE MAY QUEEN

On a May-day in the early part of the seventeenth century, and a most lovely May-day, too, admirably adapted to usher in the merriest month of the year, and seemingly made expressly for the occasion, a wake was held at Whalley, to which all the neighbouring country folk resorted, and indeed many of the gentry as well, for in the good old times, when England was still merry England, a wake had attractions for all classes alike, and especially in Lancashire; for, with pride I speak it, there were no lads who, in running, vaulting, wrestling, dancing, or in any other manly exercise, could compare with the Lancashire lads. In archery, above all, none could match them; for were not their ancestors the stout bowmen and billmen whose cloth-yard shafts, and trenchant weapons, won the day at Flodden? And were they not true sons of their fathers? And then, I speak it with yet greater pride, there were few, if any, lasses who could compare in comeliness with the rosy-cheeked, dark-haired, bright-eyed lasses of Lancashire.

Assemblages of this kind, therefore, where the best specimens of either sex were to be met with, were sure to be well attended, and in spite of an enactment passed in the preceding reign of Elizabeth, prohibiting "piping, playing, bear-baiting, and bull-baiting on the Sabbath-days, or on any other days, and also superstitious ringing of bells, wakes, and common feasts," they were not only not interfered with, but rather encouraged by the higher orders. Indeed, it was well known that the reigning monarch, James the First, inclined the other way, and, desirous of checking the growing spirit of Puritanism throughout the kingdom, had openly expressed himself in favour of honest recreation after evening prayers and upon holidays; and, furthermore, had declared that he liked well the spirit of his good subjects in Lancashire, and would not see them punished for indulging in lawful exercises, but that ere long he would pay them a visit in one of his progresses, and judge for himself, and if he found all things as they had been represented to him, he would grant them still further licence. Meanwhile, this expression of the royal opinion removed every restriction, and old sports and pastimes, May-games, Whitsun-ales, and morris-dances, with rush-bearings, bell-ringings, wakes, and feasts, were as much practised as before the passing of the obnoxious enactment of Elizabeth. The Puritans and Precisians discountenanced them, it is true, as much as ever, and would have put them down, if they could, as savouring of papistry and idolatry, and some rigid divines thundered against them from the pulpit; but with the king and the authorities in their favour, the people little heeded these denunciations against them, and abstained not from any "honest recreation" whenever a holiday occurred.

If Lancashire was famous for wakes, the wakes of Whalley were famous even in Lancashire. The men of the district were in general a hardy, handsome race, of the genuine Saxon breed, and passionately fond of all kinds of pastime, and the women had their full share of the beauty indigenous to the soil. Besides, it was a secluded spot, in the heart of a wild mountainous region, and though occasionally visited by travellers journeying northward, or by others coming from the opposite direction, retained a primitive simplicity of manners, and a great partiality for old customs and habits.

The natural beauties of the place, contrasted with the dreary region around it, and heightened by the picturesque ruins of the ancient abbey, part of which, namely, the old abbot's lodgings, had been converted into a residence by the Asshetons, and was now occupied by Sir Ralph Assheton, while the other was left to the ravages of time, made it always an object of attraction to those residing near it; but when on the May-day in question, there was not only to be a wake, but a May-pole set on the green, and a rush-bearing with morris-dancers besides, together with Whitsun-ale at the abbey, crowds flocked to Whalley from Wiswall, Cold Coates, and Clithero, from Ribchester and Blackburn, from Padiham and Pendle, and even from places more remote. Not only was John Lawe's of the Dragon full, but the Chequers, and the Swan also, and the roadside alehouse to boot. Sir Ralph Assheton had several guests at the abbey, and others were expected in the course of the day, while Doctor Ormerod had friends staying with him at the vicarage.

Soon after midnight, on the morning of the festival, many young persons of the village, of both sexes, had arisen, and, to the sound of horn, had repaired to the neighbouring woods, and there gathered a vast stock of green boughs and flowering branches of the sweetly-perfumed hawthorn, wild roses, and honeysuckle, with baskets of violets, cowslips, primroses, blue-bells, and other wild flowers, and returning in the same order they went forth, fashioned the branches into green bowers within the churchyard, or round about the May-pole set up on the green, and decorated them afterwards with garlands and crowns of flowers. This morning ceremonial ought to have been performed without wetting the feet: but though some pains were taken in the matter, few could achieve the difficult task, except those carried over the dewy grass by their lusty swains. On the day before the rushes had been gathered, and the rush cart piled, shaped, trimmed, and adorned by those experienced in the task, (and it was one requiring both taste and skill, as will be seen when the cart itself shall come forth,) while others had borrowed for its adornment, from the abbey and elsewhere, silver tankards, drinking-cups, spoons, ladles, brooches, watches, chains, and bracelets, so as to make an imposing show.

Day was ushered in by a merry peal of bells from the tower of the old parish church, and the ringers practised all kinds of joyous changes during the morning, and fired many a clanging volley. The whole village was early astir; and as these were times when good hours were kept; and as early rising is a famous sharpener of the appetite, especially when attended with exercise, so an hour before noon the rustics one and all sat down to dinner, the strangers being entertained by their friends, and if they had no friends, throwing themselves upon the general hospitality. The alehouses were reserved for tippling at a later hour, for it was then customary for both gentleman and commoner, male as well as female, as will be more fully shown hereafter, to take their meals at home, and repair afterwards to houses of public entertainment for wine or other liquors. Private chambers were, of course, reserved for the gentry; but not unfrequently the squire and his friends would take their bottle with the other guests. Such was the invariable practice in the northern counties in the reign of James the First.

Soon after mid-day, and when the bells began to peal merrily again (for even ringers must recruit themselves), at a small cottage in the outskirts of the village, and close to the Calder, whose waters swept past the trimly kept garden attached to it, two young girls were employed in attiring a third, who was to represent Maid Marian, or Queen of May, in the pageant then about to ensue. And, certainly, by sovereign and prescriptive right of beauty, no one better deserved the high title and distinction conferred upon her than this fair girl. Lovelier maiden in the whole county, and however high her degree, than this rustic damsel, it was impossible to find; and though the becoming and fanciful costume in which she was decked could not heighten her natural charms, it certainly displayed them to advantage. Upon her smooth and beautiful brow sat a gilt crown, while her dark and luxuriant hair, covered behind with a scarlet coif, embroidered with gold; and tied with yellow, white, and crimson ribands, but otherwise wholly unconfirmed, swept down almost to the ground. Slight and fragile, her figure was of such just proportion that every movement and gesture had an indescribable charm. The most courtly dame might have envied her fine and taper fingers, and fancied she could improve them by protecting them against the sun, or by rendering them snowy white with paste or cosmetic, but this was questionable; nothing certainly could improve the small foot and finely-turned ankle, so well displayed in the red hose and smart little yellow buskin, fringed with gold. A stomacher of scarlet cloth, braided with yellow lace in cross bars, confined her slender waist. Her robe was of carnation-coloured silk, with wide sleeves, and the gold-fringed skirt descended only a little below the knee, like the dress of a modern Swiss peasant, so as to reveal the exquisite symmetry of her limbs. Over all she wore a surcoat of azure silk, lined with white, and edged with gold. In her left hand she held a red pink as an emblem of the season. So enchanting was her appearance altogether, so fresh the character of her beauty, so bright the bloom that dyed her lovely checks, that she might have been taken for a personification of May herself. She was indeed in the very May of life—the mingling of spring and summer in

womanhood; and the tender blue eyes, bright and clear as diamonds of purest water, the soft regular features, and the merry mouth, whose ruddy parted lips ever and anon displayed two rows of pearls, completed the similitude to the attributes of the jocund month.

Her handmaidens, both of whom were simple girls, and though not destitute of some pretensions to beauty themselves, in nowise to be compared with her, were at the moment employed in knotting the ribands in her hair, and adjusting the azure surcoat.

Attentively watching these proceedings sat on a stool, placed in a corner, a little girl, some nine or ten years old, with a basket of flowers on her knee. The child was very diminutive, even for her age, and her smallness was increased by personal deformity, occasioned by contraction of the chest, and spinal curvature, which raised her back above her shoulders; but her features were sharp and cunning, indeed almost malignant, and there was a singular and unpleasant look about the eyes, which were not placed evenly in the head. Altogether she had a strange old-fashioned look, and from her habitual bitterness of speech, as well as from her vindictive character, which, young as she was, had been displayed, with some effect, on more than one occasion, she was no great favourite with any one. It was curious now to watch the eager and envious interest she took in the progress of her sister's adornment—for such was the degree of relationship in which she stood to the May Queen—and when the surcoat was finally adjusted, and the last riband tied, she broke forth, having hitherto preserved a sullen silence.

"Weel, sister Alizon, ye may a farrently May Queen, ey mun say" she observed, spitefully, "but to my mind other Suky Worseley, or Nancy Holt, here, would ha' looked prottier."

"Nah, nah, that we shouldna," rejoined one of the damsels referred to; "there is na a lass i' Lonkyshiar to hold a condle near Alizon Device."

"Fie upon ye, for an ill-favort minx, Jennet," cried Nancy Holt; "yo're jealous o' your protty sister."

"Ey jealous," cried Jennet, reddening, "an whoy the firrups should ey be jealous, ey, thou saucy jade! Whon ey grow older ey'st may a prottier May Queen than onny on you, an so the lads aw tell me."

"And so you will, Jennet," said Alizon Device, checking, by a gentle look, the jeering laugh in which Nancy seemed disposed to indulge—"so you will, my pretty little sister," she added, kissing her; "and I will 'tire you as well and as carefully as Susan and Nancy have just 'tired me."

"Mayhap ey shanna live till then," rejoined Jennet, peevishly, "and when ey'm dead an' gone, an' laid i' t' cowld churchyard, yo an they win be sorry fo having werreted me so."

"I have never intentionally vexed you, Jennet, love," said Alizon, "and I am sure these two girls love you dearly."

"Eigh, we may allowance fo her feaw tempers," observed Susan Worseley; "fo we knoa that ailments an deformities are sure to may folk fretful."

"Eigh, there it is," cried Jennet, sharply. "My high shoulthers an sma size are always thrown i' my feace. Boh ey'st grow tall i' time, an get straight—eigh straighter than yo, Suky, wi' your broad back an short neck—boh if ey dunna, whot matters it? Ey shall be feared at onny rate—ay, feared, wenches, by ye both."

"Nah doubt on't, theaw little good-fo'-nothin piece o' mischief," muttered Susan.

"Whot's that yo sayn, Suky?" cried Jennet, whose quick ears had caught the words, "Tak care whot ye do to offend me, lass," she added, shaking her thin fingers, armed with talon-like claws, threateningly at her, "or ey'll ask my granddame, Mother Demdike, to quieten ye."

At the mention of this name a sudden shade came over Susan's countenance. Changing colour, and slightly trembling, she turned away from the child, who, noticing the effect of her threat, could not repress her triumph. But again Alizon interposed.

"Do not be alarmed, Susan," she said, "my grandmother will never harm you, I am sure; indeed, she will never harm any one; and do not heed what little Jennet says, for she is not aware of the effect of her own words, or of the injury they might do our grandmother, if repeated."

"Ey dunna wish to repeat them, or to think of em," sobbed Susan.

"That's good, that's kind of you, Susan," replied Alizon, taking her hand. "Do not be cross any more, Jennet. You see you have made her weep."

"Ey'm glad on it," rejoined the little girl, laughing; "let her cry on. It'll do her good, an teach her to mend her manners, and nah offend me again."

"Ey didna mean to offend ye, Jennet," sobbed Susan, "boh yo're so wrythen an marr'd, a body canna speak to please ye."

"Weel, if ye confess your fault, ey'm satisfied," replied the little girl; "boh let it be a lesson to ye, Suky, to keep guard o' your tongue i' future."

"It shall, ey promise ye," replied Susan, drying her eyes.

At this moment a door opened, and a woman entered from an inner room, having a high-crowned, conical-shaped hat on her head, and broad white pinners over her cheeks. Her dress was of dark red camlet, with high-heeled shoes. She stooped slightly, and being rather lame, supported herself on a crutch-handled stick. In age she might be between forty and fifty, but she looked much older, and her features were not at all prepossessing from a hooked nose and chin, while their sinister effect was increased by a formation of the eyes similar to that in Jennet, only more strongly noticeable in her case. This woman was Elizabeth Device, widow of John Device, about whose death there was a mystery to be inquired into hereafter, and mother of Alizon and Jennet, though how she came to have a daughter so unlike herself in all respects as the former, no one could conceive; but so it was.

"Soh, ye ha donned your finery at last, Alizon," said Elizabeth. "Your brother Jem has just run up to say that t' rush-cart has set out, and that Robin Hood and his merry men are comin' for their Queen."

"And their Queen is quite ready for them," replied Alizon, moving towards the door.

"Neigh, let's ha' a look at ye fust, wench," cried Elizabeth, staying her; "fine fitthers may fine brids—ey warrant me now yo'n getten these May gewgaws on, yo fancy yourself a queen in arnest."

"A queen of a day, mother; a queen of a little village festival; nothing more," replied Alizon. "Oh, if I were a queen in right earnest, or even a great lady—"

"Whot would yo do?" demanded Elizabeth Device, sourly.

"I'd make you rich, mother, and build you a grand house to live in," replied Alizon; "much grander than Browsholme, or Downham, or Middleton."

"Pity yo're nah a queen then, Alizon," replied Elizabeth, relaxing her harsh features into a wintry smile.

"Whot would ye do fo me, Alizon, if ye were a queen?" asked little Jennet, looking up at her.

"Why, let me see," was the reply; "I'd indulge every one of your whims and wishes. You should only need ask to have."

"Poh—poh—yo'd never content her," observed Elizabeth, testily.

"It's nah your way to try an content me, mother, even whon ye might," rejoined Jennet, who, if she loved few people, loved her mother least of all, and never lost an opportunity of testifying her dislike to her.

"Awt o'pontee, little wasp," cried her mother; "theaw desarves nowt boh whot theaw dustna get often enough—a good whipping."

"Yo hanna towd us whot yo'd do fo yurself if yo war a great lady, Alizon?" interposed Susan.

"Oh, I haven't thought about myself," replied the other, laughing.

"Ey con tell ye what she'd do, Suky," replied little Jennet, knowingly; "she'd marry Master Richard Assheton, o' Middleton."

"Jennet!" exclaimed Alizon, blushing crimson.

"It's true," replied the little girl; "ye knoa ye would, Alizon, Look at her feace," she added, with a screaming laugh.

"Howd te tongue, little plague," cried Elizabeth, rapping her knuckles with her stick, "and behave thyself, or theaw shanna go out to t' wake."

Jennet dealt her mother a bitterly vindictive look, but she neither uttered cry, nor made remark.

In the momentary silence that ensued the blithe jingling of bells was heard, accompanied by the merry sound of tabor and pipe.

"Ah! here come the rush-cart and the morris-dancers," cried Alizon, rushing joyously to the window, which, being left partly open, admitted the scent of the woodbine and eglantine by which it was overgrown, as well as the humming sound of the bees by which the flowers were invaded.

Almost immediately afterwards a frolic troop, like a band of masquers, approached the cottage, and drew up before it, while the jingling of bells ceasing at the same moment, told that the rush-cart had stopped likewise. Chief amongst the party was Robin Hood clad in a suit of Lincoln green, with a sheaf of arrows at his back, a bugle dangling from his baldric, a bow in his hand, and a broad-leaved green hat on his head, looped up on one side, and decorated with a heron's feather. The hero of Sherwood was personated by a tall, well-limbed fellow, to whom, being really a forester of Bowland, the character was natural. Beside him stood a very different figure, a jovial friar, with shaven crown, rubicund cheeks, bull throat, and mighty paunch, covered by a russet habit, and girded in by a red cord, decorated with golden twist and tassel. He wore red hose and sandal shoon, and carried in his girdle a Wallet, to contain a roast capon, a neat's tongue, or any other dainty given him. Friar Tuck, for such he was, found his representative in Ned Huddlestone, porter at the abbey, who, as the largest and stoutest man in the village, was chosen on that account to the part. Next to him came a character of no little importance, and upon whom much of the mirth of the pageant depended, and this devolved upon the village cobbler, Jack Roby, a dapper little fellow, who fitted the part of the Fool to a nicety. With bauble in hand, and blue coxcomb hood adorned with long white asses' ears on head, with jerkin of green, striped with yellow; hose of different colours, the left leg being yellow, with a red pantoufle, and the right blue, terminated with a yellow shoe; with bells hung upon various parts of his motley attire, so that he could not move without producing a jingling sound, Jack Roby looked wonderful indeed; and was constantly dancing about, and dealing a blow with his bauble. Next came Will Scarlet, Stukely, and Little John, all proper men and tall, attired in Lincoln green, like Robin Hood, and similarly equipped. Like him, too, they were all foresters of Bowland, owning service to the bow-bearer, Mr. Parker of Browsholme hall; and the representative of Little John, who was six feet and a half high, and stout in proportion, was Lawrence Blackrod, Mr. Parker's head keeper. After the foresters came Tom the Piper, a wandering minstrel, habited for the occasion in a blue doublet, with sleeves of the same colour, turned up with yellow, red hose, and brown buskins, red bonnet, and green surcoat lined with yellow. Beside the piper was another minstrel, similarly attired, and provided with a tabor. Lastly came one of the main features of the pageant, and which, together with the Fool, contributed most materially to the amusement of the spectators. This was the Hobby-horse. The hue of this, spirited charger was a pinkish white, and his housings were of crimson cloth hanging to the ground, so as to conceal the rider's real legs, though a pair of sham ones dangled at the side. His bit was of gold, and his bridle red morocco leather, while his rider was very sumptuously arrayed in a

purple mantle, bordered with gold, with a rich cap of the same regal hue on his head, encircled with gold, and having a red feather stuck in it. The hobby-horse had a plume of nodding feathers on his head, and careered from side to side, now rearing in front, now kicking behind, now prancing, now gently ambling, and in short indulging in playful fancies and vagaries, such as horse never indulged in before, to the imminent danger, it seemed, of his rider, and to the huge delight of the beholders. Nor must it be omitted, as it was matter of great wonderment to the lookers-on, that by some legerdemain contrivance the rider of the hobby-horse had a couple of daggers stuck in his cheeks, while from his steed's bridle hung a silver ladle, which he held now and then to the crowd, and in which, when he did so, a few coins were sure to rattle. After the hobby-horse came the May-pole, not the tall pole so called and which was already planted in the green, but a stout staff elevated some six feet above the head of the bearer, with a coronal of flowers atop, and four long garlands hanging down, each held by a morris-dancer. Then came the May Queen's gentleman usher, a fantastic personage in habiliments of blue guarded with white, and holding a long willow wand in his hand. After the usher came the main troop of morris-dancers—the men attired in a graceful costume, which set off their light active figures to advantage, consisting of a slashed-jerkin of black and white velvet, with cut sleeves left open so as to reveal the snowy shirt beneath, white hose, and shoes of black Spanish leather with large roses. Ribands were every where in their dresses—ribands and tinsel adorned their caps, ribands crossed their hose, and ribands were tied round their arms. In either hand they held a long white handkerchief knotted with ribands. The female morris-dancers were habited in white, decorated like the dresses of the men; they had ribands and wreaths of flowers round their heads, bows in their hair, and in their hands long white knotted kerchiefs.

In the rear of the performers in the pageant came the rush-cart drawn by a team of eight stout horses, with their manes and tails tied with ribands, their collars fringed with red and yellow worsted, and hung with bells, which jingled blithely at every movement, and their heads decked with flowers. The cart itself consisted of an enormous pile of rushes, banded and twisted together, rising to a considerable height, and terminated in a sharp ridge, like the point of a Gothic window. The sides and top were decorated with flowers and ribands, and there were eaves in front and at the back, and on the space within them, which was covered with white paper, were strings of gaudy flowers, embedded in moss, amongst which were suspended all the ornaments and finery that could be collected for the occasion: to wit, flagons of silver, spoons, ladles, chains, watches, and bracelets, so as to make a brave and resplendent show. The wonder was how articles of so much value would be trusted forth on such an occasion; but nothing was ever lost. On the top of the rush-cart, and bestriding its sharp ridges, sat half a dozen men, habited somewhat like the morris-dancers, in garments bedecked with tinsel and ribands, holding garlands formed by hoops, decorated with flowers, and attached to poles ornamented with silver paper, cut into various figures and devices, and diminishing

gradually in size as they rose to a point, where they were crowned with wreaths of daffodils.

A large crowd of rustics, of all ages, accompanied the morris-dancers and rush-cart.

This gay troop having come to a halt, as described, before the cottage, the gentleman-usher entered it, and, tapping against the inner door with his wand, took off his cap as soon as it was opened, and bowing deferentially to the ground, said he was come to invite the Queen of May to join the pageant, and that it only awaited her presence to proceed to the green. Having delivered this speech in as good set phrase as he could command, and being the parish clerk and schoolmaster to boot, Sampson Harrop by name, he was somewhat more polished than the rest of the hinds; and having, moreover, received a gracious response from the May Queen, who condescendingly replied that she was quite ready to accompany him, he took her hand, and led her ceremoniously to the door, whither they were followed by the others.

Loud was the shout that greeted Alizon's appearance, and tremendous was the pushing to obtain a sight of her; and so much was she abashed by the enthusiastic greeting, which was wholly unexpected on her part, that she would have drawn back again, if it had been possible; but the usher led her forward, and Robin Hood and the foresters having bent the knee before her, the hobby-horse began to curvet anew among the spectators, and tread on their toes, the fool to rap their knuckles with his bauble, the piper to play, the taborer to beat his tambourine, and the morris-dancers to toss their kerchiefs over their heads. Thus the pageant being put in motion, the rush-cart began to roll on, its horses' bells jingling merrily, and the spectators cheering lustily.

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CHAPTER II.—THE BLACK CAT AND THE WHITE DOVE.

Little Jennet watched her sister's triumphant departure with a look in which there was far more of envy than sympathy, and, when her mother took her hand to lead her forth, she would not go, but saying she did not care for any such idle sights, went back sullenly to the inner room. When there, however, she could not help peeping through the window, and saw Susan and Nancy join the revel rout, with feelings of increased bitterness.

"Ey wish it would rain an spile their finery," she said, sitting down on her stool, and plucking the flowers from her basket in pieces. "An yet, why canna ey enjoy such seets like other folk? Truth is, ey've nah heart for it."

"Folks say," she continued, after a pause, "that grandmother Demdike is a witch, an con do os she pleases. Ey wonder if she made Alizon so protty. Nah, that canna be, fo' Alizon's na favourite o' hern. If she loves onny one it's me. Why dunna she make me good-looking, then? They say it's sinfu' to be a witch—if so, how comes grandmother Demdike to be one? Boh ey'n observed that those folks os caws her witch are afeard on her, so it may be pure spite o' their pert."

As she thus mused, a great black cat belonging to her mother, which had followed her into the room, rubbed himself against her, putting up his back, and purring loudly.

"Ah, Tib," said the little girl, "how are ye, Tib? Ey didna knoa ye were here. Lemme ask ye some questions, Tib?"

The cat mewed, looked up, and fixed his great yellow eyes upon her.

"One 'ud think ye onderstud whot wos said to ye, Tib," pursued little Jennet. "We'n see whot ye say to this! Shan ey ever be Queen o' May, like sister Alizon?"

The cat mewed in a manner that the little girl found no difficulty in interpreting the reply into "No."

"How's that, Tib?" cried Jennet, sharply. "If ey thought ye meant it, ey'd beat ye, sirrah. Answer me another question, ye saucy knave. Who will be luckiest, Alizon or me?"

This time the cat darted away from her, and made two or three skirmishes round the room, as if gone suddenly mad.

"Ey con may nowt o' that," observed Jennet, laughing.

All at once the cat bounded upon the chimney board, over which was placed a sampler, worked with the name "ALIZON."

"Why Tib really seems to onderstond me, ey declare," observed Jennet, uneasily. "Ey should like to ask him a few more questions, if ey durst," she added, regarding with some distrust the animal, who now returned, and began rubbing against her as before. "Tib—Tib!"

The cat looked up, and mewed.

"Protty Tib—sweet Tib," continued the little girl, coaxingly. "Whot mun one do to be a witch like grandmother Demdike?"

The cat again dashed twice or thrice madly round the room, and then stopping suddenly at the hearth, sprang up the chimney.

"Ey'n frightened ye away ot onny rate," observed Jennet, laughing. "And yet it may mean summot," she added, reflecting a little, "fo ey'n heerd say os how witches fly up chimleys o' broomsticks to attend their sabbaths. Ey should like to fly i' that manner, an change myself into another shape—onny shape boh my own. Oh that ey could be os protty os Alizon! Ey dunna knoa whot ey'd nah do to be like her!"

Again the great black cat was beside her, rubbing against her, and purring. The child was a good deal startled, for she had not seen him return, and the door was shut, though he might have come in through the open window, only she had been looking that way all the time, and had never noticed him. Strange!

"Tib," said the child, patting him, "thou hasna answered my last question—how is one to become a witch?"

As she made this inquiry the cat suddenly scratched her in the arm, so that the blood came. The little girl was a good deal frightened, as well as hurt, and, withdrawing her arm quickly, made a motion of striking the animal. But starting backwards, erecting his tail, and spitting, the cat assumed such a formidable appearance, that she did not dare to touch him, and she then perceived that some drops of blood stained her white sleeve, giving the spots a certain resemblance to the letters J. and D., her own initials.

At this moment, when she was about to scream for help, though she knew no one was in the house, all having gone away with the May-day revellers, a small white dove flew in at the open window, and skimming round the room, alighted near her. No sooner had the cat caught sight of this beautiful bird, than instead of preparing to pounce upon it, as might have been expected, he instantly abandoned his fierce attitude, and, uttering a sort of howl, sprang up the chimney as before. But the child scarcely observed this, her attention being directed towards the bird, whose extreme beauty delighted her. It seemed quite tame too, and allowed itself to be touched, and even drawn towards her, without an effort to escape. Never, surely, was seen so beautiful a bird—with such milkwhite feathers, such red legs, and such pretty yellow eyes, with crimson circles round them! So thought the little girl, as she gazed at it, and pressed it to her bosom. In doing this, gentle and good thoughts came upon her, and she reflected what a nice present this pretty bird would make to her sister Alizon on her return from the merry-making, and how pleased she should feel to give it to her. And then she thought of Alizon's constant kindness to her, and half reproached herself with the poor return she made for it, wondering she could entertain any feelings of envy towards one so good and amiable. All this while the dove nestled in her bosom.

While thus pondering, the little girl felt an unaccountable drowsiness steal over her, and presently afterwards dropped asleep, when she had a very strange dream. It seemed to her that there was a contest going on between two spirits, a good one and a bad,—the bad one being represented by the great black cat, and the good spirit by the white dove. What they were striving about she could not exactly tell, but she felt that the conflict had some relation to herself. The dove at first appeared to have but a poor chance against the claws of its sable adversary, but the sharp talons of the latter made no impression upon the white plumage of the bird, which now shone like silver armour, and in the end the cat fled, yelling as it darted off—"Thou art victorious now, but her soul shall yet be mine."

Something awakened the little sleeper at the same moment, and she felt very much terrified at her dream, as she could not help thinking her own soul might be the one in jeopardy, and her first impulse was to see whether the white dove was safe. Yes, there it was still nestling in her bosom, with its head under its wing.

Just then she was startled at hearing her own name pronounced by a hoarse voice, and, looking up, she beheld a tall young man standing at the window. He had a somewhat gipsy look, having a dark olive complexion, and fine black eyes, though set strangely in his head, like those of Jennet and her mother, coal black hair, and very prominent features, of a sullen and almost savage cast. His figure was gaunt but very muscular, his arms being extremely long and his hands unusually large and bony—personal

advantages which made him a formidable antagonist in any rustic encounter, and in such he was frequently engaged, being of a very irascible temper, and turbulent disposition. He was clad in a holiday suit of dark-green serge, which fitted him well, and carried a nosegay in one hand, and a stout blackthorn cudgel in the other. This young man was James Device, son of Elizabeth, and some four or five years older than Alizon. He did not live with his mother in Whalley, but in Pendle Forest, near his old relative, Mother Demdike, and had come over that morning to attend the wake.

"Whot are ye abowt, Jennet?" inquired James Device, in tones naturally hoarse and deep, and which he took as little pains to soften, as he did to polish his manners, which were more than ordinarily rude and churlish.

"Whot are ye abowt, ey sey, wench?" he repeated, "Why dunna ye go to t' green to see the morris-dancers foot it round t' May-pow? Cum along wi' me."

"Ey dunna want to go, Jem," replied the little girl.

"Boh yo shan go, ey tell ey," rejoined her brother; "ye shan see your sister dawnce. Ye con sit a whoam onny day; boh May-day cums ony wonst a year, an Alizon winna be Queen twice i' her life. Soh cum along wi' me, dereckly, or ey'n may ye."

"Ey should like to see Alizon dance, an so ey win go wi' ye, Jem," replied Jennet, getting up, "otherwise your orders shouldna may me stir, ey con tell ye."

As she came out, she found her brother whistling the blithe air of "Green Sleeves," cutting strange capers, in imitation of the morris-dancers, and whirling his cudgel over his head instead of a kerchief. The gaiety of the day seemed infectious, and to have seized even him. People stared to see Black Jem, or Surly Jem, as he was indifferently called, so joyous, and wondered what it could mean. He then fell to singing a snatch of a local ballad at that time in vogue in the neighbourhood:—

"If thou wi' nah my secret tell,
Ne bruit abroad i' Whalley parish,
And swear to keep my counsel well,
Ey win declare my day of marriage."
"Cum along, lass," he cried stopping suddenly in his song, and snatching his sister's hand. "What han ye getten there, lapped up i' your kirtle, eh?"

"A white dove," replied Jennet, determined not to tell him any thing about her strange dream.

"A white dove!" echoed Jem. "Gi' it me, an ey'n wring its neck, an get it roasted for supper."

"Ye shan do nah such thing, Jem," replied Jennet. "Ey mean to gi' it to Alizon."

"Weel, weel, that's reet," rejoined Jem, blandly, "it'll may a protty offering. Let's look at it."

"Nah, nah," said Jennet, pressing the bird gently to her bosom, "neaw one shan see it efore Alizon."

"Cum along then," cried Jem, rather testily, and mending his pace, "or we'st be too late fo' t' round. Whoy yo'n scratted yourself," he added, noticing the red spots on her sleeve.

"Han ey?" she rejoined, evasively. "Oh now ey rekilect, it wos Tib did it."

"Tib!" echoed Jem, gravely, and glancing uneasily at the marks.

Meanwhile, on quitting the cottage, the May-day revellers had proceeded slowly towards the green, increasing the number of their followers at each little tenement they passed, and being welcomed every where with shouts and cheers. The hobby-horse curveted and capered; the Fool fleered at the girls, and flouted the men, jesting with every one, and when failing in a point rapping the knuckles of his auditors; Friar Tuck chucked the pretty girls under the chin, in defiance of their sweethearts, and stole a kiss from every buxom dame that stood in his way, and then snapped his fingers, or made a broad grimace at the husband; the piper played, and the taborer rattled his tambourine; the morris-dancers tossed their kerchiefs aloft; and the bells of the rush-cart jingled merrily; the men on the top being on a level with the roofs of the cottages, and the summits of the haystacks they passed, but in spite of their exalted position jesting with the crowd below. But in spite of these multiplied attractions, and in spite of the gambols of Fool and Horse, though the latter elicited prodigious laughter, the main attention was fixed on the May Queen, who tripped lightly along by the side of her faithful squire, Robin Hood, followed by the three bold foresters of Sherwood, and her usher.

In this way they reached the green, where already a large crowd was collected to see them, and where in the midst of it, and above the heads of the assemblage, rose the lofty May-pole, with all its flowery garlands glittering in the sunshine, and its ribands fluttering in the breeze. Pleasant was it to see those cheerful groups, composed of happy rustics, youths in their holiday attire, and maidens neatly habited too, and fresh and bright as the day itself. Summer sunshine sparkled in their eyes, and weather and circumstance as well as genial natures disposed them to enjoyment. Every lass above

eighteen had her sweetheart, and old couples nodded and smiled at each other when any tender speech, broadly conveyed but tenderly conceived, reached their ears, and said it recalled the days of their youth. Pleasant was it to hear such honest laughter, and such good homely jests.

Laugh on, my merry lads, you are made of good old English stuff, loyal to church and king, and while you, and such as you, last, our land will be in no danger from foreign foe! Laugh on, and praise your sweethearts how you will. Laugh on, and blessings on your honest hearts!

The frolic train had just reached the precincts of the green, when the usher waving his wand aloft, called a momentary halt, announcing that Sir Ralph Assheton and the gentry were coming forth from the Abbey gate to meet them.

The Lancashire Witches Volume II by William Harrison Ainsworth

CHAPTER III.—THE ASSHETONS.

Between Sir Ralph Assheton of the Abbey and the inhabitants of Whalley, many of whom were his tenants, he being joint lord of the manor with John Braddyll of Portfield, the best possible feeling subsisted; for though somewhat austere in manner, and tinctured with Puritanism, the worthy knight was sufficiently shrewd, or, more correctly speaking, sufficiently liberal-minded, to be tolerant of the opinions of others, and being moreover sincere in his own religious views, no man could call him in question for them; besides which, he was very hospitable to his friends, very bountiful to the poor, a good landlord, and a humane man. His very austerity of manner, tempered by stately courtesy, added to the respect he inspired, especially as he could now and then relax into gaiety, and, when he did so, his smile was accounted singularly sweet. But in general he was grave and formal; stiff in attire, and stiff in gait; cold and punctilious in manner, precise in speech, and exacting in due respect from both high and low, which was seldom, if ever, refused him. Amongst Sir Ralph's other good qualities, for such it was esteemed by his friends and retainers, and they were, of course, the best judges, was a strong love of the chase, and perhaps he indulged a little too freely in the sports of the field, for a gentleman of a character so staid and decorous; but his popularity was far from being diminished by the circumstance; neither did he suffer the rude and boisterous companionship into which he was brought by indulgence in this his favourite pursuit in any way to affect him. Though still young, Sir Ralph was prematurely grey, and this, combined with the sad severity of his aspect, gave him the air of one considerably past the middle term of life, though this appearance was contradicted again by the youthful fire of his eagle eye. His features were handsome and strongly marked, and he wore a pointed beard and mustaches, with a shaved cheek. Sir Ralph Assheton had married twice, his first wife being a daughter of Sir James Bellingham of Levens, in Northumberland, by whom he had two children; while his second choice fell upon Eleanor Shuttleworth, the lovely and well-endowed heiress of Gawthorpe, to whom he had been recently united. In his attire, even when habited for the chase or a merry-making, like the present, the Knight of Whalley affected a sombre colour, and ordinarily wore a quilted doublet of black silk, immense trunk hose of the same material, stiffened with whalebone, puffed out well-wadded sleeves, falling bands, for he eschewed the ruff as savouring of vanity, boots of black flexible leather, ascending to the hose, and armed with spurs with gigantic rowels, a round-crowned small-brimmed black hat, with an ostrich feather placed in the side and hanging over the top, a long rapier on his hip, and a dagger in his girdle. This buckram attire, it will be easily conceived, contributed no little to the natural stiffness of his thin tall figure.

Sir Ralph Assheton was great grandson of Richard Assheton, who flourished in the time of Abbot Paslew, and who, in conjunction with John Braddyll, fourteen years after the unfortunate prelate's attainder and the dissolution of the monastery, had purchased the abbey and domains of Whalley from the Crown, subsequently to which, a division of the property so granted took place between them, the abbey and part of the manor falling to the share of Richard Assheton, whose descendants had now for three generations made it their residence. Thus the whole of Whalley belonged to the families of Assheton and Braddyll, which had intermarried; the latter, as has been stated, dwelling at Portfield, a fine old seat in the neighbourhood.

A very different person from Sir Ralph was his cousin, Nicholas Assheton of Downham, who, except as regards his Puritanism, might be considered a type of the Lancashire squire of the day. A precisian in religious notions, and constant in attendance at church and lecture, he put no sort of restraint upon himself, but mixed up fox-hunting, otter-hunting, shooting at the mark, and perhaps shooting with the long-bow, foot-racing, horse-racing, and, in fact, every other kind of country diversion, not forgetting tippling, cards, and dicing, with daily devotion, discourses, and psalm-singing in the oddest way imaginable. A thorough sportsman was Squire Nicholas Assheton, well versed in all the arts and mysteries of hawking and hunting. Not a man in the county could ride harder, hunt deer, unkennel fox, unearth badger, or spear otter, better than he. And then, as to tippling, he would sit you a whole afternoon at the alehouse, and be the merriest man there, and drink a bout with every farmer present. And if the parson chanced to be out of hearing, he would never make a mouth at a round oath, nor choose a second expression when the first would serve his turn. Then, who so constant at church or lecture as Squire Nicholas—though he did snore sometimes during the long sermons of his cousin, the Rector of Middleton? A great man was he at all weddings, christenings, churchings, and funerals, and never neglected his bottle at these ceremonies, nor any sport in doors or out of doors, meanwhile. In short, such a roystering Puritan was never known. A good-looking young man was the Squire of Downham, possessed of a very athletic frame, and a most vigorous constitution, which helped him, together with the prodigious exercise he took, through any excess. He had a sanguine complexion, with a broad, good-natured visage, which he could lengthen at will in a surprising manner. His hair was cropped close to his head, and the razor did daily duty over his cheek and chin, giving him the roundhead look, some years later, characteristic of the Puritanical party. Nicholas had taken to wife Dorothy, daughter of Richard Greenacres of Worston, and was most fortunate in his choice, which is more than can be said for his lady, for I cannot uphold the squire as a model of conjugal fidelity. Report affirmed that he loved more than one pretty girl under the rose. Squire Nicholas was not particular as to the quality or make of his clothes, provided they wore well and protected him against the weather, and was generally to be seen in doublet and hose of stout fustian, which had seen some service, with a broad-leaved hat, originally green, but of late bleached to a much lighter colour;

but he was clad on this particular occasion in ash-coloured habiliments fresh from the tailor's hands, with buff boots drawn up to the knee, and a new round hat from York with a green feather in it. His legs were slightly embowed, and he bore himself like a man rarely out of the saddle.

Downham, the residence of the squire, was a fine old house, very charmingly situated to the north of Pendle Hill, of which it commanded a magnificent view, and a few miles from Clithero. The grounds about it were well-wooded and beautifully broken and diversified, watered by the Ribble, and opening upon the lovely and extensive valley deriving its name from that stream. The house was in good order and well maintained, and the stables plentifully furnished with horses, while the hall was adorned with various trophies and implements of the chase; but as I propose paying its owner a visit, I shall defer any further description of the place till an opportunity arrives for examining it in detail.

A third cousin of Sir Ralph's, though in the second degree, likewise present on the May-day in question, was the Reverend Abdias Assheton, Rector of Middleton, a very worthy man, who, though differing from his kinsmen upon some religious points, and not altogether approving of the conduct of one of them, was on good terms with both. The Rector of Middleton was portly and middle-aged, fond of ease and reading, and by no means indifferent to the good things of life. He was unmarried, and passed much of his time at Middleton Hall, the seat of his near relative Sir Richard Assheton, to whose family he was greatly attached, and whose residence closely adjoined the rectory.

A fourth cousin, also present, was young Richard Assheton of Middleton, eldest son and heir of the owner of that estate. Possessed of all the good qualities largely distributed among his kinsmen, with none of their drawbacks, this young man was as tolerant and bountiful as Sir Ralph, without his austerity and sectarianism; as keen a sportsman and as bold a rider as Nicholas, without his propensities to excess; as studious, at times, and as well read as Abdias, without his laziness and self-indulgence; and as courtly and well-bred as his father, Sir Richard, who was esteemed one of the most perfect gentlemen in the county, without his haughtiness. Then he was the handsomest of his race, though the Asshetons were accounted the handsomest family in Lancashire, and no one minded yielding the palm to young Richard, even if it could be contested, he was so modest and unassuming. At this time, Richard Assheton was about two-and-twenty, tall, gracefully and slightly formed, but possessed of such remarkable vigour, that even his cousin Nicholas could scarcely compete with him in athletic exercises. His features were fine and regular, with an almost Phrygian precision of outline; his hair was of a dark brown, and fell in clustering curls over his brow and neck; and his complexion was fresh and blooming, and set off by a slight beard and mustache, carefully trimmed and pointed. His dress consisted of a dark-green doublet, with wide velvet hose, embroidered and

fringed, descending nearly to the knee, where they were tied with points and ribands, met by dark stockings, and terminated by red velvet shoes with roses in them. A white feather adorned his black broad-leaved hat, and he had a rapier by his side.

Amongst Sir Ralph Assheton's guests were Richard Greenacres, of Worston, Nicholas Assheton's father-in-law; Richard Sherborne of Dunnow, near Sladeburne, who had married Dorothy, Nicholas's sister; Mistress Robinson of Raydale House, aunt to the knight and the squire, and two of her sons, both stout youths, with John Braddyll and his wife, of Portfield. Besides these there was Master Roger Nowell, a justice of the peace in the county, and a very active and busy one too, who had been invited for an especial purpose, to be explained hereafter. Head of an ancient Lancashire family, residing at Read, a fine old hall, some little distance from Whalley, Roger Nowell, though a worthy, well-meaning man, dealt hard measure from the bench, and seldom tempered justice with mercy. He was sharp-featured, dry, and sarcastic, and being adverse to country sports, his presence on the occasion was the only thing likely to impose restraint on the revellers. Other guests there were, but none of particular note.

The ladies of the party consisted of Lady Assheton, Mistress Nicholas Assheton of Downham, Dorothy Assheton of Middleton, sister to Richard, a lovely girl of eighteen, with light fleecy hair, summer blue eyes, and a complexion of exquisite purity, Mistress Sherborne of Dunnow, Mistress Robinson of Raydale, and Mistress Braddyll of Portfield, before mentioned, together with the wives and daughters of some others of the neighbouring gentry; most noticeable amongst whom was Mistress Alice Nutter of Rough Lee, in Pendle Forest, a widow lady and a relative of the Assheton family.

Mistress Nutter might be a year or two turned of forty, but she still retained a very fine figure, and much beauty of feature, though of a cold and disagreeable cast. She was dressed in mourning, though her husband had been dead several years, and her rich dark habiliments well became her pale complexion and raven hair. A proud poor gentleman was Richard Nutter, her late husband, and his scanty means not enabling him to keep up as large an establishment as he desired, or to be as hospitable as his nature prompted, his temper became soured, and he visited his ill humours upon his wife, who, devotedly attached to him, to all outward appearance at least, never resented his ill treatment. All at once, and without any previous symptoms of ailment, or apparent cause, unless it might be over-fatigue in hunting the day before, Richard Nutter was seized with a strange and violent illness, which, after three or four days of acute suffering, brought him to the grave. During his illness he was constantly and zealously tended by his wife, but he displayed great aversion to her, declaring himself bewitched, and that an old woman was ever in the corner of his room mumbling wicked enchantments against him. But as no such old woman could be seen, these assertions were treated as delirious ravings. They were not, however, forgotten after his death, and

some people said that he had certainly been bewitched, and that a waxen image made in his likeness, and stuck full of pins, had been picked up in his chamber by Mistress Alice and cast into the fire, and as soon as it melted he had expired. Such tales only obtained credence with the common folk; but as Pendle Forest was a sort of weird region, many reputed witches dwelling in it, they were the more readily believed, even by those who acquitted Mistress Nutter of all share in the dark transaction.

Mistress Nutter gave the best proof that she respected her husband's memory by not marrying again, and she continued to lead a very secluded life at Rough Lee, a lonesome house in the heart of the forest. She lived quite by herself, for she had no children, her only daughter having perished somewhat strangely when quite an infant. Though a relative of the Asshetons, she kept up little intimacy with them, and it was a matter of surprise to all that she had been drawn from her seclusion to attend the present revel. Her motive, however, in visiting the Abbey, was to obtain the assistance of Sir Ralph Assheton, in settling a dispute between her and Roger Nowell, relative to the boundary line of part of their properties which came together; and this was the reason why the magistrate had been invited to Whalley. After hearing both sides of the question, and examining plans of the estates, which he knew to be accurate, Sir Ralph, who had been appointed umpire, pronounced a decision in favour of Roger Nowell, but Mistress Nutter refusing to abide by it, the settlement of the matter was postponed till the day but one following, between which time the landmarks were to be investigated by a certain little lawyer named Potts, who attended on behalf of Roger Nowell; together with Nicholas and Richard Assheton, on behalf of Mistress Nutter. Upon their evidence it was agreed by both parties that Sir Ralph should pronounce a final decision, to be accepted by them, and to that effect they signed an agreement. The three persons appointed to the investigation settled to start for Rough Lee early on the following morning.

A word as to Master Thomas Potts. This worthy was an attorney from London, who had officiated as clerk of the court at the assizes at Lancaster, where his quickness had so much pleased Roger Nowell, that he sent for him to Read to manage this particular business. A sharp-witted fellow was Potts, and versed in all the quirks and tricks of a very subtle profession—not over-scrupulous, provided a client would pay well; prepared to resort to any expedient to gain his object, and quite conversant enough with both practice and precedent to keep himself straight. A bustling, consequential little personage was he, moreover; very fond of delivering an opinion, even when unasked, and of a meddling, make-mischief turn, constantly setting men by the ears. A suit of rusty black, a parchment-coloured skin, small wizen features, a turn-up nose, scant eyebrows, and a great yellow forehead, constituted his external man. He partook of the hospitality at the Abbey, but had his quarters at the Dragon. He it was who counselled Roger Nowell to abide by the decision of Sir Ralph, confidently assuring him that he must carry his point.

This dispute was not, however, the only one the knight had to adjust, or in which Master Potts was concerned. A claim had recently been made by a certain Sir Thomas Metcalfe of Nappay, in Wensleydale, near Bainbridge, to the house and manor of Raydale, belonging to his neighbour, John Robinson, whose lady, as has been shown, was a relative of the Asshetons. Robinson himself had gone to London to obtain advice on the subject, while Sir Thomas Metcalfe, who was a man of violent disposition, had threatened to take forcible possession of Raydale, if it were not delivered to him without delay, and to eject the Robinson family. Having consulted Potts, however, on the subject, whom he had met at Read, the latter strongly dissuaded him from the course, and recommended him to call to his aid the strong arm of the law: but this he rejected, though he ultimately agreed to refer the matter to Sir Ralph Assheton, and for this purpose he had come over to Whalley, and was at present a guest at the vicarage. Thus it will be seen that Sir Ralph Assheton had his hands full, while the little London lawyer, Master Potts, was tolerably well occupied. Besides Sir Thomas Metcalfe, Sir Richard Molyneux, and Mr. Parker of Browsholme, were guests of Dr. Ormerod at the vicarage.

Such was the large company assembled to witness the May-day revels at Whalley, and if harmonious feelings did not exist amongst all of them, little outward manifestation was made of enmity. The dresses and appointments of the pageant having been provided by Sir Ralph Assheton, who, Puritan as he was, encouraged all harmless country pastimes, it was deemed necessary to pay him every respect, even if no other feeling would have prompted the attention, and therefore the troop had stopped on seeing him and his guests issue from the Abbey gate. At pretty nearly the same time Doctor Ormerod and his party came from the vicarage towards the green.

No order of march was observed, but Sir Ralph and his lady, with two of his children by the former marriage, walked first. Then came some of the other ladies, with the Rector of Middleton, John Braddyll, and the two sons of Mistress Robinson. Next came Mistress Nutter, Roger Nowell and Potts walking after her, eyeing her maliciously, as her proud figure swept on before them. Even if she saw their looks or overheard their jeers, she did not deign to notice them. Lastly came young Richard Assheton, of Middleton, and Squire Nicholas, both in high spirits, and laughing and chatting together.

"A brave day for the morris-dancers, cousin Dick," observed Nicholas Assheton, as they approached the green, "and plenty of folk to witness the sport. Half my lads from Downham are here, and I see a good many of your Middleton chaps among them. How are you, Farmer Tetlow?" he added to a stout, hale-looking man, with a blooming country woman by his side—"brought your pretty young wife to the rush-bearing, I see."

"Yeigh, squoire," rejoined the farmer, "an mightily pleased hoo be wi' it, too."

"Happy to hear if, Master Tetlow," replied Nicholas, "she'll be better pleased before the day's over, I'll warrant her. I'll dance a round with her myself in the hall at night."

"Theere now, Meg, whoy dunna ye may t' squoire a curtsy, wench, an thonk him," said Tetlow, nudging his pretty wife, who had turned away, rather embarrassed by the free gaze of the squire. Nicholas, however, did not wait for the curtsy, but went away, laughing, to overtake Richard Assheton, who had walked on.

"Ah, here's Frank Garside," he continued, espying another rustic acquaintance. "Halloa, Frank, I'll come over one day next week, and try for a fox in Easington Woods. We missed the last, you know. Tom Brockholes, are you here? Just ridden over from Sladeburne, eh? When is that shooting match at the bodkin to come off, eh? Mind, it is to be at twenty-two roods' distance. Ride over to Downham on Thursday next, Tom. We're to have a foot-race, and I'll show you good sport, and at night we'll have a lusty drinking bout at the alehouse. On Friday, we'll take out the great nets, and try for salmon in the Ribble. I took some fine fish on Monday—one salmon of ten pounds' weight, the largest I've got the whole season.—I brought it with me to-day to the Abbey. There's an otter in the river, and I won't hunt him till you come, Tom. I shall see you on Thursday, eh?"

Receiving an answer in the affirmative, squire Nicholas walked on, nodding right and left, jesting with the farmers, and ogling their pretty wives and daughters.

"I tell you what, cousin Dick," he said, calling after Richard Assheton, who had got in advance of him, "I'll match my dun nag against your grey gelding for twenty pieces, that I reach the boundary line of the Rough Lee lands before you to-morrow. What, you won't have it? You know I shall beat you—ha! ha! Well, we'll try the speed of the two tits the first day we hunt the stag in Bowland Forest. Odds my life!" he cried, suddenly altering his deportment and lengthening his visage, "if there isn't our parson here. Stay with me, cousin Dick, stay with me. Give you good-day, worthy Mr. Dewhurst," he added, taking off his hat to the divine, who respectfully returned his salutation, "I did not look to see your reverence here, taking part in these vanities and idle sports. I propose to call on you on Saturday, and pass an hour in serious discourse. I would call to-morrow, but I have to ride over to Pendle on business. Tarry a moment for me, I pray you, good cousin Richard. I fear, reverend sir, that you will see much here that will scandalise you; much lightness and indecorum. Pleasanter far would it be to me to see a large congregation of the elders flocking together to a godly meeting, than crowds assembled for such a profane purpose. Another moment, Richard. My cousin is a young man, Mr. Dewhurst, and wishes to join the revel. But we must make allowances, worthy

and reverend sir, until the world shall improve. An excellent discourse you gave us, good sir, on Sunday: viii. Rom. 12 and 13 verses: it is graven upon my memory, but I have made a note of it in my diary. I come to you, cousin, I come. I pray you walk on to the Abbey, good Mr. Dewhurst, where you will be right welcome, and call for any refreshment you may desire—a glass of good sack, and a slice of venison pasty, on which we have just dined—and there is some famous old ale, which I would commend to you, but that I know you care not, any more than myself, for creature comforts. Farewell, reverend sir. I will join you ere long, for these scenes have little attraction for me. But I must take care that my young cousin falleth not into harm."

And as the divine took his way to the Abbey, he added, laughingly, to Richard,—"A good riddance, Dick. I would not have the old fellow play the spy upon us.—Ah, Giles Mercer," he added, stopping again,—"and Jeff Rushton—well met, lads! what, are you come to the wake? I shall be at John Lawe's in the evening, and we'll have a glass together—John brews sack rarely, and spareth not the eggs."

"Boh yo'n be at th' dawncing at th' Abbey, squoire," said one of the farmers.

"Curse the dancing!" cried Nicholas—"I hope the parson didn't hear me," he added, turning round quickly. "Well, well, I'll come down when the dancing's over, and we'll make a night of it." And he ran on to overtake Richard Assheton.

By this time the respective parties from the Abbey and the Vicarage having united, they walked on together, Sir Ralph Assheton, after courteously exchanging salutations with Dr. Ormerod's guests, still keeping a little in advance of the company. Sir Thomas Metcalfe comported himself with more than his wonted haughtiness, and bowed so superciliously to Mistress Robinson, that her two sons glanced angrily at each other, as if in doubt whether they should not instantly resent the affront. Observing this, as well as what had previously taken place, Nicholas Assheton stepped quickly up to them, and said—

"Keep quiet, lads. Leave this dunghill cock to me, and I'll lower his crest."

With this he pushed forward, and elbowing Sir Thomas rudely out of the way, turned round, and, instead of apologising, eyed him coolly and contemptuously from head to foot.

"Are you drunk, sir, that you forget your manners?" asked Sir Thomas, laying his hand upon his sword.

"Not so drunk but that I know how to conduct myself like a gentleman, Sir Thomas," rejoined Nicholas, "which is more than can be said for a certain person of my acquaintance, who, for aught I know, has only taken his morning pint."

"You wish to pick a quarrel with me, Master Nicholas Assheton, I perceive," said Sir Thomas, stepping close up to him, "and I will not disappoint you. You shall render me good reason for this affront before I leave Whalley."

"When and where you please, Sir Thomas," rejoined Nicholas, laughing. "At any hour, and at any weapon, I am your man."

At this moment, Master Potts, who had scented a quarrel afar, and who would have liked it well enough if its prosecution had not run counter to his own interests, quitted Roger Nowell, and ran back to Metcalfe, and plucking him by the sleeve, said, in a low voice—

"This is not the way to obtain quiet possession of Raydale House, Sir Thomas. Master Nicholas Assheton," he added, turning to him, "I must entreat you, my good sir, to be moderate. Gentlemen, both, I caution you that I have my eye upon you. You well know there is a magistrate here, my singular good friend and honoured client, Master Roger Nowell, and if you pursue this quarrel further, I shall hold it my duty to have you bound over by that worthy gentleman in sufficient securities to keep the peace towards our sovereign lord the king and all his lieges, and particularly towards each other. You understand me, gentlemen?"

"Perfectly," replied Nicholas. "I drink at John Lawe's to-night, Sir Thomas."

So saying, he walked away. Metcalfe would have followed him, but was withheld by Potts.

"Let him go, Sir Thomas," said the little man of law; "let him go. Once master of Raydale, you can do as you please. Leave the settlement of the matter to me. I'll just whisper a word in Sir Ralph Assheton's ear, and you'll hear no more of it."

"Fire and fury!" growled Sir Thomas. "I like not this mode of settling a quarrel; and unless this hot-headed psalm-singing puritan apologises, I shall assuredly cut his throat."

"Or he yours, good Sir Thomas," rejoined Potts. "Better sit in Raydale Hall, than lie in the Abbey vaults."

"Well, we'll talk over the matter, Master Potts," replied the knight.

"A nice morning's work I've made of it," mused Nicholas, as he walked along; "here I have a dance with a farmer's pretty wife, a discourse with a parson, a drinking-bout with a couple of clowns, and a duello with a blustering knight on my hands. Quite enough, o' my conscience! but I must get through it the best way I can. And now, hey for the May-pole and the morris-dancers!"

Nicholas just got up in time to witness the presentation of the May Queen to Sir Ralph Assheton and his lady, and like every one else he was greatly struck by her extreme beauty and natural grace.

The little ceremony was thus conducted. When the company from the Abbey drew near the troop of revellers, the usher taking Alizon's hand in the tips of his fingers as before, strutted forward with her to Sir Ralph and his lady, and falling upon one knee before them, said,—"Most worshipful and honoured knight, and you his lovely dame, and you the tender and cherished olive branches growing round about their tables, I hereby crave your gracious permission to present unto your honours our chosen Queen of May."

Somewhat fluttered by the presentation, Alizon yet maintained sufficient composure to bend gracefully before Lady Assheton, and say in a very sweet voice, "I fear your ladyship will think the choice of the village hath fallen ill in alighting upon me; and, indeed, I feel myself altogether unworthy the distinction; nevertheless I will endeavour to discharge my office fittingly, and therefore pray you, fair lady, and the worshipful knight, your husband, together with your beauteous children, and the gentles all by whom you are surrounded, to grace our little festival with your presence, hoping you may find as much pleasure in the sight as we shall do in offering it to you."

"A fair maid, and modest as she is fair," observed Sir Ralph, with a condescending smile.

"In sooth is she," replied Lady Assheton, raising her kindly, and saying, as she did so—

"Nay, you must not kneel to us, sweet maid. You are queen of May, and it is for us to show respect to you during your day of sovereignty. Your wishes are commands; and, in behalf of my husband, my children, and our guests, I answer, that we will gladly attend your revels on the green."

"Well said, dear Nell," observed Sir Ralph. "We should be churlish, indeed, were we to refuse the bidding of so lovely a queen."

"Nay, you have called the roses in earnest to her cheek, now, Sir Ralph," observed Lady Assheton, smiling. "Lead on, fair queen," she continued, "and tell your companions to begin their sports when they please.—Only remember this, that we shall hope to see all your gay troop this evening at the Abbey, to a merry dance."

"Where I will strive to find her majesty a suitable partner," added Sir Ralph. "Stay, she shall make her choice now, as a royal personage should; for you know, Nell, a queen ever chooseth her partner, whether it be for the throne or for the brawl. How gay you, fair one? Shall it be either of our young cousins, Joe or Will Robinson of Raydale; or our cousin who still thinketh himself young, Squire Nicholas of Downham."

"Ay, let it be me, I implore of you, fair queen," interposed Nicholas.

"He is engaged already," observed Richard Assheton, coming forward. "I heard him ask pretty Mistress Tetlow, the farmer's wife, to dance with him this evening at the Abbey."

A loud laugh from those around followed this piece of information, but Nicholas was in no wise disconcerted.

"Dick would have her choose him, and that is why he interferes with me," he observed. "How say you, fair queen! Shall it be our hopeful cousin? I will answer for him that he danceth the coranto and lavolta indifferently well."

On hearing Richard Assheton's voice, all the colour had forsaken Alizon's cheeks; but at this direct appeal to her by Nicholas, it returned with additional force, and the change did not escape the quick eye of Lady Assheton.

"You perplex her, cousin Nicholas," she said.

"Not a whit, Eleanor," answered the squire; "but if she like not Dick Assheton, there is another Dick, Dick Sherburne of Sladeburn; or our cousin, Jack Braddyll; or, if she prefer an older and discreeter man, there is Father Greenacres of Worston, or Master Roger Nowell of Read—plenty of choice."

"Nay, if I must choose a partner, it shall be a young one," said Alizon.

"Right, fair queen, right," cried Nicholas, laughing. "Ever choose a young man if you can. Who shall it be?"

"You have named him yourself, sir," replied Alizon, in a voice which she endeavoured to keep firm, but which, in spite of all her efforts, sounded tremulously—"Master Richard Assheton."

"Next to choosing me, you could not have chosen better," observed Nicholas, approvingly. "Dick, lad, I congratulate thee."

"I congratulate myself," replied the young man. "Fair queen," he added, advancing, "highly flattered am I by your choice, and shall so demean myself, I trust, as to prove myself worthy of it. Before I go, I would beg a boon from you—that flower."

"This pink," cried Alizon. "It is yours, fair sir."

Young Assheton took the flower and took the hand that offered it at the same time, and pressed the latter to his lips; while Lady Assheton, who had been made a little uneasy by Alizon's apparent emotion, and who with true feminine tact immediately detected its cause, called out: "Now, forward—forward to the May-pole! We have interrupted the revel too long."

Upon this the May Queen stepped blushingly back with the usher, who, with his white wand in hand, had stood bolt upright behind her, immensely delighted with the scene in which his pupil—for Alizon had been tutored by him for the occasion—had taken part. Sir Ralph then clapped his hands loudly, and at this signal the tabor and pipe struck up; the Fool and the Hobby-horse, who, though idle all the time, had indulged in a little quiet fun with the rustics, recommenced their gambols; the Morris-dancers their lively dance; and the whole train moved towards the May-pole, followed by the rush-cart, with all its bells jingling, and all its garlands waving.

As to Alizon, her brain was in a whirl, and her bosom heaved so quickly, that she thought she should faint. To think that the choice of a partner in the dance at the Abbey had been offered her, and that she should venture to choose Master Richard Assheton! She could scarcely credit her own temerity. And then to think that she should give him a flower, and, more than all, that he should kiss her hand in return for it! She felt the tingling pressure of his lips upon her finger still, and her little heart palpitated strangely.

As she approached the May-pole, and the troop again halted for a few minutes, she saw her brother James holding little Jennet by the hand, standing in the front line to look at her.

"Oh, how I'm glad to see you here, Jennet!" she cried.

"An ey'm glad to see yo, Alizon," replied the little girl. "Jem has towd me whot a grand partner you're to ha' this e'en." And, she added, with playful malice, "Who was wrong whon she said the queen could choose Master Richard—"

"Hush, Jennet, not a word more," interrupted Alizon, blushing.

"Oh! ey dunna mean to vex ye, ey'm sure," replied Jennet. "Ey've got a present for ye."

"A present for me, Jennet," cried Alizon; "what is it?"

"A beautiful white dove," replied the little girl.

"A white dove! Where did you get it? Let me see it," cried Alizon, in a breath.

"Here it is," replied Jennet, opening her kirtle.

"A beautiful bird, indeed," cried Alizon. "Take care of it for me till I come home."

"Which winna be till late, ey fancy," rejoined Jennet, roguishly. "Ah!" she added, uttering a cry.

The latter exclamation was occasioned by the sudden flight of the dove, which, escaping from her hold, soared aloft. Jennet followed the course of its silver wings, as they cleaved the blue sky, and then all at once saw a large hawk, which apparently had been hovering about, swoop down upon it, and bear it off. Some white feathers fell down near the little girl, and she picked up one of them and put it in her breast.

"Poor bird!" exclaimed the May Queen.

"Eigh, poor bird!" echoed Jennet, tearfully. "Ah, ye dunna knoa aw, Alizon."

"Weel, there's neaw use whimpering abowt a duv," observed Jem, gruffly. "Ey'n bring ye another t' furst time ey go to Cown."

"There's nah another bird like that," sobbed the little girl. "Shoot that cruel hawk fo' me, Jem, win ye."

"How conney wench, whon its flown away?" he replied. "Boh ey'n rob a hawk's neest fo ye, if that'll do os weel."

"Yo dunna understand me, Jem," replied the child, sadly.

At this moment, the music, which had ceased while some arrangements were made, commenced a very lively tune, known as "Round about the May-pole," and Robin Hood, taking the May Queen's hand, led her towards the pole, and placing her near it, the whole of her attendants took hands, while a second circle was formed by the morris-dancers, and both began to wheel rapidly round her, the music momently increasing in spirit and quickness. An irresistible desire to join in the measure seized some of the lads and lasses around, and they likewise took hands, and presently a third and still wider circle was formed, wheeling gaily round the other two. Other dances were formed here and there, and presently the whole green was in movement.

"If you come off heart-whole to-night, Dick, I shall be surprised," observed Nicholas, who with his young relative had approached as near the May-pole as the three rounds of dancers would allow them.

Richard Assheton made no reply, but glanced at the pink which he had placed in his doublet.

"Who is the May Queen?" inquired Sir Thomas Metcalfe, who had likewise drawn near, of a tall man holding a little girl by the hand.

"Alizon, dowter of Elizabeth Device, an mey sister," replied James Device, gruffly.

"Humph!" muttered Sir Thomas, "she is a well-looking lass. And she dwells here—in Whalley, fellow?" he added.

"Hoo dwells i' Whalley," responded Jem, sullenly.

"I can easily find her abode," muttered the knight, walking away.

"What was it Sir Thomas said to you, Jem?" inquired Nicholas, who had watched the knight's gestures, coming up.

Jem related what had passed between them.

"What the devil does he want with her?" cried Nicholas. "No good, I'm sure. But I'll spoil his sport."

"Say boh t' word, squoire, an ey'n break every boan i' his body," remarked Jem.

"No, no, Jem," replied Nicholas. "Take care of your pretty sister, and I'll take care of him."

At this juncture, Sir Thomas, who, in spite of the efforts of the pacific Master Potts to tranquillise him, had been burning with wrath at the affront he had received from Nicholas, came up to Richard Assheton, and, noticing the pink in his bosom, snatched it away suddenly.

"I want a flower," he said, smelling at it.

"Instantly restore it, Sir Thomas!" cried Richard Assheton, pale with rage, "or—"

"What will you do, young sir?" rejoined the knight tauntingly, and plucking the flower in pieces. "You can get another from the fair nymph who gave you this."

Further speech was not allowed the knight, for he received a violent blow on the chest from the hand of Richard Assheton, which sent him reeling backwards, and would have felled him to the ground if he had not been caught by some of the bystanders. The moment he recovered, Sir Thomas drew his sword, and furiously assaulted young Assheton, who stood ready for him, and after the exchange of a few passes, for none of the bystanders dared to interfere, sent his sword whirling over their heads through the air.

"Bravo, Dick," cried Nicholas, stepping up, and clapping his cousin on the back, "you have read him a good lesson, and taught him that he cannot always insult folks with impunity, ha! ha!" And he laughed loudly at the discomfited knight.

"He is an insolent coward," said Richard Assheton. "Give him his sword and let him come on again."

"No, no," said Nicholas, "he has had enough this time. And if he has not, he must settle an account with me. Put up your blade, lad."

"I'll be revenged upon you both," said Sir Thomas, taking his sword, which had been brought him by a bystander, and stalking away.

"You leave us in mortal dread, doughty knight," cried Nicholas, shouting after him, derisively—"ha! ha! ha!"

Richard Assheton's attention was, however, turned in a different direction, for the music suddenly ceasing, and the dancers stopping, he learnt that the May Queen had fainted,

and presently afterwards the crowd opened to give passage to Robin Hood, who bore her inanimate form in his arms.

The Lancashire Witches Volume II by William Harrison Ainsworth

CHAPTER IV.—ALICE NUTTER.

The quarrel between Nicholas Assheton and Sir Thomas Metcalfe had already been made known to Sir Ralph by the officious Master Potts, and though it occasioned the knight much displeasure; as interfering with the amicable arrangement he hoped to effect with Sir Thomas for his relatives the Robinsons, still he felt sure that he had sufficient influence with his hot-headed cousin, the squire, to prevent the dispute from being carried further, and he only waited the conclusion of the sports on the green, to take him to task. What was the knight's surprise and annoyance, therefore, to find that a new brawl had sprung up, and, ignorant of its precise cause, he laid it entirely at the door of the turbulent Nicholas. Indeed, on the commencement of the fray he imagined that the squire was personally concerned in it, and full of wroth, flew to the scene of action; but before he got there, the affair, which, as has been seen, was of short duration, was fully settled, and he only heard the jeers addressed to the retreating combatant by Nicholas. It was not Sir Ralph's way to vent his choler in words, but the squire knew in an instant, from the expression of his countenance, that he was greatly incensed, and therefore hastened to explain.

"What means this unseemly disturbance, Nicholas?" cried Sir Ralph, not allowing the other to speak. "You are ever brawling like an Alsatian squire. Independently of the ill example set to these good folk, who have met here for tranquil amusement, you have counteracted all my plans for the adjustment of the differences between Sir Thomas Metcalfe and our aunt of Raydale. If you forget what is due to yourself, sir, do not forget what is due to me, and to the name you bear."

"No one but yourself should say as much to me, Sir Ralph," rejoined Nicholas somewhat haughtily; "but you are under a misapprehension. It is not I who have been fighting, though I should have acted in precisely the same manner as our cousin Dick, if I had received the same affront, and so I make bold to say would you. Our name shall suffer no discredit from me; and as a gentleman, I assert, that Sir Thomas Metcalfe has only received due chastisement, as you yourself will admit, cousin, when you know all."

"I know him to be overbearing," observed Sir Ralph.

"Overbearing is not the word, cousin," interrupted Nicholas; "he is as proud as a peacock, and would trample upon us all, and gore us too, like one of the wild bulls of Bowland, if we would let him have his way. But I would treat him as I would the bull

aforesaid, a wild boar, or any other savage and intractable beast, hunt him down, and poll his horns, or pluck out his tusks."

"Come, come, Nicholas, this is no very gentle language," remarked Sir Ralph.

"Why, to speak truth, cousin, I do not feel in any very gentle frame of mind," rejoined the squire; "my ire has been roused by this insolent braggart, my blood is up, and I long to be doing."

"Unchristian feelings, Nicholas," said Sir Ralph, severely, "and should be overcome. Turn the other cheek to the smiter. I trust you bear no malice to Sir Thomas."

"I bear him no malice, for I hope malice is not in my nature, cousin," replied Nicholas, "but I owe him a grudge, and when a fitting opportunity occurs—"

"No more of this, unless you would really incur my displeasure," rejoined Sir Ralph; "the matter has gone far enough, too far, perhaps for amendment, and if you know it not, I can tell you that Sir Thomas's claims to Raydale will be difficult to dispute, and so our uncle Robinson has found since he hath taken counsel on the case."

"Have a care, Sir Ralph," said Nicholas, noticing that Master Potts was approaching them, with his ears evidently wide open, "there is that little London lawyer hovering about. But I'll give the cunning fox a double. I'm glad to hear you say so, Sir Ralph," he added, in a tone calculated to reach Potts, "and since our uncle Robinson is so sure of his cause, it may be better to let this blustering knight be. Perchance, it is the certainty of failure that makes him so insensate."

"This is meant to blind me, but it shall not serve your turn, cautelous squire," muttered Potts; "I caught enough of what fell just now from Sir Ralph to satisfy me that he hath strong misgivings. But it is best not to appear too secure.—Ah, Sir Ralph," he added, coming forward, "I was right, you see, in my caution. I am a man of peace, and strive to prevent quarrels and bloodshed. Quarrel if you please—and unfortunately men are prone to anger—but always settle your disputes in a court of law; always in a court of law, Sir Ralph. That is the only arena where a sensible man should ever fight. Take good advice, fee your counsel well, and the chances are ten to one in your favour. That is what I say to my worthy and singular good client, Sir Thomas; but he is somewhat headstrong and vehement, and will not listen to me. He is for settling matters by the sword, for making forcible entries and detainers, and ousting the tenants in possession, whereby he would render himself liable to arrest, fine, ransom, and forfeiture; instead of proceeding cautiously and decorously as the law directs, and as I advise, Sir Ralph, by writ of ejectione firmæ or action of trespass, the which would assuredly establish his

title, and restore him the house and lands. Or he may proceed by writ of right, which perhaps, in his case, considering the long absence of possession, and the doubts supposed to perplex the title—though I myself have no doubts about it—would be the most efficacious. These are your only true weapons, Sir Ralph—your writs of entry, assise, and right—your pleas of novel disseisin, post-disseisin, and re-disseisin—your remitters, your præcipes, your pones, and your recordari faciases. These are the sword, shield, and armour of proof of a wise man."

"Zounds! you take away one's breath with this hail-storm of writs and pleas, master lawyer!" cried Nicholas. "But in one respect I am of your 'worthy and singular good' client's, opinion, and would rather trust to my own hand for the defence of my property than to the law to keep it for me."

"Then you would do wrong, good Master Nicholas," rejoined Potts, with a smile of supreme contempt; "for the law is the better guardian and the stronger adversary of the two, and so Sir Thomas will find if he takes my advice, and obtains, as he can and will do, a perfect title juris et seisinæ conjunctionem."

"Sir Thomas is still willing to refer the case to my arbitrament, I believe, sir?" demanded Sir Ralph, uneasily.

"He was so, Sir Ralph," rejoined Potts, "unless the assaults and batteries, with intent to do him grievous corporeal hurt, which he hath sustained from your relatives, have induced a change of mind in him. But as I premised, Sir Ralph, I am a man of peace, and willing to intermediate."

"Provided you get your fee, master lawyer," observed Nicholas, sarcastically.

"Certainly, I object not to the quiddam honorarium, Master Nicholas," rejoined Potts; "and if my client hath the quid pro quo, and gaineth his point, he cannot complain.—But what is this? Some fresh disturbance!"

"Something hath happened to the May Queen," cried Nicholas.

"I trust not," said Sir Ralph, with real concern. "Ha! she has fainted. They are bringing her this way. Poor maid! what can have occasioned this sudden seizure?"

"I think I could give a guess," muttered Nicholas. "Better remove her to the Abbey," he added aloud to the knight.

"You are right," said Sir Ralph. "Our cousin Dick is near her, I observe. He shall see her conveyed there at once."

At this moment Lady Assheton and Mrs. Nutter, with some of the other ladies, came up.

"Just in time, Nell," cried the knight. "Have you your smelling-bottle about you? The May Queen has fainted."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Lady Assheton, springing towards Alizon, who was now sustained by young Richard Assheton; the forester having surrendered her to him. "How has this happened?" she inquired, giving her to breathe at a small phial.

"That I cannot tell you, cousin," replied Richard Assheton, "unless from some sudden fright."

"That was it, Master Richard," cried Robin Hood; "she cried out on hearing the clashing of swords just now, and, I think, pronounced your name, on finding you engaged with Sir Thomas, and immediately after turned pale, and would have fallen if I had not caught her."

"Ah, indeed!" exclaimed Lady Assheton, glancing at Richard, whose eyes fell before her inquiring gaze. "But see, she revives," pursued the lady. "Let me support her head."

As she spoke Alizon opened her eyes, and perceiving Richard Assheton, who had relinquished her to his relative, standing beside her, she exclaimed, "Oh! you are safe! I feared"—And then she stopped, greatly embarrassed.

"You feared he might be in danger from his fierce adversary," supplied Lady Assheton; "but no. The conflict is happily over, and he is unhurt."

"I am glad of it," said Alizon, earnestly.

"She had better be taken to the Abbey," remarked Sir Ralph, coming up.

"Nay, she will be more at ease at home," observed Lady Assheton with a significant look, which, however, failed in reaching her husband.

"Yes, truly shall I, gracious lady," replied Alizon, "far more so. I have given you trouble enough already."

"No trouble at all," said Sir Ralph, kindly; "her ladyship is too happy to be of service in a case like this. Are you not, Nell? The faintness will pass off presently. But let her go to the Abbey at once, and remain there till the evening's festivities, in which she takes part, commence. Give her your arm, Dick."

Sir Ralph's word was law, and therefore Lady Assheton made no remonstrance. But she said quickly, "I will take care of her myself."

"I require no assistance, madam," replied Alizon, "since Sir Ralph will have me go. Nay, you are too kind, too condescending," she added, reluctantly taking Lady Assheton's proffered arm.

And in this way they proceeded slowly towards the Abbey, escorted by Richard Assheton, and attended by Mistress Braddyll and some others of the ladies.

Amongst those who had watched the progress of the May Queen's restoration with most interest was Mistress Nutter, though she had not interfered; and as Alizon departed with Lady Assheton, she observed to Nicholas, who was standing near,

"Can this be the daughter of Elizabeth Device, and grand-daughter of—"

"Your old Pendle witch, Mother Demdike," supplied Nicholas; "the very same, I assure you, Mistress Nutter."

"She is wholly unlike the family," observed the lady, "and her features resemble some I have seen before."

"She does not resemble her mother, undoubtedly," replied Nicholas, "though what her grand-dame may have been some sixty years ago, when she was Alizon's age, it would be difficult to say.—She is no beauty now."

"Those finely modelled features, that graceful figure, and those delicate hands, cannot surely belong to one lowly born and bred?" said Mistress Nutter.

"They differ from the ordinary peasant mould, truly," replied Nicholas. "If you ask me for the lineage of a steed, I can give a guess at it on sight of the animal, but as regards our own race I'm at fault, Mistress Nutter."

"I must question Elizabeth Device about her," observed Alice. "Strange, I should never have seen her before, though I know the family so well."

"I wish you did not know Mother Demdike quite so well, Mistress Nutter," remarked Nicholas—"a mischievous and malignant old witch, who deserves the tar barrel. The only marvel is, that she has not been burned long ago. I am of opinion, with many others, that it was she who bewitched your poor husband, Richard Nutter."

"I do not think it," replied Mistress Nutter, with a mournful shake of the head. "Alas, poor man! he died from hard riding, after hard drinking. That was the only witchcraft in his case. Be warned by his fate yourself, Nicholas."

"Hard riding after drinking was more likely to sober him than to kill him," rejoined the squire. "But, as I said just now, I like not this Mother Demdike, nor her rival in iniquity, old Mother Chattox. The devil only knows which of the two is worst. But if the former hag did not bewitch your husband to death, as I shrewdly suspect, it is certain that the latter mumbling old miscreant killed my elder brother, Richard, by her sorceries."

"Mother Chattox did you a good turn then, Nicholas," observed Mistress Nutter, "in making you master of the fair estates of Downham."

"So far, perhaps, she might," rejoined Nicholas, "but I do not like the manner of it, and would gladly see her burned; nay, I would fire the fagots myself."

"You are superstitious as the rest, Nicholas," said Mistress Nutter. "For my part I do not believe in the existence of witches."

"Not believe in witches, with these two living proofs to the contrary!" cried Nicholas, in amazement. "Why, Pendle Forest swarms with witches. They burrow in the hill-side like rabbits in a warren. They are the terror of the whole country. No man's cattle, goods, nor even life, are safe from them; and the only reason why these two old hags, who hold sovereign sway over the others, have 'scaped justice so long, is because every one is afraid to go near them. Their solitary habitations are more strongly guarded than fortresses. Not believe in witches! Why I should as soon misdoubt the Holy Scriptures."

"It may be because I reside near them that I have so little apprehension, or rather no apprehension at all," replied Mistress Nutter; "but to me Mother Demdike and Mother Chattox appear two harmless old women."

"They're a couple of dangerous and damnable old hags, and deserve the stake," cried Nicholas, emphatically.

All this discourse had been swallowed with greedy ears by the ever-vigilant Master Potts, who had approached the speakers unperceived; and he now threw in a word.

"So there are suspected witches in Pendle Forest, I find," he said. "I shall make it my business to institute inquiries concerning them, when I visit the place to-morrow. Even if merely ill-reputed, they must be examined, and if found innocent cleared; if not, punished according to the statute. Our sovereign lord the king holdeth witches in especial abhorrence, and would gladly see all such noxious vermin extirpated from the land, and it will rejoice me to promote his laudable designs. I must pray you to afford me all the assistance you can in the discovery of these dreadful delinquents, good Master Nicholas, and I will care that your services are duly represented in the proper quarter. As I have just said, the king taketh singular interest in witchcraft, as you may judge if the learned tractate he hath put forth, in form of a dialogue, intituled "Dæmonologie" hath ever met your eye; and he is never so well pleased as when the truth of his tenets are proved by such secret offenders being brought to light, and duly punished."

"The king's known superstitious dread of witches makes men seek them out to win his favour," observed Mistress Nutter. "They have wonderfully increased since the publication of that baneful book!"

"Not so, madam," replied Potts. "Our sovereign lord the king hath a wholesome and just hatred of such evil-doers and traitors to himself and heaven, and it may be dread of them, as indeed all good men must have; but he would protect his subjects from them, and therefore, in the first year of his reign, which I trust will be long and prosperous, he hath passed a statute, whereby it is enacted 'that all persons invoking any evil spirit, or consulting, covenanting with, entertaining, employing, feeding, or rewarding any evil spirit; or taking up dead bodies from their graves to be used in any witchcraft, sorcery, charm, or enchantment; or killing or otherwise hurting any person by such infernal arts, shall be guilty of felony without benefit of clergy, and suffer death.' This statute, madam, was intended to check the crimes of necromancy, sorcery, and witchcraft, and not to increase them. And I maintain that it has checked them, and will continue to check them."

"It is a wicked and bloody statute," observed Mrs. Nutter, in a deep tone, "and many an innocent life will be sacrificed thereby."

"How, madam!" cried Master Potts, staring aghast. "Do you mean to impugn the sagacity and justice of our high and mighty king, the head of the law, and defender of the faith?"

"I affirm that this is a sanguinary enactment," replied Mistress Nutter, "and will put power into hands that will abuse it, and destroy many guiltless persons. It will make more witches than it will find."

"Some are ready made, methinks," muttered Potts, "and we need not go far to find them. You are a zealous advocate for witches, I must say, madam," he added aloud, "and I shall not forget your arguments in their favour."

"To my prejudice, I doubt not," she rejoined, bitterly.

"No, to the credit of your humanity," he answered, bowing, with pretended conviction.

"Well, I will aid you in your search for witches, Master Potts," observed Nicholas; "for I would gladly see the country rid of these pests. But I warn you the quest will be attended with risk, and you will get few to accompany you, for all the folk hereabouts are mortally afraid of these terrible old hags."

"I fear nothing in the discharge of my duty," replied Master Potts, courageously, "for as our high and mighty sovereign hath well and learnedly observed—'if witches be but apprehended and detained by any private person, upon other private respects, their power, no doubt, either in escaping, or in doing hurt, is no less than ever it was before. But if, on the other part, their apprehending and detention be by the lawful magistrate upon the just respect of their guiltiness in that craft, their power is then no greater than before that ever they meddled with their master. For where God begins justly to strike by his lawful lieutenants, it is not in the devil's power to defraud or bereave him of the office or effect of his powerful and revenging sceptre.' Thus I am safe; and I shall take care to go armed with a proper warrant, which I shall obtain from a magistrate, my honoured friend and singular good client, Master Roger Newell. This will obtain me such assistance as I may require, and for due observance of my authority. I shall likewise take with me a peace-officer, or constable."

"You will do well, Master Potts," said Nicholas; "still you must not put faith in all the idle tales told you, for the common folk hereabouts are blindly and foolishly superstitious, and fancy they discern witchcraft in every mischance, however slight, that befalls them. If ale turn sour after a thunder-storm, the witch hath done it; and if the butter cometh not quickly, she hindereth it. If the meat roast ill the witch hath turned the spit; and if the lumber pie taste ill she hath had a finger in it. If your sheep have the foot-rot—your horses the staggers or string-halt—your swine the measles—your hounds a surfeit—or your cow slippeth her calf—the witch is at the bottom of it all. If your maid hath a fit of the sullens, or doeth her work amiss, or your man breaketh a dish, the witch is in fault, and her shoulders can bear the blame. On this very day of the year—namely, May Day,—the foolish folk hold any aged crone who fetcheth fire to be a witch, and if they catch a hedge-hog among their cattle, they will instantly beat it to death with sticks, concluding it to be an old hag in that form come to dry up the milk of their kine."

"These are what Master Potts's royal authority would style 'mere old wives' trattles about the fire,'" observed Mistress Nutter, scornfully.

"Better be over-credulous than over-sceptical," replied Potts. "Even at my lodging in Chancery Lane I have a horseshoe nailed against the door. One cannot be too cautious when one has to fight against the devil, or those in league with him. Your witch should be put to every ordeal. She should be scratched with pins to draw blood from her; weighed against the church bible, though this is not always proof; forced to weep, for a witch can only shed three tears, and those only from the left eye; or, as our sovereign lord the king truly observeth—no offence to you, Mistress Nutter—'Not so much as their eyes are able to shed tears, albeit the womenkind especially be able otherwise to shed tears at every light occasion when they will, yea, although it were dissemblingly like the crocodile;' and set on a stool for twenty-four hours, with her legs tied across, and suffered neither to eat, drink, nor sleep during the time. This is the surest Way to make her confess her guilt next to swimming. If it fails, then cast her with her thumbs and toes tied across into a pond, and if she sink not then is she certainly a witch. Other trials there are, as that by scalding water—sticking knives across—heating of the horseshoe—tying of knots—the sieve and the shears; but the only ordeals safely to be relied on, are the swimming and the stool before mentioned, and from these your witch shall rarely escape. Above all, be sure and search carefully for the witch-mark. I doubt not we shall find it fairly and legibly writ in the devil's characters on Mother Demdike and Mother Chattox. They shall undergo the stool and the pool, and other trials, if required. These old hags shall no longer vex you, good Master Nicholas. Leave them to me, and doubt not I will bring them to condign punishment."

"You will do us good service then, Master Potts," replied Nicholas. "But since you are so learned in the matter of witchcraft, resolve me, I pray you, how it is, that women are so much more addicted to the practice of the black art than our own sex."

"The answer to the inquiry hath been given by our British Solomon," replied Potts, "and I will deliver it to you in his own words. 'The reason is easy,' he saith; 'for as that sex is frailer than man is, so it is easier to be entrapped in those gross snares of the devil, as was overwell proved to be true, by the serpent's deceiving of Eva at the beginning, which makes him the homelier with that sex sensine.'"

"A good and sufficient reason, Master Potts," said Nicholas, laughing; "is it not so, Mistress Nutter?"

"Ay, marry, if it satisfies you," she answered, drily. "It is of a piece with the rest of the reasoning of the royal pedant, whom Master Potts styles the British Solomon."

"I only give the learned monarch the title by which he is recognised throughout Christendom," rejoined Potts, sharply.

"Well, there is comfort in the thought, that I shall never be taken for a wizard," said the squire.

"Be not too sure of that, good Master Nicholas," returned Potts. "Our present prince seems to have had you in his eye when he penned his description of a wizard, for, he saith, 'A great number of them that ever have been convict or confessors of witchcraft, as may be presently seen by many that have at this time confessed, are some of them rich and worldly-wise; some of them fat or corpulent in their bodies; and most part of them altogether given over to the pleasures of the flesh, continual haunting of company, and all kinds of merriness, lawful and unlawful.' This hitteth you exactly, Master Nicholas."

"Zounds!" exclaimed the squire, "if this be exact, it toucheth me too nearly to be altogether agreeable."

"The passage is truly quoted, Nicholas," observed Mistress Nutter, with a cold smile. "I perfectly remember it. Master Potts seems to have the 'Dæmonologie' at his fingers' ends."

"I have made it my study, madam," replied the lawyer, somewhat mollified by the remark, "as I have the statute on witchcraft, and indeed most other statutes."

"We have wasted time enough in this unprofitable talk," said Mistress Nutter, abruptly quitting them without bestowing the slightest salutation on Potts.

"I was but jesting in what I said just now, good Master Nicholas," observed the little lawyer, nowise disconcerted at the slight "though they were the king's exact words I quoted. No one would suspect you of being a wizard—ha!—ha! But I am resolved to prosecute the search, and I calculate upon your aid, and that of Master Richard Assheton, who goes with us."

"You shall have mine, at all events, Master Potts," replied Nicholas; "and I doubt not, my cousin Dick's, too."

"Our May Queen, Alizon Device, is Mother Demdike's grand-daughter, is she not?" asked Potts, after a moment's reflection.

"Ay, why do you ask?" demanded Nicholas.

"For a good and sufficing reason," replied Potts. "She might be an important witness; for, as King James saith, 'bairns or wives may, of our law, serve for sufficient witnesses and proofs.' And he goeth on to say, 'For who but witches can be proofs, and so witnesses of the doings of witches?'"

"You do not mean to aver that Alizon Device is a witch, sir?" cried Nicholas, sharply.

"I aver nothing," replied Potts; "but, as a relative of a suspected witch, she will be the best witness against her."

"If you design to meddle with Alizon Device, expect no assistance from me, Master Potts," said Nicholas, sternly, "but rather the contrary."

"Nay, I but threw out the hint, good Master Nicholas," replied Potts. "Another witness will do equally well. There are other children, no doubt. I rely on you, sir—I rely on you. I shall now go in search of Master Nowell, and obtain the warrant and the constable."

"And I shall go keep my appointment with Parson Dewhurst, at the Abbey," said Nicholas, bowing slightly to the attorney, and taking his departure.

"It will not do to alarm him at present," said Potts, looking after him, "but I'll have that girl as a witness, and I know how to terrify her into compliance. A singular woman, that Mistress Alice Nutter. I must inquire into her history. Odd, how obstinately she set her face against witchcraft. And yet she lives at Rough Lee, in the very heart of a witch district, for such Master Nicholas Assheton calls this Pendle Forest. I shouldn't wonder if she has dealings with the old hags she defends—Mother Demdike and Mother Chattox. Chattox! Lord bless us, what a name!—There's caldron and broomstick in the very sound! And Demdike is little better. Both seem of diabolical invention. If I can unearth a pack of witches, I shall gain much credit from my honourable good lords the judges of assize in these northern parts, besides pleasing the King himself, who is sure to hear of it, and reward my praiseworthy zeal. Look to yourself, Mistress Nutter, and take care you are not caught tripping. And now, for Master Roger Nowell."

With this, he peered about among the crowd in search of the magistrate, but though he thrust his little turned-up nose in every direction, he could not find him, and therefore set out for the Abbey, concluding he had gone thither.

As Mistress Nutter walked along, she perceived James Device among the crowd, holding Jennet by the hand, and motioned him to come to her. Jem instantly understood the sign, and quitting his little sister, drew near.

"Tell thy mother," said Mistress Nutter, in a tone calculated only for his hearing, "to come to me, at the Abbey, quickly and secretly. I shall be in the ruins of the old convent church. I have somewhat to say to her, that concerns herself as well as me. Thou wilt have to go to Rough Lee and Malkin Tower to-night."

Jem nodded, to show his perfect apprehension of what was said and his assent to it, and while Mistress Nutter moved on with a slow and dignified step, he returned to Jennet, and told her she must go home directly, a piece of intelligence which was not received very graciously by the little maiden; but nothing heeding her unwillingness, Jem walked her off quickly in the direction of the cottage; but while on the way to it, they accidentally encountered their mother, Elizabeth Device, and therefore stopped.

"Yo mun go up to th' Abbey directly, mother," said Jem, with a wink, "Mistress Nutter wishes to see ye. Yo'n find her i' t' ruins o' t' owd convent church. Tak kere yo're neaw seen. Yo onderstond."

"Yeigh," replied Elizabeth, nodding her head significantly, "ey'n go at wonst, an see efter Alizon ot t' same time. Fo ey'm towd hoo has fainted, an been ta'en to th' Abbey by Lady Assheton."

"Never heed Alizon," replied Jem, gruffly. "Hoo's i' good hands. Ye munna be seen, ey tell ye. Ey'm going to Malkin Tower to-neet, if yo'n owt to send."

"To-neet, Jem," echoed little Jennet.

"Eigh," rejoined Jem, sharply. "Howd te tongue, wench. Dunna lose time, mother."

And as he and his little sister pursued their way to the cottage, Elizabeth hobbled off towards the Abbey, muttering, as she went, "I hope Alizon an Mistress Nutter winna meet. Nah that it matters, boh still it's better not. Strange, the wench should ha' fainted. Boh she's always foolish an timmersome, an ey half fear has lost her heart to young Richard Assheton. Ey'n watch her narrowly, an if it turn out to be so, she mun be cured, or be secured—ha! ha!"

And muttering in this way, she passed through the Abbey gateway, the wicket being left open, and proceeded towards the ruinous convent church, taking care as much as possible to avoid observation.

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CHAPTER V.—MOTHER CHATTOX.

Not far from the green where the May-day revels were held, stood the ancient parish church of Whalley, its square tower surmounted with a flag-staff and banner, and shaking with the joyous peals of the ringers. A picturesque and beautiful structure it was, though full of architectural incongruities; and its grey walls and hoary buttresses, with the lancet-shaped windows of the choir, and the ramified tracery of the fine eastern window, could not fail to please any taste not quite so critical as to require absolute harmony and perfection in a building. Parts of the venerable fabric were older than the Abbey itself, dating back as far as the eleventh century, when a chapel occupied the site; and though many alterations had been made in the subsequent structure at various times, and many beauties destroyed, especially during the period of the Reformation, enough of its pristine character remained to render it a very good specimen of an old country church. Internally, the cylindrical columns of the north aisle, the construction of the choir, and the three stone seats supported on rounded columns near the altar, proclaimed its high antiquity. Within the choir were preserved the eighteen richly-carved stalls once occupying a similar position in the desecrated conventual church: and though exquisite in themselves, they seemed here sadly out of place, not being proportionate to the structure. Their elaborately-carved seats projected far into the body of the church, and their crocketed pinnacles shot up almost to the ceiling. But it was well they had not shared the destruction in which almost all the other ornaments of the magnificent fane they once decorated were involved. Carefully preserved, the black varnished oak well displayed the quaint and grotesque designs with which many of them—the Prior's stall in especial—were embellished. Chief among them was the abbot's stall, festooned with sculptured vine wreaths and clustering grapes, and bearing the auspicious inscription:

Semper gaudentes sint ista sede sedentes:
singularly inapplicable, however, to the last prelate who filled it. Some fine old monuments, and warlike trophies of neighbouring wealthy families, adorned the walls, and within the nave was a magnificent pew, with a canopy and pillars of elaborately-carved oak, and lattice-work at the sides, allotted to the manor of Read, and recently erected by Roger Nowell; while in the north and south aisles were two small chapels, converted since the reformed faith had obtained, into pews—the one called Saint Mary's Cage, belonging to the Assheton family; and the other appertaining to the Catterals of Little Mitton, and designated Saint Nicholas's Cage. Under the last-named chapel were interred some of the Paslews of Wiswall, and here lay the last unfortunate Abbot of Whalley, between whoso grave, and the Assheton and Braddyll families, a fatal relation

was supposed to subsist. Another large pew, allotted to the Towneleys, and designated Saint Anthony's Cage, was rendered remarkable, by a characteristic speech of Sir John Towneley, which gave much offence to the neighbouring dames. Called upon to decide as to the position of the sittings in the church, the discourteous knight made choice of Saint Anthony's Cage, already mentioned, declaring, "My man, Shuttleworth of Hacking, made this form, and here will I sit when I come; and my cousin Nowell may make a seat behind me if he please, and my son Sherburne shall make one on the other side, and Master Catteral another behind him, and for the residue the use shall be, first come first speed, and that will make the proud wives of Whalley rise betimes to come to church." One can fancy the rough knight's chuckle, as he addressed these words to the old clerk, certain of their being quickly repeated to the "proud wives" in question.

Within the churchyard grew two fine old yew-trees, now long since decayed and gone, but then spreading their dark-green arms over the little turf-covered graves. Reared against the buttresses of the church was an old stone coffin, together with a fragment of a curious monumental effigy, likewise of stone; but the most striking objects in the place, and deservedly ranked amongst the wonders of Whalley, were three remarkable obelisk-shaped crosses, set in a line upon pedestals, covered with singular devices in fretwork, and all three differing in size and design. Evidently of remotest antiquity, these crosses were traditionally assigned to Paullinus, who, according to the Venerable Bede, first preached the Gospel in these parts, in the early part of the seventh century; but other legends were attached to them by the vulgar, and dim mystery brooded over them.

Vestiges of another people and another faith were likewise here discernible, for where the Saxon forefathers of the village prayed and slumbered in death, the Roman invaders of the isle had trodden, and perchance performed their religious rites; some traces of an encampment being found in the churchyard by the historian of the spot, while the north boundary of the hallowed precincts was formed by a deep foss, once encompassing the nigh-obliterated fortification. Besides these records of an elder people, there was another memento of bygone days and creeds, in a little hermitage and chapel adjoining it, founded in the reign of Edward III., by Henry, Duke of Lancaster, for the support of two recluses and a priest to say masses daily for him and his descendants; but this pious bequest being grievously abused in the subsequent reign of Henry VI., by Isole de Heton, a fair widow, who in the first transports of grief, vowing herself to heaven, took up her abode in the hermitage, and led a very disorderly life therein, to the great scandal of the Abbey, and the great prejudice of the morals of its brethren, and at last, tired even of the slight restraint imposed upon her, fled away "contrary to her oath and profession, not willing, nor intending to be restored again;" the hermitage was dissolved by the pious monarch, and masses ordered to be said daily in the parish church for the repose of the soul of the founder. Such was the legend attached to the little cell, and tradition went on to say that the anchoress broke her leg in crossing Whalley Nab, and limped

ever afterwards; a just judgment on such a heinous offender. Both these little structures were picturesque objects, being overgrown with ivy and woodbine. The chapel was completely in ruins, while the cell, profaned by the misdoings of the dissolute votaress Isole, had been converted into a cage for vagrants and offenders, and made secure by a grated window, and a strong door studded with broad-headed nails.

The view from the churchyard, embracing the vicarage-house, a comfortable residence, surrounded by a large walled-in garden, well stocked with fruit-trees, and sheltered by a fine grove of rook-haunted timber, extended on the one hand over the village, and on the other over the Abbey, and was bounded by the towering and well-wooded heights of Whalley Nab. On the side of the Abbey, the most conspicuous objects were the great north-eastern gateway, with the ruined conventual church. Ever beautiful, the view was especially so on the present occasion, from the animated scene combined with it; and the pleasant prospect was enjoyed by a large assemblage, who had adjourned thither to witness the concluding part of the festival.

Within the green and flower-decked bowers which, as has before been mentioned, were erected in the churchyard, were seated Doctor Ormerod and Sir Ralph Assheton, with such of their respective guests as had not already retired, including Richard and Nicholas Assheton, both of whom had returned from the abbey; the former having been dismissed by Lady Assheton from further attendance upon Alizon, and the latter having concluded his discourse with Parson Dewhurst, who, indeed, accompanied him to the church, and was now placed between the Vicar and the Rector of Middleton. From this gentle elevation the gay company on the green could be fully discerned, the tall May-pole, with its garlands and ribands, forming a pivot, about which the throng ever revolved, while stationary amidst the moving masses, the rush-cart reared on high its broad green back, as if to resist the living waves constantly dashed against it. By-and-by a new kind of movement was perceptible, and it soon became evident that a procession was being formed. Immediately afterwards, the rush-cart was put in motion, and winded slowly along the narrow street leading to the church, preceded by the morris-dancers and the other May-day revellers, and followed by a great concourse of people, shouting, dancing, and singing.

On came the crowd. The jingling of bells, and the sound of music grew louder and louder, and the procession, lost for awhile behind some intervening habitations, though the men bestriding the rush-cart could be discerned over their summits, burst suddenly into view; and the revellers entering the churchyard, drew up on either side of the little path leading to the porch, while the rush-cart coming up the next moment, stopped at the gate. Then four young maidens dressed in white, and having baskets in their hands, advanced and scattered flowers along the path; after which ladders were reared against the sides of the rush-cart, and the men, descending from their exalted position, bore the

garlands to the church, preceded by the vicar and the two other divines, and followed by Robin Hood and his band, the morris-dancers, and a troop of little children singing a hymn. The next step was to unfasten the bundles of rushes, of which the cart was composed, and this was very quickly and skilfully performed, the utmost care being taken of the trinkets and valuables with which it was ornamented. These were gathered together in baskets and conveyed to the vestry, and there locked up. This done, the bundles of rushes were taken up by several old women, who strewed the aisles with them, and placed such as had been tied up as mats in the pews. At the same time, two casks of ale set near the gate, and given for the occasion by the vicar, were broached, and their foaming contents freely distributed among the dancers and the thirsty crowd. Very merry were they, as may be supposed, in consequence, but their mirth was happily kept within due limits of decorum.

When the rush-cart was wellnigh unladen Richard Assheton entered the church, and greatly pleased with the effect of the flowery garlands with which the various pews were decorated, said as much to the vicar, who smilingly replied, that he was glad to find he approved of the practice, "even though it might savour of superstition;" and as the good doctor walked away, being called forth, the young man almost unconsciously turned into the chapel on the north aisle. Here he stood for a few moments gazing round the church, wrapt in pleasing meditation, in which many objects, somewhat foreign to the place and time, passed through his mind, when, chancing to look down, he saw a small funeral wreath, of mingled yew and cypress, lying at his feet, and a slight tremor passed over his frame, as he found he was standing on the ill-omened grave of Abbot Paslew. Before he could ask himself by whom this sad garland had been so deposited, Nicholas Assheton came up to him, and with a look of great uneasiness cried, "Come away instantly, Dick. Do you know where you are standing?"

"On the grave of the last Abbot of Whalley," replied Richard, smiling.

"Have you forgotten the common saying," cried Nicholas—"that the Assheton who stands on that unlucky grave shall die within the year? Come away at once."

"It is too late," replied Richard, "I have incurred the fate, if such a fate be attached to the tomb; and as my moving away will not preserve me, so my tarrying here cannot injure me further. But I have no fear."

"You have more courage than I possess," rejoined Nicholas. "I would not set foot on that accursed stone for half the county. Its malign influence on our house has been approved too often. The first to experience the fatal destiny were Richard Assheton and John Braddyll, the purchasers of the Abbey. Both met here together on the anniversary of the abbot's execution—some forty years after its occurrence, it is true, and when they were

both pretty well stricken in years—and within that year, namely 1578, both died, and were buried in the vault on the opposite side of the church, not many paces from their old enemy. The last instance was my poor brother Richard, who, being incredulous as you are, was resolved to brave the destiny, and stationed himself upon the tomb during divine service, but he too died within the appointed time."

"He was bewitched to death—so, at least, it is affirmed," said Richard Assheton, with a smile. "But I believe in one evil influence just as much as in the other."

"It matters not how the destiny be accomplished, so it come to pass," rejoined the squire, turning away. "Heaven shield you from it!"

"Stay!" said Richard, picking up the wreath. "Who, think you, can have placed this funeral garland on the abbot's grave?"

"I cannot guess!" cried Nicholas, staring at it in amazement—"an enemy of ours, most likely. It is neither customary nor lawful in our Protestant country so to ornament graves. Put it down, Dick."

"I shall not displace it, certainly," replied Richard, laying it down again; "but I as little think it has been placed here by a hostile hand, as I do that harm will ensue to me from standing here. To relieve your anxiety, however, I will come forth," he added, stepping into the aisle. "Why should an enemy deposit a garland on the abbot's tomb, since it was by mere chance that it hath met my eyes?"

"Mere chance!" cried Nicholas; "every thing is mere chance with you philosophers. There is more than chance in it. My mind misgives me strangely. That terrible old Abbot Paslew is as troublesome to us in death, as he was during life to our predecessor, Richard Assheton. Not content with making his tombstone a weapon of destruction to us, he pays the Abbey itself an occasional visit, and his appearance always betides some disaster to the family. I have never seen him myself, and trust I never shall; but other people have, and have been nigh scared out of their senses by the apparition."

"Idle tales, the invention of overheated brains," rejoined Richard. "Trust me, the abbot's rest will not be broken till the day when all shall rise from their tombs; though if ever the dead (supposing such a thing possible) could be justified in injuring and affrighting the living, it might be in his case, since he mainly owed his destruction to our ancestor. On the same principle it has been held that church-lands are unlucky to their lay possessors; but see how this superstitious notion has been disproved in our own family, to whom Whalley Abbey and its domains have brought wealth, power, and worldly happiness."

"There is something in the notion, nevertheless," replied Nicholas; "and though our case may, I hope, continue an exception to the rule, most grantees of ecclesiastical houses have found them a curse, and the time may come when the Abbey may prove so to our descendants. But, without discussing the point, there is one instance in which the malignant influence of the vindictive abbot has undoubtedly extended long after his death. You have heard, I suppose, that he pronounced a dreadful anathema upon the child of a man who had the reputation of being a wizard, and who afterwards acted as his executioner. I know not the whole particulars of the dark story, but I know that Paslew fixed a curse upon the child, declaring it should become a witch, and the mother of witches. And the prediction has been verified. Nigh eighty years have flown by since then, and the infant still lives—a fearful and mischievous witch—and all her family are similarly fated—all are witches."

"I never heard the story before," said Richard, somewhat thoughtfully; "but I guess to whom you allude—Mother Demdike of Pendle Forest, and her family."

"Precisely," rejoined Nicholas; "they are a brood of witches."

"In that case Alizon Device must be a witch," cried Richard; "and I think you will hardly venture upon such an assertion after what you have seen of her to-day. If she be a witch, I would there were many such—as fair and gentle. And see you not how easily the matter is explained? 'Give a dog an ill name and hang him'—a proverb with which you are familiar enough. So with Mother Demdike. Whether really uttered or not, the abbot's curse upon her and her issue has been bruited abroad, and hence she is made a witch, and her children are supposed to inherit the infamous taint. So it is with yon tomb. It is said to be dangerous to our family, and dangerous no doubt it is to those who believe in the saying, which, luckily, I do not. The prophecy works its own fulfilment. The absurdity and injustice of yielding to the opinion are manifest. No wrong can have been done the abbot by Mother Demdike, any more than by her children, and yet they are to be punished for the misdeeds of their predecessor."

"Ay, just as you and I, who are of the third and fourth generation, may be punished for the sins of our fathers," rejoined Nicholas. "You have Scripture against you, Dick. The only thing I see in favour of your argument is, the instance you allege of Alizon. She does not look like a witch, certainly; but there is no saying. She may be only the more dangerous for her rare beauty, and apparent innocence!"

"I would answer for her truth with my life," cried Richard, quickly. "It is impossible to look at her countenance, in which candour and purity shine forth, and doubt her goodness."

"She hath cast her spells over you, Dick, that is certain," rejoined Nicholas, laughing; "but to be serious. Alizon, I admit, is an exception to the rest of the family, but that only strengthens the general rule. Did you ever remark the strange look they all—save the fair maid in question—have about the eyes?"

Richard answered in the negative.

"It is very singular, and I wonder you have not noticed it," pursued Nicholas; "but the question of reputed witchcraft in Mother Demdike has some chance of being speedily settled; for Master Potts, the little London lawyer, who goes with us to Pendle Forest to-morrow, is about to have her arrested and examined before a magistrate."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Richard, "this must be prevented."

"Why so?" exclaimed Nicholas, in surprise.

"Because the prejudice existing against her is sure to convict and destroy her," replied Richard. "Her great age, infirmities, and poverty, will be proofs against her. How can she, or any old enfeebled creature like her, whose decrepitude and misery should move compassion rather than excite fear—how can such a person defend herself against charges easily made, and impossible to refute? I do not deny the possibility of witchcraft, even in our own days, though I think it of very unlikely occurrence; but I would determinately resist giving credit to any tales told by the superstitious vulgar, who, naturally prone to cruelty, have so many motives for revenging imaginary wrongs. It is placing a dreadful weapon in their hands, of which they have cunning enough to know the use, but neither mercy nor justice enough to restrain them from using it. Better let one guilty person escape, than many innocent perish. So many undefined charges have been brought against Mother Demdike, that at last they have fixed a stigma on her name, and made her an object of dread and suspicion. She is endowed with mysterious power, which would have no effect if not believed in; and now must be burned because she is called a witch, and is doting and vain enough to accept the title."

"There is something in a witch difficult, nay, almost impossible to describe," said Nicholas, "but you cannot be mistaken about her. By her general ill course of life, by repeated acts of mischief, and by threats, followed by the consequences menaced, she becomes known. There is much mystery in the matter, not permitted human knowledge entirely to penetrate; but, as we know from the Scriptures that the sin of witchcraft did exist, and as we have no evidence that it has ceased, so it is fair to conclude, that there may be practisers of the dark offence in our own days, and such I hold to be Mother

Demdike and Mother Chattox. Rival potentates in evil, they contend which shall do most mischief, but it must be admitted the former bears away the bell."

"If all the ill attributed to her were really caused by her machinations, this might be correct," replied Richard, "but it only shows her to be more calumniated than the other. In a word, cousin Nicholas, I look upon them as two poor old creatures, who, persuaded they really possess the supernatural power accorded to them by the vulgar, strive to act up to their parts, and are mainly assisted in doing so by the credulity and fears of their audience."

"Admitting the blind credulity of the multitude," said Nicholas, "and their proneness to discern the hand of the witch in the most trifling accidents; admitting also, their readiness to accuse any old crone unlucky enough to offend them of sorcery; I still believe that there are actual practisers of the black art, who, for a brief term of power, have entered into a league with Satan, worship him and attend his sabbaths, and have a familiar, in the shape of a cat, dog, toad, or mole, to obey their behests, transform themselves into various shapes—as a hound, horse, or hare,—raise storms of wind or hail, maim cattle, bewitch and slay human beings, and ride whither they will on broomsticks. But, holding the contrary opinion, you will not, I apprehend, aid Master Potts in his quest of witches."

"I will not," rejoined Richard. "On the contrary, I will oppose him. But enough of this. Let us go forth."

And they quitted the church together.

As they issued into the churchyard, they found the principal arbours occupied by the morris-dancers, Robin Hood and his troop, Doctor Ormerod and Sir Ralph having retired to the vicarage-house.

Many merry groups were scattered about, talking, laughing, and singing; but two persons, seemingly objects of suspicion and alarm, and shunned by every one who crossed their path, were advancing slowly towards the three crosses of Paullinus, which stood in a line, not far from the church-porch. They were females, one about five-and-twenty, very comely, and habited in smart holiday attire, put on with considerable rustic coquetry, so as to display a very neat foot and ankle, and with plenty of ribands in her fine chestnut hair. The other was a very different person, far advanced in years, bent almost double, palsy-stricken, her arms and limbs shaking, her head nodding, her chin wagging, her snowy locks hanging about her wrinkled visage, her brows and upper lip frore, and her eyes almost sightless, the pupils being cased with a thin white film. Her dress, of antiquated make and faded stuff, had been once deep red in colour, and her old

black hat was high-crowned and broad-brimmed. She partly aided herself in walking with a crutch-handled stick, and partly leaned upon her younger companion for support.

"Why, there is one of the old women we have just been speaking of—Mother Chattox," said Richard, pointing them out, "and with her, her grand-daughter, pretty Nan Redferne."

"So it is," cried Nicholas, "what makes the old hag here, I marvel! I will go question her."

So saying, he strode quickly towards her.

"How now, Mother Chattox!" he cried. "What mischief is afoot? What makes the darkness-loving owl abroad in the glare of day? What brings the grisly she-wolf from her forest lair? Back to thy den, old witch! Ar't crazed, as well as blind and palsied, that thou knowest not that this is a merry-making, and not a devil's sabbath? Back to thy hut, I say! These sacred precincts are no place for thee."

"Who is it speaks to me?" demanded the old hag, halting, and fixing her glazed eyes upon him.

"One thou hast much injured," replied Nicholas. "One into whose house thou hast brought quick-wasting sickness and death by thy infernal arts. One thou hast good reason to fear; for learn, to thy confusion, thou damned and murtherous witch, it is Nicholas, brother to thy victim, Richard Assheton of Downham, who speaks to thee."

"I know none I have reason to fear," replied Mother Chattox; "especially thee, Nicholas Assheton. Thy brother was no victim of mine. Thou wert the gainer by his death, not I. Why should I slay him?"

"I will tell thee why, old hag," cried Nicholas; "he was inflamed by the beauty of thy grand-daughter Nancy here, and it was to please Tom Redferne, her sweetheart then, but her spouse since, that thou bewitchedst him to death."

"That reason will not avail thee, Nicholas," rejoined Mother Chattox, with a derisive laugh. "If I had any hand in his death, it was to serve and pleasure thee, and that all men shall know, if I am questioned on the subject—ha! ha! Take me to the crosses, Nance."

"Thou shalt not 'scape thus, thou murtherous hag," cried Nicholas, furiously.

"Nay, let her go her way," said Richard, who had drawn near during the colloquy. "No good will come of meddling with her."

"Who's that?" asked Mother Chattox, quickly.

Nan Redferne and Mother Chattox.
"Master Richard Assheton, o' Middleton," whispered Nan Redferne.

"Another of these accursed Asshetons," cried Mother Chattox. "A plague seize them!"

"Boh he's weel-favourt an kindly," remarked her grand-daughter.

"Well-favoured or not, kindly or cruel, I hate them all," cried Mother Chattox. "To the crosses, I say!"

But Nicholas placed himself in their path.

"Is it to pray to Beelzebub, thy master, that thou wouldst go to the crosses?" he asked.

"Out of my way, pestilent fool!" cried the hag.

"Thou shalt not stir till I have had an answer," rejoined Nicholas. "They say those are Runic obelisks, and not Christian crosses, and that the carvings upon them have a magical signification. The first, it is averred, is written o'er with deadly curses, and the forms in which they are traced, as serpentine, triangular, or round, indicate and rule their swift or slow effect. The second bears charms against diseases, storms, and lightning. And on the third is inscribed a verse which will render him who can read it rightly, invisible to mortal view. Thou shouldst be learned in such lore, old Pythoness. Is it so?"

The hag's chin wagged fearfully, and her frame trembled with passion, but she spoke not.

"Have you been in the church, old woman?" interposed Richard.

"Ay, wherefore?" she rejoined.

"Some one has placed a cypress wreath on Abbot Paslew's grave. Was it you?" he asked.

"What! hast thou found it?" cried the hag. "It shall bring thee rare luck, lad—rare luck. Now let me pass."

"Not yet," cried Nicholas, forcibly grasping her withered arm.

The hag uttered a scream of rage.

"Let me go, Nicholas Assheton," she shrieked, "or thou shalt rue it. Cramps and aches shall wring and rack thy flesh and bones; fever shall consume thee; ague shake thee—shake thee—ha!"

And Nicholas recoiled, appalled by her fearful gestures.

"You carry your malignity too far, old woman," said Richard severely.

"And thou darest tell me so," cried the hag. "Set me before him, Nance, that I may curse him," she added, raising her palsied arm.

"Nah, nah—yo'n cursed ower much already, grandmother," cried Nan Redferne, endeavouring to drag her away. But the old woman resisted.

"I will teach him to cross my path," she vociferated, in accents shrill and jarring as the cry of the goat-sucker.

"Handsome he is, it may be, now, but he shall not be so long. The bloom shall fade from his cheek, the fire be extinguished in his eyes, the strength depart from his limbs. Sorrow shall be her portion who loves him—sorrow and shame!"

"Horrible!" exclaimed Richard, endeavouring to exclude the voice of the crone, which pierced his ears like some sharp instrument.

"Ha! ha! you fear me now," she cried. "By this, and this, the spell shall work," she added, describing a circle in the air with her stick, then crossing it twice, and finally scattering over him a handful of grave dust, snatched from an adjoining hillock.

"Now lead me quickly to the smaller cross, Nance," she added, in a low tone.

Her grand-daughter complied, with a glance of deep commiseration at Richard, who remained stupefied at the ominous proceeding.

"Ah! this must indeed be a witch!" he cried, recovering from the momentary shock.

"So you are convinced at last," rejoined Nicholas. "I can take breath now the old hell-cat is gone. But she shall not escape us. Keep an eye upon her, while I see if Simon Sparshot, the beadle, be within the churchyard, and if so he shall take her into custody, and lock her in the cage."

With this, he ran towards the throng, shouting lustily for the beadle. Presently a big, burly fellow, in a scarlet doublet, laced with gold, a black velvet cap trimmed with red ribands, yellow hose, and shoes with great roses in them, and bearing a long silver-headed staff, answered the summons, and upon being told why his services were required, immediately roared out at the top of a stentorian voice, "A witch, lads!—a witch!"

All was astir in an instant. Robin Hood and his merry men, with the morris-dancers, rushed out of their bowers, and the whole churchyard was in agitation. Above the din was heard the loud voice of Simon Sparshot, still shouting, "A witch!—witch!—Mother Chattox!"

"Where—where?" demanded several voices.

"Yonder," replied Nicholas, pointing to the further cross.

A general movement took place in that direction, the crowd being headed by the squire and the beadle, but when they came up, they found only Nan Redferne standing behind the obelisk.

"Where the devil is the old witch gone, Dick?" cried Nicholas, in dismay.

"I thought I saw her standing there with her grand-daughter," replied Richard; "but in truth I did not watch very closely."

"Search for her—search for her," cried Nicholas.

But neither behind the crosses, nor behind any monument, nor in any hole or corner, nor on the other side of the churchyard wall, nor at the back of the little hermitage or chapel, though all were quickly examined, could the old hag be found.

On being questioned, Nan Redferne refused to say aught concerning her grandmother's flight or place of concealment.

"I begin to think there is some truth in that strange legend of the cross," said Nicholas. "Notwithstanding her blindness, the old hag must have managed to read the magic verse upon it, and so have rendered herself invisible. But we have got the young witch safe."

"Yeigh, squoire!" responded Sparshot, who had seized hold of Nance—"hoo be safe enough."

"Nan Redferne is no witch," said Richard Assheton, authoritatively.

"Neaw witch, Mester Ruchot!" cried the beadle in amazement.

"No more than any of these lasses around us," said Richard. "Release her, Sparshot."

"I forbid him to do so, till she has been examined," cried a sharp voice. And the next moment Master Potts was seen pushing his way through the crowd. "So you have found a witch, my masters. I heard your shouts, and hurried on as fast as I could. Just in time, Master Nicholas—just in time," he added, rubbing his hands gleefully.

"Lemme go, Simon," besought Nance.

"Neaw, neaw, lass, that munnot be," rejoined Sparshot.

"Help—save me, Master Richard!" cried the young woman.

By this time the crowd had gathered round her, yelling, hooting, and shaking their hands at her, as if about to tear her in pieces; but Richard Assheton planted himself resolutely before her, and pushed back the foremost of them.

"Remove her instantly to the Abbey, Sparshot," he cried, "and let her be kept in safe custody till Sir Ralph has time to examine her. Will that content you, masters?"

"Neaw—neaw," responded several rough voices; "swim her!—swim her!"

"Quite right, my worthy friends, quite right," said Potts. "Primo, let us make sure she is a witch—secundo, let us take her to the Abbey."

"There can be no doubt as to her being a witch, Master Potts," rejoined Nicholas; "her old grand-dame, Mother Chattox, has just vanished from our sight."

"Has Mother Chattox been here?" cried Potts, opening his round eyes to their widest extent.

"Not many minutes since," replied Nicholas. "In fact, she may be here still for aught I know."

"Here!—where?" cried Potts, looking round.

"You won't discover her for all your quickness," replied Nicholas. "She has rendered herself invisible, by reciting the magical verses inscribed on that cross."

"Indeed!" exclaimed the attorney, closely examining the mysterious inscriptions. "What strange, uncouth characters! I can make neither head nor tail, unless it be the devil's tail, of them."

At this moment a whoop was raised by Jem Device, who, having taken his little sister home, had returned to the sports on the green, and now formed part of the assemblage in the churchyard. Between the rival witch potentates, Mothers Demdike and Chattox, it has already been said a deadly enmity existed, and the feud was carried on with equal animosity by their descendants; and though Jem himself came under the same suspicion as Nan Redferne, that circumstance created no tie of interest between them, but the contrary, and he was the most active of her assailants. He had set up the above-mentioned cry from observing a large rat running along the side of the wall.

"Theere hoo goes," whooped Jem, "t'owd witch, i' th' shape ov a rotten!—loo-loo-loo!"

Half the crowd started in pursuit of the animal, and twenty sticks were thrown at it, but a stone cast by Jem stayed its progress, and it was instantly despatched. It did not change, however, as was expected by the credulous hinds, into an old woman, and they gave vent to their disappointment and rage in renewed threats against Nan Redferne. The dead rat was hurled at her by Jem, but missing its mark, it hit Master Potts on the head, and nearly knocked him off the cross, upon which he had mounted to obtain a better view of the proceedings. Irritated by this circumstance, as well as by the failure of the experiment, the little attorney jumped down and fell to kicking the unfortunate rat, after which, his fury being somewhat appeased, he turned to Nance, who had sunk for support against the pedestal, and said to her—"If you will tell us what has become of the old witch your grandmother, and undertake to bear witness against her, you shall be set free."

"Ey'n tell ye nowt, mon," replied Nance, doggedly. "Put me to onny trial ye like, ye shanna get a word fro me."

"That remains to be seen," retorted Potts, "but I apprehend we shall make you speak, and pretty plainly too, before we've done with you.—You hear what this perverse and wrong-headed young witch declares, masters," he shouted, again clambering upon the cross. "I have offered her liberty, on condition of disclosing to us the manner of her diabolical old relative's evasion, and she rejects it."

An angry roar followed, mixed with cries from Jem Device, of "swim her!—swim her!"

"You had better tell them what you know, Nance," said Richard, in a low tone, "or I shall have difficulty in preserving you from their fury."

"Ey darena, Master Richard," she replied, shaking her head; and then she added firmly, "Ey winna."

Finding it useless to reason with her, and fearing also that the infuriated crowd might attempt to put their threats into execution, Richard turned to his cousin Nicholas, and said: "We must get her away, or violence will be done."

"She does not deserve your compassion, Dick," replied Nicholas; "she is only a few degrees better than the old hag who has escaped. Sparshot here tells me she is noted for her skill in modelling clay figures."

"Yeigh, that hoo be," replied the broad-faced beadle; "hoo's unaccountable cliver ot that sort o' wark. A clay figger os big os a six months' barn, fashiont i' th' likeness o' Farmer Grimble o' Briercliffe lawnd, os died last month, war seen i' her cottage, an monny others besoide. Amongst 'em a moddle o' your lamented brother, Squoire Ruchot Assheton o' Downham, wi' t' yeod pood off, and th' 'eart pieret thro' an' thro' wi' pins and needles."

"Ye lien i' your teeth, Simon Sparshot!" cried Nance; regarding him furiously.

"If the head were off, Simon, I don't see how the likeness to my poor brother could well be recognised," said Nicholas, with a half smile. "But let her be put to some mild trial—weighed against the church Bible."

"Be it so," replied Potts, jumping down; "but if that fail, we must have recourse to stronger measures. Take notice that, with all her fright, she has not been able to shed a tear, not a single tear—a clear witch—a clear witch!"

"Ey'd scorn to weep fo t' like o' yo!" cried Nance, disdainfully, having now completely recovered her natural audacity.

"We'll soon break your spirit, young woman, I can promise you," rejoined Potts.

As soon as it was known what was about to occur, the whole crowd moved towards the church porch, Nan Redferne walking between Richard Assheton and the beadle, who kept hold of her arm to prevent any attempt at escape; and by the time they reached the appointed place, Ben Baggiley, the baker, who had been despatched for the purpose, appeared with an enormous pair of wooden scales, while Sampson Harrop, the clerk, having visited the pulpit, came forth with the church Bible, an immense volume, bound in black, with great silver clasps.

"Come, that's a good big Bible at all events," cried Potts, eyeing it with satisfaction. "It looks like my honourable and singular good Lord Chief-Justice Sir Edward Coke's learned 'Institutes of the Laws of England,' only that that great legal tome is generally bound in calf—law calf, as we say."

"Large as the book is, it will scarce prove heavy enough to weigh down the witch, I opine," observed Nicholas, with a smile.

"We shall see, sir," replied Potts. "We shall see."

By this time, the scales having been affixed to a hook in the porch by Baggiley, the sacred volume was placed on one side, and Nance set down by the beadle on the other. The result of the experiment was precisely what might have been anticipated—the moment the young woman took her place in the balance, it sank down to the ground, while the other kicked the beam.

"I hope you are satisfied now, Master Potts," cried Richard Assheton. "By your own trial her innocence is approved."

"Your pardon, Master Richard, this is Squire Nicholas's trial, not mine," replied Potts. "I am for the ordeal of swimming. How say you, masters! Shall we be content with this doubtful experiment?"

"Neaw—neaw," responded Jem Device, who acted as spokesman to the crowd, "swim her—swim her!"

"I knew you would have it so," said Potts, approvingly. "Where is a fitting place for the trial?"

"Th' Abbey pool is nah fur off," replied Jem, "or ye con tay her to th' Calder."

"The river, by all means—nothing like a running stream," said Potts. "Let cords be procured to bind her."

"Run fo 'em quickly, Ben," said Jem to Baggiley, who was very zealous in the cause.

"Oh!" groaned Nance, again losing courage, and glancing piteously at Richard.

"No outrage like this shall be perpetrated," cried the young man, firmly; "I call upon you, cousin Nicholas, to help me. Go into the church," he added, thrusting Nance backward, and presenting his sword at the breast of Jem Device, who attempted to follow her, and who retired muttering threats and curses; "I will run the first man through the body who attempts to pass."

As Nan Redferne made good her retreat, and shut the church-door after her, Master Potts, pale with rage, cried out to Richard, "You have aided the escape of a desperate and notorious offender—actually in custody, sir, and have rendered yourself liable to indictment for it, sir, with consequences of fine and imprisonment, sir:—heavy fine and long imprisonment, sir. Do you mark me, Master Richard?"

"I will answer the consequences of my act to those empowered to question it, sir," replied Richard, sternly.

"Well, sir, I have given you notice," rejoined Potts, "due notice. We shall hear what Sir Ralph will say to the matter, and Master Roger Nowell, and—"

"You forget me, good Master Potts," interrupted Nicholas, laughingly; "I entirely disapprove of it. It is a most flagrant breach of duty. Nevertheless, I am glad the poor wench has got off."

"She is safe within the church," said Potts, "and I command Master Richard, in the king's name, to let us pass. Beadle! Sharpshot, Sparshot, or whatever be your confounded name do your duty, sirrah. Enter the church, and bring forth the witch."

"Ey darna, mester," replied Simon; "young mester Ruchot ud slit mey weasand os soon os look ot meh."

Richard put an end to further altercation, by stepping back quickly, locking the door, and then taking out the key, and putting it into his pocket.

"She is quite safe now," he cried, with a smile at the discomfited lawyer.

"Is there no other door?" inquired Potts of the beadle, in a low tone.

"Yeigh, theere be one ot t'other soide," replied Sparshot, "boh it be locked, ey reckon, an maybe hoo'n getten out that way."

"Quick, quick, and let's see," cried Potts; "justice must not be thwarted in this shameful manner."

While the greater part of the crowd set off after Potts and the beadle, Richard Assheton, anxious to know what had become of the fugitive, and determined not to abandon her while any danger existed, unlocked the church-door, and entered the holy structure, followed by Nicholas. On looking around, Nance was nowhere to be seen, neither did she answer to his repeated calls, and Richard concluded she must have escaped, when all at once a loud exulting shout was heard without, leaving no doubt that the poor young woman had again fallen into the hands of her captors. The next moment a sharp, piercing scream in a female key confirmed the supposition. On hearing this cry, Richard instantly flew to the opposite door, through which Nance must have passed, but on trying it he found it fastened outside; and filled with sudden misgiving, for he now recollected leaving the key in the other door, he called to Nicholas to come with him, and hurried back to it. His apprehensions were verified; the door was locked. At first Nicholas was inclined to laugh at the trick played them; but a single look from Richard checked his tendency to merriment, and he followed his young relative, who had sprung to a window looking upon that part of the churchyard whence the shouts came, and flung it open. Richard's egress, however, was prevented by an iron bar, and he called out loudly and fiercely to the beadle, whom he saw standing in the midst of the crowd, to unlock the door.

"Have a little patience, good Master Richard," replied Potts, turning up his provoking little visage, now charged with triumphant malice. "You shall come out presently. We are busy just now—engaged in binding the witch, as you see. Both keys are safely in my pocket, and I will send you one of them when we start for the river, good Master Richard. We lawyers are not to be overreached you see—ha! ha!"

"You shall repent this conduct when I do get out," cried Richard, furiously. "Sparshot, I command you to bring the key instantly."

But, encouraged by the attorney, the beadle affected not to hear Richard's angry vociferations, and the others were unable to aid the young man, if they had been so disposed, and all were too much interested in what was going forward to run off to the

vicarage, and acquaint Sir Ralph with the circumstances in which his relatives were placed, even though enjoined to do so.

On being set free by Richard, Nance had flown quickly through the church, and passed out at the side door, and was making good her retreat at the back of the edifice, when her flying figure was descried by Jem Device, who, failing in his first attempt, had run round that way, fancying he should catch her.

He instantly dashed after her with all the fury of a bloodhound, and, being possessed of remarkable activity, speedily overtook her, and, heedless of her threats and entreaties, secured her.

"Lemme go, Jem," she cried, "an ey win do thee a good turn one o' these days, when theaw may chonce to be i' th' same strait os me." But seeing him inexorable, she added, "My granddame shan rack thy boans sorely, lad, for this."

Jem replied by a coarse laugh of defiance, and, dragging her along, delivered her to Master Potts and the beadle, who were then hurrying to the other door of the church. To prevent interruption, the cunning attorney, having ascertained that the two Asshetons were inside, instantly gave orders to have both doors locked, and the injunctions being promptly obeyed, he took possession of the keys himself, chuckling at the success of the stratagem. "A fair reprisal," he muttered; "this young milksop shall find he is no match for a skilful lawyer like me. Now, the cords—the cords!"

It was at the sight of the bonds, which were quickly brought by Baggiley, that Nance uttered the piercing cry that had roused Richard's indignation. Feeling secure of his prisoner, and now no longer apprehensive of interruption, Master Potts was in no hurry to conclude the arrangements, but rather prolonged them to exasperate Richard. Little consideration was shown the unfortunate captive. The new shoes and stockings of which she had been so vain a short time before, were torn from her feet and limbs by the rude hands of the remorseless Jem and the beadle, and bent down by the main force of these two strong men, her thumbs and great toes were tightly bound together, crosswise, by the cords. The churchyard rang with her shrieks, and, with his blood boiling with indignation at the sight, Richard redoubled his exertions to burst through the window and fly to her assistance. But though Nicholas now lent his powerful aid to the task, their combined efforts to obtain liberation were unavailing; and with rage almost amounting to frenzy, Richard beheld the poor young woman borne shrieking away by her captors. Nor was Nicholas much less incensed, and he swore a deep oath when he did get at liberty that Master Potts should pay dearly for his rascally conduct.

The Lancashire Witches Volume II by William Harrison Ainsworth

CHAPTER VI.—THE ORDEAL BY SWIMMING.

Bound hand and foot in the painful posture before described, roughly and insolently handled on all sides, in peril of her life from the frightful ordeal to which she was about to be subjected, the miserable captive was borne along on the shoulders of Jem Device and Sparshot, her long, fine chestnut hair trailing upon the ground, her white shoulders exposed to the insolent gaze of the crowd, and her trim holiday attire torn to rags by the rough treatment she had experienced. Nance Redferne, it has been said, was a very comely young woman; but neither her beauty, her youth, nor her sex, had any effect upon the ferocious crowd, who were too much accustomed to such brutal and debasing exhibitions, to feel any thing but savage delight in the spectacle of a fellow-creature so scandalously treated and tormented, and the only excuse to be offered for their barbarity, is the firm belief they entertained that they were dealing with a witch. And when even in our own day so many revolting scenes are enacted to gratify the brutal passions of the mob, while prize-fights are tolerated, and wretched animals goaded on to tear each other in pieces, it is not to be wondered at that, in times of less enlightenment and refinement, greater cruelties should be practised. Indeed, it may be well to consider how far we have really advanced in civilisation since then; for until cruelty, whether to man or beast, be wholly banished from our sports, we cannot justly reproach our ancestors, or congratulate ourselves on our improvement.

Nance's cries of distress were only answered by jeers, and renewed insults, and wearied out at length, the poor creature ceased struggling and shrieking, the dogged resolution she had before exhibited again coming to her aid.

But her fortitude was to be yet more severely tested. Revealed by the disorder of her habiliments, and contrasting strongly with the extreme whiteness of her skin, a dun-coloured mole was discovered upon her breast. It was pointed out to Potts by Jem Device, who declared it to be a witch-mark, and the spot where her familiar drained her blood.

"This is one of the 'good helps' to the discovery of a witch, pointed out by our sovereign lord the king," said the attorney, narrowly examining the spot. "'The one,' saith our wise prince, 'is the finding of their mark, and the trying the insensibleness thereof. The other is their fleeting on the water.' The water-ordeal will come presently, but the insensibility of the mark might be at once attested."

"Yeigh, that con soon be tried," cried Jem, with a savage laugh.

And taking a pin from his sleeve, the ruffian plunged it deeply into the poor creature's flesh. Nance winced, but she set her teeth hardly, and repressed the cry that must otherwise have been wrung from her.

"A clear witch!" cried Jem, drawing forth the pin; "not a drop o' blood flows, an hoo feels nowt!"

"Feel nowt?" rejoined Nance, between her ground teeth. "May ye ha a pang os sharp i' your cancart eart, ye villain."

After this barbarous test, the crowd, confirmed by it in their notions of Nan's guiltiness, hurried on, their numbers increasing as they proceeded along the main street of the village leading towards the river; all the villagers left at home rushing forth on hearing a witch was about to be swum, and when they came within a bow-shot of the stream, Sparshot called to Baggiley to lay hold of Nance, while he himself, accompanied by several of the crowd, ran over the bridge, the part he had to enact requiring him to be on the other side of the water.

Meantime, the main party turned down a little footpath protected by a gate on the left, which led between garden hedges to the grassy banks of the Calder, and in taking this course they passed by the cottage of Elizabeth Device. Hearing the shouts of the rabble, little Jennet, who had been in no very happy frame of mind since she had been brought home, came forth, and seeing her brother, called out to him, in her usual sharp tones, "What's the matter, Jem? Who han ye gotten there?"

"A witch," replied Jem, gruffly. "Nance Redferne, Mother Chattox's grand-daughter. Come an see her swum i' th' Calder."

Jennet readily complied, for her curiosity was aroused, and she shared in the family feelings of dislike to Mother Chattox and her descendants.

"Is this Nance Redferne?" she cried, keeping close to her brother, "Ey'm glad yo'n caught her at last. How dun ye find yersel, Nance?"

"Ill at ease, Jennet," replied Nance, with a bitter look; "boh it ill becomes ye to jeer me, lass, seein' yo're a born witch yoursel."

"Aha!" cried Potts, looking at the little girl, "So this is a born witch—eh, Nance?"

"A born an' bred witch," rejoined Nance; "jist as her brother Jem here is a wizard. They're the gran-childer o' Mother Demdike o' Pendle, the greatest witch i' these parts, an childer o' Bess Device, who's nah much better. Ask me to witness agen 'em, that's aw."

"Howd thy tongue, woman, or ey'n drown thee," muttered Jem, in a tone of deep menace.

"Ye canna, mon, if ey'm the witch ye ca' me," rejoined Nance. "Jennet's turn'll come os weel os mine, one o' these days. Mark my words."

"Efore that ey shan see ye burned, ye faggot," cried Jennet, almost fiercely.

"Ye'n gotten the fiend's mark o' your sleeve," cried Nance. "Ey see it written i' letters ov blood."

"That's where our cat scratted me," replied Jennet, hiding her arm quickly.

"Good!—very good!" observed Potts, rubbing his hands. "'Who but witches can be proof against witches?' saith our sagacious sovereign. I shall make something of this girl. She seems a remarkably quick child—remarkably quick—ha, ha!"

By this time, the party having gained the broad flat mead through which the Calder flowed, took their way quickly towards its banks, the spot selected for the ordeal lying about fifty yards above the weir, where the current, ordinarily rapid, was checked by the dam, offering a smooth surface, with considerable depth of water. If soft natural beauties could have subdued the hearts of those engaged in this cruel and wicked experiment, never was scene better calculated for the purpose than that under contemplation. Through a lovely green valley meandered the Calder, now winding round some verdant knoll, now washing the base of lofty heights feathered with timber to their very summits, now lost amid thick woods, and only discernible at intervals by a glimmer amongst the trees. Immediately in front of the assemblage rose Whalley Nab, its steep sides and brow partially covered with timber, with green patches in the uplands where sheep and cattle fed. Just below the spot where the crowd were collected, the stream, here of some width, passed over the weir, and swept in a foaming cascade over the huge stones supporting the dam, giving the rushing current the semblance and almost the beauty of a natural waterfall. Below this the stream ran brawling on in a wider, but shallower channel, making pleasant music as it went, and leaving many dry beds of sand and gravel in the midst; while a hundred yards lower down, it was crossed by the arches of the bridge. Further still, a row of tall cypresses lined the bank of the river, and screened that part of the Abbey, converted into a residence by the Asshetons; and after

this came the ruins of the refectory, the cloisters, the dormitory, the conventual church, and other parts of the venerable structure, overshadowed by noble lime-trees and elms. Lovelier or more peaceful scene could not be imagined. The green meads, the bright clear stream, with its white foaming weir, the woody heights reflected in the glassy waters, the picturesque old bridge, and the dark grey ruins beyond it, all might have engaged the attention and melted the heart. Then the hour, when evening was coming on, and when each beautiful object, deriving new beauty from the medium through which it was viewed, exercised a softening influence, and awakened kindly emotions. To most the scene was familiar, and therefore could have no charm of novelty. To Potts, however, it was altogether new; but he was susceptible of few gentle impressions, and neither the tender beauty of the evening, nor the wooing loveliness of the spot, awakened any responsive emotion in his breast. He was dead to every thing except the ruthless experiment about to be made.

Almost at the same time that Jem Device and his party reached the near bank of the stream, the beadle and the others appeared on the opposite side. Little was said, but instant preparations were made for the ordeal. Two long coils of rope having been brought by Baggiley, one of them was made fast to the right arm of the victim, and the other to the left; and this done, Jem Device, shouting to Sparshot to look out, flung one coil of rope across the river, where it was caught with much dexterity by the beadle. The assemblage then spread out on the bank, while Jem, taking the poor young woman in his arms, who neither spoke nor struggled, but held her breath tightly, approached the river.

"Dunna drown her, Jem," said Jennet, who had turned very pale.

"Be quiet, wench," rejoined Jem, gruffly.

And without bestowing further attention upon her, he let down his burden carefully into the water; and this achieved, he called out to the beadle, who drew her slowly towards him, while Jem guided her with the other rope.

The crowd watched the experiment for a few moments in profound silence, but as the poor young woman, who had now reached the centre of the stream, still floated, being supported either by the tension of the cords, or by her woollen apparel, a loud shout was raised that she could not sink, and was, therefore, an undeniable witch.

"Steady, lads—steady a moment," cried Potts, enchanted with the success of the experiment; "leave her where she is, that her buoyancy may be fully attested. You know, masters," he cried, with a loud voice, "the meaning of this water ordeal. Our sovereign lord and master the king, in his wisdom, hath graciously vouchsafed to explain the

matter thus: 'Water,' he saith, 'shall refuse to receive them (meaning witches, of course) in her bosom, that have shaken off their sacred water of baptism, and wilfully refused the benefit thereof.' It is manifest, you see, that this diabolical young woman hath renounced her baptism, for the water rejecteth her. Non potest mergi, as Pliny saith. She floats like a cork, or as if the clear water of the Calder had suddenly become like the slab, salt waves of the Dead Sea, in which, nothing can sink. You behold the marvel with your own eyes, my masters."

"Ay, ay!" rejoined Baggiley and several others.

"Hoo be a witch fo sartin," cried Jem Device. But as he spoke, chancing slightly to slacken the rope, the tension of which maintained the equilibrium of the body, the poor woman instantly sank.

A groan, as much of disappointment as sympathy, broke from the spectators, but none attempted to aid her; and on seeing her sink, Jem abandoned the rope altogether.

But assistance was at hand. Two persons rushed quickly and furiously to the spot. They were Richard and Nicholas Assheton. The iron bar had at length yielded to their efforts, and the first use they made of their freedom was to hurry to the river. A glance showed them what had occurred, and the younger Assheton, unhesitatingly plunging into the water, seized the rope dropped by Jem, and calling to the beadle to let go his hold, dragged forth the poor half-drowned young woman, and placed her on the bank, hewing asunder the cords that bound her hands and feet with his sword. But though still sensible, Nance was so much exhausted by the shock she had undergone, and her muscles were so severely strained by the painful and unnatural posture to which she had been compelled, that she was wholly unable to move. Her thumbs were blackened and swollen, and the cords had cut into the flesh, while blood trickled down from the puncture in her breast. Fixing a look of inexpressible gratitude upon her preserver, she made an effort to speak, but the exertion was too great; violent hysterical sobbing came on, and her senses soon after forsook her. Richard called loudly for assistance, and the sentiments of the most humane part of the crowd having undergone a change since the failure of the ordeal, some females came forward, and took steps for her restoration. Sensibility having returned, a cloak was wrapped around her, and she was conveyed to a neighbouring cottage and put to bed, where her stiffened limbs were chafed and warm drinks administered, and it began to be hoped that no serious consequences would ensue.

Meanwhile, a catastrophe had wellnigh occurred in another quarter. With eyes flashing with fury, Nicholas Assheton pushed aside the crowd, and made his way to the bank whereon Master Potts stood. Not liking his looks, the little attorney would have taken to

his heels, but finding escape impossible, he called upon Baggiley to protect him. But he was instantly in the forcible gripe of the squire, who shouted, "I'll teach you, mongrel hound, to play tricks with gentlemen."

"Master Nicholas," cried the terrified and half-strangled attorney, "my very good sir, I entreat you to let me alone. This is a breach of the king's peace, sir. Assault and battery, under aggravated circumstances, and punishable with ignominious corporal penalties, besides fine and imprisonment, sir. I take you to witness the assault, Master Baggiley. I shall bring my ac—ac—ah—o—o—oh!"

"Then you shall have something to bring your ac—ac—action for, rascal," cried Nicholas. And, seizing the attorney by the nape of the neck with one hand, and the hind wings of his doublet with the other, he cast him to a considerable distance into the river, where he fell with a tremendous splash.

"He is no wizard, at all events," laughed Nicholas, as Potts went down like a lump of lead.

But the attorney was not born to be drowned; at least, at this period of his career. On rising to the surface, a few seconds after his immersion, he roared lustily for help, but would infallibly have been carried over the weir, if Jem Device had not flung him the rope now disengaged from Nance Redferne, and which he succeeded in catching. In this way he was dragged out; and as he crept up the bank, with the wet pouring from his apparel, which now clung tightly to his lathy limbs, he was greeted by the jeers of Nicholas.

"How like you the water-ordeal—eh, Master Attorney? No occasion for a second trial, I think. If Jem Device had known his own interest, he would have left you to fatten the Calder eels; but he will find it out in time."

"You will find it out too, Master Nicholas," rejoined Potts, clapping on his wet cap. "Take me to the Dragon quickly, good fellow," he added, to Jem Device, "and I will recompense thee for thy pains, as well as for the service thou hast just rendered me. I shall have rheumatism in my joints, pains in my loins, and rheum in my head, oh dear—oh dear!"

"In which case you will not be able to pay Mother Demdike your purposed visit to-morrow," jeered Nicholas. "You forgot you were to arrest her, and bring her before a magistrate."

"Thy arm, good fellow, thy arm!" said Potts, to Jem Device.

"To the fiend wi' thee," cried Jem, shaking him off roughly. "The squoire is reet. Wouldee had let thee drown."

"What, have you changed your mind already, Jem?" cried Nicholas, in a taunting tone. "You'll have your grandmother's thanks for the service you've rendered her, lad—ha! ha!"

"Fo' t' matter o' two pins ey'd pitch him again," growled Jem, eyeing the attorney askance.

"No, no, Jem," observed Nicholas, "things must take their course. What's done is done. But if Master Potts be wise, he'll take himself out of court without delay."

"You'll be glad to get me out of court one of these days, squire," muttered Potts, "and so will you too, Master James Device.—A day of reckoning will come for both—heavy reckoning. Ugh! ugh!" he added, shivering, "how my teeth chatter!"

"Make what haste you can to the Dragon," cried the good-natured squire; "get your clothes dried, and bid John Lawe brew you a pottle of strong sack, swallow it scalding hot, and you'll never look behind you."

"Nor before me either," retorted Potts, "Scalding sack! This bloodthirsty squire has a new design upon my life!"

"Ey'n go wi' ye to th' Dragon, mester," said Baggiley; "lean o' me."

"Thanke'e friend," replied Potts, taking his arm. "A word at parting, Master Nicholas. This is not the only discovery of witchcraft I've made. I've another case, somewhat nearer home. Ha! ha!"

With this, he hobbled off in the direction of the alehouse, his steps being traceable along the dusty road like the course of a watering-cart.

"Ey'n go efter him," growled Jem.

"No you won't, lad," rejoined Nicholas, "and if you'll take my advice, you'll get out of Whalley as fast as you can. You will be safer on the heath of Pendle than here, when Sir Ralph and Master Roger Nowell come to know what has taken place. And mind this, sirrah—the hounds will be out in the forest to-morrow. D'ye heed?"

Jem growled something in reply, and, seizing his little sister's hand, strode off with her towards his mother's dwelling, uttering not a word by the way.

Having seen Nance Redferne conveyed to the cottage, as before mentioned, Richard Assheton, regardless of the wet state of his own apparel, now joined his cousin, the squire, and they walked to the Abbey together, conversing on what had taken place, while the crowd dispersed, some returning to the bowers in the churchyard, and others to the green, their merriment in nowise damped by the recent occurrences, which they looked upon as part of the day's sport. As some of them passed by, laughing, singing, and dancing, Richard Assheton remarked, "I can scarcely believe these to be the same people I so lately saw in the churchyard. They then seemed totally devoid of humanity."

"Pshaw! they are humane enough," rejoined Nicholas; "but you cannot expect them to show mercy to a witch, any more than to a wolf, or other savage and devouring beast."

"But the means taken to prove her guilt were as absurd as iniquitous," said Richard, "and savour of the barbarous ages. If she had perished, all concerned in the trial would have been guilty of murder."

"But no judge would condemn them," returned Nicholas; "and they have the highest authority in the realm to uphold them. As to leniency to witches, in a general way, I would show none. Traitors alike to God and man, and bond slaves of Satan, they are out of the pale of Christian charity."

"No criminal, however great, is out of the pale of Christian charity," replied Richard; "but such scenes as we have just witnessed are a disgrace to humanity, and a mockery of justice. In seeking to discover and punish one offence, a greater is committed. Suppose this poor young woman really guilty—what then? Our laws are made for protection, as well as punishment of wrong. She should he arraigned, convicted, and condemned before punishment."

"Our laws admit of torture, Richard," observed Nicholas.

"True," said the young man, with a shudder, "and it is another relic of a ruthless age. But torture is only allowed under the eye of the law, and can be inflicted by none but its sworn servants. But, supposing this poor young woman innocent of the crime imputed to her, which I really believe her to be, how, then, will you excuse the atrocities to which she has been subjected?"

"I do not believe her innocent," rejoined Nicholas; "her relationship to a notorious witch, and her fabrication of clay images, make her justly suspected."

"Then let her be examined by a magistrate," said Richard; "but, even then, woe betide her! When I think that Alizon Device is liable to the same atrocious treatment, in consequence of her relationship to Mother Demdike, I can scarce contain my indignation."

"It is unlucky for her, indeed," rejoined Nicholas; "but of all Nance's assailants the most infuriated was Alizon's brother, Jem Device."

"I saw it," cried Richard—an uneasy expression passing over his countenance. "Would she could be removed from that family!"

"To what purpose?" demanded Nicholas, quickly. "Her family are more likely to be removed from her if Master Potts stay in the neighbourhood."

"Poor girl!" exclaimed Richard.

And he fell into a reverie which was not broken till they reached the Abbey.

To return to Jem Device. On reaching the cottage, the ruffian flung himself into a chair, and for a time seemed lost in reflection. At last he looked up, and said gruffly to Jennet, who stood watching him, "See if mother be come whoam?"

"Eigh, eigh, ey'm here, Jem," said Elizabeth Device, opening the inner door and coming forth. "So, ye ha been swimmin' Nance Redferne, lad, eh! Ey'm glad on it—ha! ha!"

Jem gave her a significant look, upon which she motioned Jennet to withdraw, and the injunction being complied with, though with evident reluctance, by the little girl, she closed the door upon her.

"Now, Jem, what hast got to say to me, lad, eh?" demanded Elizabeth, stepping up to him.

"Neaw great deal, mother," he replied; "boh ey keawnsel ye to look weel efter yersel. We're aw i' dawnger."

"Ey knoas it, lad, ey knoas it," replied Elizabeth; "boh fo my own pert ey'm nah afeerd. They darna touch me; an' if they dun, ey con defend mysel reet weel. Here's a letter to thy gran-mother," she added, giving him a sealed packet. "Take care on it."

"Fro Mistress Nutter, ey suppose?" asked Jem.

"Eigh, who else should it be from?" rejoined Elizabeth. "Your gran-mother win' ha' enough to do to neet, an so win yo, too, Jem, lettin alone the walk fro here to Malkin Tower."

"Weel, gi' me mey supper, an ey'n set out," rejoined Jem. "So ye ha' seen Mistress Nutter?"

"Ey found her i' th' Abbey garden," replied Elizabeth, "an we had some tawk together, abowt th' boundary line o' th' Rough Lee estates, and other matters."

And, as she spoke, she set a cold pasty, with oat cakes, cheese, and butter, before her son, and next proceeded to draw him a jug of ale.

"What other matters dun you mean, mother?" inquired Jem, attacking the pasty. "War it owt relatin' to that little Lunnon lawyer, Mester Potts?"

"Theawst hit it, Jem," replied Elizabeth, seating herself near him. "That Potts means to visit thy gran-mother to morrow."

"Weel!" said Jem, grimly.

"An arrest her," pursued Elizabeth.

"Easily said," laughed Jem, scornfully, "boh neaw quite so easily done."

"Nah quite, Jem," responded Elizabeth, joining in the laugh. "'Specially when th' owd dame's prepared, as she win be now."

"Potts may set out 'o that journey, boh he winna come back again," remarked Jem, in a sombre tone.

"Wait till yo'n seen your gran-mother efore ye do owt, lad," said Elizabeth.

"Ay, wait," added a voice.

"What's that?" demanded Jem, laving down his knife and fork.

Elizabeth did not answer in words, but her significant looks were quite response enough for her son.

"Os ye win, mother," he said in an altered tone. After a pause, employed in eating, he added, "Did Mistress Nutter put onny questions to ye about Alizon?"

"More nor enough, lad," replied Elizabeth; "fo what had ey to tell her? She praised her beauty, an said how unlike she wur to Jennet an thee, lad—ha! ha!—An wondert how ey cum to ha such a dowter, an monny other things besoide. An what could ey say to it aw, except—"

"Except what, mother?" interrupted Jem.

"Except that she wur my child just os much os Jennet an thee!"

"Humph!" exclaimed Jem.

"Humph!" echoed the voice that had previously spoken.

Jem looked at his mother, and took a long pull at the ale-jug.

"Any more messages to Malkin Tower?" he asked, getting up.

"Neaw—mother will onderstond," replied Elizabeth. "Bid her be on her guard, fo' the enemy is abroad."

"Meanin' Potts?" said Jem.

"Meaning Potts," answered the voice.

"There are strange echoes here," said Jem, looking round suspiciously.

At this moment, Tib came from under a piece of furniture, where he had apparently been lying, and rubbed himself familiarly against his legs.

"Ey needna be afeerd o' owt happenin to ye, mother," said Jem, patting the cat's back. "Tib win tay care on yo."

"Eigh, eigh," replied Elizabeth, bending down to pat him, "he's a trusty cat." But the ill-tempered animal would not be propitiated, but erected his back, and menaced her with his claws.

"Yo han offended him, mother," said Jem. "One word efore ey start. Are ye quite sure Potts didna owerhear your conversation wi' Mistress Nutter?"

"Why d'ye ask, Jem?" she replied.

"Fro' summat the knave threw out to Squoire Nicholas just now," rejoined Jem. "He said he'd another case o' witchcraft nearer whoam. Whot could he mean?"

"Whot, indeed?" cried Elizabeth, quickly.

"Look at Tib," exclaimed her son.

As he spoke, the cat sprang towards the inner door, and scratched violently against it.

Elizabeth immediately raised the latch, and found Jennet behind it, with a face like scarlet.

"Yo'n been listenin, ye young eavesdropper," cried Elizabeth, boxing her ears soundly; "take that fo' your pains—an that."

"Touch me again, an Mester Potts shan knoa aw ey'n heer'd," said the little girl, repressing her tears.

Elizabeth regarded her angrily; but the looks of the child were so spiteful, that she did not dare to strike her. She glanced too at Tib; but the uncertain cat was now rubbing himself in the most friendly manner against Jennet.

"Yo shan pay for this, lass, presently," said Elizabeth.

"Best nah provoke me, mother," rejoined Jennet in a determined tone; "if ye dun, aw secrets shan out. Ey knoa why Jem's goin' to Malkin-Tower to-neet—an why yo're afeerd o' Mester Potts."

"Howd thy tongue or ey'n choke thee, little pest," cried her mother, fiercely.

Jennet replied with a mocking laugh, while Tib rubbed against her more fondly than ever.

"Let her alone," interposed Jem. "An now ey mun be off. So, fare ye weel, mother,—an yo, too, Jennet." And with this, he put on his cap, seized his cudgel, and quitted the cottage.

The Lancashire Witches Volume II by William Harrison Ainsworth

CHAPTER VII.—THE RUINED CONVENTUAL CHURCH.

Beneath a wild cherry-tree, planted by chance in the Abbey gardens, and of such remarkable size that it almost rivalled the elms and lime trees surrounding it, and when in bloom resembled an enormous garland, stood two young maidens, both of rare beauty, though in totally different styles;—the one being fair-haired and blue-eyed, with a snowy skin tinged with delicate bloom, like that of roses seen through milk, to borrow a simile from old Anacreon; while the other far eclipsed her in the brilliancy of her complexion, the dark splendour of her eyes, and the luxuriance of her jetty tresses, which, unbound and knotted with ribands, flowed down almost to the ground. In age, there was little disparity between them, though perhaps the dark-haired girl might be a year nearer twenty than the other, and somewhat more of seriousness, though not much, sat upon her lovely countenance than on the other's laughing features. Different were they too, in degree, and here social position was infinitely in favour of the fairer girl, but no one would have judged it so if not previously acquainted with their history. Indeed, it was rather the one having least title to be proud (if any one has such title) who now seemed to look up to her companion with mingled admiration and regard; the latter being enthralled at the moment by the rich notes of a thrush poured from a neighbouring lime-tree.

Pleasant was the garden where the two girls stood, shaded by great trees, laid out in exquisite parterres, with knots and figures, quaint flower-beds, shorn trees and hedges, covered alleys and arbours, terraces and mounds, in the taste of the time, and above all an admirably kept bowling-green. It was bounded on the one hand by the ruined chapter-house and vestry of the old monastic structure, and on the other by the stately pile of buildings formerly making part of the Abbot's lodging, in which the long gallery was situated, some of its windows looking upon the bowling-green, and then kept in excellent condition, but now roofless and desolate. Behind them, on the right, half hidden by trees, lay the desecrated and despoiled conventual church. Reared at such cost, and with so much magnificence, by thirteen abbots—the great work having been commenced, as heretofore stated, by Robert de Topcliffe, in 1330, and only completed in all its details by John Paslew; this splendid structure, surpassing, according to Whitaker, "many cathedrals in extent," was now abandoned to the slow ravages of decay. Would it had never encountered worse enemy! But some half century later, the hand of man was called in to accelerate its destruction, and it was then almost entirely rased to the ground. At the period in question though partially unroofed, and with some of the walls destroyed, it was still beautiful and picturesque—more picturesque, indeed than in the days of its pride and splendour. The tower with its lofty crocketed spire was still

standing, though the latter was cracked and tottering, and the jackdaws roosted within its windows and belfry. Two ranges of broken columns told of the bygone glories of the aisles; and the beautiful side chapels having escaped injury better than other parts of the fabric, remained in tolerable preservation. But the choir and high altar were stripped of all their rich carving and ornaments, and the rain descended through the open rood-loft upon the now grass-grown graves of the abbots in the presbytery. Here and there the ramified mullions still retained their wealth of painted glass, and the grand eastern window shone gorgeously as of yore. All else was neglect and ruin. Briers and turf usurped the place of the marble pavement; many of the pillars were festooned with ivy; and, in some places, the shattered walls were covered with creepers, and trees had taken root in the crevices of the masonry. Beautiful at all times were these magnificent ruins; but never so beautiful as when seen by the witching light of the moon—the hour, according to the best authority, when all ruins should be viewed—when the long lines of broken pillars, the mouldering arches, and the still glowing panes over the altar, had a magical effect.

In front of the maidens stood a square tower, part of the defences of the religious establishment, erected by Abbot Lyndelay, in the reign of Edward III., but disused and decaying. It was sustained by high and richly groined arches, crossing the swift mill-race, and faced the river. A path led through the ruined chapter-house to the spacious cloister quadrangle, once used as a cemetery for the monks, but now converted into a kitchen garden, its broad area being planted out, and fruit-trees trained against the hoary walls. Little of the old refectory was left, except the dilapidated stairs once conducting to the gallery where the brethren were wont to take their meals, but the inner wall still served to enclose the garden on that side. Of the dormitory, formerly constituting the eastern angle of the cloisters, the shell was still left, and it was used partly as a grange, partly as a shed for cattle, the farm-yard and tenements lying on this side.

Thus it will be seen that the garden and grounds, filling up the ruins of Whalley Abbey, offered abundant points of picturesque attraction, all of which—with the exception of the ruined conventual church—had been visited by the two girls. They had tracked the labyrinths of passages, scaled the broken staircases, crept into the roofless and neglected chambers, peered timorously into the black and yawning vaults, and now, having finished their investigations, had paused for awhile, previous to extending their ramble to the church, beneath the wild cherry-tree to listen to the warbling of the birds.

"You should hear the nightingales at Middleton, Alizon," observed Dorothy Assheton, breaking silence; "they sing even more exquisitely than yon thrush. You must come and see me. I should like to show you the old house and gardens, though they are very different from these, and we have no ancient monastic ruins to ornament them. Still,

they are very beautiful; and, as I find you are fond of flowers, I will show you some I have reared myself, for I am something of a gardener, Alizon. Promise you will come."

"I wish I dared promise it," replied Alizon.

"And why not, then?" cried Dorothy. "What should prevent you? Do you know, Alizon, what I should like better than all? You are so amiable, and so good, and so—so very pretty; nay, don't blush—there is no one by to hear me—you are so charming altogether, that I should like you to come and live with me. You shall be my handmaiden if you will."

"I should desire nothing better, sweet young lady," replied Alizon; "but—"

"But what?" cried Dorothy. "You have only your own consent to obtain."

"Alas! I have," replied Alizon.

"How can that be!" cried Dorothy, with a disappointed look. "It is not likely your mother will stand in the way of your advancement, and you have not, I suppose, any other tie? Nay, forgive me if I appear too inquisitive. My curiosity only proceeds from the interest I take in you."

"I know it—I feel it, dear, kind young lady," replied Alizon, with the colour again mounting her cheeks. "I have no tie in the world except my family. But I am persuaded my mother will never allow me to quit her, however great the advantage might be to me."

"Well, though sorry, I am scarcely surprised at it," said Dorothy. "She must love you too dearly to part with you."

"I wish I could think so," sighed Alizon. "Proud of me in some sort, though with little reason, she may be, but love me, most assuredly, she does not. Nay more, I am persuaded she would be glad to be freed from my presence, which is an evident restraint and annoyance to her, were it not for some motive stronger than natural affection that binds her to me."

"Now, in good sooth, you amaze me, Alizon!" cried Dorothy. "What possible motive can it be, if not of affection?"

"Of interest, I think," replied Alizon. "I speak to you without reserve, dear young lady, for the sympathy you have shown me deserves and demands confidence on my part, and

there are none with whom I can freely converse, so that every emotion has been locked up in my own bosom. My mother fancies I shall one day be of use to her, and therefore keeps me with her. Hints to this effect she has thrown out, when indulging in the uncontrollable fits of passion to which she is liable. And yet I have no just reason to complain; for though she has shown me little maternal tenderness, and repelled all exhibition of affection on my part, she has treated me very differently from her other children, and with much greater consideration. I can make slight boast of education, but the best the village could afford has been given me; and I have derived much religious culture from good Doctor Ormerod. The kind ladies of the vicarage proposed, as you have done, that I should live with them, but my mother forbade it; enjoining me, on the peril of incurring her displeasure, not to leave her, and reminding me of all the benefits I have received from her, and of the necessity of making an adequate return. And, ungrateful indeed I should be, if I did not comply; for, though her manner is harsh and cold to me, she has never ill-used me, as she has done her favourite child, my little sister Jennet, but has always allowed me a separate chamber, where I can retire when I please, to read, or meditate, or pray. For, alas! dear young lady, I dare not pray before my mother. Be not shocked at what I tell you, but I cannot hide it. My poor mother denies herself the consolation of religion—never addresses herself to Heaven in prayer—never opens the book of Life and Truth—never enters church. In her own mistaken way she has brought up poor little Jennet, who has been taught to make a scoff at religious truths and ordinances, and has never been suffered to keep holy the Sabbath-day. Happy and thankful am I, that no such evil lessons have been taught me, but rather, that I have profited by the sad example. In my own secret chamber I have prayed, daily and nightly, for both—prayed that their hearts might be turned. Often have I besought my mother to let me take Jennet to church, but she never would consent. And in that poor misguided child, dear young lady, there is a strange mixture of good and ill. Afflicted with personal deformity, and delicate in health, the mind perhaps sympathising with the body, she is wayward and uncertain in temper, but sensitive and keenly alive to kindness, and with a shrewdness beyond her years. At the risk of offending my mother, for I felt confident I was acting rightly, I have endeavoured to instil religious principles into her heart, and to inspire her with a love of truth. Sometimes she has listened to me; and I have observed strange struggles in her nature, as if the good were obtaining mastery of the evil principle, and I have striven the more to convince her, and win her over, but never with entire success, for my efforts have been overcome by pernicious counsels, and sceptical sneers. Oh, dear young lady, what would I not do to be the instrument of her salvation!"

"You pain me much by this relation, Alizon," said Dorothy Assheton, who had listened with profound attention, "and I now wish more ardently than ever to take you from such a family."

"I cannot leave them, dear young lady," replied Alizon; "for I feel I may be of infinite service—especially to Jennet—by staying with them. Where there is a soul to be saved, especially the soul of one dear as a sister, no sacrifice can be too great to make—no price too heavy to pay. By the blessing of Heaven I hope to save her! And that is the great tie that binds me to a home, only so in name."

"I will not oppose your virtuous intentions, dear Alizon," replied Dorothy; "but I must now mention a circumstance in connexion with your mother, of which you are perhaps in ignorance, but which it is right you should know, and therefore no false delicacy on my part shall restrain me from mentioning it. Your grandmother, Old Demdike, is in very ill depute in Pendle, and is stigmatised by the common folk, and even by others, as a witch. Your mother, too, shares in the opprobrium attaching to her."

"I dreaded this," replied Alizon, turning deadly pale, and trembling violently, "I feared you had heard the terrible report. But oh, believe it not! My poor mother is erring enough, but she is not so bad as that. Oh, believe it not!"

"I will not believe it," said Dorothy, "since she is blessed with such a daughter as you. But what I fear is that you—you so kind, so good, so beautiful—may come under the same ban."

"I must run this risk also, in the good work I have appointed myself," replied Alizon. "If I am ill thought of by men, I shall have the approval of my own conscience to uphold me. Whatever betide, and whatever be said, do not you think ill of me, dear young lady."

"Fear it not," returned Dorothy, earnestly.

While thus conversing, they gradually strayed away from the cherry-tree, and taking a winding path leading in that direction, entered the conventual church, about the middle of the south aisle. After gazing with wonder and delight at the still majestic pillars, that, like ghosts of the departed brethren, seemed to protest against the desolation around them, they took their way along the nave, through broken arches, and over prostrate fragments of stone, to the eastern extremity of the fane, and having admired the light shafts and clerestory windows of the choir, as well as the magnificent painted glass over the altar, they stopped before an arched doorway on the right, with two Gothic niches, in one of which was a small stone statue of Saint Agnes with her lamb, and in the other a similar representation of Saint Margaret, crowned, and piercing the dragon with a cross. Both were sculptures of much merit, and it was wonderful they had escaped destruction. The door was closed, but it easily opened when tried by Dorothy, and they found themselves in a small but beautiful chapel. What struck them chiefly in it was a magnificent monument of white marble, enriched with numerous small shields, painted

and gilt, supporting two recumbent figures, representing Henry de Lacy, one of the founders of the Abbey, and his consort. The knight was cased in plate armour, covered with a surcoat, emblazoned with his arms, and his feet resting upon a hound. This superb monument was wholly uninjured, the painting and gilding being still fresh and bright. Behind it a flag had been removed, discovering a flight of steep stone steps, leading to a vault, or other subterranean chamber.

After looking round this chapel, Dorothy remarked, "There is something else that has just occurred to me. When a child, a strange dark tale was told me, to the effect that the last ill-fated Abbot of Whalley laid his dying curse upon your grandmother, then an infant, predicting that she should be a witch, and the mother of witches."

"I have heard the dread tradition, too," rejoined Alizon; "but I cannot, will not, believe it. An all-benign Power will never sanction such terrible imprecations."

"Far be it from me to affirm the contrary," replied Dorothy; "but it is undoubted that some families have been, and are, under the influence of an inevitable fatality. In one respect, connected also with the same unfortunate prelate, I might instance our own family. Abbot Paslew is said to be unlucky to us even in his grave. If such a curse, as I have described, hangs over the head of your family, all your efforts to remove it will be ineffectual."

"I trust not," said Alizon. "Oh! dear young lady, you have now penetrated the secret of my heart. The mystery of my life is laid open to you. Disguise it as I may, I cannot but believe my mother to be under some baneful influence. Her unholy life, her strange actions, all impress me with the idea. And there is the same tendency in Jennet."

"You have a brother, have you not?" inquired Dorothy.

"I have," returned Alizon, slightly colouring; "but I see little of him, for he lives near my grandmother, in Pendle Forest, and always avoids me in his rare visits here. You will think it strange when I tell you I have never beheld my grandmother Demdike."

"I am glad to hear it," exclaimed Dorothy.

"I have never even been to Pendle," pursued Alizon, "though Jennet and my mother go there frequently. At one time I much wished to see my aged relative, and pressed my mother to take me with her; but she refused, and now I have no desire to go."

"Strange!" exclaimed Dorothy. "Every thing you tell me strengthens the idea I conceived, the moment I saw you, and which my brother also entertained, that you are not the daughter of Elizabeth Device."

"Did your brother think this?" cried Alizon, eagerly. But she immediately cast down her eyes.

"He did," replied Dorothy, not noticing her confusion. "'It is impossible,' he said, 'that that lovely girl can be sprung from'—but I will not wound you by adding the rest."

"I cannot disown my kindred," said Alizon. "Still, I must confess that some notions of the sort have crossed me, arising, probably, from my mother's extraordinary treatment, and from many other circumstances, which, though trifling in themselves, were not without weight in leading me to the conclusion. Hitherto I have treated it only as a passing fancy, but if you and Master Richard Assheton"—and her voice slightly faltered as she pronounced the name—"think so, it may warrant me in more seriously considering the matter."

"Do consider it most seriously, dear Alizon," cried Dorothy. "I have made up my mind, and Richard has made up his mind, too, that you are not Mother Demdike's grand-daughter, nor Elizabeth Device's daughter, nor Jennet's sister—nor any relation of theirs. We are sure of it, and we will have you of our mind."

The fair and animated speaker could not help noticing the blushes that mantled Alizon's cheeks as she spoke, but she attributed them to other than the true cause. Nor did she mend the matter as she proceeded.

"I am sure you are well born, Alizon," she said, "and so it will be found in the end. And Richard thinks so, too, for he said so to me; and Richard is my oracle, Alizon."

In spite of herself Alizon's eyes sparkled with pleasure; but she speedily checked the emotion.

"I must not indulge the dream," she said, with a sigh.

"Why not?" cried Dorothy. "I will have strict inquiries made as to your history."

"I cannot consent to it," replied Alizon. "I cannot leave one who, if she be not my parent, has stood to me in that relation. Neither can I have her brought into trouble on my account. What will she think of me, if she learns I have indulged such a notion? She will say, and with truth, that I am the most ungrateful of human beings, as well as the most

unnatural of children. No, dear young lady, it must not be. These fancies are brilliant, but fallacious, and, like bubbles, burst as soon as formed."

"I admire your sentiments, though I do not admit the justice of your reasoning," rejoined Dorothy. "It is not on your own account merely, though that is much, that the secret of your birth—if there be one—ought to be cleared up; but, for the sake of those with whom you may be connected. There may be a mother, like mine, weeping for you as lost—a brother, like Richard, mourning you as dead. Think of the sad hearts your restoration will make joyful. As to Elizabeth Device, no consideration should be shown her. If she has stolen you from your parents, as I suspect, she deserves no pity."

"All this is mere surmise, dear young lady," replied Alizon.

At this juncture they were startled, by seeing an old woman come from behind the monument and plant herself before them. Both uttered a cry, and would have fled, but a gesture from the crone detained them. Very old was she, and of strange and sinister aspect, almost blind, bent double, with frosted brows and chin, and shaking with palsy.

"Stay where you are," cried the hag, in an imperious tone. "I want to speak to you. Come nearer to me, my pretty wheans; nearer—nearer."

And as they complied, drawn towards her by an impulse they could not resist, the old woman caught hold of Alizon's arm, and said with a chuckle. "So you are the wench they call Alizon Device, eh!"

"Ay," replied Alizon, trembling like a dove in the talons of a hawk.

"Do you know who I am?" cried the hag, grasping her yet more tightly. "Do you know who I am, I say? If not, I will tell you. I am Mother Chattox of Pendle Forest, the rival of Mother Demdike, and the enemy of all her accursed brood. Now, do you know me, wench? Men call me witch. Whether I am so or not, I have some power, as they and you shall find. Mother Demdike has often defied me—often injured me, but I will have my revenge upon her—ha! ha!"

"Let me go," cried Alizon, greatly terrified.

"I will run and bring assistance," cried Dorothy. And she flew to the door, but it resisted her attempts to open it.

"Come back," screamed the hag. "You strive in vain. The door is fast shut—fast shut. Come back, I say. Who are you?" she added, as the maid drew near, ready to sink with

terror. "Your voice is an Assheton's voice. I know you now. You are Dorothy Assheton—whey-skinned, blue-eyed Dorothy. Listen to me, Dorothy. I owe your family a grudge, and, if you provoke me, I will pay it off in part on you. Stir not, as you value your life."

The poor girl did not dare to move, and Alizon remained as if fascinated by the terrible old woman.

"I will tell you what has happened, Dorothy," pursued Mother Chattox. "I came hither to Whalley on business of my own; meddling with no one; harming no one. Tread upon the adder and it will bite; and, when molested, I bite like the adder. Your cousin, Nick Assheton, came in my way, called me 'witch,' and menaced me. I cursed him—ha! ha! And then your brother, Richard—"

Mother Chattox, Alizon, and Dorothy.
"What of him, in Heaven's name?" almost shrieked Alizon.

"How's this?" exclaimed Mother Chattox, placing her hand on the beating heart of the girl.

"What of Richard Assheton?" repeated Alizon.

"You love him, I feel you do, wench," cried the old crone with fierce exultation.

"Release me, wicked woman," cried Alizon.

"Wicked, am I? ha! ha!" rejoined Mother Chattox, chuckling maliciously, "because, forsooth, I read thy heart, and betray its secrets. Wicked, eh! I tell thee wench again, Richard Assheton is lord and master here. Every pulse in thy bosom beats for him—for him alone. But beware of his love. Beware of it, I say. It shall bring thee ruin and despair."

"For pity's sake, release me," implored Alizon.

"Not yet," replied the inexorable old woman, "not yet. My tale is not half told. My curse fell on Richard's head, as it did on Nicholas's. And then the hell-hounds thought to catch me; but they were at fault. I tricked them nicely—ha! ha! However, they took my Nance—my pretty Nance—they seized her, bound her, bore her to the Calder—and there swam her. Curses light on them all!—all!—but chief on him who did it!"

"Who was he?" inquired Alizon, tremblingly.

"Jem Device," replied the old woman—"it was he who bound her—he who plunged her in the river, he who swam her. But I will pinch and plague him for it, I will strew his couch with nettles, and all wholesome food shall be poison to him. His blood shall be as water, and his flesh shrink from his bones. He shall waste away slowly—slowly—slowly—till he drops like a skeleton into the grave ready digged for him. All connected with him shall feel my fury. I would kill thee now, if thou wert aught of his."

"Aught of his! What mean you, old woman?" demanded Alizon.

"Why, this," rejoined Mother Chattox, "and let the knowledge work in thee, to the confusion of Bess Device. Thou art not her daughter."

"It is as I thought," cried Dorothy Assheton, roused by the intelligence from her terror.

"I tell thee not this secret to pleasure thee," continued Mother Chattox, "but to confound Elizabeth Device. I have no other motive. She hath provoked my vengeance, and she shall feel it. Thou art not her child, I say. The secret of thy birth is known to me, but the time is not yet come for its disclosure. It shall out, one day, to the confusion of those who offend me. When thou goest home tell thy reputed mother what I have said, and mark how she takes the information. Ha! who comes here?"

The hag's last exclamation was occasioned by the sudden appearance of Mistress Nutter, who opened the door of the chapel, and, staring in astonishment at the group, came quickly forward.

"What makes you here, Mother Chattox?" she cried.

"I came here to avoid pursuit," replied the old hag, with a cowed manner, and in accents sounding strangely submissive after her late infuriated tone.

"What have you been saying to these girls?" demanded Mistress Nutter, authoritatively.

"Ask them," the hag replied.

"She declares that Alizon is not the daughter of Elizabeth Device," cried Dorothy Assheton.

"Indeed!" exclaimed Mistress Nutter quickly, and as if a spring of extraordinary interest had been suddenly touched. "What reason hast thou for this assertion?"

"No good reason," replied the old woman evasively, yet with evident apprehension of her questioner.

"Good reason or bad, I will have it," cried Mistress Nutter.

"What you, too, take an interest in the wench, like the rest!" returned Mother Chattox. "Is she so very winning?"

"That is no answer to my question," said the lady. "Whose child is she?"

"Ask Bess Device, or Mother Demdike," replied Mother Chattox; "they know more about the matter than me."

"I will have thee speak, and to the purpose," cried the lady, angrily.

"Many an one has lost a child who would gladly have it back again," said the old hag, mysteriously.

"Who has lost one?" asked Mistress Nutter.

"Nay, it passeth me to tell," replied the old woman with affected ignorance. "Question those who stole her. I have set you on the track. If you fail in pursuing it, come to me. You know where to find me."

"You shall not go thus," said Mistress Nutter. "I will have a direct answer now."

And as she spoke she waved her hands twice or thrice over the old woman. In doing this her figure seemed to dilate, and her countenance underwent a marked and fearful change. All her beauty vanished, her eyes blazed, and terror sat on her wrinkled brow. The hag, on the contrary, crouched lower down, and seemed to dwindle less than her ordinary size. Writhing as from heavy blows, and with a mixture of malice and fear in her countenance, she cried, "Were I to speak, you would not thank me. Let me go."

"Answer," vociferated Mistress Nutter, disregarding the caution, and speaking in a sharp piercing voice, strangely contrasting with her ordinary utterance. "Answer, I say, or I will beat thee to the dust."

And she continued her gestures, while the sufferings of the old hag evidently increased, and she crouched nearer and nearer to the ground, moaning out the words, "Do not force me to speak. You will repent it!—you will repent it!"

"Do not torment her thus, madam," cried Alizon, who with Dorothy looked at the strange scene with mingled apprehension and wonderment. "Much as I desire to know the secret of my birth, I would not obtain it thus."

As she uttered these words, the old woman contrived to shuffle off, and disappeared behind the tomb.

"Why did you interpose, Alizon," cried Mistress Nutter, somewhat angrily, and dropping her hands. "You broke the power I had over her. I would have compelled her to speak."

"I thank you, gracious lady, for your consideration," replied Alizon, gratefully; "but the sight was too painful."

"What has become of her—where is she gone?" cried Dorothy, peeping behind the tomb. "She has crept into this vault, I suppose."

"Do not trouble yourelf about her more, Dorothy," said Mistress Nutter, resuming her wonted voice and wonted looks. "Let us return to the house. Thus much is ascertained, Alizon, that you are no child of your supposed parent. Wait a little, and the rest shall be found out for you. And, meantime, be assured that I take strong interest in you."

"That we all do," added Dorothy.

"Thank you! thank you!" exclaimed Alizon, almost overpowered.

With this they went forth, and, traversing the shafted aisle, quitted the conventual church, and took their way along the alley leading to the garden.

"Say not a word at present to Elizabeth Device of the information you have obtained, Alizon," observed Mistress Nutter. "I have reasons for this counsel, which I will afterwards explain to you. And do you keep silence on the subject, Dorothy."

"May I not tell Richard?" said the young lady.

"Not Richard—not any one," returned Mistress Nutter, "or you may seriously affect Alizon's prospects."

"You have cautioned me in time," cried Dorothy, "for here comes my brother with our cousin Nicholas."

And as she spoke a turn in the alley showed Richard and Nicholas Assheton advancing towards them.

A strange revolution had been produced in Alizon's feelings by the events of the last half hour. The opinions expressed by Dorothy Assheton, as to her birth, had been singularly confirmed by Mother Chattox; but could reliance be placed on the old woman's assertions? Might they not have been made with mischievous intent? And was it not possible, nay, probable, that, in her place of concealment behind the tomb, the vindictive hag had overheard the previous conversation with Dorothy, and based her own declaration upon it? All these suggestions occurred to Alizon, but the previous idea having once gained admission to her breast, soon established itself firmly there, in spite of doubts and misgivings, and began to mix itself up with new thoughts and wishes, with which other persons were connected; for she could not help fancying she might be well-born, and if so the vast distance heretofore existing between her and Richard Assheton might be greatly diminished, if not altogether removed. So rapid is the progress of thought, that only a few minutes were required for this long train of reflections to pass through her mind, and it was merely put to flight by the approach of the main object of her thoughts.

On joining the party, Richard Assheton saw plainly that something had happened; but as both his sister and Alizon laboured under evident embarrassment, he abstained from making inquiries as to its cause for the present, hoping a better opportunity of doing so would occur, and the conversation was kept up by Nicholas Assheton, who described, in his wonted lively manner, the encounter with Mother Chattox and Nance Redferne, the swimming of the latter, and the trickery and punishment of Potts. During the recital Mistress Nutter often glanced uneasily at the two girls, but neither of them offered any interruption until Nicholas had finished, when Dorothy, taking her brother's hand, said, with a look of affectionate admiration, "You acted like yourself, dear Richard."

Alizon did not venture to give utterance to the same sentiment, but her looks plainly expressed it.

"I only wish you had punished that cruel James Device, as well as saved poor Nance," added Dorothy.

"Hush!" exclaimed Richard, glancing at Alizon.

"You need not be afraid of hurting her feelings," cried the young lady. "She does not mind him now."

"What do you mean, Dorothy?" cried Richard, in surprise.

"Oh, nothing—nothing," she replied, hastily.

"Perhaps you will explain," said Richard to Alizon.

"Indeed I cannot," she answered in confusion.

"You would have laughed to see Potts creep out of the river," said Nicholas, turning to Dorothy; "he looked just like a drowned rat—ha!—ha!"

"You have made a bitter enemy of him, Nicholas," observed Mistress Nutter; "so look well to yourself."

"I heed him not," rejoined the squire; "he knows me now too well to meddle with me again, and I shall take good care how I put myself in his power. One thing I may mention, to show the impotent malice of the knave. Just as he was setting off, he said, 'This is not the only discovery of witchcraft I have made to-day. I have another case nearer home.' What could he mean?"

"I know not," replied Mistress Nutter, a shade of disquietude passing over her countenance. "But he is quite capable of bringing the charge against you or any of us."

"He is so," said Nicholas. "After what has occurred, I wonder whether he will go over to Rough Lee to-morrow?"

"Very likely not," replied Mistress Nutter, "and in that case Master Roger Nowell must provide some other person competent to examine the boundary-line of the properties on his behalf."

"Then you are confident of the adjudication being in your favour?" said Nicholas.

"Quite so," replied Mistress Nutter, with a self-satisfied smile.

"The result, I hope, may justify your expectation," said Nicholas; "but it is right to tell you, that Sir Ralph, in consenting to postpone his decision, has only done so out of consideration to you. If the division of the properties be as represented by him, Master Nowell will unquestionably obtain an award in his favour."

"Under such circumstances he may," said Mistress Nutter; "but you will find the contrary turn out to be the fact. I will show you a plan I have had lately prepared, and you can then judge for yourself."

While thus conversing, the party passed through a door in the high stone wall dividing the garden from the court, and proceeded towards the principal entrance of the mansion. Built out of the ruins of the Abbey, which had served as a very convenient quarry for the construction of this edifice, as well as for Portfield, the house was large and irregular, planned chiefly with the view of embodying part of the old abbot's lodging, and consisting of a wide front, with two wings, one of which looked into the court, and the other, comprehending the long gallery, into the garden. The old north-east gate of the Abbey, with its lofty archway and embattled walls, served as an entrance to the great court-yard, and at its wicket ordinarily stood Ned Huddlestone, the porter, though he was absent on the present occasion, being occupied with the May-day festivities. Immediately opposite the gateway sprang a flight of stone steps, with a double landing-place and a broad balustrade of the same material, on the lowest pillar of which was placed a large escutcheon sculptured with the arms of the family—argent, a mullet sable—with a rebus on the name—an ash on a tun. The great door to which these steps conducted stood wide open, and before it, on the upper landing-place, were collected Lady Assheton, Mistress Braddyll, Mistress Nicholas Assheton, and some other dames, laughing and conversing together. Some long-eared spaniels, favourites of the lady of the house, were chasing each other up and down the steps, disturbing the slumbers of a couple of fine blood-hounds in the court-yard; or persecuting the proud peafowl that strutted about to display their gorgeous plumage to the spectators.

On seeing the party approach, Lady Assheton came down to meet them.

"You have been long absent," she said to Dorothy; "but I suppose you have been exploring the ruins?"

"Yes, we have not left a hole or corner unvisited," was the reply.

"That is right," said Lady Assheton. "I knew you would make a good guide, Dorothy. Of course you have often seen the old conventual church before, Alizon?"

"I am ashamed to say I have not, your ladyship," she replied.

"Indeed!" exclaimed Lady Assheton; "and yet you have lived all your life in the village?"

"Quite true, your ladyship," answered Alizon; "but these ruins have been prohibited to me."

"Not by us," said Lady Assheton; "they are open to every one."

"I was forbidden to visit them by my mother," said Alizon. And for the first time the word "mother" seemed strange to her.

Lady Assheton looked surprised, but made no remark, and mounting the steps, led the way to a spacious though not very lofty chamber, with huge uncovered rafters, and a floor of polished oak. Over a great fireplace at one side, furnished with immense andirons, hung a noble pair of antlers, and similar trophies of the chase were affixed to other parts of the walls. Here and there were likewise hung rusty skull-caps, breastplates, two-handed and single-handed swords, maces, halberts, and arquebusses, with chain-shirts, buff-jerkins, matchlocks, and other warlike implements, amongst which were several shields painted with the arms of the Asshetons and their alliances. High-backed chairs of gilt leather were ranged against the walls, and ebony cabinets inlaid with ivory were set between them at intervals, supporting rare specimens of glass and earthenware. Opposite the fireplace, stood a large clock, curiously painted and decorated with emblematical devices, with the signs of the zodiac, and provided with movable figures to strike the hours on a bell; while from the centre of the roof hung a great chandelier of stag's horn.

Lady Assheton did not tarry long within the entrance hall, for such it was, but conducted her guests through an arched doorway on the right into the long gallery. One hundred and fifty feet in length, and proportionately wide and lofty, this vast chamber had undergone little change since its original construction by the old owners of the Abbey. Panelled and floored with lustrous oak, and hung in some parts with antique tapestry, representing scriptural subjects, one side was pierced with lofty pointed windows, looking out upon the garden, while the southern extremity boasted a magnificent window, with heavy stone mullions, though of more recent workmanship than the framework, commanding Whalley Nab and the river. The furniture of the apartment was grand but gloomy, and consisted of antique chairs and tables belonging to the Abbey. Some curious ecclesiastical sculptures, wood carvings, and saintly images, were placed at intervals near the walls, and on the upper panels were hung a row of family portraits.

Quitting the rest of the company, and proceeding to the southern window, Dorothy invited Alizon and her brother to place themselves beside her on the cushioned seats of the deep embrasure. Little conversation, however, ensued; Alizon's heart being too full for utterance, and recent occurrences engrossing Dorothy's thoughts, to the exclusion of every thing else. Having made one or two unsuccessful efforts to engage them in talk, Richard likewise lapsed into silence, and gazed out on the lovely scenery before him. The evening has been described as beautiful; and the swift Calder, as it hurried by, was tinged with rays of the declining sun, whilst the woody heights of Whalley Nab were steeped in the same rosy light. But the view failed to interest Richard in his present

mood, and after a brief survey, he stole a look at Alizon, and was surprised to find her in tears.

"What saddening thoughts cross you, fair girl?" he inquired, with deep interest.

"I can hardly account for my sudden despondency," she replied; "but I have heard that great happiness is the precursor of dejection, and the saying I suppose must be true, for I have been happier to-day than I ever was before in my life. But the feeling of sadness is now past," she added, smiling.

"I am glad of it," said Richard. "May I not know what has occurred to you?"

"Not at present," interposed Dorothy; "but I am sure you will be pleased when you are made acquainted with the circumstance. I would tell you now if I might."

"May I guess?" said Richard.

"I don't know," rejoined Dorothy, who was dying to tell him. "May he?"

"Oh no, no!" cried Alizon.

"You are very perverse," said Richard, with a look of disappointment. "There can be no harm in guessing; and you can please yourself as to giving an answer. I fancy, then, that Alizon has made some discovery."

Dorothy nodded.

"Relative to her parentage?" pursued Richard.

Another nod.

"She has found out she is not Elizabeth Device's daughter?" said Richard.

"Some witch must have told you this," exclaimed Dorothy.

"Have I indeed guessed rightly?" cried Richard, with an eagerness that startled his sister. "Do not keep me in suspense. Speak plainly."

"How am I to answer him, Alizon?" said Dorothy.

"Nay, do not appeal to me, dear young lady," she answered, blushing.

"I have gone too far to retreat," rejoined Dorothy, "and therefore, despite Mistress Nutter's interdiction, the truth shall out. You have guessed shrewdly, Richard. A discovery has been made—a very great discovery. Alizon is not the daughter of Elizabeth Device."

"The intelligence delights me, though it scarcely surprises me," cried Richard, gazing with heartfelt pleasure at the blushing girl; "for I was sure of the fact from the first. Nothing so good and charming as Alizon could spring from so foul a source. How and by what means you have derived this information, as well as whose daughter you are, I shall wait patiently to learn. Enough for me you are not the sister of James Device—enough you are not the grandchild of Mother Demdike."

"You know all I know, in knowing thus much," replied Alizon, timidly. "And secrecy has been enjoined by Mistress Nutter, in order that the rest may be found out. But oh! should the hopes I have—perhaps too hastily—indulged, prove fallacious—"

"They cannot be fallacious, Alizon," interrupted Richard, eagerly. "On that score rest easy. Your connexion with that wretched family is for ever broken. But I can see the necessity of caution, and shall observe it. And so Mistress Nutter takes an interest in you?"

"The strongest," replied Dorothy; "but see! she comes this way."

But we must now go back for a short space.

While Mistress Nutter and Nicholas were seated at a table examining a plan of the Rough Lee estates, the latter was greatly astonished to see the door open and give admittance to Master Potts, who he fancied snugly lying between a couple of blankets, at the Dragon. The attorney was clad in a riding-dress, which he had exchanged for his wet habiliments, and was accompanied by Sir Ralph Assheton and Master Roger Nowell. On seeing Nicholas, he instantly stepped up to him.

"Aha! squire," he cried, "you did not expect to see me again so soon, eh! A pottle of hot sack put my blood into circulation, and having, luckily, a change of raiment in my valise, I am all right again. Not so easily got rid of, you see!"

"So it appears," replied Nicholas, laughing.

"We have a trifling account to settle together, sir," said the attorney, putting on a serious look.

"Whenever you please, sir," replied Nicholas, good-humouredly, tapping the hilt of his sword.

"Not in that way," cried Potts, darting quickly back. "I never fight with those weapons—never. Our dispute must be settled in a court of law, sir—in a court of law. You understand, Master Nicholas?"

"There is a shrewd maxim, Master Potts, that he who is his own lawyer has a fool for his client," observed Nicholas, drily. "Would it not be better to stick to the defence of others, rather than practise in your own behalf?"

"You have expressed my opinion, Master Nicholas," observed Roger Nowell; "and I hope Master Potts will not commence any action on his own account till he has finished my business."

"Assuredly not, sir, since you desire it," replied the attorney, obsequiously. "But my motives must not be mistaken. I have a clear case of assault and battery against Master Nicholas Assheton, or I may proceed against him criminally for an attempt on my life."

"Have you given him no provocation, sir?" demanded Sir Ralph, sternly.

"No provocation can justify the treatment I have experienced, Sir Ralph," replied Potts. "However, to show I am a man of peace, and harbour no resentment, however just grounds I may have for such a feeling, I am willing to make up the matter with Master Nicholas, provided—"

"He offers you a handsome consideration, eh?" said the squire.

"Provided he offers me a handsome apology—such as a gentleman may accept," rejoined Potts, consequentially.

"And which he will not refuse, I am sure," said Sir Ralph, glancing at his cousin.

"I should certainly be sorry to have drowned you," said the squire—"very sorry."

"Enough—enough—I am content," cried Potts, holding out his hand, which Nicholas grasped with an energy that brought tears into the little man's eyes.

"I am glad the matter is amicably adjusted," observed Roger Nowell, "for I suspect both parties have been to blame. And I must now request you, Master Potts, to forego your

search, and inquiries after witches, till such time as you have settled this question of the boundary line for me. One matter at a time, my good sir."

"But, Master Nowell," cried Potts, "my much esteemed and singular good client—"

"I will have no nay," interrupted Nowell, peremptorily.

"Hum!" muttered Potts; "I shall lose the best chance of distinction ever thrown in my way."

"I care not," said Nowell.

"Just as you came up, Master Nowell," observed Nicholas, "I was examining a plan of the disputed estates in Pendle Forest. It differs from yours, and, if correct, certainly substantiates Mistress Nutter's claim."

"I have mine with me," replied Nowell, producing a plan, and opening it. "We can compare the two, if you please. The line runs thus:—From the foot of Pendle Hill, beginning with Barley Booth, the boundary is marked by a stone wall, as far as certain fields in the occupation of John Ogden. Is it not so?"

"It is," replied Nicholas, comparing the statement with the other plan.

"It then runs on in a northerly direction," pursued Nowell, "towards Burst Clough, and here the landmarks are certain stones placed in the moor, one hundred yards apart, and giving me twenty acres of this land, and Mistress Nutter ten."

"On the contrary," replied Nicholas. "This plan gives Mistress Nutter twenty acres, and you ten."

"Then the plan is wrong," cried Nowell, sharply.

"It has been carefully prepared," said Mistress Nutter, who had approached the table.

"No matter; it is wrong, I say," cried Nowell, angrily.

"You see where the landmarks are placed, Master Nowell," said Nicholas, pointing to the measurement. "I merely go by them."

"The landmarks are improperly placed in that plan," cried Nowell.

"I will examine them myself to-morrow," said Potts, taking out a large memorandum-hook; "there cannot be an error of ten acres—ten perches—or ten feet, possibly, but acres—pshaw!"

"Laugh as you please; but go on," said Mrs. Nutter.

"Well, then," pursued Nicholas, "the line approaches the bank of a rivulet, called Moss Brook—a rare place for woodcocks and snipes that Moss Brook, I may remark—the land on the left consisting of five acres of waste land, marked by a sheepfold, and two posts set up in a line with it, belonging to Mistress Nutter."

"To Mistress Nutter!" exclaimed Nowell, indignantly. "To me, you mean."

"It is here set down to Mistress Nutter," said Nicholas.

"Then it is set down wrongfully," cried Nowell. "That plan is altogether incorrect."

"On which side of the field does the rivulet flow?" inquired Potts.

"On the right," replied Nicholas.

"On the left," cried Nowell.

"There must be some extraordinary mistake," said Potts. "I shall make a note of that, and examine it to-morrow.—N.B. Waste land—sheepfold—rivulet called Moss Brook, flowing on the left."

"On the right," cried Mistress Nutter.

"That remains to be seen," rejoined Potts, "I have made the entry as on the left."

"Go on, Master Nicholas," said Nowell, "I should like to see how many other errors that plan contains."

"Passing the rivulet," pursued the squire, "we come to a footpath leading to the limestone quarry, about which there can be no mistake. Then by Cat Gallows Wood and Swallow Hole; and then by another path to Worston Moor, skirting a hut in the occupation of James Device—ha! ha! Master Jem, are you here? I thought you dwelt with your grandmother at Malkin Tower—excuse me, Master Nowell, but one must relieve the dulness of this plan by an exclamation or so—and here being waste land

again, the landmarks are certain stones set at intervals towards Hook Cliff, and giving Mistress Nutter two-thirds of the whole moor, and Master Roger Nowell one-third."

"False again," cried Nowell, furiously. "The two-thirds are mine, the one-third Mistress Nutter's."

"Somebody must be very wrong," cried Nicholas.

"Very wrong indeed," added Potts; "and I suspect that that somebody is—"

"Master Nowell," said Mistress Nutter.

"Mistress Nutter," cried Master Nowell.

"Both are wrong and both right, according to your own showing," said Nicholas, laughing.

"To-morrow will decide the question," said Potts.

"Better wait till then," interposed Sir Ralph. "Take both plans with you, and you will then ascertain which is correct."

"Agreed," cried Nowell. "Here is mine."

"And here is mine," said Mistress Nutter. "I will abide by the investigation."

"And Master Potts and I will verify the statements," said Nicholas.

"We will, sir," replied the attorney, putting his memorandum book in his pocket. "We will."

The plans were then delivered to the custody of Sir Ralph, who promised to hand them over to Potts and Nicholas on the morrow.

The party then separated; Mistress Nutter shaping her course towards the window where Alizon and the two other young people were seated, while Potts, plucking the squire's sleeve, said, with a very mysterious look, that he desired a word with him in private. Wondering what could be the nature of the communication the attorney desired to make, Nicholas withdrew with him into a corner, and Nowell, who saw them retire, and could not help watching them with some curiosity, remarked that the squire's

hilarious countenance fell as he listened to the attorney, while, on the contrary, the features of the latter gleamed with malicious satisfaction.

Meanwhile, Mistress Nutter approached Alizon, and beckoning her towards her, they quitted the room together. As the young girl went forth, she cast a wistful look at Dorothy and her brother.

"You think with me, that that lovely girl is well born?" said Dorothy, as Alizon disappeared.

"It were heresy to doubt it," answered Richard.

"Shall I tell you another secret?" she continued, regarding him fixedly—"if, indeed, it be a secret, for you must be sadly wanting in discernment if you have not found it out ere this. She loves you."

"Dorothy!" exclaimed Richard.

"I am sure of it," she rejoined. "But I would not tell you this, if I were not quite equally sure that you love her in return."

"On my faith, Dorothy, you give yourself credit for wonderful penetration," cried Richard.

"Not a whit more than I am entitled to," she answered. "Nay, it will not do to attempt concealment with me. If I had not been certain of the matter before, your manner now would convince me. I am very glad of it. She will make a charming sister, and I shall he very fond of her."

"How you do run on, madcap!" cried her brother, trying to look displeased, but totally failing in assuming the expression.

"Stranger things have come to pass," said Dorothy; "and one reads in story-hooks of young nobles marrying village maidens in spite of parental opposition. I dare say you will get nobody's consent to the marriage but mine, Richard."

"I dare say not," he replied, rather blankly.

"That is, if she should not turn out to be somebody's daughter," pursued Dorothy; "somebody, I mean, quite as great as the heir of Middleton, which I make no doubt she will."

"I hope she may," replied Richard.

"Why, you don't mean to say you wouldn't marry her if she didn't!" cried Dorothy. "I'm ashamed of you, Richard."

"It would remove all opposition, at all events," said her brother.

"So it would," said Dorothy; "and now I'll tell you another notion of mine, Richard. Somehow or other, it has come into my head that Alizon is the daughter of—whom do you think?"

"Whom!" he cried.

"Guess," she rejoined.

"I can't," he exclaimed, impatiently.

"Well, then, I'll tell you without more ado," she answered. "Mind, it's only my notion, and I've no precise grounds for it. But, in my opinion, she's the daughter of the lady who has just left the room."

"Of Mistress Nutter!" ejaculated Richard, starting. "What makes you think so?"

"The extraordinary and otherwise unaccountable interest she takes in her," replied Dorothy. "And, if you recollect, Mistress Nutter had an infant daughter who was lost in a strange manner."

"I thought the child died," replied Richard; "but it may be as you say. I hope it is so."

"Time will show," said Dorothy; "but I have made up my mind about the matter."

At this moment Nicholas Assheton came up to them, looking grave and uneasy.

"What has happened?" asked Richard, anxiously.

"I have just received some very unpleasant intelligence," replied Nicholas. "I told you of a menace uttered by that confounded Potts, on quitting me after his ducking. He has now spoken out plainly, and declares he overheard part of a conversation between Mistress Nutter and Elizabeth Device, which took place in the ruins of the convent church this morning, and he is satisfied that—"

"Well!" cried Richard, breathlessly.

"That Mistress Nutter is a witch, and in league with witches," continued Nicholas.

"Ha!" exclaimed Richard, turning deathly pale.

"I suspect the rascal has invented the charge," said Nicholas; "but he is quite unscrupulous enough to make it; and, if made, it will be fatal to our relative's reputation, if not to her life."

"It is false, I am sure of it," cried Richard, torn by conflicting emotions.

"Would I could think so!" cried Dorothy, suddenly recollecting Mistress Nutter's strange demeanour in the little chapel, and the unaccountable influence she seemed to exercise over the old crone. "But something has occurred to-day that leads me to a contrary conviction."

"What is it? Speak!" cried Richard.

"Not now—not now," replied Dorothy.

"Whatever suspicions you may entertain, keep silence, or you will destroy Mistress Nutter," said Nicholas.

"Fear me not," rejoined Dorothy. "Oh, Alizon!" she murmured, "that this unhappy question should arise at such a moment."

"Do you indeed believe the charge, Dorothy?" asked Richard, in a low voice.

"I do," she answered in the same tone. "If Alizon be her daughter, she can never be your wife."

"How?" cried Richard.

"Never—never!" repeated Dorothy, emphatically. "The daughter of a witch, be that witch named Elizabeth Device or Alice Nutter, is no mate for you."

"You prejudge Mistress Nutter, Dorothy," he cried.

"Alas! Richard. I have too good reason for what I say," she answered, sadly.

Richard uttered an exclamation of despair. And on the instant the lively sounds of tabor and pipe, mixed with the jingling of bells, arose from the court-yard, and presently afterwards an attendant entered to announce that the May-day revellers were without, and directions were given by Sir Ralph that they should be shown into the great banqueting-hall below the gallery, which had been prepared for their reception.

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CHAPTER VIII.—THE REVELATION.

On quitting the long gallery, Mistress Nutter and Alizon ascended a wide staircase, and, traversing a corridor, came to an antique, tapestried chamber, richly but cumbrously furnished, having a carved oak bedstead with sombre hangings, a few high-backed chairs of the same material, and a massive wardrobe, with shrine-work atop, and two finely sculptured figures, of the size of life, in the habits of Cistertian monks, placed as supporters at either extremity. At one side of the bed the tapestry was drawn aside, showing the entrance to a closet or inner room, and opposite it there was a great yawning fireplace, with a lofty mantelpiece and chimney projecting beyond the walls. The windows were narrow, and darkened by heavy transom bars and small diamond panes while the view without, looking upon Whalley Nab, was obstructed by the contiguity of a tall cypress, whose funereal branches added to the general gloom. The room was one of those formerly allotted to their guests by the hospitable abbots, and had undergone little change since their time, except in regard to furniture; and even that appeared old and faded now. What with the gloomy arras, the shrouded bedstead, and the Gothic wardrobe with its mysterious figures, the chamber had a grim, ghostly air, and so the young girl thought on entering it.

"I have brought you hither, Alizon," said Mistress Nutter, motioning her to a seat, "that we may converse without chance of interruption, for I have much to say. On first seeing you to-day, your appearance, so superior to the rest of the May-day mummers, struck me forcibly, and I resolved to question Elizabeth Device about you. Accordingly I bade her join me in the Abbey gardens. She did so, and had not long left me when I accidentally met you and the others in the Lacy Chapel. When questioned, Elizabeth affected great surprise, and denied positively that there was any foundation for the idea that you were other than her child; but, notwithstanding her asseverations, I could see from her confused manner that there was more in the notion than she chose to admit, and I determined to have recourse to other means of arriving at the truth, little expecting my suspicions would be so soon confirmed by Mother Chattox. To my interrogation of that old woman, you were yourself a party, and I am now rejoiced that you interfered to prevent me from prosecuting my inquiries to the utmost. There was one present from whom the secret of your birth must be strictly kept—at least, for awhile—and my impatience carried me too far."

"I only obeyed a natural impulse, madam," said Alizon; "but I am at a loss to conceive what claim I can possibly have to the consideration you show me."

"Listen to me, and you shall learn," replied Mistress Nutter. "It is a sad tale, and its recital will tear open old wounds, but it must not be withheld on that account. I do not ask you to bury the secrets I am about to impart in the recesses of your bosom. You will do so when you learn them, without my telling you. When little more than your age I was wedded; but not to him I would have chosen if choice had been permitted me. The union I need scarcely say was unhappy—most unhappy—though my discomforts were scrupulously concealed, and I was looked upon as a devoted wife, and my husband as a model of conjugal affection. But this was merely the surface—internally all was strife and misery. Erelong my dislike of my husband increased to absolute hate, while on his part, though he still regarded me with as much passion as heretofore, he became frantically jealous—and above all of Edward Braddyll of Portfield, who, as his bosom friend, and my distant relative, was a frequent visiter at the house. To relate the numerous exhibitions of jealousy that occurred would answer little purpose, and it will be enough to say that not a word or look passed between Edward and myself but was misconstrued. I took care never to be alone with our guest—nor to give any just ground for suspicion—but my caution availed nothing. An easy remedy would have been to forbid Edward the house, but this my husband's pride rejected. He preferred to endure the jealous torment occasioned by the presence of his wife's fancied lover, and inflict needless anguish on her, rather than brook the jeers of a few indifferent acquaintances. The same feeling made him desire to keep up an apparent good understanding with me; and so far I seconded his views, for I shared in his pride, if in nothing else. Our quarrels were all in private, when no eye could see us—no ear listen."

"Yours is a melancholy history, madam," remarked Alizon, in a tone of profound interest.

"You will think so ere I have done," returned the lady, sadly. "The only person in my confidence, and aware of my secret sorrows, was Elizabeth Device, who with her husband, John Device, then lived at Rough Lee. Serving me in the quality of tire-woman and personal attendant, she could not be kept in ignorance of what took place, and the poor soul offered me all the sympathy in her power. Much was it needed, for I had no other sympathy. After awhile, I know not from what cause, unless from some imprudence on the part of Edward Braddyll, who was wild and reckless, my husband conceived worse suspicions than ever of me, and began to treat me with such harshness and cruelty, that, unable longer to endure his violence, I appealed to my father. But he was of a stern and arbitrary nature, and, having forced me into the match, would not listen to my complaints, but bade me submit. 'It was my duty to do so,' he said, and he added some cutting expressions to the effect that I deserved the treatment I experienced, and dismissed me. Driven to desperation, I sought counsel and assistance from one I should most have avoided—from Edward Braddyll—and he proposed flight from my husband's roof—flight with him."

"But you were saved, madam?" cried Alizon, greatly shocked by the narration. "You were saved?"

"Hear me out," rejoined Mistress Nutter. "Outraged as my feelings were, and loathsome as my husband was to me, I spurned the base proposal, and instantly quitted my false friend. Nor would I have seen him more, if permitted; but that secret interview with him was my first and last;—for it had been witnessed by my husband."

"Ha!" exclaimed Alizon.

"Concealed behind the arras, Richard Nutter heard enough to confirm his worst suspicions," pursued the lady; "but he did not hear my justification. He saw Edward Braddyll at my feet—he heard him urge me to fly—but he did not wait to learn if I consented, and, looking upon me as guilty, left his hiding-place to take measures for frustrating the plan, he supposed concerted between us. That night I was made prisoner in my room, and endured treatment the most inhuman. But a proposal was made by my husband, that promised some alleviation of my suffering. Henceforth we were to meet only in public, when a semblance of affection was to be maintained on both sides. This was done, he said, to save my character, and preserve his own name unspotted in the eyes of others, however tarnished it might be in his own. I willingly consented to the arrangement; and thus for a brief space I became tranquil, if not happy. But another and severer trial awaited me."

"Alas, madam!" exclaimed Alizon, sympathisingly.

"My cup of sorrow, I thought, was full," pursued Mistress Nutter; "but the drop was wanting to make it overflow. It came soon enough. Amidst my griefs I expected to be a mother, and with that thought how many fond and cheering anticipations mingled! In my child I hoped to find a balm for my woes: in its smiles and innocent endearments a compensation for the harshness and injustice I had experienced. How little did I foresee that it was to be a new instrument of torture to me; and that I should be cruelly robbed of the only blessing ever vouchsafed me!"

"Did the child die, madam?" asked Alizon.

"You shall hear," replied Mistress Nutter. "A daughter was born to me. I was made happy by its birth. A new existence, bright and unclouded, seemed dawning upon me; but it was like a sunburst on a stormy day. Some two months before this event Elizabeth Device had given birth to a daughter, and she now took my child under her fostering care; for weakness prevented me from affording it the support it is a mother's blessed

privilege to bestow. She seemed as fond of it as myself; and never was babe more calculated to win love than my little Millicent. Oh! how shall I go on? The retrospect I am compelled to take is frightful, but I cannot shun it. The foul and false suspicions entertained by my husband began to settle on the child. He would not believe it to be his own. With violent oaths and threats he first announced his odious suspicions to Elizabeth Device, and she, full of terror, communicated them to me. The tidings filled me with inexpressible alarm; for I knew, if the dread idea had once taken possession of him, it would never be removed, while what he threatened would be executed. I would have fled at once with my poor babe if I had known where to go; but I had no place of shelter. It would be in vain to seek refuge with my father; and I had no other relative or friend whom I could trust. Where then should I fly? At last I bethought me of a retreat, and arranged a plan of escape with Elizabeth Device. Vain were my precautions. On that very night, I was startled from slumber by a sudden cry from the nurse, who was seated by the fire, with the child on her knees. It was long past midnight, and all the household were at rest. Two persons had entered the room. One was my ruthless husband, Richard Nutter; the other was John Device, a powerful ruffianly fellow, who planted himself near the door.

"Marching quickly towards Elizabeth, who had arisen on seeing him, my husband snatched the child from her before I could seize it, and with a violent blow on the chest felled me to the ground, where I lay helpless, speechless. With reeling senses I heard Elizabeth cry out that it was her own child, and call upon her husband to save it. Richard Nutter paused, but re-assured by a laugh of disbelief from his ruffianly follower, he told Elizabeth the pitiful excuse would not avail to save the brat. And then I saw a weapon gleam—there was a feeble piteous cry—a cry that might have moved a demon—but it did not move him. With wicked words and blood-imbrued hands he cast the body on the fire. The horrid sight was too much for me, and I became senseless."

"A dreadful tale, indeed, madam!" cried Alizon, frozen with horror.

"The crime was hidden—hidden from the eyes of men, but mark the retribution that followed," said Mistress Nutter; her eyes sparkling with vindictive joy. "Of the two murderers both perished miserably. John Device was drowned in a moss-pool. Richard Nutter's end was terrible, sharpened by the pangs of remorse, and marked by frightful suffering. But another dark event preceded his death, which may have laid a crime the more on his already heavily-burdened soul. Edward Braddyll, the object of his jealousy and hate, suddenly sickened of a malady so strange and fearful, that all who saw him affirmed it the result of witchcraft. None thought of my husband's agency in the dark affair except myself; but knowing he had held many secret conferences about the time with Mother Chattox, I more than suspected him. The sick man died; and from that hour Richard Nutter knew no rest. Ever on horseback, or fiercely carousing, he sought in

vain to stifle remorse. Visions scared him by night, and vague fears pursued him by day. He would start at shadows, and talk wildly. To me his whole demeanour was altered; and he strove by every means in his power to win my love. But he could not give me back the treasure he had taken. He could not bring to life my murdered babe. Like his victim, he fell ill on a sudden, and of a strange and terrible sickness. I saw he could not recover, and therefore tended him carefully. He died; and I shed no tear."

"Alas!" exclaimed Alizon, "though guilty, I cannot but compassionate him."

"You are right to do so, Alizon," said Mistress Nutter, rising, while the young girl rose too; "for he was your father."

"My father!" she exclaimed, in amazement. "Then you are my mother?"

"I am—I am," replied Mistress Nutter, straining her to her bosom. "Oh, my child!—my dear child!" she cried. "The voice of nature from the first pleaded eloquently in your behalf, and I should have been deaf to all impulses of affection if I had not listened to the call. I now trace in every feature the lineaments of the babe I thought lost for ever. All is clear to me. The exclamation of Elizabeth Device, which, like my ruthless husband, I looked upon as an artifice to save the infant's life, I now find to be the truth. Her child perished instead of mine. How or why she exchanged the infants on that night remains to be explained, but that she did so is certain; while that she should afterwards conceal the circumstance is easily comprehended, from a natural dread of her own husband as well as of mine. It is possible that from some cause she may still deny the truth, but I can make it her interest to speak plainly. The main difficulty will lie in my public acknowledgment of you. But, at whatever cost, it shall be made."

"Oh! consider it well;" said Alizon, "I will be your daughter in love—in duty—in all but name. But sully not my poor father's honour, which even at the peril of his soul he sought to maintain! How can I be owned as your daughter without involving the discovery of this tragic history?"

"You are right, Alizon," rejoined Mistress Nutter, thoughtfully. "It will bring the dark deed to light. But you shall never return to Elizabeth Device. You shall go with me to Rough Lee, and take up your abode in the house where I was once so wretched—but where I shall now be full of happiness with you. You shall see the dark spots on the hearth, which I took to be your blood."

"If not mine, it was blood spilt by my father," said Alizon, with a shudder.

Was it fancy, or did a low groan break upon her ear? It must be imaginary, for Mistress Nutter seemed unconscious of the dismal sound. It was now growing rapidly dark, and the more distant objects in the room were wrapped in obscurity; but Alizon's gaze rested on the two monkish figures supporting the wardrobe.

"Look there, mother," she said to Mistress Nutter.

"Where?" cried the lady, turning round quickly, "Ah! I see. You alarm yourself needlessly, my child. Those are only carved figures of two brethren of the Abbey. They are said, I know not with what truth—to be statues of John Paslew and Borlace Alvetham."

"I thought they stirred," said Alizon.

"It was mere fancy," replied Mistress Nutter. "Calm yourself, sweet child. Let us think of other things—of our newly discovered relationship. Henceforth, to me you are Millicent Nutter; though to others you must still be Alizon Device. My sweet Millicent," she cried, embracing her again and again. "Ah, little—little did I think to see you more!"

Alizon's fears were speedily chased away.

"Forgive me, dear mother," she cried, "if I have failed to express the full delight I experience in my restitution to you. The shock of your sad tale at first deadened my joy, while the suddenness of the information respecting myself so overwhelmed me, that like one chancing upon a hidden treasure, and gazing at it confounded, I was unable to credit my own good fortune. Even now I am quite bewildered; and no wonder, for many thoughts, each of different import, throng upon me. Independently of the pleasure and natural pride I must feel in being acknowledged by you as a daughter, it is a source of the deepest satisfaction to me to know that I am not, in any way, connected with Elizabeth Device—not from her humble station—for poverty weighs little with me in comparison with virtue and goodness—but from her sinfulness. You know the dark offence laid to her charge?"

"I do," replied Mistress Nutter, in a low deep tone, "but I do not believe it."

"Nor I," returned Alizon. "Still, she acts as if she were the wicked thing she is called; avoids all religious offices; shuns all places of worship; and derides the Holy Scriptures. Oh, mother! you will comprehend the frequent conflict of feelings I must have endured. You will understand my horror when I have sometimes thought myself the daughter of a witch."

"Why did you not leave her if you thought so?" said Mistress Nutter, frowning.

"I could not leave her," replied Alizon, "for I then thought her my mother."

Mistress Nutter fell upon her daughter's neck, and wept aloud. "You have an excellent heart, my child," she said at length, checking her emotion.

"I have nothing to complain of in Elizabeth Device, dear mother," she replied. "What she denied herself, she did not refuse me; and though I have necessarily many and great deficiencies, you will find in me, I trust, no evil principles. And, oh! shall we not strive to rescue that poor benighted creature from the pit? We may yet save her."

"It is too late," replied Mistress Nutter in a sombre tone.

"It cannot be too late," said Alizon, confidently. "She cannot be beyond redemption. But even if she should prove intractable, poor little Jennet may be preserved. She is yet a child, with some good—though, alas! much evil, also—in her nature. Let our united efforts be exerted in this good work, and we must succeed. The weeds extirpated, the flowers will spring up freely, and bloom in beauty."

"I can have nothing to do with her," said Mistress Nutter, in a freezing tone—"nor must you."

"Oh! say not so, mother," cried Alizon. "You rob me of half the happiness I feel in being restored to you. When I was Jennets sister, I devoted myself to the task of reclaiming her. I hoped to be her guardian angel—to step between her and the assaults of evil—and I cannot, will not, now abandon her. If no longer my sister, she is still dear to me. And recollect that I owe a deep debt of gratitude to her mother—a debt I can never pay."

"How so?" cried Mistress Nutter. "You owe her nothing—but the contrary."

"I owe her a life," said Alizon. "Was not her infant's blood poured out for mine! And shall I not save the child left her, if I can?"

"I shall not oppose your inclinations," replied Mistress Nutter, with reluctant assent; "but Elizabeth, I suspect, will thank you little for your interference."

"Not now, perhaps," returned Alizon; "but a time will come when she will do so."

While this conversation took place, it had been rapidly growing dark, and the gloom at length increased so much, that the speakers could scarcely see each other's faces. The

sudden and portentous darkness was accounted for by a vivid flash of lightning, followed by a low growl of thunder rumbling over Whalley Nab. The mother and daughter drew close together, and Mistress Nutter passed her arm round Alizon's neck.

The storm came quickly on, with forked and dangerous lightning, and loud claps of thunder threatening mischief. Presently, all its fury seemed collected over the Abbey. The red flashes hissed, and the peals of thunder rolled overhead. But other terrors were added to Alizon's natural dread of the elemental warfare. Again she fancied the two monkish figures, which had before excited her alarm, moved, and even shook their arms menacingly at her. At first she attributed this wild idea to her overwrought imagination, and strove to convince herself of its fallacy by keeping her eyes steadily fixed upon them. But each succeeding flash only served to confirm her superstitious apprehensions.

Another circumstance contributed to heighten her alarm. Scared most probably by the storm, a large white owl fluttered down the chimney, and after wheeling twice or thrice round the chamber, settled upon the bed, hooting, puffing, ruffling its feathers, and glaring at her with eyes that glowed like fiery coals.

Mistress Nutter seemed little moved by the storm, though she kept a profound silence, but when Alizon gazed in her face, she was frightened by its expression, which reminded her of the terrible aspect she had worn at the interview with Mother Chattox.

All at once Mistress Nutter arose, and, rapid as the lightning playing around her and revealing her movements, made several passes, with extended hands, over her daughter; and on this the latter instantly fell back, as if fainting, though still retaining her consciousness; and, what was stranger still, though her eyes were closed, her power of sight remained.

In this condition she fancied invisible forms were moving about her. Strange sounds seemed to salute her ears, like the gibbering of ghosts, and she thought she felt the flapping of unseen wings around her.

All at once her attention was drawn—she knew not why—towards the closet, and from out it she fancied she saw issue the tall dark figure of a man. She was sure she saw him; for her imagination could not body forth features charged with such a fiendish expression, or eyes of such unearthly lustre. He was clothed in black, but the fashion of his raiments was unlike aught she had ever seen. His stature was gigantic, and a pale phosphoric light enshrouded him. As he advanced, forked lightnings shot into the room, and the thunder split overhead. The owl hooted fearfully, quitted its perch, and flew off by the way it had entered the chamber.

The Dark Shape came on. It stood beside Mistress Nutter, and she prostrated herself before it. The gestures of the figure were angry and imperious—those of Mistress Nutter supplicating. Their converse was drowned by the rattling of the storm. At last the figure pointed to Alizon, and the word "midnight" broke in tones louder than the thunder from its lips. All consciousness then forsook her.

How long she continued in this state she knew not, but the touch of a finger applied to her brow seemed to recall her suddenly to animation. She heaved a deep sigh, and looked around. A wondrous change had occurred. The storm had passed off, and the moon was shining brightly over the top of the cypress-tree, flooding the chamber with its gentle radiance, while her mother was bending over her with looks of tenderest affection.

"You are better now, sweet child," said Mistress Nutter. "You were overcome by the storm. It was sudden and terrible."

"Terrible, indeed!" replied Alizon, imperfectly recalling what had passed. "But it was not alone the storm that frightened me. This chamber has been invaded by evil beings. Methought I beheld a dark figure come from out yon closet, and stand before you."

"You have been thrown into a state of stupor by the influence of the electric fluid," replied Mistress Nutter, "and while in that condition visions have passed through your brain. That is all, my child."

"Oh! I hope so," said Alizon.

"Such ecstasies are of frequent occurrence," replied Mistress Nutter. "But, since you are quite recovered, we will descend to Lady Assheton, who may wonder at our absence. You will share this room with me to-night, my child; for, as I have already said, you cannot return to Elizabeth Device. I will make all needful explanations to Lady Assheton, and will see Elizabeth in the morning—perhaps to-night. Reassure yourself, sweet child. There is nothing to fear."

"I trust not, mother," replied Alizon. "But it would ease my mind to look into that closet."

"Do so, then, by all means," replied Mistress Nutter with a forced smile.

Alizon peeped timorously into the little room, which was lighted up by the moon's rays. There was a faded white habit, like the robe of a Cistertian monk, hanging in one corner, and beneath it an old chest. Alizon would fain have opened the chest, but Mistress

Nutter called out to her impatiently, "You will discover nothing, I am sure. Come, let us go down-stairs."

And they quitted the room together.

The Lancashire Witches Volume II by William Harrison Ainsworth

CHAPTER IX.—THE TWO PORTRAITS IN THE BANQUETING-HALL.

The banqueting-hall lay immediately under the long gallery, corresponding with it in all but height; and though in this respect it fell somewhat short of the magnificent upper room, it was quite lofty enough to admit of a gallery of its own for spectators and minstrels. Great pains had been taken in decorating the hall for the occasion. Between the forest of stags' horns that branched from the gallery rails were hung rich carpets, intermixed with garlands of flowers, and banners painted with the arms of the Assheton family, were suspended from the corners. Over the fireplace, where, despite the advanced season, a pile of turf and wood was burning, were hung two panoplies of arms, and above them, on a bracket, was set a complete suit of mail, once belonging to Richard Assheton, the first possessor of the mansion. On the opposite wall hung two remarkable portraits—the one representing a religious votaress in a loose robe of black, with wide sleeves, holding a rosary and missal in her hand, and having her brow and neck entirely concealed by the wimple, in which her head and shoulders were enveloped. Such of her features as could be seen were of extraordinary loveliness, though of a voluptuous character, the eyes being dark and languishing, and shaded by long lashes, and the lips carnation-hued and full. This was the fair votaress, Isole de Heton, who brought such scandal on the Abbey in the reign of Henry VI. The other portrait was that of an abbot, in the white gown and scapulary of the Cistertian order. The countenance was proud and stern, but tinctured with melancholy. In a small shield at one corner the arms were blazoned—argent, a fess between three mullets, sable, pierced of the field, a crescent for difference—proving it to be the portrait of John Paslew. Both pictures had been found in the abbot's lodgings, when taken possession of by Richard Assheton, but they owed their present position to his descendant, Sir Ralph, who discovering them in an out-of-the-way closet, where they had been cast aside, and struck with their extraordinary merit, hung them up as above stated.

The long oaken table, usually standing in the middle of the hall, had been removed to one side, to allow free scope for dancing and other pastimes, but it was still devoted to hospitable uses, being covered with trenchers and drinking-cups, and spread for a substantial repast. Near it stood two carvers, with aprons round their waists, brandishing long knives, while other yeomen of the kitchen and cellar were at hand to keep the trenchers well supplied, and the cups filled with strong ale, or bragget, as might suit the taste of the guests. Nor were these the only festive preparations. The upper part of the hall was reserved for Sir Ralph's immediate friends, and here, on a slightly raised elevation, stood a cross table, spread for a goodly supper, the snowy napery being ornamented with wreaths and ropes of flowers, and shining with costly vessels. At the

lower end of the room, beneath the gallery, which it served to support, was a Gothic screen, embellishing an open armoury, which made a grand display of silver plates and flagons. Through one of the doorways contrived in this screen, the May-day revellers were ushered into the hall by old Adam Whitworth, the white-headed steward.

"I pray you be seated, good masters, and you, too, comely dames," said Adam, leading them to the table, and assigning each a place with his wand. "Fall to, and spare not, for it is my honoured master's desire you should sup well. You will find that venison pasty worth a trial, and the baked red deer in the centre of the table is a noble dish. The fellow to it was served at Sir Ralph's own table at dinner, and was pronounced excellent. I pray you try it, masters.—Here, Ned Scargill, mind your office, good fellow, and break me that deer. And you, Paul Pimlot, exercise your craft on the venison pasty."

And as trencher after trencher was rapidly filled by the two carvers, who demeaned themselves in their task like men acquainted with the powers of rustic appetite, the old steward addressed himself to the dames.

"What can I do for you, fair mistresses?" he said. "Here be sack possets, junkets and cream, for such as like them—French puffs and Italian puddings, right good, I warrant you, and especially admired by my honourable good lady. Indeed, I am not sure she hath not lent a hand herself in their preparation. Then here be fritters in the court fashion, made with curds of sack posset, eggs and ale, and seasoned with nutmeg and pepper. You will taste them, I am sure, for they are favourites with our sovereign lady, the queen. Here, Gregory, Dickon—bestir yourselves, knaves, and pour forth a cup of sack for each of these dames. As you drink, mistresses, neglect not the health of our honourable good master Sir Ralph, and his lady. It is well—it is well. I will convey to them both your dutiful good wishes. But I must see all your wants supplied. Good Dame Openshaw, you have nought before you. Be prevailed upon to taste these dropt raisins or a fond pudding. And you, too, sweet Dame Tetlow. Squire Nicholas gave me special caution to take care of you, but the injunction was unneeded, as I should have done so without it.—Another cup of canary to Dame Tetlow, Gregory. Fill to the brim, knave—to the very brim. To the health of Squire Nicholas," he added in a low tone, as he handed the brimming goblet to the blushing dame; "and be sure and tell him, if he questions you, that I obeyed his behests to the best of my ability. I pray you taste this pippin jelly, dame. It is as red as rubies, but not so red as your lips, or some leach of almonds, which, lily-white though it be, is not to be compared with the teeth that shall touch it."

"Odd's heart! mester steward, yo mun ha' larnt that protty speech fro' th' squoire himself," replied Dame Tetlow, laughing.

"It may be the recollection of something said to me by him, brought to mind by your presence," replied Adam Whitworth, gallantly. "If I can serve you in aught else, sign to me, dame.—Now, knaves, fill the cups—ale or bragget, at your pleasure, masters. Drink and stint not, and you will the better please your liberal entertainer and my honoured master."

Thus exhorted, the guests set seriously to work to fulfil the hospitable intentions of the provider of the feast. Cups flowed fast and freely, and erelong little was left of the venison pasty but the outer crust, and nothing more than a few fragments of the baked red deer. The lighter articles then came in for a share of attention, and salmon from the Ribble, jack, trout, and eels from the Hodder and Calder, boiled, broiled, stewed, and pickled, and of delicious flavour, were discussed with infinite relish. Puddings and pastry were left to more delicate stomachs—the solids only being in request with the men. Hitherto, the demolition of the viands had given sufficient employment, but now the edge of appetite beginning to be dulled, tongues were unloosed, and much merriment prevailed. More than eighty in number, the guests were dispersed without any regard to order, and thus the chief actors in the revel were scattered promiscuously about the table, diversifying it with their gay costumes. Robin Hood sat between two pretty female morris-dancers, whose partners had got to the other end of the table; while Ned Huddlestone, the representative of Friar Tuck, was equally fortunate, having a buxom dame on either side of him, towards whom he distributed his favours with singular impartiality. As porter to the Abbey, Ned made himself at home; and, next to Adam Whitworth, was perhaps the most important personage present, continually roaring for ale, and pledging the damsels around him. From the way he went on, it seemed highly probable he would be under the table before supper was over; but Ned Huddlestone, like the burly priest whose gown he wore, had a stout bullet head, proof against all assaults of liquor; and the copious draughts he swallowed, instead of subduing him, only tended to make him more uproarious. Blessed also with lusty lungs, his shouts of laughter made the roof ring again. But if the strong liquor failed to make due impression upon him, the like cannot be said of Jack Roby, who, it will be remembered, took the part of the Fool, and who, having drunk overmuch, mistook the hobby-horse for a real steed, and in an effort to bestride it, fell head-foremost on the floor, and, being found incapable of rising, was carried out to an adjoining room, and laid on a bench. This, however, was the only case of excess; for though the Sherwood foresters emptied their cups often enough to heighten their mirth, none of them seemed the worse for what they drank. Lawrence Blackrod, Mr. Parker's keeper, had fortunately got next to his old flame, Sukey Worseley; while Phil Rawson, the forester, who enacted Will Scarlet, and Nancy Holt, between whom an equally tender feeling subsisted, had likewise got together. A little beyond them sat the gentleman usher and parish clerk, Sampson Harrop, who, piquing himself on his good manners, drank very sparingly, and was content to sup on sweetmeats and a bowl of fleetings, as curds separated from whey

are termed in this district. Tom the piper, and his companion the taborer, ate for the next week, but were somewhat more sparing in the matter of drink, their services as minstrels being required later on. Thus the various guests enjoyed themselves according to their bent, and universal hilarity prevailed. It would be strange indeed if it had been otherwise; for what with the good cheer, and the bright eyes around them, the rustics had attained a point of felicity not likely to be surpassed. Of the numerous assemblage more than half were of the fairer sex; and of these the greater portion were young and good-looking, while in the case of the morris-dancers, their natural charms were heightened by their fanciful attire.

Before supper was half over, it became so dark that it was found necessary to illuminate the great lamp suspended from the centre of the roof, while other lights were set on the board, and two flaming torches placed in sockets on either side of the chimney-piece. Scarcely was this accomplished when the storm came on, much to the surprise of the weatherwise, who had not calculated upon such an occurrence, not having seen any indications whatever of it in the heavens. But all were too comfortably sheltered, and too well employed, to pay much attention to what was going on without; and, unless when a flash of lightning more than usually vivid dazzled the gaze, or a peal of thunder more appalling than the rest broke overhead, no alarm was expressed, even by the women. To be sure, a little pretty trepidation was now and then evinced by the younger damsels; but even this was only done with the view of exacting attention on the part of their swains, and never failed in effect. The thunder-storm, therefore, instead of putting a stop to the general enjoyment, only tended to increase it. However the last peal was loud enough to silence the most uproarious. The women turned pale, and the men looked at each other anxiously, listening to hear if any damage had been done. But, as nothing transpired, their spirits revived. A few minutes afterwards word was brought that the Conventual Church had been struck by a thunderbolt, but this was not regarded as a very serious disaster. The bearer of the intelligence was little Jennet, who said she had been caught in the ruins by the storm, and after being dreadfully frightened by the lightning, had seen a bolt strike the steeple, and heard some stones rattle down, after which she ran away. No one thought of inquiring what she had been doing there at the time, but room was made for her at the supper-table next to Sampson Harrop, while the good steward, patting her on the head, filled her a cup of canary with his own hand, and gave her some cates to eat.

"Ey dunna see Alizon" observed the little girl, looking round the table, after she had drunk the wine.

"Your sister is not here, Jennet," replied Adam Whitworth, with a smile. "She is too great a lady for us now. Since she came up with her ladyship from the green she has been treated quite like one of the guests, and has been walking about the garden and

ruins all the afternoon with young Mistress Dorothy, who has taken quite a fancy to her. Indeed, for the matter of that, all the ladies seem to have taken a fancy to her, and she is now closeted with Mistress Nutter in her own room."

This was gall and wormwood to Jennet.

"She'll be hard to please when she goes home again, after playing the fine dame here," pursued the steward.

"Then ey hope she'll never come home again," rejoined Jennet; spitefully, "fo' we dunna want fine dames i' our poor cottage."

"For my part I do not wonder Alizon pleases the gentle folks," observed Sampson Harrop, "since such pains have been taken with her manners and education; and I must say she does great credit to her instructor, who, for reasons unnecessary to mention, shall be nameless. I wish I could say the same for you, Jennet; but though you're not deficient in ability, you've no perseverance or pleasure in study."

"Ey knoa os much os ey care to knoa," replied Jennet, "an more than yo con teach me, Mester Harrop. Why is Alizon always to be thrown i' my teeth?"

"Because she's the best model you can have," rejoined Sampson. "Ah! if I'd my own way wi' ye, lass, I'd mend your temper and manners. But you come of an ill stock, ye saucy hussy."

"Ey come fro' th' same stock as Alizon, onny how," said Jennet.

"Unluckily that cannot be denied," replied Sampson; "but you're as different from her as light from darkness."

Jennet eyed him bitterly, and then rose from the table.

"Ey'n go," she said.

"No—no; sit down," interposed the good-natured steward. "The dancing and pastimes will begin presently, and you will see your sister. She will come down with the ladies."

"That's the very reason she wishes to go," said Sampson Harrop. "The spiteful little creature cannot bear to see her sister better treated than herself. Go your ways, then. It is the best thing you can do. Alizon would blush to see you here."

"Then ey'n een stay an vex her," replied Jennet, sharply; "boh ey winna sit near yo onny longer, Mester Sampson Harrop, who ca' yersel gentleman usher, boh who are nah gentleman at aw, nor owt like it, boh merely parish clerk an schoolmester, an a poor schoolmester to boot. Eyn go an sit by Sukey Worseley an Nancy Holt, whom ey see yonder."

"You've found your match, Master Harrop," said the steward, laughing, as the little girl walked away.

"I should account it a disgrace to bandy words with the like of her, Adam," rejoined the clerk, angrily; "but I'm greatly out in my reckoning, if she does not make a second Mother Demdike, and worse could not well befall her."

Jennet's society could have been very well dispensed with by her two friends, but she would not be shaken off. On the contrary, finding herself in the way, she only determined the more pertinaciously to remain, and began to exercise all her powers of teasing, which have been described as considerable, and which on this occasion proved eminently successful. And the worst of it was, there was no crushing the plaguy little insect; any effort made to catch her only resulting in an escape on her part, and a new charge on some undefended quarter, with sharper stinging and more intolerable buzzing than ever.

Out of all patience, Sukey Worseley at length exclaimed, "Ey should loike to see ye swum, crosswise, i' th' Calder, Jennet, as Nance Redferne war this efternoon."

"May be ye would, Sukey," replied the little girl, "boh eym nah so likely to be tried that way as yourself, lass; an if ey war swum ey should sink, while yo, wi' your broad back and shouthers, would be sure to float, an then yo'd be counted a witch."

"Heed her not, Sukey," said Blackrod, unable to resist a laugh, though the poor girl was greatly discomfited by this personal allusion; "ye may ha' a broad back o' our own, an the broader the better to my mind, boh mey word on't ye'll never be ta'en fo a witch. Yo're far too comely."

This assurance was a balm to poor Sukey's wounded spirit, and she replied with a well-pleased smile, "Ey hope ey dunna look like one, Lorry."

"Not a bit, lass," said Blackrod, lifting a huge ale-cup to his lips. "Your health, sweetheart."

"What think ye then o' Nance Redferne?" observed Jennet. "Is she neaw comely?—ay, comelier far than fat, fubsy Sukey here—or than Nancy Holt, wi' her yallo hure an frecklet feace—an yet ye ca' her a witch."

"Ey ca' thee one, theaw feaw little whean—an the dowter—an grandowter o' one—an that's more," cried Nancy. "Freckles i' your own feace, ye mismannert minx."

"Ne'er heed her, Nance," said Phil Rawson, putting his arm round the angry damsel's waist, and drawing her gently down. "Every one to his taste, an freckles an yellow hure are so to mine. So dunna fret about it, an spoil your protty lips wi' pouting. Better ha' freckles o' your feace than spots o' your heart, loike that ill-favort little hussy."

"Dunna offend her, Phil," said Nancy Holt, noticing with alarm the malignant look fixed upon her lover by Jennet. "She's dawngerous."

"Firrups tak her!" replied Phil Eawson. "Boh who the dole's that? Ey didna notice him efore, an he's neaw one o' our party."

The latter observation was occasioned by the entrance of a tall personage, in the garb of a Cistertian monk, who issued from one of the doorways in the screen, and glided towards the upper table, attracting general attention and misgiving as he proceeded. His countenance was cadaverous, his lips livid, and his eyes black and deep sunken in their sockets, with a bistre-coloured circle around them. His frame was meagre and bony. What remained of hair on his head was raven black, but either he was bald on the crown, or carried his attention to costume so far as to adopt the priestly tonsure. His forehead was lofty and sallow, and seemed stamped, like his features, with profound gloom. His garments were faded and mouldering, and materially contributed to his ghostly appearance.

"Who is it?" cried Sukey and Nance together.

But no one could answer the question.

"He dusna look loike a bein' o' this warld," observed Blackrod, gaping with alarm, for the stout keeper was easily assailable on the side of superstition; "an there is a mowdy air about him, that gies one the shivers to see. Ey've often heer'd say the Abbey is haanted; an that pale-feaced chap looks like one o' th' owd monks risen fro' his grave to join our revel."

"An see, he looks this way," cried Phil Rawson.

"What flaming een! they mey the very flesh crawl o' one's booans."

"Is it a ghost, Lorry?" said Sukey, drawing nearer to the stalwart keeper.

"By th' maskins, lass, ey conna tell," replied Blackrod; "boh whotever it be, ey'll protect ye."

"Tak care o' me, Phil," ejaculated Nancy Holt, pressing close to her lover's side.

"Eigh, that I win," rejoined the forester.

"Ey dunna care for ghosts so long as yo are near me, Phil," said Nancy, tenderly.

"Then ey'n never leave ye, Nance," replied Phil.

"Ghost or not," said Jennet, who had been occupied in regarding the new-comer attentively, "ey'n go an speak to it. Ey'm nah afeerd, if yo are."

"Eigh do, Jennet, that's a brave little lass," said Blackrod, glad to be rid of her in any way.

"Stay!" cried Adam Whitworth, coming up at the moment, and overhearing what was said—"you must not go near the gentleman. I will not have him molested, or even spoken with, till Sir Ralph appears."

Meanwhile, the stranger, without returning the glances fixed upon him, or deigning to notice any of the company, pursued his way, and sat down in a chair at the upper table.

But his entrance had been witnessed by others besides the rustic guests and servitors. Nicholas and Richard Assheton chanced to be in the gallery at the time, and, greatly struck by the singularity of his appearance, immediately descended to make inquiries respecting him. As they appeared below, the old steward advanced to meet them.

"Who the devil have you got there, Adam?" asked the squire.

"It passeth me almost to tell you, Master Nicholas," replied the steward; "and, not knowing whether the gentleman be invited or not, I am fain to wait Sir Ralph's pleasure in regard to him."

"Have you no notion who he is?" inquired Richard.

"All I know about him may be soon told, Master Richard," replied Adam. "He is a stranger in these parts, and hath very recently taken up his abode in Wiswall Hall, which has been abandoned of late years, as you know, and suffered to go to decay. Some few months ago an aged couple from Colne, named Hewit, took possession of part of the hall, and were suffered to remain there, though old Katty Hewit, or Mould-heels, as she is familiarly termed by the common folk, is in no very good repute hereabouts, and was driven, it is said from Colne, owing to her practices as a witch. Be that as it may, soon after these Hewits were settled at Wiswall, comes this stranger, and fixes himself in another part of the hall. How he lives no one can tell, but it is said he rambles all night long, like a troubled spirit, about the deserted rooms, attended by Mother Mould-heels; while in the daytime he is never seen."

"Can he be of sound mind?" asked Richard.

"Hardly so, I should think, Master Richard," replied the steward. "As to who he may be there are many opinions; and some aver he is Francis Paslew, grandson of Francis, brother to the abbot, and being a Jesuit priest, for you know the Paslews have all strictly adhered to the old faith—and that is why they have fled the country and abandoned their residence—he is obliged to keep himself concealed."

"If such be the case, he must be crazed indeed to venture here," observed Nicholas; "and yet I am half inclined to credit the report. Look at him, Dick. He is the very image of the old abbot."

"Yon portrait might have been painted for him," said Richard, gazing at the picture on the wall, and from it to the monk as he spoke; "the very same garb, too."

"There is an old monastic robe up-stairs, in the closet adjoining the room occupied by Mistress Nutter," observed the steward, "said to be the garment in which Abbot Paslew suffered death. Some stains are upon it, supposed to be the blood of the wizard Demdike, who perished in an extraordinary manner on the same day."

"I have seen it," cried Nicholas, "and the monk's habit looks precisely like it, and, if my eyes deceive me not, is stained in the same manner."

"I see the spots plainly on the breast," cried Richard. "How can he have procured the robe?"

"Heaven only knows," replied the old steward. "It is a very strange occurrence."

"I will go question him," said Richard.

So saying, he proceeded to the upper table, accompanied by Nicholas. As they drew near, the stranger arose, and fixed a grim look upon Richard, who was a little in advance.

"It is the abbot's ghost!" cried Nicholas, stopping, and detaining his cousin. "You shall not address it."

During the contention that ensued, the monk glided towards a side-door at the upper end of the hall, and passed through it. So general was the consternation, that no one attempted to stay him, nor would any one follow to see whither he went. Released, at length, from the strong grasp of the squire, Richard rushed forth, and not returning, Nicholas, after the lapse of a few minutes, went in search of him, but came back presently, and told the old steward he could neither find him nor the monk.

"Master Richard will be back anon, I dare say, Adam," he remarked; "if not, I will make further search for him; but you had better not mention this mysterious occurrence to Sir Ralph, at all events not until the festivities are over, and the ladies have retired. It might disturb them. I fear the appearance of this monk bodes no good to our family; and what makes it worse is, it is not the first ill omen that has befallen us to-day, Master Richard was unlucky enough to stand on Abbot Paslew's grave!"

"Mercy on us! that was unlucky indeed!" cried Adam, in great trepidation. "Poor dear young gentleman! Bid him take especial care of himself, good Master Nicholas. I noticed just now, that yon fearsome monk regarded him more attentively than you. Bid him be careful, I conjure you, sir. But here comes my honoured master and his guests. Here, Gregory, Dickon, bestir yourselves, knaves; and serve supper at the upper table in a trice."

Any apprehensions Nicholas might entertain for Richard were at this moment relieved, for as Sir Ralph and his guests came in at one door, the young man entered by another. He looked deathly pale. Nicholas put his finger to his lips in token of silence—a gesture which the other signified that he understood.

Sir Ralph and his guests having taken their places at the table, an excellent and plentiful repast was speedily set before them, and if they did not do quite such ample justice to it as the hungry rustics at the lower board had done to the good things provided for them, the cook could not reasonably complain. No allusion whatever being made to the recent strange occurrence, the cheerfulness of the company was uninterrupted; but the noise in the lower part of the hall had in a great measure subsided, partly out of respect to the host, and partly in consequence of the alarm occasioned by the supposed supernatural

visitation. Richard continued silent and preoccupied, and neither ate nor drank; but Nicholas appearing to think his courage would be best sustained by an extra allowance of clary and sack, applied himself frequently to the goblet with that view, and erelong his spirits improved so wonderfully, and his natural boldness was so much increased, that he was ready to confront Abbot Paslew, or any other abbot of them all, wherever they might chance to cross him. In this enterprising frame of mind he drew Richard aside, and questioned him as to what had taken place in his pursuit of the mysterious monk.

"You overtook him, Dick, of course?" he said, "and put it to him roundly why he came hither, where neither ghosts nor Jesuit priests, whichever he may be, are wanted. What answered he, eh? Would I had been there to interrogate him! He should have declared how he became possessed of that old moth-eaten, blood-stained, monkish gown, or I would have unfrocked him, even if he had proved to be a skeleton. But I interrupt you. You have not told me what occurred at the interview?"

"There was no interview," replied Richard, gravely.

"No interview!" echoed Nicholas. "S'blood, man!—but I must be careful, for Doctor Ormerod and Parson Dewhurst are within hearing, and may lecture me on the wantonness and profanity of swearing. By Saint Gregory de Northbury!—no, that's an oath too, and, what is worse, a Popish oath. By—I have several tremendous imprecations at my tongue's end, but they shall not out. It is a sinful propensity, and must be controlled. In a word, then, you let him escape, Dick?"

"If you were so anxious to stay him, I wonder you came not with me," replied Richard; "but you now hold very different language from what you used when I quitted the hall."

"Ah, true—right—Dick," replied Nicholas; "my sentiments have undergone a wonderful change since then. I now regret having stopped you. By my troth! if I meet that confounded monk again, he shall give a good account of himself, I promise him. But what said he to you, Dick? Make an end of your story."

"I have not begun it yet," replied Richard. "But pay attention, and you shall hear what occurred. When I rushed forth, the monk had already gained the entrance-hall. No one was within it at the time, all the serving-men being busied here with the feasting. I summoned him to stay, but he answered not, and, still grimly regarding me, glided towards the outer door, which (I know not by what chance) stood open, and passing through it, closed it upon me. This delayed me a moment; and when I got out, he had already descended the steps, and was moving towards the garden. It was bright moonlight, so I could see him distinctly. And mark this, Nicholas—the two great blood-hounds were running about at large in the court-yard, but they slunk off, as if alarmed at

his appearance. The monk had now gained the garden, and was shaping his course swiftly towards the ruined Conventual Church. Determined to overtake him, I quickened my pace; but he gained the old fane before me, and threaded the broken aisles with noiseless celerity. In the choir he paused and confronted me. When within a few yards of him, I paused, arrested by his fixed and terrible gaze. Nicholas, his look froze my blood. I would have spoken, but I could not. My tongue clove to the roof of my mouth for very fear. Before I could shake off this apprehension the figure raised its hand menacingly thrice, and passed into the Lacy Chapel. As soon as he was gone my courage returned, and I followed. The little chapel was brilliantly illuminated by the moon; but it was empty. I could only see the white monument of Sir Henry de Lacy glistening in the pale radiance."

"I must take a cup of wine after this horrific relation," said Nicholas, replenishing his goblet. "It has chilled my blood, as the monk's icy gaze froze yours. Body o' me! but this is strange indeed. Another oath. Lord help me!—I shall never get rid of the infernal—I mean, the evil habit. Will you not pledge me, Dick?"

The young man shook his head.

"You are wrong," pursued Nicholas,—"decidedly wrong. Wine gladdeneth the heart of man, and restoreth courage. A short while ago I was downcast as you, melancholy as an owl, and timorous as a kid, but now I am resolute as an eagle, stout of heart, and cheerful of spirit; and all owing to a cup of wine. Try the remedy, Dick, and get rid of your gloom. You look like a death's-head at a festival. What if you have stumbled on an ill-omened grave! What if you have been banned by a witch! What if you have stood face to face with the devil—or a ghost! Heed them not! Drink, and set care at defiance. And, not to gainsay my own counsel, I shall fill my cup again. For, in good sooth, this is rare clary, Dick; and, talking of wine, you should taste some of the wonderful Rhenish found in the abbot's cellar by our ancestor, Richard Assheton—a century old if it be a day, and yet cordial and corroborative as ever. Those monks were lusty tipplers, Dick. I sometimes wish I had been an abbot myself. I should have made a rare father confessor—especially to a pretty penitent. Here, Gregory, hie thee to the master cellarer, and bid him fill me a goblet of the old Rhenish—the wine from the abbot's cellar. Thou understandest—or, stay, better bring the flask. I have a profound respect for the venerable bottle, and would pay my devoirs to it. Hie away, good fellow!"

"You will drink too much if you go on thus," remarked Richard.

"Not a drop," rejoined Nicholas. "I am blithe as a lark, and would keep so. That is why I drink. But to return to our ghosts. Since this place must be haunted, I would it were visited by spirits of a livelier kind than old Paslew. There is Isole de Heton, for instance.

The fair votaress would be the sort of ghost for me. I would not turn my back on her, but face her manfully. Look at her picture, Dick. Was ever countenance sweeter than hers—lips more tempting, or eyes more melting! Is she not adorable? Zounds!" he exclaimed, suddenly pausing, and staring at the portrait—"Would you believe it, Dick? The fair Isole winked at me—I'll swear she did. I mean—I will venture to affirm upon oath, if required, that she winked."

"Pshaw!" exclaimed Richard. "The fumes of the wine have mounted to your brain, and disordered it."

"No such thing," cried Nicholas, regarding the picture as steadily as he could—"she's leering at me now. By the Queen of Paphos! another wink. Nay, if you doubt me, watch her well yourself. A pleasant adventure this—ha!—ha!"

"A truce to this drunken foolery," cried Richard, moving away.

"Drunken! s'death! recall that epithet, Dick," cried Nicholas, angrily. "I am no more drunk than yourself, you dog. I can walk as steadily, and see as plainly, as you; and I will maintain it at the point of the sword, that the eyes of that picture have lovingly regarded me; nay, that they follow me now."

"A common delusion with a portrait," said Richard; "they appear to follow me."

"But they do not wink at you as they do at me," said Nicholas, "neither do the lips break into smiles, and display the pearly teeth beneath them, as occurs in my case. Grim old abbots frown on you, but fair, though frail, votaresses smile on me. I am the favoured mortal, Dick."

"Were it as you represent, Nicholas," replied Richard, gravely, "I should say, indeed, that some evil principle was at work to lure you through your passions to perdition. But I know they are all fancies engendered by your heated brain, which in your calmer moments you will discard, as I discard them now. If I have any weight with you, I counsel you to drink no more, or you will commit some mad foolery, of which you will be ashamed hereafter. The discreeter course would be to retire altogether; and for this you have ample excuse, as you will have to arise betimes to-morrow, to set out for Pendle Forest with Master Potts."

"Retire!" exclaimed Nicholas, bursting into a loud, contemptuous laugh. "I like thy counsel, lad. Yes, I will retire when I have finished the old monastic Rhenish which Gregory is bringing me. I will retire when I have danced the Morisco with the May Queen—the Cushion Dance with Dame Tetlow—and the Brawl with the lovely Isole de

Heton. Another wink, Dick. By our Lady! she assents to my proposition. When I have done all this, and somewhat more, it will be time to think of retiring. But I have the night before me, Dick—not to be spent in drowsy unconsciousness, as thou recommendest, but in active, pleasurable enjoyment. No man requires less sleep than I do. Ordinarily, I 'retire,' as thou termest it, at ten, and rise with the sun. In summer I am abroad soon after three, and mend that if thou canst, Dick. To-night I shall seek my couch about midnight, and yet I'll warrant me I shall be the first stirring in the Abbey; and, in any case, I shall be in the saddle before thee."

"It may be," replied Richard; "but it was to preserve you from extravagance to-night that I volunteered advice, which, from my knowledge of your character, I might as well have withheld. But let me caution you on another point. Dance with Dame Tetlow, or any other dame you please—dance with the fair Isole de Heton, if you can prevail upon her to descend from her frame and give you her hand; but I object—most decidedly object—to your dancing with Alizon Device."

"Why so?" cried Nicholas; "why should I not dance with whom I please? And what right hast thou to forbid me Alizon? Troth, lad, art thou so ignorant of human nature as not to know that forbidden fruit is the sweetest. It hath ever been so since the fall. I am now only the more bent upon dancing with the prohibited damsel. But I would fain know the principle on which thou erectest thyself into her guardian. Is it because she fainted when thy sword was crossed with that hot-headed fool, Sir Thomas Metcalfe, that thou flatterest thyself she is in love with thee? Be not too sure of it, Dick. Many a timid wench has swooned at the sight of a naked weapon, without being enamoured of the swordsman. The fainting proves nothing. But grant she loves thee—what then! An end must speedily come of it; so better finish at once, before she be entangled in a mesh from which she cannot be extricated without danger. For hark thee, Dick, whatever thou mayst think, I am not so far gone that I know not what I say, neither is my vision so much obscured that I see not some matters plainly enough, and I understand thee and Alizon well, and see through you both. This matter must go no further. It has gone too far already. After to-night you must see her no more. I am serious in this—serious inter pocula, if such a thing can be. It is necessary to observe caution, for reasons that will at once occur to thee. Thou canst not wed this girl—then why trifle with her till her heart be broken."

"Broken it shall never be by me!" cried Richard.

"But I tell you it will be broken, if you do not desist at once," rejoined Nicholas. "I was but jesting when I said I would rob you of her in the Morisco, though it would be charity to both, and spare you many a pang hereafter, were I to put my threat into execution. However, I have a soft heart where aught of love is concerned, and, having pointed out

the risk you will incur, I shall leave you to follow your own devices. But, for Alizon's sake, stop in time."

"You now speak soberly and sensibly enough, Nicholas," replied Richard, "and I thank you heartily for your counsel; and if I do not follow it by withdrawing at once from a pursuit which may appear to you hopeless, if not dangerous, you will, I hope, give me credit for being actuated by worthy motives. I will at once, and frankly admit, that I love Alizon; and loving her, you may rest assured I would sacrifice my life a thousand times rather than endanger her happiness. But there is a point in her history, with which if you were acquainted, it might alter your view of the case; but this is not the season for its disclosure, neither, I am bound to say, does the circumstance so materially alter the apparent posture of affairs as to remove all difficulty. On the contrary, it leaves an insurmountable obstacle behind it."

"Are you wise, then, in going on?" asked Nicholas.

"I know not," answered Richard, "but I feel as if I were the sport of fate. Uncertain whither to turn for the best, I leave the disposition of my course to chance. But, alas!" he added, sadly, "all seems to point out that this meeting with Alizon will be my last."

"Well, cheer up, lad," said Nicholas. "These afflictions are hard to bear, it is true; but somehow they are got over. Just as if your horse should fling you in the midst of a hedge when you are making a flying leap, you get scratched and bruised, but you scramble out, and in a day or two are on your legs again. Love breaks no bones, that's one comfort. When at your age, I was desperately in love, not with Mistress Nicholas Assheton—Heaven help the fond soul! but with—never mind with whom; but it was not a very prudent match, and so, in my worldly wisdom, I was obliged to cry off. A sad business it was. I thought I should have died of it, and I made quite sure that the devoted girl would die first, in which case we were to occupy the same grave. But I was not driven to such a dire extremity, for before I had kept house a week, Jack Walker, the keeper of Downham, made his appearance in my room, and after telling me of the mischief done by a pair of otters in the Ribble, finding me in a very desponding state, ventured to inquire if I had heard the news. Expecting to hear of the death of the girl, I prepared myself for an outburst of grief, and resolved to give immediate directions for a double funeral, when he informed me—what do you think, Dick?—that she was going to be married to himself. I recovered at once, and immediately went out to hunt the otters, and rare sport we had. But here comes Gregory with the famous old Rhenish. Better take a cup, Dick; this is the best cure for the heartache, and for all other aches and grievances. Ah! glorious stuff—miraculous wine!" he added, smacking his lips with extraordinary satisfaction after a deep draught; "those worthy fathers were excellent judges. I have a great reverence for them. But where can Alizon be all this while? Supper

is wellnigh over, and the dancing and pastimes will commence anon, and yet she comes not."

"She is here," cried Richard.

And as he spoke Mistress Nutter and Alizon entered the hall.

Richard endeavoured to read in the young girl's countenance some intimation of what had passed between her and Mistress Nutter, but he only remarked that she was paler than before, and had traces of anxiety about her. Mistress Nutter also looked gloomy and thoughtful, and there was nothing in the manner or deportment of either to lead to the conclusion, that a discovery of relationship between them had taken place. As Alizon moved on, her eyes met those of Richard—but the look was intercepted by Mistress Nutter, who instantly called off her daughter's attention to herself; and, while the young man hesitated to join them, his sister came quickly up to him, and drew him away in another direction. Left to himself, Nicholas tossed off another cup of the miraculous Rhenish, which improved in flavour as he discussed it, and then, placing a chair opposite the portrait of Isole de Heton, filled a bumper, and, uttering the name of the fair votaress, drained it to her. This time he was quite certain he received a significant glance in return, and no one being near to contradict him, he went on indulging the idea of an amorous understanding between himself and the picture, till he had finished the bottle, and obtained as many ogles as he swallowed draughts of wine, upon which he arose and staggered off in search of Dame Tetlow.

Meanwhile, Mistress Nutter having made her excuses to Lady Assheton for not attending the supper, walked down the hall with her daughter, until such time as the dancing and pastimes should commence. As will be readily supposed under the circumstances, this part of the entertainment was distasteful to both of them; but it could not be avoided without entering into explanations, which Mistress Nutter was unwilling to make, and she, therefore, counselled her daughter to act in all respects as if she were still Alizon Device, and in no way connected with her.

"I shall take an early opportunity of announcing my intention to adopt you," she said, "and then you can act differently. Meantime, keep near me as much as you can. Say little to Dorothy or Richard Assheton, and prepare to retire early; for this noisy and riotous assemblage is not much to my taste, and I care not how soon I quit it."

Alizon assented to what was said, and stole a timid glance towards Richard and Dorothy; but the latter, who alone perceived it, instantly averted her head, in such way as to make it evident she wished to shun her regards. Slight as it was, this circumstance occasioned Alizon much pain, for she could not conceive how she had offended her new-

made friend, and it was some relief to encounter a party of acquaintances who had risen from the lower table at her approach, though they did not presume to address her while she was with Mistress Nutter, but waited respectfully at a little distance. Alizon, however, flew towards them.

"Ah, Susan!—ah, Nancy!" she cried taking the hand of each—"how glad I am to see you here; and you too, Lawrence Blackrod—and you, Phil Rawson—and you, also, good Master Harrop. How happy you all look!"

"An wi' good reason, sweet Alizon," replied Blackrod. "Boh we began to be afeerd we'd lost ye, an that wad ha' bin a sore mishap—to lose our May Queen—an th' prettiest May Queen os ever dawnced i' this ha', or i' onny other ha' i' Lonkyshiar."

"We ha drunk your health, sweet Alizon," added Phil—"an wishin' ye may be os happy os ye desarve, wi' the mon o' your heart, if onny sich lucky chap there be."

"Thank you—thank you both," replied Alizon, blushing; "and in return I cannot wish you better fortune, Philip, than to be united to the good girl near you, for I know her kindly disposition so well, that I am sure she will make you happy."

"Ey'm satisfied on't myself," replied Rawson; "an ey hope ere long she'll be missus o' a little cot i' Bowland Forest, an that yo'll pay us a visit, Alizon, an see an judge fo' yourself how happy we be. Nance win make a rare forester's wife."

"Not a bit better than my Sukey," cried Lawrence Blackrod. "Ye shanna get th' start o' me, Phil, fo' by th' mess! the very same day os sees yo wedded to Nancy Holt shan find me united to Sukey Worseley. An so Alizon win ha' two cottages i' Bowland Forest to visit i'stead o' one."

"And well pleased I shall be to visit them both," she rejoined. At this moment Mistress Nutter came up.

"My good friends," she said, "as you appear to take so much interest in Alizon, you may be glad to learn that it is my intention to adopt her as a daughter, having no child of my own; and, though her position henceforth will be very different from what it has been, I am sure she will never forget her old friends."

"Never, indeed, never!" cried Alizon, earnestly.

"This is good news, indeed," cried Sampson Harrop, joyfully, while the others joined in his exclamation. "We all rejoice in Alizon's good fortune, and think she richly deserves

it. For my own part, I was always sure she would have rare luck, but I did not expect such luck as this."

"What's to become o' me?" cried Jennet, coming from behind a chair, where she had hitherto concealed herself.

"I will always take care of you," replied Alizon, stooping, and kissing her.

"Do not promise more than you may be able to perform, Alizon," observed Mistress Nutter, coldly, and regarding the little girl with a look of disgust; "an ill-favour'd little creature, with the Demdike eyes."

"And as ill-tempered as she is ill-favoured," rejoined Sampson Harrop; "and, though she cannot help being ugly, she might help being malicious."

Jennet gave him a bitter look.

"You do her injustice, Master Harrop," said Alizon. "Poor little Jennet is quick-tempered, but not malevolent."

"Ey con hate weel if ey conna love," replied Jennet, "an con recollect injuries if ey forget kindnesses.—Boh dunna trouble yourself about me, sister. Ey dunna envy ye your luck. Ey dunna want to be adopted by a grand-dame. Ey'm content os ey am. Boh are na ye gettin' on raythe too fast, lass? Mother's consent has to be axed, ey suppose, efore ye leave her."

"There is little fear of her refusal," observed Mistress Nutter.

"Ey dunna knoa that," rejoined Jennet. "If she were to refuse, it wadna surprise me."

"Nothing spiteful she could do would surprise me," remarked Harrop. "But how are you likely to know what your mother will think and do, you forward little hussy?"

"Ey judge fro circumstances," replied the little girl. "Mother has often said she conna weel spare Alizon. An mayhap Mistress Nutter may knoa, that she con be very obstinate when she tays a whim into her head."

"I do know it," replied Mistress Nutter; "and, from my experience of her temper in former days, I should be loath to have you near me, who seem to inherit her obstinacy."

"Wi' sich misgivings ey wonder ye wish to tak Alizon, madam," said Jennet; "fo she's os much o' her mother about her os me, onny she dunna choose to show it."

"Peace, thou mischievous urchin," cried Mistress Nutter, losing all patience.

"Shall I take her away?" said Harrop—seizing her hand.

"Ay, do," said Mistress Nutter.

"No, no, let her stay!" cried Alizon, quickly; "I shall be miserable if she goes."

"Oh, ey'm quite ready to go," said Jennet, "fo ey care little fo sich seets os this—boh efore ey leave ey wad fain say a few words to Mester Potts, whom ey see yonder."

"What can you want with him, Jennet," cried Alizon, in surprise.

"Onny to tell him what brother Jem is gone to Pendle fo to-neet," replied the little girl, with a significant and malicious look at Mistress Nutter.

"Ha!" muttered the lady. "There is more malice in this little wasp than I thought. But I must rob it of its sting."

And while thus communing with herself, she fixed a searching look on Jennet, and then raising her hand quickly, waved it in her face.

"Oh!" cried the little girl, falling suddenly backwards.

"What's the matter?" demanded Alizon, flying to her.

"Ey dunna reetly knoa," replied Jennet.

"She's seized with a sudden faintness," said Harrop. "Better she should go home then at once. I'll find somebody to take her."

"Neaw, neaw, ey'n sit down here," said Jennet; "ey shan be better soon."

"Come along, Alizon," said Mistress Nutter, apparently unconcerned at the circumstance.

Having confided the little girl, who was now recovered from the shock, to the care of Nancy Holt, Alizon followed her mother.

At this moment Sir Ralph, who had quitted the supper-table, clapped his hands loudly, thus giving the signal to the minstrels, who, having repaired to the gallery, now struck up a merry tune, and instantly the whole hall was in motion. Snatching up his wand Sampson Harrop hurried after Alizon, beseeching her to return with him, and join a procession about to be formed by the revellers, and of course, as May Queen, and the most important personage in it, she could not refuse. Very short space sufficed the morris-dancers to find their partners; Robin Hood and the foresters got into their places; the hobby-horse curveted and capered; Friar Tuck resumed his drolleries; and even Jack Roby was so far recovered as to be able to get on his legs, though he could not walk very steadily. Marshalled by the gentleman-usher, and headed by Robin Hood and the May Queen, the procession marched round the hall, the minstrels playing merrily the while, and then drew up before the upper table, where a brief oration was pronounced by Sir Ralph. A shout that made the rafters ring again followed the address, after which a couranto was called for by the host, who, taking Mistress Nicholas Assheton by the hand, led her into the body of the hall, whither he was speedily followed by the other guests, who had found partners in like manner.

Before relating how the ball was opened a word must be bestowed upon Mistress Nicholas Assheton, whom I have neglected nearly as much as she was neglected by her unworthy spouse, and I therefore hasten to repair the injustice by declaring that she was a very amiable and very charming woman, and danced delightfully. And recollect, ladies, these were dancing days—I mean days when knowledge of figures as well as skill was required, more than twenty forgotten dances being in vogue, the very names of which may surprise you as I recapitulate them. There was the Passamezzo, a great favourite with Queen Elizabeth, who used to foot it merrily, when, as you are told by Gray—

"The great Lord-keeper led the brawls,
And seals and maces danced before him!"
the grave Pavane, likewise a favourite with the Virgin Queen, and which I should like to see supersede the eternal polka at Almack's and elsewhere, and in which—

"Five was the number of the music's feet
Which still the dance did with live paces meet;"
the Couranto, with its "current traverses," "sliding passages," and solemn tune, wherein, according to Sir John Davies—

—"that dancer greatest praise hath won
Who with best order can all order shun;"
the Lavolta, also delineated by the same knowing hand—

"Where arm in arm two dancers are entwined,
And whirl themselves with strict embracements bound,
their feet an anapest do sound."
Is not this very much like a waltz? Yes, ladies, you have been dancing the lavolta of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries without being aware of it. But there was another waltz still older, called the Sauteuse, which I suspect answered to your favourite polka. Then there were brawls, galliards, paspys, sarabands, country-dances of various figures, cushion dances (another dance I long to see revived), kissing dances, and rounds, any of which are better than the objectionable polka. Thus you will see that there was infinite variety at least at the period under consideration, and that you have rather retrograded than advanced in the saltatory art. But to return to the ball.

Mistress Nicholas Assheton, I have said, excelled in the graceful accomplishment of dancing, and that was probably the reason why she had been selected for the couranto by Sir Ralph, who knew the value of a good partner. By many persons she was accounted the handsomest woman in the room, and in dignity of carriage she was certainly unrivalled. This was precisely what Sir Ralph required, and having executed a few "current traverses and sliding passages" with her, with a gravity and stateliness worthy of Sir Christopher Hatton himself, when graced by the hand of his sovereign mistress, he conducted her, amid the hushed admiration of the beholders, to a seat. Still the dance continued with unabated spirit; all those engaged in it running up and down, or "turning and winding with unlooked-for change." Alizon's hand had been claimed by Richard Assheton, and next to the stately host and his dignified partner, they came in for the largest share of admiration and attention; and if the untutored girl fell short of the accomplished dame in precision and skill, she made up for the want of them in natural grace and freedom of movement, for the display of which the couranto, with its frequent and impromptu changes, afforded ample opportunity. Even Sir Ralph was struck with her extreme gracefulness, and pointed her out to Mistress Nicholas, who, unenvying and amiable, joined heartily in his praises. Overhearing what was said, Mrs. Nutter thought it a fitting opportunity to announce her intention of adopting the young girl; and though Sir Ralph seemed a good deal surprised at the suddenness of the declaration, he raised no objection to the plan; but, on the contrary, applauded it. But another person, by no means disposed to regard it in an equally favourable light became acquainted with the intelligence at the same time. This was Master Potts, who instantly set his wits at work to discover its import. Ever on the alert, his little eyes, sharp as needles, had detected Jennet amongst the rustic company, and he now made his way towards her, resolved, by dint of cross-questioning and otherwise, to extract all the information he possibly could from her.

The dance over, Richard and his partner wandered towards a more retired part of the hall.

"Why does your sister shun me?" inquired Alizon, with a look of great distress. "What can I have done to offend her? Whenever I regard her she averts her head, and as I approached her just now, she moved away, making it evident she designed to avoid me. If I could think myself in any way different from what I was this morning, when she treated me with such unbounded confidence and kindness, or accuse myself of any offence towards her, even in thought, I could understand it; but as it is, her present coldness appears inexplicable and unreasonable, and gives me great pain. I would not forfeit her regard for worlds, and therefore beseech you to tell me what I have done amiss, that I may endeavour to repair it."

"You have done nothing—nothing whatever, sweet girl," replied Richard. "It is only caprice on Dorothy's part, and except that it distresses you, her conduct, which you justly call 'unreasonable,' does not deserve a moment's serious consideration."

"Oh no! you cannot deceive me thus," cried Alizon. "She is too kind—too well-judging, to be capricious. Something must have occurred to make her change her opinion of me, though what it is I cannot conjecture. I have gained much to-day—more than I had any right to expect; but if I have forfeited the good opinion of your sister, the loss of her friendship will counterbalance all the rest."

"But you have not lost it, Alizon," replied Richard, earnestly. "Dorothy has got some strange notions into her head, which only require to be combated. She does not like Mistress Nutter, and is piqued and displeased by the extraordinary interest which that lady displays towards you. That is all."

"But why should she not like Mistress Nutter?" inquired Alizon.

"Nay, there is no accounting for fancies," returned Richard, with a faint smile. "I do not attempt to defend her, but simply offer the only excuse in my power for her conduct."

"I am concerned to hear it," said Alizon, sadly, "because henceforth I shall be so intimately connected with Mistress Nutter, that this estrangement, which I hoped arose only from some trivial cause, and merely required a little explanation to be set aside, may become widened and lasting. Owing every thing to Mistress Nutter, I must espouse her cause; and if your sister likes her not, she likes me not in consequence, and therefore we must continue divided. But surely her dislike is of very recent date, and cannot have any strong hold upon her; for when she and Mistress Nutter met this morning, a very different feeling seemed to animate her."

"So, indeed, it did," replied Richard, visibly embarrassed and distressed. "And since you have made me acquainted with the new tie and interests you have formed, I can only regret alluding to the circumstance."

"That you may not misunderstand me," said Alizon, "I will explain the extent of my obligations to Mistress Nutter, and then you will perceive how much I am bounden to her. Childless herself, greatly interested in me, and feeling for my unfortunate situation, with infinite goodness of heart she has declared her intention of removing me from all chance of baneful influence, from the family with whom I have been heretofore connected, by adopting me as her daughter."

"I should indeed rejoice at this," said Richard, "were it not that—"

And he stopped, gazing anxiously at her.

"Were not what?" cried Alizon, alarmed by his looks. "What do you mean?"

"Do not press me further," he rejoined; "I cannot answer you. Indeed I have said too much already."

"You have said too much or too little," cried Alizon. "Speak, I implore you. What mean these dark hints which you throw out, and which like shadows elude all attempts to grasp them! Do not keep me in this state of suspense and agitation. Your looks speak more than your words. Oh, give your thoughts utterance!"

"I cannot," replied Richard. "I do not believe what I have heard, and therefore will not repeat it. It would only increase the mischief. But oh! tell me this! Was it, indeed, to remove you from the baneful influence of Elizabeth Device that Mistress Nutter adopted you?"

"Other motives may have swayed her, and I have said they did so," replied Alizon; "but that wish, no doubt, had great weight with her. Nay, notwithstanding her abhorrence of the family, she has kindly consented to use her best endeavours to preserve little Jennet from further ill, as well as to reclaim poor misguided Elizabeth herself."

"Oh! what a weight you have taken from my heart," cried Richard, joyfully. "I will tell Dorothy what you say, and it will at once remove all her doubts and suspicions. She will now be the same to you as ever, and to Mistress Nutter."

"I will not ask you what those doubts and suspicions were, since you so confidently promise me this, which is all I desire," replied Alizon, smiling; "but any unfavourable

opinions entertained of Mistress Nutter are wholly undeserved. Poor lady! she has endured many severe trials and sufferings, and whenever you learn the whole of her history, she will, I am sure, have your sincere sympathy."

"You have certainly produced a complete revolution in my feelings towards her," said Richard, "and I shall not be easy till I have made a like convert of Dorothy."

At this moment a loud clapping of hands was heard, and Nicholas was seen marching towards the centre of the hall, preceded by the minstrels, who had descended for the purpose from the gallery, and bearing in his arms a large red velvet cushion. As soon as the dancers had formed a wide circle round him, a very lively tune called "Joan Sanderson," from which the dance about to be executed sometimes received its name, was struck up, and the squire, after a few preliminary flourishes, set down the cushion, and gave chase to Dame Tetlow, who, threading her way rapidly through the ring, contrived to elude him. This chase, accompanied by music, excited shouts of laughter on all hands, and no one knew which most to admire, the eagerness of the squire, or the dexterity of the lissom dame in avoiding him.

Exhausted at length, and baffled in his quest, Nicholas came to a halt before Tom the Piper, and, taking up the cushion, thus preferred his complaint:—"This dance it can no further go—no further go."

Whereupon the piper chanted in reply,—"I pray you, good sir, why say you so—why say you so?"

Amidst general laughter, the squire tenderly and touchingly responded—"Because Dame Tetlow will not come to—will not come to."

Whereupon Tom the Piper, waxing furious, blew a shrill whistle, accompanied by an encouraging rattle of the tambarine, and enforcing the mandate by two or three energetic stamps on the floor, delivered himself in this fashion:—"She must come to, and she SHALL come to. And she must come, whether she will or no."

Upon this two of the prettiest female morris-dancers, taking each a hand of the blushing and overheated Dame Tetlow, for she had found the chase rather warm work, led her forward; while the squire advancing very gallantly placed the cushion upon the ground before her, and as she knelt down upon it, bestowed a smacking kiss upon her lips. This ceremony being performed amidst much tittering and flustering, accompanied by many knowing looks and some expressed wishes among the swains, who hoped that their turn might come next, Dame Tetlow arose, and the squire seizing her hand, they began to whisk round in a sort of jig, singing merrily as they danced—

"Prinkum prankum is a fine dance,
And we shall go dance it once again!
Once again,
And we shall go dance it once again!"
And they made good the words too; for on coming to a stop, Dame Tetlow snatched up the cushion, and ran in search of the squire, who retreating among the surrounding damsels, made sad havoc among them, scarcely leaving a pretty pair of lips unvisited. Oh Nicholas! Nicholas! I am thoroughly ashamed of you, and regret becoming your historian. You get me into an infinitude of scrapes. But there is a rod in pickle for you, sir, which shall be used with good effect presently. Tired of such an unprofitable quest, Dame Tetlow came to a sudden halt, addressed the piper as Nicholas had addressed him, and receiving a like answer, summoned the delinquent to come forward; but as he knelt down on the cushion, instead of receiving the anticipated salute, he got a sound box on the ears, the dame, actuated probably by some feeling of jealousy, taking advantage of the favourable opportunity afforded her of avenging herself. No one could refrain from laughing at this unexpected turn in affairs, and Nicholas, to do him justice, took it in excellent part, and laughed louder than the rest. Springing to his feet, he snatched the kiss denied him by the spirited dame, and led her to obtain some refreshment at the lower table, of which they both stood in need, while the cushion being appropriated by other couples, other boxes on the ear and kisses were interchanged, leading to an infinitude of merriment.

Long before this Master Potts had found his way to Jennet, and as he drew near, affecting to notice her for the first time, he made some remarks upon her not looking very well.

"'Deed, an ey'm nah varry weel," replied the little girl, "boh ey knoa who ey han to thonk fo' my ailment."

"Your sister, most probably," suggested the attorney. "It must be very vexatious to see her so much noticed, and be yourself so much neglected—very vexatious, indeed—I quite feel for you."

"By dunna want your feelin'," replied Jennet, nettled by the remark; "boh it wasna my sister os made me ill."

"Who was it then, my little dear," said Potts.

"Dunna 'dear' me," retorted Jennet; "yo're too ceevil by half, os the lamb said to the wolf. Boh sin ye mun knoa, it wur Mistress Nutter."

"Aha! very good—I mean—very bad," cried Potts. "What did Mistress Nutter do to you, my little dear? Don't be afraid of telling me. If I can do any thing for you I shall be very happy. Speak out—and don't be afraid."

"Nay fo' shure, ey'm nah afeerd," returned Jennet. "Boh whot mays ye so inqueesitive? Ye want to get summat out'n me, ey con see that plain enough, an os ye stand there glenting at me wi' your sly little een, ye look loike an owd fox ready to snap up a chicken o' th' furst opportunity."

"Your comparison is not very flattering, Jennet," replied Potts; "but I pass it by for the sake of its cleverness. You are a sharp child, Jennet—a very sharp child. I remarked that from the first moment I saw you. But in regard to Mistress Nutter, she seems a very nice lady—and must be a very kind lady, since she has made up her mind to adopt your sister. Not that I am surprised at her determination, for really Alizon is so superior—so unlike—"

"Me, ye wad say," interrupted Jennet. "Dunna be efeerd to speak out, sir."

"No, no," replied Potts, "on the contrary, there's a very great likeness between you. I saw you were sisters at once. I don't know which is the cleverest or prettiest—but perhaps you are the sharpest. Yes, you are the sharpest, undoubtedly, Jennet. If I wished to adopt any one, which unfortunately I'm not in a condition to do, having only bachelor's chambers in Chancery Lane, it should be you. But I can put you in a way of making your fortune, Jennet, and that's the next best thing to adopting you. Indeed, it's much better in my case."

"May my fortune!" cried the little girl, pricking up her ears, "ey should loike to knoa how ye wad contrive that."

"I'll show you how directly, Jennet," returned Potts. "Pay particular attention to what I say, and think it over carefully, when you are by yourself. You are quite aware that there is a great talk about witches in these parts; and, I may speak it without offence to you, your own family come under the charge. There is your grandmother Demdike, for instance, a notorious witch—your mother, Dame Device, suspected—your brother James suspected."

"Weel, sir," cried Jennet, eyeing him sharply, "what does all this suspicion tend to?"

"You shall hear, my little dear," returned Potts. "It would not surprise me, if every one of your family, including yourself, should be arrested, shut up in Lancaster Castle, and burnt for witches!"

"Alack a day! an this ye ca' makin my fortin," cried Jennet, derisively. "Much obleeged to ye, sir, boh ey'd leefer be without the luck."

"Listen to me," pursued Potts, chuckling, "and I will point out to you a way of escaping the general fate of your family—not merely of escaping it—but of acquiring a large reward. And that is by giving evidence against them—by telling all you know—you understand—eh!"

"Yeigh, ey think ey do onderstond," replied Jennet, sullenly. "An so this is your grand scheme, eh, sir?"

"This is my scheme, Jennet," said Potts, "and a notable scheme it is, my little lass. Think it over. You're an admissible and indeed a desirable witness; for our sagacious sovereign has expressly observed that 'bairns,' (I believe you call children 'bairns' in Lancashire, Jennet; your uncouth dialect very much resembles the Scottish language, in which our learned monarch writes as well as speaks)—'bairns,' says he, 'or wives, or never so defamed persons, may of our law serve for sufficient witnesses and proofs; for who but witches can be proofs, and so witnesses of the doings of witches.'"

"Boh, ey am neaw witch, ey tell ye, mon," cried Jennet, angrily.

"But you're a witch's bairn, my little lassy," replied Potts, "and that's just as bad, and you'll grow up to be a witch in due time—that is, if your career be not cut short. I'm sure you must have witnessed some strange things when you visited your grandmother at Malkin Tower—that, if I mistake not, is the name of her abode?—and a fearful and witch-like name it is;—you must have heard frequent mutterings and curses, spells, charms, and diabolical incantations—beheld strange and monstrous visions—listened to threats uttered against people who have afterwards perished unaccountably."

"Ey've heerd an seen nowt o't sort," replied Jennet; "boh ey' han heerd my mother threaten yo."

"Ah, indeed," cried Potts, forcing a laugh, but looking rather blank afterwards; "and how did she threaten me, Jennet, eh?—But no matter. Let that pass for the moment. As I was saying, you must have seen mysterious proceedings both at Malkin Tower and your own house. A black gentleman with a club foot must visit you occasionally, and your mother must, now and then—say once a week—take a fancy to riding on a broomstick. Are you

quite sure you have never ridden on one yourself, Jennet, and got whisked up the chimney without being aware of it? It's the common witch conveyance, and said to be very expeditious and agreeable—but I can't vouch for it myself—ha! ha! Possibly—though you are rather young—but possibly, I say, you may have attended a witch's Sabbath, and seen a huge He-Goat, with four horns on his head, and a large tail, seated in the midst of a large circle of devoted admirers. If you have seen this, and can recollect the names and faces of the assembly, it would be highly important."

"When ey see it, ey shanna forget it," replied Jennet. "Boh ey am nah quite so familiar wi' Owd Scrat os yo seem to suppose."

"Has it ever occurred to you that Alizon might be addicted to these practices?" pursued Potts, "and that she obtained her extraordinary and otherwise unaccountable beauty by some magical process—some charm—some diabolical unguent prepared, as the Lord Keeper of the Privy Seals, the singularly learned Lord Bacon, declares, from fat of unbaptised babes, compounded with henbane, hemlock, mandrake, moonshade, and other terrible ingredients. She could not be so beautiful without some such aid."

"That shows how little yo knoaw about it," replied Jennet. "Alizon is os good as she's protty, and dunna yo think to wheedle me into sayin' out agen her, fo' yo winna do it. Ey'd dee rayther than harm a hure o' her heaod."

"Very praiseworthy, indeed, my little dear," replied Potts, ironically. "I honour you for your sisterly affection; but, notwithstanding all this, I cannot help thinking she has bewitched Mistress Nutter."

"Licker, Mistress Nutter has bewitched her," replied Jennet.

"Then you think Mistress Nutter is a witch, eh?" cried Potts, eagerly.

"Ey'st neaw tell ye what ey think, mon," rejoined Jennet, doggedly.

"But hear me," cried Potts, "I have my own suspicions, also, nay, more than suspicions."

"If ye're shure, yo dunna want me," said Jennet.

"But I want a witness," pursued Potts, "and if you'll serve as one—"

"Whot'll ye gi' me?" said Jennet.

"Whatever you like," rejoined Potts. "Only name the sum. So you can prove the practice of witchcraft against Mistress Nutter—eh?"

Jennet nodded. "Wad ye loike to knoa why brother Jem is gone to Pendle to-neet?" she said.

"Very much, indeed," replied Potts, drawing still nearer to her. "Very much, indeed."

The little girl was about to speak, but on a sudden a sharp convulsion agitated her frame; her utterance totally failed her; and she fell back in the seat insensible.

Very much startled, Potts flew in search of some restorative, and on doing so, he perceived Mistress Nutter moving away from this part of the hall.

"She has done it," he cried. "A piece of witchcraft before my very eyes. Has she killed the child? No; she breathes, and her pulse beats, though faintly. She is only in a swoon, but a deep and deathlike one. It would be useless to attempt to revive her; she must come to in her own way, or at the pleasure of the wicked woman who has thrown her into this condition. I have now an assured witness in this girl. But I must keep watch upon Mistress Nutter's further movements."

And he walked cautiously after her.

As Richard had anticipated, his explanation was perfectly satisfactory to Dorothy; and the young lady, who had suffered greatly from the restraint she had imposed upon herself, flew to Alizon, and poured forth excuses, which were as readily accepted as they were freely made. They were instantly as great friends as before, and their brief estrangement only seemed to make them dearer to each other. Dorothy could not forgive herself, and Alizon assured her there was nothing to be forgiven, and so they took hands upon it, and promised to forget all that had passed. Richard stood by, delighted with the change, and wrapped in the contemplation of the object of his love, who, thus engaged, seemed to him more beautiful than he had ever beheld her.

Towards the close of the evening, while all three were still together. Nicholas came up and took Richard aside. The squire looked flushed; and there was an undefined expression of alarm in his countenance.

"What is the matter?" inquired Richard, dreading to hear of some new calamity.

"Have you not noticed it, Dick?" said Nicholas, in a hollow tone. "The portrait is gone."

"What portrait?" exclaimed Richard, forgetting the previous circumstances.

"The portrait of Isole de Heton," returned Nicholas, becoming more sepulchral in his accents as he proceeded; "it has vanished from the wall. See and believe."

"Who has taken it down?" cried Richard, remarking that the picture had certainly disappeared.

"No mortal hand," replied Nicholas. "It has come down of itself. I knew what would happen, Dick. I told you the fair votaress gave me the clin d'oeil—the wink. You would not believe me then—and now you see your mistake."

"I see nothing but the bare wall," said Richard.

"But you will see something anon, Dick," rejoined Nicholas, with a hollow laugh, and in a dismally deep tone. "You will see Isole herself. I was foolhardy enough to invite her to dance the brawl with me. She smiled her assent, and winked at me thus—very significantly, I protest to you—and she will be as good as her word."

"Absurd!" exclaimed Richard.

"Absurd, sayest thou—thou art an infidel, and believest nothing, Dick," cried Nicholas. "Dost thou not see that the picture is gone? She will be here presently. Ha! the brawl is called for—the very dance I invited her to. She must be in the room now. I will go in search of her. Look out, Dick. Thou wilt behold a sight presently shall make thine hair stand on end."

And he moved away with a rapid but uncertain step.

"The potent wine has confused his brain," said Richard. "I must see that no mischance befalls him."

And, waving his hand to his sister, he followed the squire, who moved on, staring inquisitively into the countenance of every pretty damsel he encountered.

Time had flown fleetly with Dorothy and Alizon, who, occupied with each other, had taken little note of its progress, and were surprised to find how quickly the hours had gone by. Meanwhile several dances had been performed; a Morisco, in which all the May-day revellers took part, with the exception of the queen herself, who, notwithstanding the united entreaties of Robin Hood and her gentleman-usher, could not be prevailed upon to join it: a trenchmore, a sort of long country-dance, extending

from top to bottom of the hall, and in which the whole of the rustics stood up: a galliard, confined to the more important guests, and in which both Alizon and Dorothy were included, the former dancing, of course, with Richard, and the latter with one of her cousins, young Joseph Robinson: and a jig, quite promiscuous and unexclusive, and not the less merry on that account. In this way, what with the dances, which were of some duration—the trenchmore alone occupying more than an hour—and the necessary breathing-time between them, it was on the stroke of ten without any body being aware of it. Now this, though a very early hour for a modern party, being about the time when the first guest would arrive, was a very late one even in fashionable assemblages at the period in question, and the guests began to think of retiring, when the brawl, intended to wind up the entertainment, was called. The highest animation still prevailed throughout the company, for the generous host had taken care that the intervals between the dances should be well filled up with refreshments, and large bowls of spiced wines, with burnt oranges and crabs floating in them, were placed on the side-table, and liberally dispensed to all applicants. Thus all seemed destined to be brought to a happy conclusion.

Throughout the evening Alizon had been closely watched by Mistress Nutter, who remarked, with feelings akin to jealousy and distrust, the marked predilection exhibited by her for Richard and Dorothy Assheton, as well as her inattention to her own expressed injunctions in remaining constantly near them. Though secretly displeased by this, she put a calm face upon it, and neither remonstrated by word or look. Thus Alizon, feeling encouraged in the course she had adopted, and prompted by her inclinations, soon forgot the interdiction she had received. Mistress Nutter even went so far in her duplicity as to promise Dorothy, that Alizon should pay her an early visit at Middleton—though inwardly resolving no such visit should ever take place. However, she now received the proposal very graciously, and made Alizon quite happy in acceding to it.

"I would fain have her go back with me to Middleton when I return," said Dorothy, "but I fear you would not like to part with your newly-adopted daughter so soon; neither would it be quite fair to rob you of her. But I shall hold you to your promise of an early visit."

Mistress Nutter replied by a bland smile, and then observed to Alizon that it was time for them to retire, and that she had stayed on her account far later than she intended—a mark of consideration duly appreciated by Alizon. Farewells for the night were then exchanged between the two girls, and Alizon looked round to bid adieu to Richard, but unfortunately, at this very juncture, he was engaged in pursuit of Nicholas. Before quitting the hall she made inquiries after Jennet, and receiving for answer that she was still in the hall, but had fallen asleep in a chair at one corner of the side-table, and could not be wakened, she instantly flew thither and tried to rouse her, but in vain; when

Mistress Nutter, coming up the next moment, merely touched her brow, and the little girl opened her eyes and gazed about her with a bewildered look.

"She is unused to these late hours, poor child," said Alizon. "Some one must be found to take her home."

"You need not go far in search of a convoy," said Potts, who had been hovering about, and now stepped up; "I am going to the Dragon myself, and shall be happy to take charge of her."

"You are over-officious, sir," rejoined Mistress Nutter, coldly; "when we need your assistance we will ask it. My own servant, Simon Blackadder, will see her safely home."

And at a sign from her, a tall fellow with a dark, scowling countenance, came from among the other serving-men, and, receiving his instructions from his mistress, seized Jennet's hand, and strode off with her. During all this time, Mistress Nutter kept her eyes steadily fixed on the little girl, who spoke not a word, nor replied even by a gesture to Alizon's affectionate good-night, retaining her dazed look to the moment of quitting the hall.

"I never saw her thus before," said Alizon. "What can be the matter with her?"

"I think I could tell you," rejoined Potts, glancing maliciously and significantly at Mistress Nutter.

The lady darted an ireful and piercing look at him, which seemed to produce much the same consequences as those experienced by Jennet, for his visage instantly elongated, and he sank back in a chair.

"Oh dear!" he cried, putting his hand to his head; "I'm struck all of a heap. I feel a sudden qualm—a giddiness—a sort of don't-know-howishness. Ho, there! some aquavitæ—or imperial water—or cinnamon water—or whatever reviving cordial may be at hand. I feel very ill—very ill, indeed—oh dear!"

While his requirements were attended to, Mistress Nutter moved away with her daughter; but they had not proceeded far when they encountered Richard, who, having fortunately descried them, came up to say good-night.

The brawl, meanwhile, had commenced, and the dancers were whirling round giddily in every direction, somewhat like the couples in a grand polka, danced after a very boisterous, romping, and extravagant fashion.

"Who is Nicholas dancing with?" asked Mistress Nutter suddenly.

"Is he dancing with any one?" rejoined Richard, looking amidst the crowd.

"Do you not see her?" said Mistress Nutter; "a very beautiful woman with flashing eyes: they move so quickly, that I can scarce discern her features; but she is habited like a nun."

"Like a nun!" cried Richard, his blood growing chill in his veins. "'Tis she indeed, then! Where is he?"

"Yonder, yonder, whirling madly round," replied Mistress Nutter.

"I see him now," said Richard, "but he is alone. He has lost his wits to dance in that strange manner by himself. How wild, too, is his gaze!"

"I tell you he is dancing with a very beautiful woman in the habit of a nun," said Mistress Nutter. "Strange I should never have remarked her before. No one in the room is to be compared with her in loveliness—not even Alizon. Her eyes seem to flash fire, and she bounds like the wild roe."

"Does she resemble the portrait of Isole de Heton?" asked Richard, shuddering.

"She does—she does," replied Mistress Nutter. "See! she whirls past us now."

"I can see no one but Nicholas," cried Richard.

"Nor I," added Alizon, who shared in the young man's alarm.

"Are you sure you behold that figure?" said Richard, drawing Mistress Nutter aside, and breathing the words in her ear. "If so, it is a phantom—or he is in the power of the fiend. He was rash enough to invite that wicked votaress, Isole de Heton, condemned, it is said, to penal fires for her earthly enormities, to dance with him, and she has come."

"Ha!" exclaimed Mistress Nutter.

"She will whirl him round till he expires," cried Richard; "I must free him at all hazards."

"Stay," said Mistress Nutter; "it is I who have been deceived. Now I look again, I see that Nicholas is alone."

"But the nun's dress—the wondrous beauty—the flashing eyes!" cried Richard. "You described Isole exactly."

"It was mere fancy," said Mistress Nutter. "I had just been looking at her portrait, and it dwelt on my mind, and created the image."

"The portrait is gone," cried Richard, pointing to the empty wall.

Mistress Nutter looked confounded.

And without a word more, she took Alizon, who was full of alarm and astonishment, by the arm, and hurried her out of the hall.

As they disappeared, the young man flew towards Nicholas, whose extraordinary proceedings had excited general amazement. The other dancers had moved out of the way, so that free space was left for his mad gyrations. Greatly scandalised by the exhibition, which he looked upon as the effect of intoxication, Sir Ralph called loudly to him to stop, but he paid no attention to the summons, but whirled on with momently-increasing velocity, oversetting old Adam Whitworth, Gregory, and Dickon, who severally ventured to place themselves in his path, to enforce their master's injunctions, until at last, just as Richard reached him, he uttered a loud cry, and fell to the ground insensible. By Sir Ralph's command he was instantly lifted up and transported to his own chamber.

This unexpected and extraordinary incident put an end to the ball, and the whole of the guests, after taking a respectful and grateful leave of the host, departed—not in "most admired" disorder, but full of wonder. By most persons the squire's "fantastical vagaries," as they were termed, were traced to the vast quantity of wine he had drunk, but a few others shook their heads, and said he was evidently bewitched, and that Mother Chattox and Nance Redferne were at the bottom of it. As to the portrait of Isole de Heton, it was found under the table, and it was said that Nicholas himself had pulled it down; but this he obstinately denied, when afterwards taken to task for his indecorous behaviour; and to his dying day he asserted, and believed, that he had danced the brawl with Isole de Heton. "And never," he would say, "had mortal man such a partner."

From that night the two portraits in the banqueting-hall were regarded with great awe by the inmates of the Abbey.

The Lancashire Witches Volume II by William Harrison Ainsworth

CHAPTER X.—THE NOCTURNAL MEETING.

On gaining the head of the staircase leading to the corridor, Mistress Nutter, whose movements had hitherto been extremely rapid, paused with her daughter to listen to the sounds arising from below. Suddenly was heard a loud cry, and the music, which had waxed fast and furious in order to keep pace with the frenzied boundings of the squire, ceased at once, showing some interruption had occurred, while from the confused noise that ensued, it was evident the sudden stoppage had been the result of accident. With blanched cheek Alizon listened, scarcely daring to look at her mother, whose expression of countenance, revealed by the lamp she held in her hand, almost frightened her; and it was a great relief to hear the voices and laughter of the serving-men as they came forth with Nicholas, and bore him towards another part of the mansion; and though much shocked, she was glad when one of them, who appeared to be Nicholas's own servant, assured the others "that it was only a drunken fit and that the squire would wake up next morning as if nothing had happened."

Apparently satisfied with this explanation, Mistress Nutter moved on; but a new feeling of uneasiness came over Alizon as she followed her down the long dusky corridor, in the direction of the mysterious chamber, where they were to pass the night. The fitful flame of the lamp fell upon many a grim painting depicting the sufferings of the early martyrs; and these ghastly representations did not serve to re-assure her. The grotesque carvings on the panels and ribs of the vaulted roof, likewise impressed her with vague terror, and there was one large piece of sculpture—Saint Theodora subjected to diabolical temptation, as described in the Golden Legend—that absolutely scared her. Their footsteps echoed hollowly overhead, and more than once, deceived by the sound, Alizon turned to see if any one was behind them. At the end of the corridor lay the room once occupied by the superior of the religious establishment, and still known from that circumstance as the "Abbot's Chamber." Connected with this apartment was the beautiful oratory built by Paslew, wherein he had kept his last vigils; and though now no longer applied to purposes of worship, still wearing from the character of its architecture, its sculptured ornaments, and the painted glass in its casements, a dim religious air. The abbot's room was allotted to Dorothy Assheton; and from its sombre magnificence, as well as the ghostly tales connected with it, had impressed her with so much superstitious misgiving, that she besought Alizon to share her couch with her, but the young girl did not dare to assent. Just, however, as Mistress Nutter was about to enter her own room, Dorothy appeared on the corridor, and, calling to Alizon to stay a moment, flew quickly towards her, and renewed the proposition. Alizon looked at her mother, but the latter decidedly, and somewhat sternly, negatived it.

The young girls then said good-night, kissing each other affectionately, after which Alizon entered the room with Mistress Nutter, and the door was closed. Two tapers were burning on the dressing-table, and their light fell upon the carved figures of the wardrobe, which still exercised the same weird influence over her. Mistress Nutter neither seemed disposed to retire to rest immediately, nor willing to talk, but sat down, and was soon lost in thought. After awhile, an impulse of curiosity which she could not resist, prompted Alizon to peep into the closet, and pushing aside the tapestry, partly drawn over the entrance, she held the lamp forward so as to throw its light into the little chamber. A mere glance was all she was allowed, but it sufficed to show her the large oak chest, though the monkish robe lately suspended above it, and which had particularly attracted her attention, was gone. Mistress Nutter had noticed the movement, and instantly and somewhat sharply recalled her.

As Alizon obeyed, a slight tap was heard at the door. The young girl turned pale, for in her present frame of mind any little matter affected her. Nor were her apprehensions materially allayed by the entrance of Dorothy, who, looking white as a sheet, said she did not dare to remain in her own room, having been terribly frightened, by seeing a monkish figure in mouldering white garments, exactly resembling one of the carved images on the wardrobe, issue from behind the hangings on the wall, and glide into the oratory, and she entreated Mistress Nutter to let Alizon go back with her. The request was peremptorily refused, and the lady, ridiculing Dorothy for her fears, bade her return; but she still lingered. This relation filled Alizon with inexpressible alarm, for though she did not dare to allude to the disappearance of the monkish gown, she could not help connecting the circumstance with the ghostly figure seen by Dorothy.

Unable otherwise to get rid of the terrified intruder, whose presence was an evident restraint to her, Mistress Nutter, at length, consented to accompany her to her room, and convince her of the folly of her fears, by an examination of the oratory. Alizon went with them, her mother not choosing to leave her behind, and indeed she herself was most anxious to go.

The abbot's chamber was large and gloomy, nearly twice the size of the room occupied by Mistress Nutter, but resembling it in many respects, as well as in the No interdusky hue of its hangings and furniture, most of which had been undisturbed since the days of Paslew. The very bed, of carved oak, was that in which he had slept, and his arms were still displayed upon it, and on the painted glass of the windows. As Alizon entered she looked round with apprehension, but nothing occurred to justify her uneasiness. Having raised the arras, from behind which Dorothy averred the figure had issued, and discovering nothing but a panel of oak; with a smile of incredulity, Mistress Nutter walked boldly towards the oratory, the two girls, hand in hand, following tremblingly

after her; but no fearful object met their view. A dressing-table, with a large mirror upon it, occupied the spot where the altar had formerly stood; but, in spite of this, and of other furniture, the little place of prayer, as has previously been observed, retained much of its original character, and seemed more calculated to inspire sentiments of devotional awe than any other.

After remaining for a short time in the oratory, during which she pointed out the impossibility of any one being concealed there, Mistress Nutter assured Dorothy she might rest quite easy that nothing further would occur to alarm her, and recommending her to lose the sense of her fears as speedily as she could in sleep, took her departure with Alizon.

But the recommendation was of little avail. The poor girl's heart died within her, and all her former terrors returned, and with additional force. Sitting down, she looked fixedly at the hangings till her eyes ached, and then covering her face with her hands, and scarcely daring to breathe, she listened intently for the slightest sound. A rustle would have made her scream—but all was still as death, so profoundly quiet, that the very hush and silence became a new cause of disquietude, and longing for some cheerful sound to break it, she would have spoken aloud but from a fear of hearing her own voice. A book lay before her, and she essayed to read it, but in vain. She was ever glancing fearfully round—ever listening intently. This state could not endure for ever, and feeling a drowsiness steal over her she yielded to it, and at length dropped asleep in her chair. Her dreams, however, were influenced by her mental condition, and slumber was no refuge, as promised by Mistress Nutter, from the hauntings of terror.

At last a jarring sound aroused her, and she found she had been awakened by the clock striking twelve. Her lamp required trimming and burnt dimly, but by its imperfect light she saw the arras move. This could be no fancy, for the next moment the hangings were raised, and a figure looked from behind them; and this time it was not the monk, but a female robed in white. A glimpse of the figure was all Dorothy caught, for it instantly retreated, and the tapestry fell back to its place against the wall. Scared by this apparition, Dorothy rushed out of the room so hurriedly that she forgot to take her lamp, and made her way, she scarcely knew how, to the adjoining chamber. She did not tap at the door, but trying it, and finding it unfastened, opened it softly, and closed it after her, resolved if the occupants of the room were asleep not to disturb them, but to pass the night in a chair, the presence of some living beings beside her sufficing, in some degree, to dispel her terrors. The room was buried in darkness, the tapers being extinguished.

Advancing on tiptoe she soon discovered a seat, when what was her surprise to find Alizon asleep within it. She was sure it was Alizon—for she had touched her hair and

face, and she felt surprised that the contact had not awakened her. Still more surprised did she feel that the young girl had not retired to rest. Again she stepped forward in search of another chair, when a gleam of light suddenly shot from one side of the bed, and the tapestry, masking the entrance to the closet, was slowly drawn aside. From behind it, the next moment, appeared the same female figure, robed in white, that she had previously beheld in the abbot's chamber. The figure held a lamp in one hand, and a small box in the other, and, to her unspeakable horror, disclosed the livid and contorted countenance of Mistress Nutter.

Alizon Alarmed at the Appearance of Mrs. Nutter.

Dreadful though undefined suspicions crossed her mind, and she feared, if discovered, she should be sacrificed to the fury of this strange and terrible woman. Luckily, where she stood, though Mistress Nutter was revealed to her, she herself was screened from view by the hangings of the bed, and looking around for a hiding-place, she observed that the mysterious wardrobe, close behind her, was open, and without a moment's hesitation, she slipped into the covert and drew the door to, noiselessly. But her curiosity overmastered her fear, and, firmly believing some magical rite was about to be performed, she sought for means of beholding it; nor was she long in discovering a small eyelet-hole in the carving which commanded the room.

Unconscious of any other presence than that of Alizon, whose stupor appeared to occasion her no uneasiness, Mistress Nutter, placed the lamp upon the table, made fast the door, and, muttering some unintelligible words, unlocked the box. It contained two singularly-shaped glass vessels, the one filled with a bright sparkling liquid, and the other with a greenish-coloured unguent. Pouring forth a few drops of the liquid into a glass near her, Mistress Nutter swallowed them, and then taking some of the unguent upon her hands, proceeded to anoint her face and neck with it, exclaiming as she did so, "Emen hetan! Emen hetan!"—words that fixed themselves upon the listener's memory.

Wondering what would follow, Dorothy gazed on, when she suddenly lost sight of Mistress Nutter, and after looking for her as far as her range of vision, limited by the aperture, would extend, she became convinced that she had left the room. All remaining quiet, she ventured, after awhile, to quit her hiding-place, and flying to Alizon, tried to waken her, but in vain. The poor girl retained the same moveless attitude, and appeared plunged in a deathly stupor.

Much frightened, Dorothy resolved to alarm the house, but some fears of Mistress Nutter restrained her, and she crept towards the closet to see whether that dread lady could be there. All was perfectly still; and somewhat emboldened, she returned to the

table, where the box, which was left open and its contents unguarded, attracted her attention.

What was the liquid in the phial? What could it do? These were questions she asked herself, and longing to try the effect, she ventured at last to pour forth a few drops and taste it. It was like a potent distillation, and she became instantly sensible of a strange bewildering excitement. Presently her brain reeled, and she laughed wildly. Never before had she felt so light and buoyant, and wings seemed scarcely wanting to enable her to fly. An idea occurred to her. The wondrous liquid might arouse Alizon. The experiment should be tried at once, and, dipping her finger in the phial, she touched the lips of the sleeper, who sighed deeply and opened her eyes. Another drop, and Alizon was on her feet, gazing at her in astonishment, and laughing wildly as herself.

Poor girls! how wild and strange they looked—and how unlike themselves!

"Whither are you going?" cried Alizon.

"To the moon! to the stars!—any where!" rejoined Dorothy, with a laugh of frantic glee.

"I will go with you," cried Alizon, echoing the laugh.

"Here and there!—here and there!" exclaimed Dorothy, taking her hand. "Emen hetan! Emen hetan!"

As the mystic words were uttered they started away. It seemed as if no impediments could stop them; how they crossed the closet, passed through a sliding panel into the abbot's room, entered the oratory, and from it descended, by a secret staircase, to the garden, they knew not—but there they were, gliding swiftly along in the moonlight, like winged spirits. What took them towards the conventual church they could not say. But they were drawn thither, as the ship was irresistibly dragged towards the loadstone rock described in the Eastern legend. Nothing surprised them then, or they might have been struck by the dense vapour, enveloping the monastic ruins, and shrouding them from view; nor was it until they entered the desecrated fabric, that any consciousness of what was passing around returned to them.

Their ears were then assailed by a wild hubbub of discordant sounds, hootings and croakings as of owls and ravens, shrieks and jarring cries as of night-birds, bellowings as of cattle, groans and dismal sounds, mixed with unearthly laughter. Undefined and extraordinary shapes, whether men or women, beings of this world or of another they could not tell, though they judged them the latter, flew past with wild whoops and piercing cries, flapping the air as if with great leathern bat-like wings, or bestriding

black, monstrous, misshapen steeds. Fantastical and grotesque were these objects, yet hideous and appalling. Now and then a red and fiery star would whiz crackling through the air, and then exploding break into numerous pale phosphoric lights, that danced awhile overhead, and then flitted away among the ruins. The ground seemed to heave and tremble beneath the footsteps, as if the graves were opening to give forth their dead, while toads and hissing reptiles crept forth.

Appalled, yet partly restored to herself by this confused and horrible din, Alizon stood still and kept fast hold of Dorothy, who, seemingly under a stronger influence than herself, was drawn towards the eastern end of the fane, where a fire appeared to be blazing, a strong ruddy glare being cast upon the broken roof of the choir, and the mouldering arches around it. The noises around them suddenly ceased, and all the uproar seemed concentrated near the spot where the fire was burning. Dorothy besought her friend so earnestly to let her see what was going forward, that Alizon reluctantly and tremblingly assented, and they moved slowly towards the transept, taking care to keep under the shelter of the columns.

On reaching the last pillar, behind which they remained, an extraordinary and fearful spectacle burst upon them. As they had supposed, a large fire was burning in the midst of the choir, the smoke of which, ascending in eddying wreaths, formed a dark canopy overhead, where it was mixed with the steam issuing from a large black bubbling caldron set on the blazing embers. Around the fire were ranged, in a wide circle, an assemblage of men and women, but chiefly the latter, and of these almost all old, hideous, and of malignant aspect, their grim and sinister features looking ghastly in the lurid light. Above them, amid the smoke and steam, wheeled bat and flitter-mouse, horned owl and screech-owl, in mazy circles. The weird assemblage chattered together in some wild jargon, mumbling and muttering spells and incantations, chanting fearfully with hoarse, cracked voices a wild chorus, and anon breaking into a loud and long-continued peal of laughter. Then there was more mumbling, chattering, and singing, and one of the troop producing a wallet, hobbled forward.

She was a fearful old crone; hunchbacked, toothless, blear-eyed, bearded, halt, with huge gouty feet swathed in flannel. As she cast in the ingredients one by one, she chanted thus:—

"Head of monkey, brain of cat,
Eye of weasel, tail of rat,
Juice of mugwort, mastic, myrrh—
All within the pot I stir."
"Well sung, Mother Mould-heels," cried a little old man, whose doublet and hose were of rusty black, with a short cloak, of the same hue, over his shoulders. "Well sung, Mother

Mould-heels," he cried, advancing as the old witch retired, amidst a roar of laughter from the others, and chanting as he filled the caldron:

"Here is foam from a mad dog's lips,
Gather'd beneath the moon's eclipse,
Ashes of a shroud consumed,
And with deadly vapour fumed.
These within the mess I cast—
Stir the caldron—stir it fast!"
A red-haired witch then took his place, singing,

"Here are snakes from out the river,
Bones of toad and sea-calf's liver;
Swine's flesh fatten'd on her brood,
Wolf's tooth, hare's foot, weasel's blood.
Skull of ape and fierce baboon,
And panther spotted like the moon;
Feathers of the horned owl,
Daw, pie, and other fatal fowl.
Fruit from fig-tree never sown,
Seed from cypress never grown.
All within the mess I cast,
Stir the caldron—stir it fast!"
Nance Redferne then advanced, and, taking from her wallet a small clay image, tricked out in attire intended to resemble that of James Device, plunged several pins deeply into its breast, singing as she did so, thus,—

"In his likeness it is moulded,
In his vestments 'tis enfolded.
Ye may know it, as I show it!
In its breast sharp pins I stick,
And I drive them to the quick.
They are in—they are in—
And the wretch's pangs begin.
Now his heart,
Feels the smart;
Through his marrow,
Sharp as arrow,
Torments quiver
He shall shiver,
He shall burn,

He shall toss, and he shall turn.
Unavailingly.
Aches shall rack him,
Cramps attack him,
He shall wail,
Strength shall fail,
Till he die
Miserably!"
As Nance retired, another witch advanced, and sung thus:

"Over mountain, over valley, over woodland, over waste,
On our gallant broomsticks riding we have come with frantic haste,
And the reason of our coming, as ye wot well, is to see
Who this night, as new-made witch, to our ranks shall added be."
A wild burst of laughter followed this address, and another wizard succeeded, chanting thus:

"Beat the water, Demdike's daughter!
Till the tempest gather o'er us;
Till the thunder strike with wonder
And the lightnings flash before us!
Beat the water, Demdike's daughter!
Ruin seize our foes and slaughter!"
As the words were uttered, a woman stepped from out the circle, and throwing back the grey-hooded cloak in which she was enveloped, disclosed the features of Elizabeth Device. Her presence in that fearful assemblage occasioned no surprise to Alizon, though it increased her horror. A pail of water was next set before the witch, and a broom being placed in her hand, she struck the lymph with it, sprinkling it aloft, and uttering this spell:

"Mount, water, to the skies!
Bid the sudden storm arise.
Bid the pitchy clouds advance,
Bid the forked lightnings glance,
Bid the angry thunder growl,
Bid the wild wind fiercely howl!
Bid the tempest come amain,
Thunder, lightning, wind, and rain!"

The Incantation.

As she concluded, clouds gathered thickly overhead, obscuring the stars that had hitherto shone down from the heavens. The wind suddenly arose, but in lieu of dispersing the vapours it seemed only to condense them. A flash of forked lightning cut through the air, and a loud peal of thunder rolled overhead.

Then the whole troop sang together—

"Beat the water, Demdike's daughter!
See the tempests gathers o'er us,
Lightning flashes—thunder crashes,
Wild winds sing in lusty chorus!"

For a brief space the storm raged fearfully, and recalled the terror of that previously witnessed by Alizon, which she now began to think might have originated in a similar manner. The wind raved around the ruined pile, but its breath was not felt within it, and the rain was heard descending in deluging showers without, though no drop came through the open roof. The thunder shook the walls and pillars of the old fabric, and threatened to topple them down from their foundations, but they resisted the shocks. The lightning played around the tall spire springing from this part of the fane, and ran down from its shattered summit to its base, without doing any damage. The red bolts struck the ground innocuously, though they fell at the very feet of the weird assemblage, who laughed wildly at the awful tumult.

Whilst the storm was at its worst, while the lightning was flashing fiercely, and the thunder rattling loudly, Mother Chattox, with a chafing-dish in her hand, advanced towards the fire, and placing the pan upon it, threw certain herbs and roots into it, chanting thus:—

"Here is juice of poppy bruised,
With black hellebore infused;
Here is mandrake's bleeding root,
Mixed with moonshade's deadly fruit;
Viper's bag with venom fill'd,
Taken ere the beast was kill'd;
Adder's skin and raven's feather,
With shell of beetle blent together;
Dragonwort and barbatus,
Hemlock black and poisonous;
Horn of hart, and storax red,
Lapwing's blood, at midnight shed.
In the heated pan they burn,
And to pungent vapours turn.

By this strong suffumigation,
By this potent invocation,
Spirits! I compel you here!
All who list may call appear!"
After a moment's pause, she resumed as follows:—

"White-robed brethren, who of old,
Nightly paced yon cloisters cold,
Sleeping now beneath the mould!
I bid ye rise.

"Abbots! by the weakling fear'd,
By the credulous revered,
Who this mighty fabric rear'd!
I bid ye rise!

"And thou last and guilty one!
By thy lust of power undone,
Whom in death thy fellows shun!
I bid thee come!

"And thou fair one, who disdain'd
To keep the vows thy lips had feign'd;
And thy snowy garments stain'd!
I bid thee come!"
During this invocation, the glee of the assemblage ceased, and they looked around in hushed expectation of the result. Slowly then did a long procession of monkish forms, robed in white, glide along the aisles, and gather round the altar. The brass-covered stones within the presbytery were lifted up, as if they moved on hinges, and from the yawning graves beneath them arose solemn shapes, sixteen in number, each with mitre on head and crosier in hand, which likewise proceeded to the altar. Then a loud cry was heard, and from a side chapel burst the monkish form, in mouldering garments, which Dorothy had seen enter the oratory, and which would have mingled with its brethren at the altar, but they waved it off menacingly. Another piercing shriek followed, and a female shape, habited like a nun, and of surpassing loveliness, issued from the opposite chapel, and hovered near the fire. Content with this proof of her power, Mother Chattox waved her hand, and the long shadowy train glided off as they came. The ghostly abbots returned to their tombs, and the stones closed over them. But the shades of Paslew and Isole de Heton still lingered.

The storm had wellnigh ceased, the thunder rolled hollowly at intervals, and a flash of lightning now and then licked the walls. The weird crew had resumed their rites, when the door of the Lacy chapel flew open, and a tall female figure came forward.

Alizon doubted if she beheld aright. Could that terrific woman in the strangely-fashioned robe of white, girt by a brazen zone graven with mystic characters, with a long glittering blade in her hand, infernal fury in her wildly-rolling orbs, the livid hue of death on her cheeks, and the red brand upon her brow—could that fearful woman, with the black dishevelled tresses floating over her bare shoulders, and whose gestures were so imperious, be Mistress Nutter? Mother no longer, if it indeed were she! How came she there amid that weird assemblage? Why did they so humbly salute her, and fall prostrate before her, kissing the hem of her garment? Why did she stand proudly in the midst of them, and extend her hand, armed with the knife, over them? Was she their sovereign mistress, that they bent so lowly at her coming, and rose so reverentially at her bidding? Was this terrible woman, now seated oh a dilapidated tomb, and regarding the dark conclave with the eye of a queen who held their lives in her hands—was she her mother? Oh, no!—no!—it could not be! It must be some fiend that usurped her likeness.

Still, though Alizon thus strove to discredit the evidence of her senses, and to hold all she saw to be delusion, and the work of darkness, she could not entirely convince herself, but imperfectly recalling the fearful vision she had witnessed during her former stupor, began to connect it with the scene now passing before her. The storm had wholly ceased, and the stars again twinkled down through the shattered roof. Deep silence prevailed, broken only by the hissing and bubbling of the caldron.

Alizon's gaze was riveted upon her mother, whose slightest gestures she watched. After numbering the assemblage thrice, Mistress Nutter majestically arose, and motioning Mother Chattox towards her, the old witch tremblingly advanced, and some words passed between them, the import of which did not reach the listener's ear. In conclusion, however, Mistress Nutter exclaimed aloud, in accents of command—"Go, bring it at once, the sacrifice must be made."—And on this, Mother Chattox hobbled off to one of the side chapels.

A mortal terror seized Alizon, and she could scarcely draw breath. Dark tales had been told her that unbaptised infants were sometimes sacrificed by witches, and their flesh boiled and devoured at their impious banquets, and dreading lest some such atrocity was now about to be practised, she mustered all her resolution, determined, at any risk, to interfere, and, if possible, prevent its accomplishment.

In another moment, Mother Chattox returned bearing some living thing, wrapped in a white cloth, which struggled feebly for liberation, apparently confirming Alizon's

suspicions, and she was about to rush forward, when Mistress Nutter, snatching the bundle from the old witch, opened it, and disclosed a beautiful bird, with plumage white as driven snow, whose legs were tied together, so that it could not escape. Conjecturing what was to follow, Alizon averted her eyes, and when she looked round again the bird had been slain, while Mother Chattox was in the act of throwing its body into the caldron, muttering a charm as she did so. Mistress Nutter held the ensanguined knife aloft, and casting some ruddy drops upon the glowing embers, pronounced, as they hissed and smoked, the following adjuration:—

"Thy aid I seek, infernal Power!
Be thy word sent to Malkin Tower,
That the beldame old may know
Where I will, thou'dst have her go—
What I will, thou'dst have her do!"
An immediate response was made by an awful voice issuing apparently from the bowels of the earth.

"Thou who seek'st the Demon's aid,
Know'st the price that must be paid."
The queen witch rejoined—

"I do. But grant the aid I crave,
And that thou wishest thou shalt have.
Another worshipper is won,
Thine to be, when all is done."
Again the deep voice spake, with something of mockery in its accents:—

"Enough proud witch, I am content.
To Malkin Tower the word is sent,
Forth to her task the beldame goes,
And where she points the streamlet flows;
Its customary bed forsaking,
Another distant channel making.
Round about like elfets tripping,
Stock and stone, and tree are skipping;
Halting where she plants her staff,
With a wild exulting laugh.
Ho! ho! 'tis a merry sight,
Thou hast given the hag to-night.

Lo! the sheepfold, and the herd,

To another site are stirr'd!
And the rugged limestone quarry,
Where 'twas digg'd may no more tarry;
While the goblin haunted dingle,
With another dell must mingle.
Pendle Moor is in commotion,
Like the billows of the ocean,
When the winds are o'er it ranging,
Heaving, falling, bursting, changing.
Ho! ho! 'tis a merry sight
Thou hast given the hag to-night.

Lo! the moss-pool sudden flies,
In another spot to rise;
And the scanty-grown plantation,
Finds another situation,
And a more congenial soil,
Without needing woodman's toil.
Now the warren moves—and see!
How the burrowing rabbits flee,
Hither, thither till they find it,
With another brake behind it.
Ho! ho! 'tis a merry sight
Thou hast given the hag to-night.

Lo! new lines the witch is tracing,
Every well-known mark effacing,
Elsewhere, other bounds erecting,
So the old there's no detecting.
Ho! ho! 'tis a pastime quite,
Thou hast given the hag to-night!

The hind at eve, who wander'd o'er
The dreary waste of Pendle Moor,
Shall wake at dawn, and in surprise,
Doubt the strange sight that meets his eyes.
The pathway leading to his hut
Winds differently,—the gate is shut.
The ruin on the right that stood.
Lies on the left, and nigh the wood;
The paddock fenced with wall of stone,

Wcll-stock'd with kine, a mile hath flown,
The sheepfold and the herd are gone.
Through channels new the brooklet rushes,
Its ancient course conceal'd by bushes.
Where the hollow was, a mound
Rises from the upheaved ground.
Doubting, shouting with surprise,
How the fool stares, and rubs his eyes!
All's so changed, the simple elf
Fancies he is changed himself!
Ho! ho! 'tis a merry sight
The hag shall have when dawns the light.
But see! she halts and waves her hand.
All is done as thou hast plann'd."
After a moment's pause the voice added,

"I have done as thou hast will'd—
Now be thy path straight fulfill'd."
"It shall be," replied Mistress Nutter, whose features gleamed with fierce exultation. "Bring forth the proselyte!" she shouted.

And at the words, her swarthy serving-man, Blackadder, came forth from the Lacy chapel, leading Jennet by the hand. They were followed by Tib, who, dilated to twice his former size, walked with tail erect, and eyes glowing like carbuncles.

At sight of her daughter a loud cry of rage and astonishment burst from Elizabeth Device, and, rushing forward, she would have seized her, if Tib had not kept her off by a formidable display of teeth and talons. Jennet made no effort to join her mother, but regarded her with a malicious and triumphant grin.

"This is my chilt," screamed Elizabeth. "She canna be baptised without my consent, an ey refuse it. Ey dunna want her to be a witch—at least not yet awhile. What mays yo here, yo little plague?"

"Ey wur brought here, mother," replied Jennet, with affected simplicity.

"Then get whoam at once, and keep there," rejoined Elizabeth, furiously.

"Nay, eyst nah go just yet," replied Jennet. "Ey'd fain be a witch as weel as yo."

"Ho! ho! ho!" laughed the voice from below.

"Nah, nah—ey forbid it," shrieked Elizabeth, "ye shanna be bapteesed. Whoy ha ye brought her here, madam?" she added to Mistress Nutter. "Yo ha' stolen her fro' me. Boh ey protest agen it."

"Your consent is not required," replied Mistress Nutter, waving her off. "Your daughter is anxious to become a witch. That is enough."

"She is not owd enough to act for herself," said Elizabeth.

"Age matters not," replied Mistress Nutter.

"What mun ey do to become a witch?" asked Jennet.

"You must renounce all hopes of heaven," replied Mistress Nutter, "and devote yourself to Satan. You will then be baptised in his name, and become one of his worshippers. You will have power to afflict all persons with bodily ailments—to destroy cattle—blight corn—burn dwellings—and, if you be so minded, kill those you hate, or who molest you. Do you desire to do all this?"

"Eigh, that ey do," replied Jennet. "Ey ha' more pleasure in evil than in good, an wad rayther see folk weep than laugh; an if ey had the power, ey wad so punish them os jeer at me, that they should rue it to their deein' day."

"All this you shall do, and more," rejoined Mistress Nutter. "You renounce all hopes of salvation, then, and devote yourself, soul and body, to the Powers of Darkness."

Elizabeth, who was still kept at bay by Tib, shaking her arms, and gnashing her teeth, in impotent rage, now groaned aloud; but ere Jennet could answer, a piercing cry was heard, which thrilled through Mistress Nutter's bosom, and Alizon, rushing from her place of concealment, passed through the weird circle, and stood beside the group in the midst of it.

"Forbear, Jennet," she cried; "forbear! Pronounce not those impious words, or you are lost for ever. Come with me, and I will save you."

"Sister Alizon," cried Jennet, staring at her in surprise, "what makes you here?"

"Do not ask—but come," cried Alizon, trying to take her hand.

"Oh! what is this?" cried Mistress Nutter, now partly recovered from the consternation and astonishment into which she had been thrown by Alizon's unexpected appearance. "Why are you here? How have you broken the chains of slumber in which I bound you? Fly—fly—at once, this girl is past your help. You cannot save her. She is already devoted. Fly. I am powerless to protect you here."

"Ho! ho! ho!" laughed the voice.

"Do you not hear that laughter?" cried Mistress Nutter, with a haggard look. "Go!"

"Never, without Jennet," replied Alizon, firmly.

"My child—my child—on my knees I implore you to depart," cried Mistress Nutter, throwing herself before her—"You know not your danger—oh, fly—fly!"

But Alizon continued inflexible.

"Yo are caught i' your own snare, madam," cried Elizabeth Device, with a taunting laugh. "Sin Jennet mun be a witch, Alizon con be bapteesed os weel. Your consent is not required—and age matters not—ha! ha!"

"Curses upon thy malice," cried Mistress Nutter, rising. "What can be done in this extremity?"

"Nothing," replied the voice. "Jennet is mine already. If not brought hither by thee, or by her mother, she would have come of her own accord. I have watched her, and marked her for my own. Besides, she is fated. The curse of Paslew clings to her."

As the words were uttered, the shade of the abbot glided forwards, and, touching the shuddering child upon the brow with its finger, vanished with a lamentable cry.

"Kneel, Jennet," cried Alizon; "kneel, and pray!"

"To me," rejoined the voice; "she can bend to no other power. Alice Nutter, thou hast sought to deceive me, but in vain. I bade thee bring thy daughter here, and in place of her thou offerest me the child of another, who is mine already. I am not to be thus trifled with. Thou knowest my will. Sprinkle water over her head, and devote her to me."

Alizon would fain have thrown herself on her knees, but extremity of horror, or some overmastering influence, held her fast; and she remained with her gaze fixed upon her mother, who seemed torn by conflicting emotions.

"Is there no way to avoid this?" cried Mistress Nutter.

"No way but one," replied the voice. "I have been offered a new devotee, and I claim fulfilment of the promise. Thy daughter or another, it matters not—but not Jennet."

"I embrace the alternative," cried Mistress Nutter.

"It must be done upon the instant," said the voice.

"It shall be," replied Mistress Nutter. And, stretching her arm in the direction of the mansion, she called in a loud imperious voice, "Dorothy Assheton, come hither!"

A minute elapsed, but no one appeared, and, with a look of disappointment, Mistress Nutter repeated the gesture and the words.

Still no one came.

"Baffled!" she exclaimed, "what can it mean?"

"There is a maiden within the south transept, who is not one of my servants," cried the voice. "Call her."

"'Tis she!" cried Mistress Nutter, stretching her arm towards the transept. "This time I am answered," she added, as with a wild laugh Dorothy obeyed the summons.

"I have anointed myself with the unguent, and drank of the potion, ha! ha! ha!" cried Dorothy, with a wild gesture, and wilder laughter.

"Ha! this accounts for her presence here," muttered Mistress Nutter. "But it could not be better. She is in no mood to offer resistance. Dorothy, thou shalt be a witch."

"A witch!" exclaimed the bewildered maiden. "Is Alizon a witch?"

"We are all witches here," replied Mistress Nutter.

Alizon had no power to contradict her.

"A merry company!" exclaimed Dorothy, laughing loudly.

"You will say so anon," replied Mistress Nutter, waving her hand over her, and muttering a spell; "but you see them not in their true forms, Dorothy. Look again—what do you behold now?"

"In place of a troop of old wrinkled crones in wretched habiliments," replied Dorothy, "I behold a band of lovely nymphs in light gauzy attire, wreathed with flowers, and holding myrtle and olive branches in their hands. See they rise, and prepare for the dance. Strains of ravishing music salute the ear. I never heard sounds so sweet and stirring. The round is formed. The dance begins. How gracefully—how lightly they move—ha! ha!"

Alizon could not check her—could not undeceive her—for power of speech as of movement was denied her, but she comprehended the strange delusion under which the poor girl laboured. The figures Dorothy described as young and lovely, were still to her the same loathsome and abhorrent witches; the ravishing music jarred discordantly on her ear, as if produced by a shrill cornemuse; and the lightsome dance was a fantastic round, performed with shouts and laughter by the whole unhallowed crew.

Jennet laughed immoderately, and seemed delighted by the antics of the troop.

"Ey never wished to dance efore," she cried, "boh ey should like to try now."

"Join them, then," said Mistress Nutter.

And to the little girl's infinite delight a place was made for her in the round, and, taking hands with Mother Mould-heels and the red-haired witch, she footed it as merrily as the rest.

"Who is she in the nunlike habit?" inquired Dorothy, pointing to the shade of Isole de Heton, which still hovered near the weird assemblage. "She seems more beautiful than all the others. Will she not dance with me?"

"Heed her not," said Mistress Nutter.

Dorothy, however, would not be gainsaid, but, spite of the caution, beckoned the figure towards her. It came at once, and in another instant its arms were enlaced around her. The same frenzy that had seized Nicholas now took possession of Dorothy, and her dance with Isole might have come to a similar conclusion, if it had not been abruptly checked by Mistress Nutter, who, waving her hand, and pronouncing a spell, the figure instantly quitted Dorothy, and, with a wild shriek, fled.

"How like you these diversions?" said Mistress Nutter to the panting and almost breathless maiden.

"Marvellously," replied Dorothy; "but why have you scared my partner away?"

"Because she would have done you a mischief," rejoined Mistress Nutter. "But now let me put a question to you. Are you willing to renounce your baptism, and enter into a covenant with the Prince of Darkness?"

Dorothy did not seem in the least to comprehend what was said to her; but she nevertheless replied, "I am."

"Bring water and salt," said Mistress Nutter to Mother Chattox. "By these drops I baptise you," she added, dipping her fingers in the liquid, and preparing to sprinkle it over the brow of the proselyte.

Then it was that Alizon, by an almost superhuman effort, burst the spell that bound her, and clasped Dorothy in her arms.

"You know not what you do, dear Dorothy," she cried. "I answer for you. You will not yield to the snares and temptations of Satan, however subtly devised. You defy him and all his works. You will make no covenant with him. Though surrounded by his bond-slaves, you fear him not. Is it not so? Speak!"

But Dorothy could only answer with an insane laugh—"I will be a witch."

"It is too late," interposed Mistress Nutter. "You cannot save her. And, remember! she stands in your place. Or you or she must be devoted."

"I will never desert her," cried Alizon, twining her arms round her. "Dorothy—dear Dorothy—address yourself to Heaven."

An angry growl of thunder was heard.

"Beware!" cried Mistress Nutter.

"I am not to be discouraged," rejoined Alizon, firmly. "You cannot gain a victory over a soul in this condition, and I shall effect her deliverance. Heaven will aid us, Dorothy."

A louder roll of thunder was heard, followed by a forked flash of lightning.

"Provoke not the vengeance of the Prince of Darkness," said Mistress Nutter.

"I have no fear," replied Alizon. "Cling to me, Dorothy. No harm shall befall you."

"Be speedy!" cried the voice.

"Let her go," cried Mistress Nutter to Alizon, "or you will rue this disobedience. Why should you interfere with my projects, and bring ruin on yourself! I would save you. What, still obstinate? Nay, then, I will no longer show forbearance. Help me, sisters. Force the new witch from her. But beware how you harm my child."

At these words the troop gathered round the two girls. But Alizon only clasped her hands more tightly round Dorothy; while the latter, on whose brain the maddening potion still worked, laughed frantically at them. It was at this moment that Elizabeth Device, who had conceived a project of revenge, put it into execution. While near Dorothy, she stamped, spat on the ground, and then cast a little mould over her, breathing in her ear, "Thou art bewitched—bewitched by Alizon Device."

Dorothy instantly struggled to free herself from Alizon.

"Oh! do not you strive against me, dear Dorothy," cried Alizon. "Remain with me, or you are lost."

"Hence! off! set me free!" shrieked Dorothy; "you have bewitched me. I heard it this moment."

"Do not believe the false suggestion," cried Alizon.

"It is true," exclaimed all the other witches together. "Alizon has bewitched you, and will kill you. Shake her off—shake her off!"

"Away!" cried Dorothy, mustering all her force. "Away!"

But Alizon was still too strong for her, and, in spite of her efforts at liberation, detained her.

"My patience is wellnigh exhausted," exclaimed the voice.

"Alizon!" cried Mistress Nutter, imploringly.

And again the witches gathered furiously round the two girls.

"Kneel, Dorothy, kneel!" whispered Alizon. And forcing her down, she fell on her knees beside her, exclaiming, with uplifted hands, "Gracious heaven! deliver us."

As the words were uttered, a fearful cry was heard, and the weird troop fled away screaming, like ill-omened birds. The caldron sank into the ground; the dense mist arose like a curtain; and the moon and stars shone brightly down upon the ruined pile.

Alizon prayed long and fervently, with clasped hands and closed eyes, for deliverance from evil. When she looked round again, all was so calm, so beautiful, so holy in its rest, that she could scarcely believe in the recent fearful occurrences. Her hair and garments were damp with the dews of night; and at her feet lay Dorothy, insensible.

She tried to raise her—to revive her, but in vain; when at this moment footsteps were heard approaching, and the next moment Mistress Nutter, accompanied by Adam Whitworth and some other serving-men, entered the choir.

"I see them—they are here!" cried the lady, rushing forward.

"Heaven be praised you have found them, madam!" exclaimed the old steward, coming quickly after her.

"Oh! what an alarm you have given me, Alizon," said Mistress Nutter. "What could induce you to go forth secretly at night in this way with Dorothy! I dreamed you were here, and missing you when I awoke, roused the house and came in search of you. What is the matter with Dorothy? She has been frightened, I suppose. I will give her to breathe at this phial. It will revive her. See, she opens her eyes."

Dorothy looked round wildly for a moment, and then pointing her finger at Alizon, said—

"She has bewitched me."

"Poor thing! she rambles," observed Mistress Nutter to Adam Whitworth, who, with the other serving-men, stared aghast at the accusation; "she has been scared out of her senses by some fearful sight. Let her be conveyed quickly to my chamber, and I will see her cared for."

The orders were obeyed. Dorothy was raised gently by the serving-men, but she still kept pointing to Alizon, and repeatedly exclaimed—

"She has bewitched me!"

The serving-men shook their heads, and looked significantly at each other, while Mistress Nutter lingered to speak to her daughter.

"You look greatly disturbed, Alizon, as if you had been visited by a nightmare in your sleep, and were still under its influence."

Alizon made no reply.

"A few hours' tranquil sleep will restore you," pursued Mistress Nutter, "and you will forget your fears. You must not indulge in these nocturnal rambles again, or they may be attended with dangerous consequences. I may not have a second warning dream. Come to the house."

And, as Alizon followed her along the garden path, she could not help asking herself, though with little hope in the question, if all she had witnessed was indeed nothing more than a troubled dream.


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