

THE LANCASHIRE
WITCHES
VOLUME III
BY
WILLIAM
HARRISON
AINSWORTH

The Lancashire Witches Volume III by William Harrison Ainsworth

Pendle Forest CHAPTER I.—FLINT

A lovely morning succeeded the strange and terrible night. Brightly shone the sun upon the fair Calder as it wined along the green meads above the bridge, as it rushed rejoicingly over the weir, and pursued its rapid course through the broad plain below the Abbey. A few white vapours hung upon the summit of Whalley Nab, but the warm rays tinged them with gold, and tipping with fire the tree-tops that pierced through them, augured their speedy dispersion. So beautiful, so tranquil, looked the old monastic fane, that none would have deemed its midnight rest had been broken by the impious rites of a foul troop. The choir, where the unearthly scream and the demon laughter had resounded, was now vocal with the melodies of the blackbird, the thrush, and other songsters of the grove. Bells of dew glittered upon the bushes rooted in the walls, and upon the ivy-grown pillars; and gemming the countless spiders' webs stretched from bough to bough, showed they were all unbroken. No traces were visible on the sod where the unhallowed crew had danced their round; nor were any ashes left where the fire had burnt and the caldron had bubbled. The brass-covered tombs of the abbots in the presbytery looked as if a century had passed over them without disturbance; while the graves in the cloister cemetery, obliterated, and only to be detected when a broken coffin or a mouldering bone was turned up by the tiller of the ground, preserved their wonted appearance. The face of nature had received neither impress nor injury from the fantastic freaks and necromantic exhibitions of the witches. Every thing looked as it was left overnight; and the only footprints to be detected were those of the two girls, and of the party who came in quest of them. All else had passed by like a vision or a dream. The rooks cawed loudly in the neighbouring trees, as if discussing the question of breakfast, and the jackdaws wheeled merrily round the tall spire, which sprang from the eastern end of the fane.

Brightly shone the sun upon the noble timber embowering the mansion of the Asshetons; upon the ancient gateway, in the upper chamber of which Ned Huddlestone, the porter, and the burly representative of Friar Tuck, was rubbing his sleepy eyes, preparatory to habiting himself in his ordinary attire; and upon the wide court-yard, across which Nicholas was walking in the direction of the stables. Notwithstanding his excesses overnight, the squire was astir, as he had declared he should be, before daybreak; and a plunge into the Calder had cooled his feverish limbs and cured his racking headache, while a draught of ale set his stomach right. Still, in modern parlance, he looked rather "seedy," and his recollection of the events of the previous night was somewhat confused. Aware he had committed many fooleries, he did not desire to

investigate matters too closely, and only hoped he should not be reminded of them by Sir Ralph, or worse still, by Parson Dewhurst. As to his poor, dear, uncomplaining wife, he never once troubled his head about her, feeling quite sure she would not upbraid him. On his appearance in the court-yard, the two noble blood-hounds and several lesser dogs came forward to greet him, and, attended by this noisy pack, he marched up to a groom, who was rubbing down his horse at the stable-door.

"Poor Robin," he cried to the steed, who neighed at his approach. "Poor Robin," he said, patting his neck affectionately, "there is not thy match for speed or endurance, for fence or ditch, for beck or stone wall, in the country. Half an hour on thy back will make all right with me; but I would rather take thee to Bowland Forest, and hunt the stag there, than go and perambulate the boundaries of the Rough Lee estates with a rascally attorney. I wonder how the fellow will be mounted."

"If yo be speering about Mester Potts, squoire," observed the groom, "ey con tell ye. He's to ha' little Flint, the Welsh pony."

"Why, zounds, you don't say, Peter!" exclaimed Nicholas, laughing; "he'll never be able to manage him. Flint's the wickedest and most wilful little brute I ever knew. We shall have Master Potts run away with, or thrown into a moss-pit. Better give him something quieter."

"It's Sir Roaph's orders," replied Peter, "an ey darna disobey 'em. Boh Flint's far steadier than when yo seed him last, squoire. Ey dar say he'll carry Mester Potts weel enough, if he dusna mislest him."

"You think nothing of the sort, Peter," said Nicholas. "You expect to see the little gentleman fly over the pony's head, and perhaps break his own at starting. But if Sir Ralph has ordered it, he must abide by the consequences. I sha'n't interfere further. How goes on the young colt you were breaking in? You should take care to show him the saddle in the manger, let him smell it, and jingle the stirrups in his ears, before you put it on his back. Better ground for his first lessons could not be desired than the field below the grange, near the Calder. Sir Ralph was saying yesterday, that the roan mare had pricked her foot. You must wash the sore well with white wine and salt, rub it with the ointment the farriers call ægyptiacum, and then put upon it a hot plaster compounded of flax hards, turpentine, oil and wax, bathing the top of the hoof with bole armeniac and vinegar. This is the best and quickest remedy. And recollect, Peter, that for a new strain, vinegar, bole armeniac, whites of eggs, and bean-flour, make the best salve. How goes on Sir Ralph's black charger, Dragon? A brave horse that, Peter, and the only one in your master's whole stud to compare with my Robin! But Dragon, though of high courage and great swiftness, has not the strength and endurance of Robin—neither

can he leap so well. Why, Robin would almost clear the Calder, Peter, and makes nothing of Smithies Brook, near Downham, and you know how wide that stream is. I once tried him at the Ribble, at a narrow point, and if horse could have done it, he would—but it was too much to expect."

"A great deal, ey should say, squoire," replied the groom, opening his eyes to their widest extent. "Whoy, th' Ribble, where yo speak on, mun be twenty yards across, if it be an inch; and no nag os ever wur bred could clear that, onless a witch wur on his back."

"Don't allude to witches, Peter," said Nicholas. "I've had enough of them. But to come back to our steeds. Colour is matter of taste, and a man must please his own eye with bay or grey, chestnut, sorrel, or black; but dun is my fancy. A good horse, Peter, should be clean-limbed, short-jointed, strong-hoofed, out-ribbed, broad-chested, deep-necked, loose-throttled, thin-crested, lean-headed, full-eyed, with wide nostrils. A horse with half these points would not be wrong, and Robin has them all."

"So he has, sure enough, squoire," replied Peter, regarding the animal with an approving eye, as Nicholas enumerated his merits. "Boh, if ey might choose betwixt him an yunk Mester Ruchot Assheton's grey gelding, Merlin, ey knoas which ey'd tak."

"Robin, of course," said Nicholas.

"Nah, squoire, it should be t'other," replied the groom.

"You're no judge of a horse, Peter," rejoined Nicholas, shrugging his shoulders.

"May be not," said the groom, "boh ey'm bound to speak truth. An see! Tum Lomax is bringin' out Merlin. We con put th' two nags soide by soide, if yo choose."

"They shall be put side by side in the field, Peter—that's the way to test their respective merit," returned Nicholas, "and they won't remain long together, I'll warrant you. I offered to make a match for twenty pieces with Master Richard, but he declined the offer. Harkee, Peter, break an egg in Robin's mouth before you put on his bridle. It strengthens the wind, and adds to a horse's power of endurance. You understand?"

"Parfitly, squoire," replied the groom. "By th' mess! that's a secret worth knoain'. Onny more orders?"

"No," replied Nicholas. "We shall set out in an hour—or it may be sooner."

"Aw shan be ready," said Peter. And he added to himself, as Nicholas moved away, "Ey'st tak care Tum Lomax gies an egg to Merlin, an that'll may aw fair, if they chance to try their osses' mettle."

As Nicholas returned to the house, he perceived to his dismay Sir Ralph and Parson Dewhurst standing upon the steps; and convinced, from their grave looks, that they were prepared to lecture him, he endeavoured to nerve himself for the infliction.

"Two to one are awkward odds," said the squire to himself, "especially when they have the 'vantage ground. But I must face them, and make the best fight circumstances will allow. I shall never be able to explain that mad dance with Isole de Heton. No one but Dick will believe me, and the chances are he will not support my story. But I must put on an air of penitence, and sooth to say, in my present state, it is not very difficult to assume."

Thus pondering, with slow step, affectedly humble demeanour, and surprisingly-lengthened visage, he approached the pair who were waiting for him, and regarding him with severe looks.

Thinking it the best plan to open the fire himself, Nicholas saluted them, and said—

"Give you good-day, Sir Ralph, and you too, worthy Master Dewhurst. I scarcely expected to see you so early astir, good sirs; but the morning is too beautiful to allow us to be sluggards. For my own part I have been awake for hours, and have passed the time wholly in self-reproaches for my folly and sinfulness last night, as well as in forming resolutions for self-amendment, and better governance in future."

"I hope you will adhere to those resolutions, then, Nicholas," rejoined Sir Ralph, sternly; "for change of conduct is absolutely necessary, if you would maintain your character as a gentleman. I can make allowance for high animal spirits, and can excuse some licence, though I do not approve of it; But I will not permit decorum to be outraged in my house, and suffer so ill an example to be set to my tenantry."

"Fortunately I was not present at the exhibition," said Dewhurst; "but I am told you conducted yourself like one possessed, and committed such freaks as are rarely, if ever, acted by a rational being."

"I can offer no defence, worthy sir, and you my respected relative," returned Nicholas, with a contrite air; "neither can you reprove me more strongly than I deserve, nor than I upbraid myself. I allowed myself to be overcome by wine, and in that condition was undoubtedly guilty of follies I must ever regret."

"Amongst others, I believe you stood upon your head," remarked Dewhurst.

"I am not aware of the circumstance, reverend sir," replied Nicholas, with difficulty repressing a smile; "but as I certainly lost my head, I may have stood upon it unconsciously. But I do recollect enough to make me heartily ashamed of myself, and determine to avoid all such excesses in future."

"In that case, sir," rejoined Dewhurst, "the occurrences of last night, though sufficiently discreditable to you, will not be without profit; for I have observed to my infinite regret, that you are apt to indulge in immoderate potations, and when under their influence to lose due command of yourself, and commit follies which your sober reason must condemn. At such times I scarcely recognise you. You speak with unbecoming levity, and even allow oaths to escape your lips."

"It is too true, reverend sir," said Nicholas; "but, zounds!—a plague upon my tongue—it is an unruly member. Forgive me, good sir, but my brain is a little confused."

"I do not wonder, from the grievous assaults made upon it last night, Nicholas," observed Sir Ralph. "Perhaps you are not aware that your crowning act was whisking wildly round the room by yourself, like a frantic dervish."

"I was dancing with Isole de Heton," said Nicholas.

"With whom?" inquired Dewhurst, in surprise.

"With a wicked votaress, who has been dead nearly a couple of centuries," interposed Sir Ralph; "and who, by her sinful life, merited the punishment she is said to have incurred. This delusion shows how dreadfully intoxicated you were, Nicholas. For the time you had quite lost your reason."

"I am sober enough now, at all events," rejoined Nicholas; "and I am convinced that Isole did dance with me, nor will any arguments reason me out of that belief."

"I am sorry to hear you say so, Nicholas," returned Sir Ralph. "That you were under the impression at the time I can easily understand; but that you should persist in such a senseless and wicked notion is more than I can comprehend."

"I saw her with my own eyes as plainly as I see you, Sir Ralph," replied Nicholas, warmly; "that I declare upon my honour and conscience, and I also felt the pressure of her arms. Whether it may not have been the Fiend in her likeness I will not take upon

me to declare—and indeed I have some misgivings on the subject; but that a beautiful creature, exactly resembling the votaress, danced with me, I will ever maintain."

"If so, she was invisible to others, for I beheld her not," said Sir Ralph; "and, though I cannot yield credence to your explanation, yet, granting it to be correct, I do not see how it mends your case."

"On the contrary, it only proves that Master Nicholas yielded to the snares of Satan," said Dewhurst, shaking his head. "I would recommend you long fasting and frequent prayer, my good sir, and I shall prepare a lecture for your special edification, which I will propound to you on your return to Downham, and, if it fails in effect, I will persevere with other godly discourses."

"With your aid, I trust to be set free, reverend sir," returned Nicholas; "but, as I have already passed two or three hours in prayer, I hope they may stand me in lieu of any present fasting, and induce you to omit the article of penance, or postpone it to some future occasion, when I may be better able to perform it; for I am just now particularly hungry, and am always better able to resist temptation with a full stomach than an empty one. As I find it displeasing to Sir Ralph, I will not insist upon my visionary partner in the dance, at least until I am better able to substantiate the fact; and I shall listen to your lectures, worthy sir, with great delight, and, I doubt not, with equal benefit; but in the meantime, as carnal wants must be supplied, and mundane matters attended to, I propose, with our excellent host's permission, that we proceed to breakfast."

Sir Ralph made no answer, but ascended the steps, and was followed by Dewhurst, heaving a deep sigh, and turning up the whites of his eyes, and by Nicholas, who felt his bosom eased of half its load, and secretly congratulated himself upon getting out of the scrape so easily.

In the hall they found Richard Assheton habited in a riding-dress, booted, spurred, and in all respects prepared for the expedition. There were such evident traces of anxiety and suffering about him, that Sir Ralph questioned him as to the cause, and Richard replied that he had passed a most restless night. He did not add, that he had been made acquainted by Adam Whitworth with the midnight visit of the two girls to the conventual church, because he was well aware Sir Ralph would be greatly displeased by the circumstance, and because Mistress Nutter had expressed a wish that it should be kept secret. Sir Ralph, however, saw there was more upon his young relative's mind than he chose to confess, but he did not urge any further admission into his confidence.

Meantime, the party had been increased by the arrival of Master Potts, who was likewise equipped for the ride. The hour was too early, it might be, for him, or he had not rested well like Richard, or had been troubled with bad dreams, but certainly he did not look very well, or in very good-humour. He had slept at the Abbey, having been accommodated with a bed after the sudden seizure which he attributed to the instrumentality of Mistress Nutter. The little attorney bowed obsequiously to Sir Ralph, who returned his salutation very stiffly, nor was he much better received by the rest of the company.

At a sign from Sir Ralph, his guests then knelt down, and a prayer was uttered by the divine—or rather a discourse, for it partook more of the latter character than the former. In the course of it he took occasion to paint in strong colours the terrible consequences of intemperance, and Nicholas was obliged to endure a well-merited lecture of half an hour's duration. But even Parson Dewhurst could not hold out for ever, and, to the relief of all his hearers, he at length brought this discourse to a close.

Breakfast at this period was a much more substantial affair than a modern morning repast, and differed little from dinner or supper, except in respect to quantity. On the present occasion, there were carbonadoes of fish and fowl, a cold chine, a huge pasty, a capon, neat's tongues, sausages, botargos, and other matters as provocative of thirst as sufficing to the appetite. Nicholas set to work bravely. Broiled trout, steaks, and a huge slice of venison pasty, disappeared quickly before him, and he was not quite so sparing of the ale as seemed consistent with his previously-expressed resolutions of temperance. In vain Parson Dewhurst filled a goblet with water, and looked significantly at him. He would not take the hint, and turned a deaf ear to the admonitory cough of Sir Ralph. He had little help from the others, for Richard ate sparingly, and Master Potts made a very poor figure beside him. At length, having cleared his plate, emptied his cup, and wiped his lips, the squire arose, and said he must bid adieu to his wife, and should then be ready to attend them.

While he quitted the hall for this purpose, Mistress Nutter entered it. She looked paler than ever, and her eyes seemed larger, darker, and brighter. Nicholas shuddered slightly as she approached, and even Potts felt a thrill of apprehension pass through his frame. He scarcely, indeed, ventured a look at her, for he dreaded her mysterious power, and feared she could fathom the designs he secretly entertained against her. But she took no notice whatever of him. Acknowledging Sir Ralph's salutation, she motioned Richard to follow her to the further end of the room.

"Your sister is very ill, Richard," she said, as the young man attended her, "feverish, and almost light-headed. Adam Whitworth has told you, I know, that she was imprudent enough, in company with Alizon, to visit the ruins of the conventual church late last

night, and she there sustained some fright, which has produced a great shock upon her system. When found, she was fainting, and though I have taken every care of her, she still continues much excited, and rambles strangely. You will be surprised as well as grieved when I tell you, that she charges Alizon with having bewitched her."

"How, madam!" cried Richard. "Alizon bewitch her! It is impossible."

"You are right, Richard," replied Mistress Nutter; "the thing is impossible; but the accusation will find easy credence among the superstitious household here, and may be highly prejudicial, if not fatal to poor Alizon. It is most unlucky she should have gone out in this way, for the circumstance cannot be explained, and in itself serves to throw suspicion upon her."

"I must see Dorothy before I go," said Richard; "perhaps I may be able to soothe her."

"It was for that end I came hither," replied Mistress Nutter; "but I thought it well you should be prepared. Now come with me."

Upon this they left the hall together, and proceeded to the abbot's chamber, where Dorothy was lodged. Richard was greatly shocked at the sight of his sister, so utterly changed was she from the blithe being of yesterday—then so full of health and happiness. Her cheeks burnt with fever, her eyes were unnaturally bright, and her fair hair hung about her face in disorder. She kept fast hold of Alizon, who stood beside her.

"Ah, Richard!" she cried on seeing him, "I am glad you are come. You will persuade this girl to restore me to reason—to free me from the terrors that beset me. She can do so if she will."

"Calm yourself, dear sister," said Richard, gently endeavouring to free Alizon from her grasp.

"No, do not take her from me," said Dorothy, wildly; "I am better when she is near me—much better. My brow does not throb so violently, and my limbs are not twisted so painfully. Do you know what ails me, Richard?"

"You have caught cold from wandering out indiscreetly last night," said Richard.

"I am bewitched!" rejoined Dorothy, in tones that pierced her brother's brain—"bewitched by Alizon Device—by your love—ha! ha! She wishes to kill me, Richard, because she thinks I am in her way. But you will not let her do it."

"You are mistaken, dear Dorothy. She means you no harm," said Richard.

"Heaven knows how much I grieve for her, and how fondly I love her!" exclaimed Alizon, tearfully.

"It is false!" cried Dorothy. "She will tell a different tale when you are gone. She is a witch, and you shall never marry her, Richard—never!—never!"

Mistress Nutter, who stood at a little distance, anxiously observing what was passing, waved her hand several times towards the sufferer, but without effect.

"I have no influence over her," she muttered. "She is really bewitched. I must find other means to quieten her."

Though both greatly distressed, Alizon and Richard redoubled their attentions to the poor sufferer. For a few moments she remained quiet, but with her eyes constantly fixed on Alizon, and then said, quickly and fiercely, "I have been told, if you scratch one who has bewitched you till you draw blood, you will be cured. I will plunge my nails in her flesh."

"I will not oppose you," replied Alizon, gently; "tear my flesh if you will. You should have my life's blood if it would cure you; but if the success of the experiment depends on my having bewitched you, it will assuredly fail."

"This is dreadful," interposed Richard. "Leave her, Alizon, I entreat of you. She will do you an injury."

"I care not," replied the young maid. "I will stay by her till she voluntarily releases me."

The almost tigress fury with which Dorothy had seized upon the unresisting girl here suddenly deserted her, and, sobbing hysterically, she fell upon her neck. Oh, with what delight Alizon pressed her to her bosom!

"Dorothy, dear Dorothy!" she cried.

"Alizon, dear Alizon!" responded Dorothy. "Oh! how could I suspect you of any ill design against me!"

"She is no witch, dear sister, be assured of that!" said Richard.

"Oh, no—no—no! I am quite sure she is not," cried Dorothy, kissing her affectionately.

This change had been wrought by the low-breathed spells of Mistress Nutter.

"The access is over," she mentally ejaculated; "but I must get him away before the fit returns." "You had better go now, Richard," she added aloud, and touching his arm, "I will answer for your sister's restoration. An opiate will produce sleep, and if possible, she shall return to Middleton to-day."

"If I go, Alizon must go with me," said Dorothy. "Well, well, I will not thwart your desires," rejoined Mistress Nutter. And she made a sign to Richard to depart.

The young man pressed his sister's hand, bade a tender farewell to Alizon, and, infinitely relieved by the improvement which had taken place in the former, and which he firmly believed would speedily lead to her entire restoration, descended to the entrance-hall, where he found Sir Ralph and Parson Dewhurst, who told him that Nicholas and Potts were in the court-yard, and impatient to set out.

Shouts of laughter saluted the ears of the trio as they descended the steps. The cause of the merriment was speedily explained when they looked towards the stables, and beheld Potts struggling for mastery with a stout Welsh pony, who showed every disposition, by plunging, kicking, and rearing, to remove him from his seat, though without success, for the attorney was not quite such a contemptible horseman as might be imagined. A wicked-looking little fellow was Flint, with a rough, rusty-black coat, a thick tail that swept the ground, a mane to match, and an eye of mixed fire and cunning. When brought forth he had allowed Potts to mount him quietly enough; but no sooner was the attorney comfortably in possession, than he was served with a notice of ejectment. Down went Flint's head and up went his heels; while on the next instant he was rearing aloft, with his fore-feet beating the air, so nearly perpendicular, that the chances seemed in favour of his coming down on his back. Then he whirled suddenly round, shook himself violently, threatened to roll over, and performed antics of the most extraordinary kind, to the dismay of his rider, but to the infinite amusement of the spectators, who were ready to split their sides with laughter—indeed, tears fairly streamed down the squire's cheeks. However, when Sir Ralph appeared, it was thought desirable to put an end to the fun; and Peter, the groom, advanced to seize the restive little animal's bridle, but, eluding the grasp, Flint started off at full gallop, and, accompanied by the two blood-hounds, careered round the court-yard, as if running in a ring. Vainly did poor Potts tug at the bridle. Flint, having the bit firmly between his teeth, defied his utmost efforts. Away he went with the hounds at his heels, as if, said Nicholas, "the devil were behind him." Though annoyed and angry, Sir Ralph could not help laughing at the ridiculous scene, and even a smile crossed Parson Dewhurst's grave countenance as Flint and his rider scampered madly past them. Sir Ralph called to the grooms, and attempts were

instantly made to check the furious pony's career; but he baffled them all, swerving suddenly round when an endeavour was made to intercept him, leaping over any trifling obstacle, and occasionally charging any one who stood in his path. What with the grooms running hither and thither, vociferating and swearing, the barking and springing of the hounds, the yelping of lesser dogs, and the screaming of poultry, the whole yard was in a state of uproar and confusion.

"Flint mun be possessed," cried Peter. "Ey never seed him go on i' this way efore. Ey noticed Elizabeth Device near th' stables last neet, an ey shouldna wonder if hoo ha' bewitched him."

"Neaw doubt on't," replied another groom. "Howsomever we mun contrive to ketch him, or Sir Roaph win send us aw aboutt our business."

"Ey wish yo'd contrive to do it, then, Tum Lomax," replied Peter, "fo' ey'm fairly blowd. Dang me, if ey ever seed sich hey-go-mad wark i' my born days. What's to be done, squoire?" he added to Nicholas.

"The devil only knows," replied the latter; "but it seems we must wait till the little rascal chooses to stop."

This occurred sooner than was expected. Thinking, possibly, that he had done enough to induce Master Potts to give up all idea of riding him, Flint suddenly slackened his pace, and trotted, as if nothing had happened, to the stable-door; but if he had formed any such notion as the above, he was deceived, for the attorney, who was quite as obstinate and wilful as himself, and who through all his perils had managed to maintain his seat, was resolved not to abandon it, and positively refused to dismount when urged to do so by Nicholas and the grooms.

"He will go quietly enough now, I dare say," observed Potts, "and if not, and you will lend me a hunting-whip, I will undertake to cure him of his tricks."

Flint seemed to understand what was said, for he laid back his ears as if meditating more mischief; but being surrounded by the grooms, he deemed it advisable to postpone the attempt to a more convenient opportunity. In compliance with his request, a heavy hunting-whip was handed to Potts, and, armed with this formidable weapon, the little attorney quite longed for an opportunity of effacing his disgrace. Meanwhile, Sir Ralph had come up and ordered a steady horse out for him; but Master Potts adhered to his resolution, and Flint remaining perfectly quiet, the baronet let him have his own way.

Soon after this, Nicholas and Richard having mounted their steeds, the party set forth. As they were passing through the gateway, which had been thrown wide open by Ned Huddleston, they were joined by Simon Sparshot, who had been engaged by Potts to attend him on the expedition in his capacity of constable. Simon was mounted on a mule, and brought word that Master Roger Nowell begged they would ride round by Read Hall, where he would be ready to accompany them, as he wished to be present at the perambulation of the boundaries. Assenting to the arrangement, the party set forth in that direction, Richard and Nicholas riding a little in advance of the others.

The Lancashire Witches Volume III by William Harrison Ainsworth

CHAPTER II.—READ HALL.

The road taken by the party on quitting Whalley led up the side of a hill, which, broken into picturesque inequalities, and partially clothed with trees, sloped down to the very brink of the Calder. Winding round the broad green plain, heretofore described, with the lovely knoll in the midst of it, and which formed, with the woody hills encircling it, a perfect amphitheatre, the river was ever an object of beauty—sometimes lost beneath over-hanging boughs or high banks, anon bursting forth where least expected, now rushing swiftly over its shallow and rocky bed, now subsiding into a smooth full current. The Abbey and the village were screened from view by the lower part of the hill which the horsemen were scaling; but the old bridge and a few cottages at the foot of Whalley Nab, with their thin blue smoke mounting into the pure morning air, gave life and interest to the picture. Hence, from base to summit, Whalley Nab stood revealed, and the verdant lawns opening out amidst the woods feathering its heights, were fully discernible. Placed by Nature as the guardian of this fair valley, the lofty eminence well became the post assigned to it. None of the belt of hills connected with it were so well wooded as their leader, nor so beautiful in form; while some of them were overtopped by the bleak fells of Longridge, rising at a distance behind them.

Nor were those exquisite contrasts wanting, which are only to be seen in full perfection when the day is freshest and the dew is still heavy on the grass. The near side of the hill was plunged in deep shade; thin, gauzy vapour hung on the stream beneath, while on the opposite heights, and where the great boulder stones were visible in the bed of the river, all was sparkling with sunshine. So enchanting was the prospect, that though perfectly familiar with it, the two foremost horsemen drew in the rein to contemplate it. High above them, on a sandbank, through which their giant roots protruded, shot up two tall silver-stemm'd beech-trees, forming with their newly opened foliage a canopy of tenderest green. Further on appeared a grove of oaks scarcely in leaf; and below were several fine sycamores, already green and umbrageous, intermingled with elms, ashes, and horse-chestnuts, and overshadowing brakes, covered with maples, alders, and hazels. The other spaces among the trees were enlivened by patches of yellow flowering and odorous gorse. Mixed with the warblings of innumerable feathered songsters were heard the cheering notes of the cuckoo; and the newly-arrived swallows were seen chasing the flies along the plain, or skimming over the surface of the river. Already had Richard's depression yielded to the exhilarating freshness of the morning, and the same kindly influence produced a more salutary effect on Nicholas than Parson Dewhurst's lecture had been able to accomplish. The worthy squire was a true lover of Nature; admiring her in all her forms, whether arrayed in pomp of wood and verdure, as in the

lovely landscape before him, or dreary and desolate, as in the heathy forest wastes they were about to traverse. While breathing the fresh morning air, inhaling the fragrance of the wild-flowers, and listening to the warbling of the birds, he took a well-pleased survey of the scene, commencing with the bridge, passing over Whalley Nab and the mountainous circle conjoined with it, till his gaze settled on Morton Hall, a noble mansion finely situated on a shoulder of the hill beyond him, and commanding the entire valley.

"Were I not owner of Downham," he observed to Richard, "I should wish to be master of Morton." And then, pointing to the green area below, he added, "What a capital spot for a race! There we might try the speed of our nags for the twenty pieces I talked of yesterday; and the judges of the match and those who chose to look on might station themselves on yon knoll, which seems made for the express purpose. Three years ago I remember a fair was held upon that plain, and the foot-races, the wrestling matches, and the various sports and pastimes of the rustics, viewed from the knoll, formed the prettiest sight ever looked upon. But, pleasant as the prospect is, we must not tarry here all day."

Before setting forward, he cast a glance towards Pendle Hill, which formed the most prominent object of view on the left, and lay like a leviathan basking in the sunshine. The vast mass rose up gradually until at its further extremity it attained an altitude of more than 1800 feet above the sea. At the present moment it was without a cloud, and the whole of its broad outline was distinctly visible.

"I love Pendle Hill," cried Nicholas, enthusiastically; "and from whatever side I view it—whether from this place, where I see it from end to end, from its lowest point to its highest; from Padiham, where it frowns upon me; from Clithero, where it smiles; or from Downham, where it rises in full majesty before me—from all points and under all aspects, whether robed in mist or radiant with sunshine, I delight in it. Born beneath its giant shadow, I look upon it with filial regard. Some folks say Pendle Hill wants grandeur and sublimity, but they themselves must be wanting in taste. Its broad, round, smooth mass is better than the roughest, craggiest, shaggiest, most sharply splintered mountain of them all. And then what a view it commands!—Lancaster with its grey old castle on one hand; York with its reverend minster on the other—the Irish Sea and its wild coast—fell, forest, moor, and valley, watered by the Ribble, the Hodder, the Calder, and the Lime—rivers not to be matched for beauty. You recollect the old distich—

'Ingleborough, Pendle Hill, and Pennygent,
Are the highest hills between Scotland and Trent.'

This vouches for its height, but there are two other doggerel lines still more to the purpose—

'Pendle Hill, Pennygent, and Ingleborough,
Are three such hills as you'll not find by seeking England thorough.'
With this opinion I quite agree. There is no hill in England like Pendle Hill."

"Every man to his taste, squire," observed Potts; "but to my mind, Pendle Hill has no other recommendation than its size. I think it a great, brown, ugly, lumpy mass, without beauty of form or any striking character. I hate your bleak Lancashire hills, with heathy ranges on the top, fit only for the sustenance of a few poor half-starved sheep; and as to the view from them, it is little else than a continuous range of moors and dwarfed forests. Highgate Hill is quite mountain enough for me, and Hampstead Heath wild enough for any civilised purpose."

"A veritable son of Cockayne!" muttered Nicholas, contemptuously.

Riding on, and entering the grove of oaks, he lost sight of his favourite hill, though glimpses were occasionally caught through the trees of the lovely valley below. Soon afterwards the party turned off on the left, and presently arrived at a gate which admitted them to Read Park. Five minutes' canter over the springy turf then brought them to the house.

The manor of Reved or Read came into the possession of the Nowell family in the time of Edward III., and extended on one side, within a mile of Whalley, from which township it was divided by a deep woody ravine, taking its name from the little village of Sabden, and on the other stretched far into Pendle Forest. The hall was situated on an eminence forming part of the heights of Padiham, and faced a wide valley, watered by the Calder, and consisting chiefly of barren tracts of moor and forest land, bounded by the high hills near Accrington and Rossendale. On the left, some half-dozen miles off, lay Burnley, and the greater part of the land in this direction, being uninclosed and thinly peopled, had a dark dreary look, that served to enhance the green beauty of the well-cultivated district on the right. Behind the mansion, thick woods extended to the very confines of Pendle Forest, of which, indeed, they originally formed part, and here, if the course of the stream, flowing through the gully of Sabden, were followed, every variety of brake, glen, and dingle, might be found. Read Hall was a large and commodious mansion, forming, with a centre and two advancing wings, three sides of a square, between which was a grass-plot ornamented with a dial. The gardens were laid out in the taste of the time, with trim alleys and parterres, terraces and steps, stone statues, and clipped yews.

The house was kept up well and consistently by its owner, who lived like a country gentleman with a good estate, entertained his friends hospitably, but without any

parade, and was never needlessly lavish in his expenditure, unless, perhaps, in the instance of the large ostentatious pew erected by him in the parish church of Whalley; and which, considering he had a private chapel at home, and maintained a domestic chaplain to do duty in it, seemed little required, and drew upon him the censure of the neighbouring gossips, who said there was more of pride than religion in his pew. With the chapel at the hall a curious history was afterwards connected. Converted into a dining-room by a descendant of Roger Nowell, the apartment was incautiously occupied by the planner of the alterations before the plaster was thoroughly dried; in consequence of which he caught a severe cold, and died in the desecrated chamber, his fate being looked upon as a judgment.

With many good qualities Roger Nowell was little liked. His austere and sarcastic manner repelled his equals, and his harshness made him an object of dislike and dread among his inferiors. Besides being the terror of all evil-doers, he was a hard man in his dealings, though he endeavoured to be just, and persuaded himself he was so. A year or two before, having been appointed sheriff of the county, he had discharged the important office with so much zeal and ability, as well as liberality, that he rose considerably in public estimation. It was during this period that Master Potts came under his notice at Lancaster, and the little attorney's shrewdness gained him an excellent client in the owner of Read. Roger Nowell was a widower; but his son, who resided with him, was married, and had a family, so that the hall was fully occupied.

Roger Nowell was turned sixty, but he was still in the full vigour of mind and body, his temperate and active habits keeping him healthy; he was of a spare muscular frame, somewhat bent in the shoulders, and had very sharp features, keen grey eyes, a close mouth, and prominent chin. His hair was white as silver, but his eyebrows were still black and bushy.

Seeing the party approach, the lord of the mansion came forth to meet them, and begged them to dismount for a moment and refresh themselves. Richard excused himself, but Nicholas sprang from his saddle, and Potts, though somewhat more slowly, imitated his example. An open door admitted them to the entrance hall, where a repast was spread, of which the host pressed his guests to partake; but Nicholas declined on the score of having just breakfasted, notwithstanding which he was easily prevailed upon to take a cup of ale. Leaving him to discuss it, Nowell led the attorney to a well-furnished library, where he usually transacted his magisterial business, and held a few minutes' private conference with him, after which they returned to Nicholas, and by this time the magistrate's own horse being brought round, the party mounted once more. The attorney regretted abandoning his seat; for Flint indulged him with another exhibition somewhat similar to the first, though of less duration, for a vigorous application of the hunting-whip brought the wrong-headed little animal to reason.

Elated by the victory he had obtained over Flint, and anticipating a successful issue to the expedition, Master Potts was in excellent spirits, and found a great deal to admire in the domain of his honoured and singular good client. Though not very genuine, his admiration was deservedly bestowed. The portion of the park they were now traversing was extremely diversified and beautiful, with long sweeping lawns studded with fine trees, among which were many ancient thorns, now in full bloom, and richly scenting the gale. Herds of deer were nipping the short grass, browsing the lower spray of the ashes, or couching amid the ferny hollows.

It was now that Nicholas, who had been all along anxious to try the speed of his horse, proposed to Richard a gallop towards a clump of trees about a mile off, and the young man assenting, away they started. Master Potts started too, for Flint did not like to be left behind, but the mettlesome pony was soon distanced. For some time the two horses kept so closely together, that it was difficult to say which would arrive at the goal first; but, by-and-by, Robin got a-head. Though at first indifferent to the issue of the race, the spirit of emulation soon seized upon Richard, and spurring Merlin, the noble animal sprang forward, and was once again by the side of his opponent.

For a quarter of a mile the ground had been tolerably level, and the sod firm; but they now approached a swamp, and, in his eagerness, Nicholas did not take sufficient precaution, and got involved in it before he was aware. Richard was more fortunate, having kept on the right, where the ground was hard. Seeing Nicholas struggling out of the marshy soil, he would have stayed for him; but the latter bade him go on, saying he would soon be up with him, and he made good his words. Shortly after this their course was intercepted by a brook, and both horses having cleared it excellently, they kept well together again for a short time, when they neared a deep dyke which lay between them and the clump of trees. On descrying it, Richard pointed out a course to the left, but Nicholas held on, unheeding the caution. Fully expecting to see him break his neck, for the dyke was of formidable width, Richard watched him with apprehension, but the squire gave him a re-assuring nod, and went on. Neither horse nor man faltered, though failure would have been certain destruction to both. The wide trench now yawned before them—they were upon its edge, and without trusting himself to measure it with his eye, Nicholas clapped spurs into Robin's sides. The brave horse sprang forward and landed him safely on the opposite bank. Halloing cheerily, as soon as he could check his courser the squire wheeled round, and rode back to look at the dyke he had crossed. Its width was terrific, and fairly astounded him. Robin snorted loudly, as if proud of his achievement, and showed some disposition to return, but the squire was quite content with what he had done. The exploit afterwards became a theme of wonder throughout the country, and the spot was long afterwards pointed out as "Squire Nicholas's Leap"; but there was not another horseman found daring enough to repeat the experiment.

Richard had to make a considerable circuit to join his cousin, and, while he was going round, Nicholas looked out for the others. In the distance, he could see Roger Nowell riding leisurely on, followed by Sparshot and a couple of grooms, who had come with their master from the hall; while midway, to his surprise, he perceived Flint galloping without a rider. A closer examination showed the squire what had happened. Like himself, Master Potts had incautiously approached the swamp, and, getting entangled in it, was thrown, head foremost, into the slough; out of which he was now floundering, covered from head to foot with inky-coloured slime. As soon as they were aware of the accident, the two grooms pushed forward, and one of them galloped after Flint, whom he succeeded at last in catching; while the other, with difficulty preserving his countenance at the woful plight of the attorney, who looked as black as a negro, pointed out a cottage in the hollow which belonged to one of the keepers, and offered to conduct him thither. Potts gladly assented, and soon gained the little tenement, where he was being washed and rubbed down by a couple of stout wenches when the rest of the party came up. It was impossible to help laughing at him, but Potts took the merriment in good part; and, to show he was not disheartened by the misadventure, as soon as circumstances would permit he mounted the unlucky pony, and the cavalcade set forward again.

The Lancashire Witches Volume III by William Harrison Ainsworth

CHAPTER III.—THE BOGGART'S GLEN.

The manor of Read, it has been said, was skirted by a deep woody ravine of three or four miles in length, extending from the little village of Sabden, in Pendle Forest, to within a short distance of Whalley; and through this gully flowed a stream which, taking its rise near Barley, at the foot of Pendle Hill, added its waters to those of the Calder at a place called Cock Bridge. In summer, or in dry seasons, this stream proceeded quietly enough, and left the greater part of its stony bed unoccupied; but in winter, or after continuous rains, it assumed all the character of a mountain torrent, and swept every thing before it. A narrow bridle road led through the ravine to Sabden, and along it, after quitting the park, the cavalcade proceeded, headed by Nicholas.

The little river danced merrily past them, singing as it went, the sunshine sparkling on its bright clear waters, and glittering on the pebbles beneath them. Now the stream would chafe and foam against some larger impediment to its course; now it would dash down some rocky height, and form a beautiful cascade; then it would hurry on for some time with little interruption, till stayed by a projecting bank it would form a small deep basin, where, beneath the far-cast shadow of an overhanging oak, or under its huge twisted and denuded roots, the angler might be sure of finding the speckled trout, the dainty greyling, or their mutual enemy, the voracious jack. The ravine was well wooded throughout, and in many parts singularly beautiful, from the disposition of the timber on its banks, as well as from the varied form and character of the trees. Here might be seen an acclivity covered with waving birch, or a top crowned with a mountain ash—there, on a smooth expanse of greensward, stood a range of noble elms, whose mighty arms stretched completely across the ravine. Further on, there were chestnut and walnut trees; willows, with hoary stems and silver leaves, almost encroaching upon the stream; larches upon the heights; and here and there, upon some sandy eminence, a spreading beech-tree. For the most part the bottom of the glen was overgrown with brushwood, and, where its sides were too abrupt to admit the growth of larger trees, they were matted with woodbine and brambles. Out of these would sometimes start a sharp pinnacle, or fantastically-formed crag, adding greatly to the picturesque beauty of the scene. On such points were not unfrequently found perched a hawk, a falcon, or some large bird of prey; for the gully, with its brakes and thickets, was a favourite haunt of the feathered tribe. The hollies, of which there were plenty, with their green prickly leaves and scarlet berries, afforded shelter and support to the blackbird; the thorns were frequented by the thrush; and numberless lesser songsters filled every other tree. In the covert there were pheasants and partridges in abundance, and snipe and wild-fowl resorted to the river in winter. Thither also, at all seasons, repaired the stately heron, to

devour the finny race; and thither came, on like errand, the splendidly-plumed kingfisher. The magpie chattered, the jay screamed and flew deeper into the woods as the horsemen approached, and the shy bittern hid herself amid the rushes. Occasionally, too, was heard the deep ominous croaking of a raven.

Potts After Being Thrown from his Horse.

Hitherto, the glen had been remarkable for its softness and beauty, but it now began to assume a savage and sombre character. The banks drew closer together, and became rugged and precipitous; while the trees met overhead, and, intermingling their branches, formed a canopy impervious to the sun's rays. The stream was likewise contracted in its bed, and its current, which, owing to the gloom, looked black as ink, flowed swiftly on, as if anxious to escape to livelier scenes. A large raven, which had attended the horsemen all the way, now alighted near them, and croaked ominously.

This part of the glen was in very ill repute, and was never traversed, even at noonday, without apprehension. Its wild and savage aspect, its horrent precipices, its shaggy woods, its strangely-shaped rocks and tenebrous depths, where every imperfectly-seen object appeared doubly frightful—all combined to invest it with mystery and terror. No one willingly lingered here, but hurried on, afraid of the sound of his own footsteps. No one dared to gaze at the rocks, lest he should see some hideous hobgoblin peering out of their fissures. No one glanced at the water, for fear some terrible kelpy, with twining snakes for hair and scaly hide, should issue from it and drag him down to devour him with his shark-like teeth. Among the common folk, this part of the ravine was known as "the boggart's glen", and was supposed to be haunted by mischievous beings, who made the unfortunate wanderer their sport.

For the last half-mile the road had been so narrow and intricate in its windings, that the party were obliged to proceed singly; but this did not prevent conversation; and Nicholas, throwing the bridle over Robin's neck, left the surefooted animal to pursue his course unguided, while he himself, leaning back, chatted with Roger Nowell. At the entrance of the gloomy gorge above described, Robin came to a stand, and refusing to move at a jerk from his master, the latter raised himself, and looked forward to see what could be the cause of the stoppage. No impediment was visible, but the animal obstinately refused to go on, though urged both by word and spur. This stoppage necessarily delayed the rest of the cavalcade.

Well aware of the ill reputation of the place, when Simon Sparshot and the grooms found that Robin would not go on, they declared he must see the boggart, and urged the squire to turn back, or some mischief would befall him. But Nicholas, though not without misgivings, did not like to yield thus, especially when urged on by Roger Nowell.

Indeed, the party could not get out of the ravine without going back nearly a mile, while Sabden was only half that distance from them. What was to be done? Robin still continued obstinate, and for the first time paid no attention to his master's commands. The poor animal was evidently a prey to violent terror, and snorted and reared, while his limbs were bathed in cold sweat.

Dismounting, and leaving him in charge of Roger Nowell, Nicholas walked on by himself to see if he could discover any cause for the horse's alarm; and he had not advanced far, when his eye rested upon a blasted oak forming a conspicuous object on a crag before him, on a scathed branch of which sat the raven.

Croak! croak! croak!

"Accursed bird, it is thou who hast frightened my horse," cried Nicholas. "Would I had a crossbow or an arquebuss to stop thy croaking."

And as he picked up a stone to cast at the raven, a crashing noise was heard among the bushes high up on the rock, and the next moment a huge fragment dislodged from the cliff rolled down and would have crushed him, if he had not nimbly avoided it.

Croak! croak! croak!

Nicholas almost fancied hoarse laughter was mingled with the cries of the bird.

The raven nodded its head and expanded its wings, and the squire, whose recent experience had prepared him for any wonder, fully expected to hear it speak, but it only croaked loudly and exultingly, or if it laughed, the sound was like the creaking of rusty hinges.

Nicholas did not like it at all, and he resolved to go back; but ere he could do so, he was startled by a buffet on the ear, and turning angrily round to see who had dealt it, he could distinguish no one, but at the same moment received a second buffet on the other ear.

The raven croaked merrily.

"Would I could wring thy neck, accursed bird!" cried the enraged squire.

Scarcely was the vindictive wish uttered than a shower of blows fell upon him, and kicks from unseen feet were applied to his person.

All the while the raven croaked merrily, and flapped his big black wings.

Infuriated by the attack, the squire hit right and left manfully, and dashed out his feet in every direction; but his blows and kicks only met the empty air, while those of his unseen antagonist told upon his own person with increased effect.

The spectacle seemed to afford infinite amusement to the raven. The mischievous bird almost crowed with glee.

There was no standing it any longer. So, amid a perfect hurricane of blows and kicks, and with the infernal voice of the raven ringing in his ears, the squire took to his heels. On reaching his companions he found they had not fared much better than himself. The two grooms were belabouring each other lustily; and Master Potts was exercising his hunting-whip on the broad shoulders of Sparshot, who in return was making him acquainted with the taste of a stout ash-plant. Assailed in the same manner as the squire, and naturally attributing the attack to their nearest neighbours, they waited for no explanation, but fell upon each other. Richard Assheton and Roger Nowell endeavoured to interfere and separate the combatants, and in doing so received some hard knocks for their pains; but all their pacific efforts were fruitless, until the squire appeared, and telling them they were merely the sport of hobgoblins, they desisted, but still the blows fell heavily on them as before, proving the truth of Nicholas's assertion.

Meanwhile the squire had mounted Robin, and, finding the horse no longer exhibit the same reluctance to proceed, he dashed at full speed through the haunted glen; but even above the clatter, of hoofs, and the noise of the party galloping after him, he could hear the hoarse exulting croaking of the raven.

As the gully expanded, and the sun once more found its way through the trees, and shone upon the river, Nicholas began to breathe more freely; but it was not until fairly out of the wood that he relaxed his speed. Not caring to enter into any explanation of the occurrence, he rode a little apart to avoid conversation; as the others, who were still smarting from the blows they had received, were in no very good-humour, a sullen silence prevailed throughout the party, as they mounted the bare hill-side in the direction of the few scattered huts constituting the village of Sabden.

A blight seemed to have fallen upon the place. Roger Nowell, who had visited it a few months ago, could scarcely believe his eyes, so changed was its appearance. His inquiries as to the cause of its altered condition were every where met by the same answer—the poor people were all bewitched. Here a child was ill of a strange sickness, tossed and tumbled in its bed, and contorted its limbs so violently, that its parents could scarcely hold it down. Another family was afflicted in a different manner, two of its

number pining away and losing strength daily, as if a prey to some consuming disease. In a third, another child was sick, and vomited pins, nails, and other extraordinary substances. A fourth household was tormented by an imp in the form of a monkey, who came at night and pinched them all black and blue, spilt the milk, broke the dishes and platters, got under the bed, and, raising it to the roof, let it fall with a terrible crash; putting them all in mental terror. In the next cottage there was no end to calamities, though they took a more absurd form. Sometimes the fire would not burn, or when it did it emitted no heat, so that the pot would not boil, nor the meat roast. Then the oatcakes would stick to the bake-stone, and no force could get them away from it till they were burnt and spoiled; the milk turned sour, the cheese became so hard that not even rats' teeth could gnaw it, the stools and settles broke down if sat upon, and the list of petty grievances was completed by a whole side of bacon being devoured in a single night. Roger Nowell and Nicholas listened patiently to a detail of all these grievances, and expressed strong sympathy for the sufferers, promising assistance and redress if possible. All the complainants taxed either Mother Demdike or Mother Chattox with afflicting them, and said they had incurred the anger of the two malevolent old witches by refusing to supply them with poultry, eggs, milk, butter, or other articles, which they had demanded. Master Potts made ample notes of the strange relations, and took down the name of every cottager.

At length, they arrived at the last cottage, and here a man, with a very doleful countenance, besought them to stop and listen to his tale.

"What is the matter, friend?" demanded Roger Nowell, halting with the others. "Are you bewitched, like your neighbours?"

"Troth am ey, your warship," replied the man, "an ey hope yo may be able to deliver me. Yo mun knoa, that somehow ey wor unlucky enough last Yule to offend Mother Chattox, an ever sin then aw's gone wrang wi' me. Th' good-wife con never may butter come without stickin' a redhot poker into t' churn; and last week, when our brindlt sow farrowed, and had fifteen to t' litter, an' fine uns os ever yo seed, seign on um deed. Sad wark! sad wark, mesters. The week efore that t' keaw deed; an th' week efore her th' owd mare, so that aw my stock be gone. Waes me! waes me! Nowt prospers wi' me. My poor dame is besaide hersel, an' th' chilter seems possessed. Ey ha' tried every remedy, boh without success. Ey ha' followed th' owd witch whoam, plucked a hontle o' thatch fro' her roof, sprinklet it wi' sawt an weter, burnt it an' buried th' ess at th' change o' t' moon. No use, mesters. Then again, ey ha' gotten a horseshoe, heated it redhot, quenched it i' brine, an' nailed it to t' threshold wi' three nails, heel uppard. No more use nor t'other. Then ey ha' taen sawt weter, and put it in a bottle wi' three rusty nails, needles, and pins, boh ey hanna found that th' witch ha' suffered thereby. An, lastly, ey ha' let myself blood, when the moon wur at full, an in opposition to th' owd hag's planet, an minglin' it wi'

sawt, ha' burnt it i' a trivet, in hopes of afflictin' her; boh without avail, fo' ey seed her two days ago, an she flouted me an scoffed at me. What mun ey do, good mesters? What mun ey do?"

"Have you offended any one besides Mother Chattox, my poor fellow?" said Nowell.

"Mother Demdike, may be, your warship," replied the man.

"You suspect Mother Demdike and Mother Chattox of bewitching you," said Potts, taking out his memorandum-book, and making a note in it. "Your name, good fellow?"

"Oamfrey o' Will's o' Ben's o' Tummas' o' Sabden," replied the man.

"Is that all?" asked Potts.

"What more would you have?" said Richard. "The description is sufficiently particular."

"Scarcely precise enough," returned Potts. "However, it may do. We will help you in the matter, good Humphrey Etcetera. You shall not be troubled with these pestilent witches much longer. The neighbourhood shall be cleared of them."

"Ey'm reet glad to hear, mester," replied the man.

"You promise much, Master Potts," observed Richard.

"Not a jot more than I am able to perform," replied the attorney.

"That remains to be seen," said Richard. "If these old women are as powerful as represented, they will not be so readily defeated."

"There you are in error, Master Richard," replied Potts. "The devil, whose vassals they are, will deliver them into our hands."

"Granting what you say to be correct, the devil must have little regard for his servants if he abandons them so easily," observed Richard, drily.

"What else can you expect from him?" cried Potts. "It is his custom to ensnare his victims, and then leave them to their fate."

"You are rather describing the course pursued by certain members of your own profession, Master Potts," said Richard. "The devil behaves with greater fairness to his clients."

"You are not going to defend him, I hope, sir?" said the attorney.

"No; I only desire to give him his due," returned Richard.

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed Nicholas. "You had better have done, Master Potts; you will never get the better in the argument. But we must be moving, or we shall not get our business done before nightfall. As to you, Numps," he added, to the poor man, "we will not forget you. If any thing can be done for your relief, rely upon it, it shall not be neglected."

"Ay, ay," said Nowell, "the matter shall be looked into—and speedily."

"And the witches brought to justice," said Potts; "comfort yourself with that, good Humphrey Etcetera."

"Ay, comfort yourself with that," observed Nicholas.

Soon after this they entered a wide dreary waste forming the bottom of the valley, lying between the heights of Padiham and Pendle Hill, and while wending their way across it, they heard a shout from the hill-side, and presently afterwards perceived a man, mounted on a powerful black horse, galloping swiftly towards them. The party awaited his approach, and the stranger speedily came up. He was a small man habited in a suit of rusty black, and bore a most extraordinary and marked resemblance to Master Potts. He had the same perky features, the same parchment complexion, the same yellow forehead, as the little attorney. So surprising was the likeness, that Nicholas unconsciously looked round for Potts, and beheld him staring at the new-comer in angry wonder.

The Lancashire Witches Volume III by William Harrison Ainsworth

CHAPTER IV.—THE REEVE OF THE FOREST.

The surprise of the party was by no means diminished when the stranger spoke. His voice exactly resembled the sharp cracked tones of the attorney.

"I crave pardon for the freedom I have taken in stopping you, good masters," he said, doffing his cap, and saluting them respectfully; "but, being aware of your errand, I am come to attend you on it."

"And who are you, fellow, who thus volunteer your services?" demanded Roger Nowell, sharply.

"I am one of the reeves of the forest of Blackburnshire, worshipful sir," replied the stranger, "and as such my presence, at the intended perambulation of the boundaries of her property, has been deemed necessary by Mrs. Nutter, as I shall have to make a representation of the matter at the next court of swainmote."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Nowell, "but how knew you we were coming?"

"Mistress Nutter sent me word last night," replied the reeve, "that Master Nicholas Assheton and certain other gentlemen, would come to Rough Lee for the purpose of ascertaining the marks, meres, and boundaries of her property, early this morning, and desired my attendance on the occasion. Accordingly I stationed myself on yon high ground to look out for you, and have been on the watch for more than an hour."

"Humph!" exclaimed Roger Nowell, "and you live in the forest?"

"I live at Barrowford, worshipful sir," replied the reeve, "but I have only lately come there, having succeeded Maurice Mottisfont, the other reeve, who has been removed by the master forester to Rossendale, where I formerly dwelt."

"That may account for my not having seen you before," rejoined Nowell. "You are well mounted, sirrah. I did not know the master forester allowed his men such horses as the one you ride."

"This horse does not belong to me, sir," replied the reeve; "it has been lent me by Mistress Nutter."

"Aha! I see how it is now," cried Nowell; "you are suborned to give false testimony, knave. I object to his attendance, Master Nicholas."

"Nay, I think you do the man injustice," said the squire. "He speaks frankly and fairly enough, and seems to know his business. The worst that can be said against him is, that he resembles somewhat too closely our little legal friend there. That, however, ought to be no objection to you, Master Nowell, but rather the contrary."

"Well, take the responsibility of the matter upon your own shoulders," said Nowell; "if any ill comes of it I shall blame you."

"Be it so," replied the squire; "my shoulders are broad enough to bear the burthen. You may ride with us, master reeve."

"May I inquire your name, friend?" said Potts, as the stranger fell back to the rear of the party.

"Thomas Potts, at your service, sir," replied the reeve.

"What!—Thomas Potts!" exclaimed the astonished attorney.

"That is my name, sir," replied the reeve, quietly.

"Why, zounds!" exclaimed Nicholas, who overheard the reply, "you do not mean to say your name is Thomas Potts? This is more wonderful still. You must be this gentleman's twin brother."

"The gentleman certainly seems to resemble me very strongly," replied the reeve, apparently surprised in his turn. "Is he of these parts?"

"No, I am not," returned Potts, angrily, "I am from London, where I reside in Chancery-lane, and practise the law, though I likewise attend as clerk of the court at the assizes at Lancaster, where I may possibly, one of these days, have the pleasure of seeing you, my pretended namesake."

"Possibly, sir," said the reeve, with provoking calmness. "I myself am from Chester, and like yourself was brought up to the law, but I abandoned my profession, or rather it abandoned me, for I had few clients; so I took to an honest calling, and became a forester, as you see. My father was a draper in the city I have mentioned, and dwelt in Watergate-street—his name was Peter Potts."

"Peter Potts your father!" exclaimed the attorney, in the last state of astonishment—"Why, he was mine! But I am his only son."

"Up to this moment I conceived myself an only son," said the reeve; "but it seems I was mistaken, since I find I have an elder brother."

"Elder brother!" exclaimed Potts, wrathfully. "You are older than I am by twenty years. But it is all a fabrication. I deny the relationship entirely."

"You cannot make me other than the son of my father," said the reeve, with a smile.

"Well, Master Potts," interposed Nicholas, laughing, "I see no reason why you should be ashamed of your brother. There is a strong family likeness between you. So old Peter Potts, the draper of Chester, was your father, eh? I was not aware of the circumstance before—ha, ha!"

"And, but for this intrusive fellow, you would never have become aware of it," muttered the attorney. "Give ear to me, squire," he said, urging Flint close up to the other's side, and speaking in a low tone, "I do not like the fellow's looks at all."

"I am surprised at that," rejoined the squire, "for he exactly resembles you."

"That is why I do not like him," said Potts; "I believe him to be a wizard."

"You are no wizard to think so," rejoined the squire. And he rode on to join Roger Nowell, who was a little in advance.

"I will try him on the subject of witchcraft," thought Potts. "As you dwell in the forest," he said to the reeve, "you have no doubt seen those two terrible beings, Mothers Demdike and Chattox."

"Frequently," replied the reeve, "but I would rather not talk about them in their own territories. You may judge of their power by the appearance of the village you have just quitted. The inhabitants of that unlucky place refused them their customary tributes, and have therefore incurred their resentment. You will meet other instances of the like kind before you have gone far."

"I am glad of it, for I want to collect as many cases as I can of witchcraft," observed Potts.

"They will be of little use to you," observed the reeve.

"How so?" inquired Potts.

"Because if the witches discover what you are about, as they will not fail to do, you will never leave the forest alive," returned the other.

"You think not?" cried Potts.

"I am sure of it," replied the reeve.

"I will not be deterred from the performance of my duty," said Potts. "I defy the devil and all his works."

"You may have reason to repent your temerity," replied the reeve.

And anxious, apparently, to avoid further conversation on the subject, he drew in the rein for a moment, and allowed the attorney to pass on.

Notwithstanding his boasting, Master Potts was not without much secret misgiving; but his constitutional obstinacy made him determine to prosecute his plans at any risk, and he comforted himself by recalling the opinion of his sovereign authority on such matters.

"Let me ponder over the exact words of our British Solomon," he thought. "I have his learned treatise by heart, and it is fortunate my memory serves me so well, for the sagacious prince's dictum will fortify me in my resolution, which has been somewhat shaken by this fellow, whom I believe to be no better than he should be, for all he calls himself my father's son, and hath assumed my likeness, doubtless for some mischievous purpose. 'If the magistrate,' saith the King, 'be slothful towards witches, God is very able to make them instruments to waken and punish his sloth.' No one can accuse me of slothfulness and want of zeal. My best exertions have been used against the accursed creatures. And now for the rest. 'But if, on the contrary, he be diligent in examining and punishing them, God will not permit their master to trouble or hinder so good a work!' Exactly what I have done. I am quite easy now, and shall go on fearlessly as before. I am one of the 'lawful lieutenants' described by the King, and cannot be 'defrauded or deprived' of my office."

As these thoughts passed through the attorney's mind a low derisive laugh sounded in his ears, and, connecting it with the reeve, he looked back and found the object of his suspicions gazing at him, and chuckling maliciously. So fiendishly malignant, indeed, was the gaze fixed upon him, that Potts was glad to turn his head away to avoid it.

"I am confirmed in my suspicions," he thought; "he is evidently a wizard, if he be not—"

Again the mocking laugh sounded in his ears, but he did not venture to look round this time, being fearful of once more encountering the terrible gaze.

Meanwhile the party had traversed the valley, and to avoid a dangerous morass stretching across its lower extremity, and shorten the distance—for the ordinary road would have led them too much to the right—they began to climb one of the ridges of Pendle Hill, which lay between them and the vale they wished to gain. On obtaining the top of this eminence, an extensive view on either side opened upon them. Behind was the sterile valley they had just crossed, its black soil, hoary grass, and heathy wastes, only enlivened at one end by patches of bright sulphur-coloured moss, which masked a treacherous quagmire lurking beneath it. Some of the cottages in Sabden were visible, and, from the sad circumstances connected with them, and which oppressed the thoughts of the beholders, added to the dreary character of the prospect. The day, too, had lost its previous splendour, and there were clouds overhead which cast deep shadows on the ground. But on the crest of Pendle Hill, which rose above them, a sun-burst fell, and attracted attention from its brilliant contrast to the prevailing gloom. Before them lay a deep gully, the sinuosities of which could be traced from the elevated position where they stood, though its termination was hidden by other projecting ridges. Further on, the sides of the mountain were bare and rugged, and covered with shelving stone. Beyond the defile before mentioned, and over the last mountain ridge, lay a wide valley, bounded on the further side by the hills overlooking Colne, and the mountain defile, now laid open to the travellers, exhibiting in the midst of the dark heathy ranges, which were its distinguishing features, some marks of cultivation. In parts it was inclosed and divided into paddocks by stone walls, and here and there a few cottages were collected together, dignified, as in the case of Sabden, by the name of a village. Amongst these were the Hey-houses, an assemblage of small stone tenements, the earliest that arose in the forest; Goldshaw Booth, now a populous place, and even then the largest hamlet in the district; and in the distance Ogden and Barley, the two latter scarcely comprising a dozen habitations, and those little better than huts. In some sheltered nook on the hill-side might be discerned the solitary cottage of a cowherd, and not far from it the certain accompaniment of a sheepfold. Throughout this weird region, thinly peopled it is true, but still of great extent, and apparently abandoned to the powers of darkness, only one edifice could be found where its inhabitants could meet to pray, and this was an ancient chapel at Goldshaw Booth, originally erected in the reign of Henry III., though subsequently in part rebuilt in 1544, and which, with its low grey tower peeping from out the trees, was just discernible. Two halls were in view; one of which, Sabden, was of considerable antiquity, and gave its name to the village; and the other was Hoarstones, a much more recently erected mansion, strikingly situated on an

acclivity of Pendle Hill. In general, the upper parts of this mountain monarch of the waste were bare and heathy, while the heights overhanging Ogden and Barley were rocky, shelving, and precipitous; but the lower ridges were well covered with wood, and a thicket, once forming part of the ancient forest, ran far out into the plain near Goldshaw Booth. Numerous springs burst from the mountain side, and these collecting their forces, formed a considerable stream, which, under the name of Pendle Water, flowed through the valley above described, and, after many picturesque windings, entered the rugged glen in which Rough Lee was situated, and swept past the foot of Mistress Nutter's residence.

Descending the hill, and passing through the thicket, the party came within a short distance of Goldshaw Booth, when they were met by a cowherd, who, with looks of great alarm, told them that John Law, the pedlar, had fallen down in a fit in the clough, and would perish if they did not stay to help him. As the poor man in question was well known both to Nicholas and Roger Nowell, they immediately agreed to go to his assistance, and accompanied the cowherd along a by-road which led through the clough to the village. They had not gone far when they heard loud groans, and presently afterwards found the unfortunate pedlar lying on his back, and writhing in agony. He was a large, powerfully-built man, of middle age, and had been in the full enjoyment of health and vigour, so that his sudden prostration was the more terrible. His face was greatly disfigured, the mouth and neck drawn awry, the left eye pulled down, and the whole power of the same side gone.

"Why, John, this is a bad business," cried Nicholas. "You have had a paralytic stroke, I fear."

"Nah—nah—squire," replied the sufferer, speaking with difficulty, "it's neaw nat'ral ailment—it's witchcraft."

"Witchcraft!" exclaimed Potts, who had come up, and producing his memorandum book. "Another case. Your name and description, friend?"

"John Law o' Cown, pedlar," replied the man.

"John Law of Colne, I suppose, petty chapman," said Potts, making an entry. "Now, John, my good man, be pleased to tell us by whom you have been bewitched?"

"By Mother Demdike," groaned the man.

"Mother Demdike, ah?" exclaimed Potts, "good! very good. Now, John, as to the cause of your quarrel with the old hag?"

"Ey con scarcely rekillect it, my head be so confused, mester," replied the pedlar.

"Make an effort, John," persisted Potts; "it is most desirable such a dreadful offender should not escape justice."

"Weel, weel, ey'n try an tell it then," replied the pedlar. "Yo mun knoa ey wur crossing the hill fro' Cown to Rough Lee, wi' my pack upon my shouthers, when who should ey meet boh Mother Demdike, an hoo axt me to gi' her some scithers an pins, boh, os ill luck wad ha' it, ey refused. 'Yo had better do it, John,' hoo said, 'or yo'll rue it efore to-morrow neet.' Ey laughed at her, an trudged on, boh when I looked back, an seed her shakin' her skinny hond at me, ey repented and thowt ey would go back, an gi' her the choice o' my wares. Boh my pride wur too strong, an ey walked on to Barley an Ogden, an slept at Bess's o th' Booth, an woke this mornin' stout and strong, fully persuaded th' owd witch's threat would come to nowt. Alack-a-day! ey wur out i' my reckonin', fo' scarcely had ey reached this kloof, o' my way to Sabden, than ey wur seized wi' a sudden shock, os if a thunder-bowt had hit me, an ey lost the use o' my lower limbs, an t' laft soide, an should ha' deed most likely, if it hadna bin fo' Ebil o' Jem's o' Dan's who spied me out, an brought me help."

"Yours is a deplorable case indeed, John," said Richard—"especially if it be the result of witchcraft."

"You do not surely doubt that it is so, Master Richard?" cried Potts.

"I offer no opinion," replied the young man; "but a paralytic stroke would produce the same effect. But, instead of discussing the matter, the best thing we can do will be to transport the poor man to Bess's o' th' Booth, where he can be attended to."

"Tom and I can carry him there, if Abel will take charge of his pack," said one of the grooms.

"That I win," replied the cowherd, unstrapping the box, upon which the sufferer's head rested, and placing it on his own shoulders.

Meanwhile, a gate having been taken from its hinges by Sparshot and the reeve, the poor pedlar, who groaned deeply during the operation, was placed upon it by the men, and borne towards the village, followed by the others, leading their horses.

Great consternation was occasioned in Goldshaw Booth by the entrance of the cavalcade, and still more, when it became known that John Law, the pedlar, who was a

favourite with all, had had a frightful seizure. Old and young flocked forth to see him, and the former shook their heads, while the latter were appalled at the hideous sight. Master Potts took care to tell them that the poor fellow was bewitched by Mother Demdike; but the information failed to produce the effect he anticipated, and served rather to repress than heighten their sympathy for the sufferer. The attorney concluded, and justly, that they were afraid of incurring the displeasure of the vindictive old hag by an open expression of interest in his fate. So strongly did this feeling operate, that after bestowing a glance of commiseration at the pedlar, most of them returned, without a word, to their dwellings.

On their way to the little hostel, whither they were conveying the poor pedlar, the party passed the church, and the sexton, who was digging a grave in the yard, came forward to look at them; but on seeing John Law he seemed to understand what had happened, and resumed his employment. A wide-spreading yew-tree grew in this part of the churchyard, and near it stood a small cross rudely carved in granite, marking the spot where, in the reign of Henry VI., Ralph Cliderhow, tenth abbot of Whalley, held a meeting of the tenantry, to check encroachments. Not far from this ancient cross the sexton, a hale old man, with a fresh complexion and silvery hair, was at work, and while the others went on, Master Potts paused to say a word to him.

"You have a funeral here to-day, I suppose, Master Sexton?" he said.

"Yeigh," replied the man, gruffly.

"One of the villagers?" inquired the attorney.

"Neaw; hoo were na o' Goldshey," replied the sexton.

"Where then—who was it?" persevered Potts.

The sexton seemed disinclined to answer; but at length said, "Meary Baldwyn, the miller's dowter o' Rough Lee, os protty a lass os ever yo see, mester. Hoo wur the apple o' her feyther's ee, an he hasna had a dry ee sin hoo deed. Wall-a-dey! we mun aw go, owd an young—owd an young—an protty Meary Baldwyn went young enough. Poor lass! poor lass!" and he brushed the dew from his eyes with his brawny hand.

"Was her death sudden?" asked Potts.

"Neaw, not so sudden, mester," replied the sexton. "Ruchot Baldwyn had fair warnin'. Six months ago Meary wur ta'en ill, an fro' t' first he knoad how it wad eend."

"How so, friend?" asked Potts, whose curiosity began to be aroused.

"Becose—" replied the sexton, and he stopped suddenly short.

"She was bewitched?" suggested Potts.

The sexton nodded his head, and began to ply his mattock vigorously.

"By Mother Demdike?" inquired Potts, taking out his memorandum book.

The sexton again nodded his head, but spake no word, and, meeting some obstruction in the ground, took up his pick to remove it.

"Another case!" muttered Potts, making an entry. "Mary Baldwyn, daughter of Richard Baldwyn of Rough Lee, aged—How old was she, sexton?"

"Throtteen," replied the man; "boh dunna ax me ony more questions, mester. Th' berrin takes place i' an hour, an ey hanna half digg'd th' grave."

"Your own name, Master Sexton, and I have done?" said Potts.

"Zachariah Worms," answered the man.

"Worms—ha! an excellent name for a sexton," cried Potts. "You provide food for your family, eh, Zachariah?"

"Tut—tut," rejoined the sexton, testily, "go an' moind yer own bus'ness, mon, an' leave me to moind mine."

"Very well, Zachariah," replied Potts. And having obtained all he required, he proceeded to the little hostel, where, finding the rest of the party had dismounted, he consigned Flint to a cowherd, and entered the house.

The Lancashire Witches Volume III by William Harrison Ainsworth

CHAPTER V.—BESS'S O' TH' BOOTH.

Bess's o' th' Booth—for so the little hostel at Goldshaw was called, after its mistress Bess Whitaker—was far more comfortable and commodious than its unpretending exterior seemed to warrant. Stouter and brighter ale was not to be drunk in Lancashire than Bess brewed; nor was better sherris or clary to be found, go where you would, than in her cellars. The traveller crossing those dreary wastes, and riding from Burnley to Clithero, or from Colne to Whalley, as the case might be, might well halt at Bess's, and be sure of a roast fowl for dinner, with the addition, perhaps, of some trout from Pendle Water, or, if the season permitted, a heath-cock or a pheasant; or, if he tarried there for the night, he was equally sure of a good supper and fair linen. It has already been mentioned, that at this period it was the custom of all classes in the northern counties, men and women, to resort to the alehouses to drink, and the hostel at Goldshaw was the general rendezvous of the neighbourhood. For those who could afford it Bess would brew incomparable sack; but if a guest called for wine, and she liked not his looks, she would flatly tell him her ale was good enough for him, and if it pleased him not he should have nothing. Submission always followed in such cases, for there was no disputing with Bess. Neither would she permit the frequenters of the hostel to sit later than she chose, and would clear the house in a way equally characteristic and effectual. At a certain hour, and that by no means a late one, she would take down a large horsewhip, which hung on a convenient peg in the principal room, and after bluntly ordering her guests to go home, if any resistance were offered, she would lay the whip across their shoulders, and forcibly eject them from the premises; but, as her determined character was well known, this violence was seldom necessary. In strength Bess was a match for any man, and assistance from her cowherds—for she was a farmer as well as hostess—was at hand if required. As will be surmised from the above, Bess was large and masculine-looking, but well-proportioned nevertheless, and possessed a certain coarse kind of beauty, which in earlier years had inflamed Richard Baldwyn, the miller of Rough Lee, who made overtures of marriage to her. These were favourably entertained, but a slight quarrel occurring between them, the lover, in her own phrase, got "his jacket soundly dusted" by her, and declared off, taking to wife a more docile and light-handed maiden. As to Bess, though she had given this unmistakable proof of her ability to manage a husband, she did not receive a second offer, nor, as she had now attained the mature age of forty, did it seem likely she would ever receive one.

Bess's o' th' Booth was an extremely clean and comfortable house. The floor, it is true, was of hard clay, and the windows little more than narrow slits, with heavy stone frames, further darkened by minute diamond panes; but the benches were scrupulously

clean, and so was the long oak table in the centre of the principal and only large room in the house. A roundabout fireplace occupied one end of the chamber, sheltered from the draught of the door by a dark oak screen, with a bench on the warm side of it; and here, or in the deep ingle-nooks, on winter nights, the neighbours would sit and chat by the blazing hearth, discussing pots of "nappy ale, good and stale," as the old ballad hath it; and as persons of both sexes came thither, young as well as old, many a match was struck up by Bess's cheery fireside. From the blackened rafters hung a goodly supply of hams, sides of bacon, and dried tongues, with a profusion of oatcakes in a bread-flake; while, in case this store should be exhausted, means of replenishment were at hand in the huge, full-crammed meal-chest standing in one corner. Altogether, there was a look of abundance as well as of comfort about the place.

Great was Bess's consternation when the poor pedlar, who had quitted her house little more than an hour ago, full of health and spirits, was brought back to it in such a deplorable condition; and when she saw him deposited at her door, notwithstanding her masculine character, she had some difficulty in repressing a scream. She did not, however, yield to the weakness, but seeing at once what was best to be done, caused him to be transported by the grooms to the chamber he had occupied over-night, and laid upon the bed. Medical assistance was fortunately at hand; for it chanced that Master Sudall, the chirurgeon of Colne, was in the house at the time, having been brought to Goldshaw by the great sickness that prevailed at Sabden and elsewhere in the neighbourhood. Sudall was immediately in attendance upon the sufferer, and bled him copiously, after which the poor man seemed much easier; and Richard Assheton, taking the chirurgeon aside, asked his opinion of the case, and was told by Sudall that he did not think the pedlar's life in danger, but he doubted whether he would ever recover the use of his limbs.

"You do not attribute the attack to witchcraft, I suppose, Master Sudall?" said Richard.

"I do not like to deliver an opinion, sir," replied the chirurgeon. "It is impossible to decide, when all the appearances are precisely like those of an ordinary attack of paralysis. But a sad case has recently come under my observation, as to which I can have no doubt—I mean as to its being the result of witchcraft—but I will tell you more about it presently, for I must now return to my patient."

It being agreed among the party to rest for an hour at the little hostel, and partake of some refreshment, Nicholas went to look after the horses, while Roger Nowell and Richard remained in the room with the pedlar. Bess Whitaker owned an extensive farm-yard, provided with cow-houses, stables, and a large barn; and it was to the latter place that the two grooms proposed to repair with Sparshot and play a game at loggats on the clay floor. No one knew what had become of the reeve; for, on depositing the poor

pedlar at the door of the hostel, he had mounted his horse and ridden away. Having ordered some fried eggs and bacon, Nicholas wended his way to the stable, while Bess, assisted by a stout kitchen wench, busied herself in preparing the eatables, and it was at this juncture that Master Potts entered the house.

Bess eyed him narrowly, and was by no means prepossessed by his looks, while the muddy condition of his habiliments did not tend to exalt him in her opinion.

"Yo mey yersel a' whoam, mon, ey mun say," she observed, as the attorney seated himself on the bench beside her.

"To be sure," rejoined Potts; "where should a man make himself at home, if not at an inn? Those eggs and bacon look very tempting. I'll try some presently; and, as soon as you've done with the frying-pan, I'll have a pottle of sack."

"Neaw, yo winna," replied Bess. "Yo'n get nother eggs nor bacon nor sack here, ey can promise ye. Ele an whoat-kekes mun sarve your turn. Go to t' barn wi' t' other grooms, and play at kittle-pins or nine-holes wi' hin, an ey'n send ye some ele."

"I'm quite comfortable where I am, thank you, hostess," replied Potts, "and have no desire to play at kittle-pins or nine-holes. But what does this bottle contain?"

"Sherris," replied Bess.

"Sherris!" echoed Potts, "and yet you say I can have no sack. Get me some sugar and eggs, and I'll show you how to brew the drink. I was taught the art by my friend, Ben Jonson—rare Ben—ha, ha!"

"Set the bottle down," cried Bess, angrily.

"What do you mean, woman!" said Potts, staring at her in surprise. "I told you to fetch sugar and eggs, and I now repeat the order—sugar, and half-a-dozen eggs at least."

"An ey repeat my order to yo," cried Bess, "to set the bottle down, or ey'st may ye."

"Make me! ha, ha! I like that," cried Potts. "Let me tell you, woman, I am not accustomed to be ordered in this way. I shall do no such thing. If you will not bring the eggs I shall drink the wine, neat and unsophisticate." And he filled a flagon near him.

"If yo dun, yo shan pay dearly for it," said Bess, putting aside the frying-pan and taking down the horsewhip.

"I daresay I shall," replied Potts merrily; "you hostesses generally do make one pay dearly. Very good sherris this, i' faith!—the true nutty flavour. Now do go and fetch me some eggs, my good woman. You must have plenty, with all the poultry I saw in the farm-yard; and then I'll teach you the whole art and mystery of brewing sack."

"Ey'n teach yo to dispute my orders," cried Bess. And, catching the attorney by the collar, she began to belabour him soundly with the whip.

"Holloa! ho! what's the meaning of this?" cried Potts, struggling to get free. "Assault and battery; ho!"

"Ey'n sawt an batter yo, ay, an baste yo too!" replied Bess, continuing to lay on the whip.

"Why, zounds! this passes a joke," cried the attorney. "How desperately strong she is! I shall be murdered! Help! help! The woman must be a witch."

"A witch! Ey'n teach yo' to ca' me feaw names," cried the enraged hostess, laying on with greater fury.

"Help! help!" roared Potts.

At this moment Nicholas returned from the stables, and, seeing how matters stood, flew to the attorney's assistance.

"Come, come, Bess," he cried, laying hold of her arm, "you've given him enough. What has Master Potts been about? Not insulting you, I hope?"

"Neaw, ey'd tak keare he didna do that, squoire," replied the hostess. "Ey tow'd him he'd get nowt boh ele here, an' he made free wi't wine bottle, so ey brought down t' whip jist to teach him manners."

"You teach me! you ignorant and insolent hussy," cried Potts, furiously; "do you think I'm to be taught manners by an overgrown Lancashire witch like you? I'll teach you what it is to assault a gentleman. I'll prefer an instant complaint against you to my singular good friend and client, Master Roger, who is in your house, and you'll soon find whom you've got to deal with—"

"Marry—kem—eawt!" exclaimed Bess; "who con it be? Ey took yo fo' one o't grooms, mon."

"Fire and fury!" exclaimed Potts; "this is intolerable. Master Nowell shall let you know who I am, woman."

"Nay, I'll tell you, Bess," interposed Nicholas, laughing. "This little gentleman is a London lawyer, who is going to Rough Lee on business with Master Roger Nowell. Unluckily, he got pitched into a quagmire in Read Park, and that is the reason why his countenance and habiliments have got begrimed."

"Eigh! ey thowt he wur i' a strawnge fettle," replied Bess; "an so he be a lawyer fro' Lunnun, eh? Weel," she added, laughing, and displaying two ranges of very white teeth, "he'll remember Bess Whitaker, t' next time he comes to Pendle Forest."

"And she'll remember me," rejoined Potts.

"Neaw more sawce, mon," cried Bess, "or ey'n raddle thy boans again."

"No you won't, woman," cried Potts, snatching up his horsewhip, which he had dropped in the previous scuffle, and brandishing it fiercely. "I dare you to touch me."

Nicholas was obliged once more to interfere, and as he passed his arms round the hostess's waist, he thought a kiss might tend to bring matters to a peaceable issue, so he took one.

"Ha' done wi' ye, squoire," cried Bess, who, however, did not look very seriously offended by the liberty.

"By my faith, your lips are so sweet that I must have another," cried Nicholas. "I tell you what, Bess, you're the finest woman in Lancashire, and you owe it to the county to get married."

"Whoy so?" said Bess.

"Because it would be a pity to lose the breed," replied Nicholas. "What say you to Master Potts there? Will he suit you?"

"He—pooh! Do you think ey'd put up wi' sich powsement os he! Neaw; when Bess Whitaker, the lonleydey o' Goldshey, weds, it shan be to a mon, and nah to a ninny-hommer."

"Bravely resolved, Bess," cried Nicholas. "You deserve another kiss for your spirit."

"Ha' done, ey say," cried Bess, dealing him a gentle tap that sounded very much like a buffet. "See how yon jobberknow is grinning at ye."

"Jobberknow and ninny-hammer," cried Potts, furiously; "really, woman, I cannot permit such names to be applied to me."

"Os yo please, boh ey'st gi' ye nah better," rejoined the hostess.

"Come, Bess, a truce to this," observed Nicholas; "the eggs and bacon are spoiling, and I'm dying with hunger. There—there," he added, clapping her on the shoulder, "set the dish before us, that's a good soul—a couple of plates, some oatcakes and butter, and we shall do."

And while Bess attended to these requirements, he observed, "This sudden seizure of poor John Law is a bad business."

"Deed on it is, squoire," replied Bess, "ey wur quite glopp'nt at seet on him. Lorjus o' me! whoy, it's scarcely an hour sin he left here, looking os strong an os 'earty os yersel. Boh it's a kazzardly onsartin loife we lead. Here to-day an gone the morrow, as Parson Houlden says. Wall-a-day!"

"True, true, Bess," replied the squire, "and the best plan therefore is, to make the most of the passing moment. So brew us each a lusty pottle of sack, and fry us some more eggs and bacon."

And while the hostess proceeded to prepare the sack, Potts remarked to Nicholas, "I have got another case of witchcraft, squire. Mary Baldwyn, the miller's daughter, of Rough Lee."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Nicholas. "What, is the poor girl bewitched?"

"Bewitched to death—that's all," said Potts.

"Eigh—poor Meary! hoo's to be berried here this mornin," observed Bess, emptying the bottle of sherris into a pot, and placing the latter on the fire.

"And you think she was forespoken?" said Nicholas, addressing her.

"Folk sayn so," replied Bess; "boh I'd leyther howd my tung about it."

"Then I suppose you pay tribute to Mother Chattox, hostess?" cried Potts,— "butter, eggs, and milk from the farm, ale and wine from the cellar, with a flitch of bacon now and then, ey?"

"Nay, by th' maskins! ey gi' her nowt," cried Bess.

"Then you bribe Mother Demdike, and that comes to the same thing," said Potts.

"Weel, yo're neaw so fur fro' t' mark this time," replied Bess, adding eggs, sugar, and spice to the now boiling wine, and stirring up the compound.

"I wonder where your brother, the reeve of the forest, can be, Master Potts!" observed Nicholas. "I did not see either him or his horse at the stables."

"Perhaps the arch impostor has taken himself off altogether," said Potts; "and if so, I shall be sorry, for I have not done with him."

The sack was now set before them, and pronounced excellent, and while they were engaged in discussing it, together with a fresh supply of eggs and bacon, fried by the kitchen wench, Roger Nowell came out of the inner room, accompanied by Richard and the chirurgeon.

"Well, Master Sudall, how goes on your patient?" inquired Nicholas of the latter.

"Much more favourably than I expected, squire," replied the chirurgeon. "He will be better left alone for awhile, and, as I shall not quit the village till evening, I shall be able to look well after him."

"You think the attack occasioned by witchcraft of course, sir?" said Potts.

"The poor fellow affirms it to be so, but I can give no opinion," replied Sudall, evasively.

"You must make up your mind as to the matter, for I think it right to tell you your evidence will be required," said Potts. "Perhaps, you may have seen poor Mary Baldwyn, the miller's daughter of Rough Lee, and can speak more positively as to her case."

"I can, sir," replied the chirurgeon, seating himself beside Potts, while Roger Nowell and Richard placed themselves on the opposite side of the table. "This is the case I referred to a short time ago, when answering your inquiries on the same subject, Master Richard, and a most afflicting one it is. But you shall have the particulars. Six months ago, Mary Baldwyn was as lovely and blooming a lass as could be seen, the joy of her widowed

father's heart. A hot-headed, obstinate man is Richard Baldwyn, and he was unwise enough to incur the displeasure of Mother Demdike, by favouring her rival, old Chattox, to whom he gave flour and meal, while he refused the same tribute to the other. The first time Mother Demdike was dismissed without the customary dole, one of his millstones broke, and, instead of taking this as a warning, he became more obstinate. She came a second time, and he sent her away with curses. Then all his flour grew damp and musty, and no one would buy it. Still he remained obstinate, and, when she appeared again, he would have laid hands upon her. But she raised her staff, and the blows fell short. 'I have given thee two warnings, Richard,' she said, 'and thou hast paid no heed to them. Now I will make thee smart, lad, in right earnest. That which thou lovest best thou shalt lose.' Upon this, bethinking him that the dearest thing he had in the world was his daughter Mary, and afraid of harm happening to her, Richard would fain have made up his quarrel with the old witch; but it had now gone too far, and she would not listen to him, but uttering some words, with which the name of the girl was mingled, shook her staff at the house and departed. The next day poor Mary was taken ill, and her father, in despair, applied to old Chattox, who promised him help, and did her best, I make no doubt—for she would have willingly thwarted her rival, and robbed her of her prey; but the latter was too strong for her, and the hapless victim got daily worse and worse. Her blooming cheek grew white and hollow, her dark eyes glistened with unnatural lustre, and she was seen no more on the banks of Pendle water. Before this my aid had been called in by the afflicted father—and I did all I could—but I knew she would die—and I told him so. The information I feared had killed him, for he fell down like a stone—and I repented having spoken. However he recovered, and made a last appeal to Mother Demdike; but the unrelenting hag derided him and cursed him, telling him if he brought her all his mill contained, and added to that all his substance, she would not spare his child. He returned heart-broken, and never quitted the poor girl's bedside till she breathed her last."

"Poor Ruchot! Robb'd o' his ownly dowter—an neaw woife to cheer him! Ey pity him fro' t' bottom o' my heart," said Bess, whose tears had flowed freely during the narration.

"He is wellnigh crazed with grief," said the surgeon. "I hope he will commit no rash act."

Expressions of deep commiseration for the untimely death of the miller's daughter had been uttered by all the party, and they were talking over the strange circumstances attending it, when they were roused by the trampling of horses' feet at the door, and the moment after, a middle-aged man, clad in deep mourning, but put on in a manner that betrayed the disorder of his mind, entered the house. His looks were wild and frenzied, his cheeks haggard, and he rushed into the room so abruptly that he did not at first observe the company assembled.

"Why, Richard Baldwyn, is that you?" cried the surgeon.

"What! is this the father?" exclaimed Potts, taking out his memorandum-book; "I must prepare to interrogate him."

"Sit thee down, Ruchot,—sit thee down, mon," said Bess, taking his hand kindly, and leading him to a bench. "Con ey get thee onny thing?"

"Neaw—neaw, Bess," replied the miller; "ey ha lost aw ey valled i' this warlt, an ey care na how soon ey quit it mysel."

"Neigh, dunna talk on thus, Ruchot," said Bess, in accents of sincere sympathy. "Theaw win live to see happier an brighter days."

"Ey win live to be revenged, Bess," cried the miller, rising suddenly, and stamping his foot on the ground,—"that accursed witch has robbed me o' my' eart's chief treasure—hoo has crushed a poor innocent os never injured her i' thowt or deed—an has struck the heaviest blow that could be dealt me; but by the heaven above us ey win requite her! A feyther's deep an lasting curse leet on her guilty heoad, an on those of aw her accursed race. Nah rest, neet nor day, win ey know, till ey ha brought em to the stake."

"Right—right—my good friend—an excellent resolution—bring them to the stake!" cried Potts.

But his enthusiasm was suddenly checked by observing the reeve of the forest peeping from behind the wainscot, and earnestly regarding the miller, and he called the attention of the latter to him.

Richard Baldwyn mechanically followed the expressive gestures of the attorney,—but he saw no one, for the reeve had disappeared.

The incident passed unnoticed by the others, who had been, too deeply moved by poor Baldwyn's outburst of grief to pay attention to it.

After a little while Bess Whitaker succeeded in prevailing upon the miller to sit down, and when he became more composed he told her that the funeral procession, consisting of some of his neighbours who had undertaken to attend his ill-fated daughter to her last home, was coming from Rough Lee to Goldshaw, but that, unable to bear them company, he had ridden on by himself. It appeared also, from his muttered threats, that he had meditated some wild project of vengeance against Mother Demdike, which he

intended to put into execution, before the day was over; but Master Potts endeavoured to dissuade him from this course, assuring him that the most certain and efficacious mode of revenge he could adopt would be through the medium of the law, and that he would give him his best advice and assistance in the matter. While they were talking thus, the bell began to toll, and every stroke seemed to vibrate through the heart of the afflicted father, who was at last so overpowered by grief, that the hostess deemed it expedient to lead him into an inner room, where he might indulge his sorrow unobserved.

Without awaiting the issue of this painful scene, Richard, who was much affected by it, went forth, and taking his horse from the stable, with the intention of riding on slowly before the others, led the animal towards the churchyard. When within a short distance of the grey old fabric he paused. The bell continued to toll mournfully, and deepened the melancholy hue of his thoughts. The sad tale he had heard held possession of his mind, and while he pitied poor Mary Baldwyn, he began to entertain apprehensions that Alizon might meet a similar fate. So many strange circumstances had taken place during the morning's ride; he had listened to so many dismal relations, that, coupled with the dark and mysterious events of the previous night, he was quite bewildered, and felt oppressed as if by a hideous nightmare, which it was impossible to shake off. He thought of Mothers Demdike and Chattox. Could these dread beings be permitted to exercise such baneful influence over mankind? With all the apparent proofs of their power he had received, he still strove to doubt, and to persuade himself that the various cases of witchcraft described to him were only held to be such by the timid and the credulous.

Full of these meditations, he tied his horse to a tree and entered the churchyard, and while pursuing a path shaded by a row of young lime-trees leading to the porch, he perceived at a little distance from him, near the cross erected by Abbot Cliderhow, two persons who attracted his attention. One was the sexton, who was now deep in the grave; and the other an old woman, with her back towards him. Neither had remarked his approach, and, influenced by an unaccountable feeling of curiosity, he stood still to watch their proceedings. Presently, the sexton, who was shovelling out the mould, paused in his task; and the old woman, in a hoarse voice, which seemed familiar to the listener, said, "What hast found, Zachariah?"

Richard Overhears the Mother Chattox and the Sexton.

"That which yo lack, mother," replied the sexton, "a mazzard wi' aw th' teeth in't."

"Pluck out eight, and give them me," replied the hag.

And, as the sexton complied with her injunction, she added, "Now I must have three scalps."

"Here they be, mother," replied Zachariah, uncovering a heap of mould with his spade. "Two brain-pans bleached loike snow, an the third wi' more hewr on it than ey ha' o' my own sconce. Fro' its size an shape ey should tak it to be a female. Ey ha' laid these three skulls aside fo' ye. Whot dun yo mean to do wi' 'em?"

"Question me not, Zachariah," said the hag, sternly; "now give me some pieces of the mouldering coffin, and fill this box with the dust of the corpse it contained."

The sexton complied with her request.

"Now yo ha' gotten aw yo seek, mother," he said, "ey wad pray you to tay your departure, fo' the berrin folk win be here presently."

"I'm going," replied the hag, "but first I must have my funeral rites performed—ha! ha! Bury this for me, Zachariah," she said, giving him a small clay figure. "Bury it deep, and as it moulders away, may she it represents pine and wither, till she come to the grave likewise!"

"An whoam doth it represent, mother?" asked the sexton, regarding the image with curiosity. "Ey dunna knoa the feace?"

"How should you know it, fool, since you have never seen her in whose likeness it is made?" replied the hag. "She is connected with the race I hate."

"Wi' the Demdikes?" inquired the sexton.

"Ay," replied the hag, "with the Demdikes. She passes for one of them—but she is not of them. Nevertheless, I hate her as though she were."

"Yo dunna mean Alizon Device?" said the sexton. "Ey ha' heerd say hoo be varry comely an kind-hearted, an ey should be sorry onny harm befell her."

"Mary Baldwyn, who will soon lie there, was quite as comely and kind-hearted as Alizon," cried the hag, "and yet Mother Demdike had no pity on her."

"An that's true," replied the sexton. "Weel, weel; ey'n do your bidding."

"Hold!" exclaimed Richard, stepping forward. "I will not suffer this abomination to be practised."

"Who is it speaks to me?" cried the hag, turning round, and disclosing the hideous countenance of Mother Chattox. "The voice is that of Richard Assheton."

"It is Richard Assheton who speaks," cried the young man, "and I command you to desist from this wickedness. Give me that clay image," he cried, snatching it from the sexton, and trampling it to dust beneath his feet. "Thus I destroy thy impious handiwork, and defeat thy evil intentions."

"Ah! think'st thou so, lad," rejoined Mother Chattox. "Thou wilt find thyself mistaken. My curse has already alighted upon thee, and it shall work. Thou lov'st Alizon.—I know it. But she shall never be thine. Now, go thy ways."

"I will go," replied Richard—"but you shall come with me, old woman."

"Dare you lay hands on me?" screamed the hag.

"Nay, let her be, mester," interposed the sexton, "yo had better."

"You are as bad as she is," said Richard, "and deserve equal punishment. You escaped yesterday at Whalley, old woman, but you shall not escape me now."

"Be not too sure of that," cried the hag, disabling him for the moment, by a severe blow on the arm from her staff. And shuffling off with an agility which could scarcely have been expected from her, she passed through a gate near her, and disappeared behind a high wall.

Richard would have followed, but he was detained by the sexton, who besought him, as he valued his life, not to interfere, and when at last he broke away from the old man, he could see nothing of her, and only heard the sound of horses' feet in the distance. Either his eyes deceived him, or at a turn in the woody lane skirting the church he descried the reeve of the forest galloping off with the old woman behind him. This lane led towards Rough Lee, and, without a moment's hesitation, Richard flew to the spot where he had left his horse, and, mounting him, rode swiftly along it.

The Lancashire Witches Volume III by William Harrison Ainsworth

CHAPTER VI.—THE TEMPTATION.

Shortly after Richard's departure, a round, rosy-faced personage, whose rusty black cassock, hastily huddled over a dark riding-dress, proclaimed him a churchman, entered the hostel. This was the rector of Goldshaw, Parson Holden, a very worthy little man, though rather, perhaps, too fond of the sports of the field and the bottle. To Roger Nowell and Nicholas Assheton he was of course well known, and was much esteemed by the latter, often riding over to hunt and fish, or carouse, at Downham. Parson Holden had been sent for by Bess to administer spiritual consolation to poor Richard Baldwyn, who she thought stood in need of it, and having respectfully saluted the magistrate, of whom he stood somewhat in awe, and shaken hands cordially with Nicholas, who was delighted to see him, he repaired to the inner room, promising to come back speedily. And he kept his word; for in less than five minutes he reappeared with the satisfactory intelligence that the afflicted miller was considerably calmer, and had listened to his counsels with much edification.

"Take him a glass of aquavitæ, Bess," he said to the hostess. "He is evidently a cup too low, and will be the better for it. Strong water is a specific I always recommend under such circumstances, Master Sudall, and indeed adopt myself, and I am sure you will approve of it.—Harkee, Bess, when you have ministered to poor Baldwyn's wants, I must crave your attention to my own, and beg you to fill me a tankard with your oldest ale, and toast me an oatcake to eat with it.—I must keep up my spirits, worthy sir," he added to Roger Nowell, "for I have a painful duty to perform. I do not know when I have been more shocked than by the death of poor Mary Baldwyn. A fair flower, and early nipped."

"Nipped, indeed, if all we have heard be correct," rejoined Newell. "The forest is in a sad state, reverend sir. It would seem as if the enemy of mankind, by means of his abominable agents, were permitted to exercise uncontrolled dominion over it. I must needs say, the forlorn condition of the people reflects little credit on those who have them in charge. The powers of darkness could never have prevailed to such an extent if duly resisted."

"I lament to hear you say so, good Master Nowell," replied the rector. "I have done my best, I assure you, to keep my small and widely-scattered flock together, and to save them from the ravening wolves and cunning foxes that infest the country; and if now and then some sheep have gone astray, or a poor lamb, as in the instance of Mary Baldwyn, hath fallen a victim, I am scarcely to blame for the mischance. Rather let me say, sir, that you, as an active and zealous magistrate, should take the matter in hand,

and by severe dealing with the offenders, arrest the progress of the evil. No defence, spiritual or otherwise, as yet set up against them, has proved effectual."

"Justly remarked, reverend sir," observed Potts, looking up from the memorandum book in which he was writing, "and I am sure your advice will not be lost upon Master Roger Nowell. As regards the persons who may be afflicted by witchcraft, hath not our sagacious monarch observed, that 'There are three kind of folks who may be tempted or troubled: the wicked for their horrible sins, to punish them in the like measure; the godly that are sleeping in any great sins or infirmities, and weakness in faith, to waken them up the faster by such an uncouth form; and even some of the best, that their patience may be tried before the world as Job's was tried. For why may not God use any kind of extraordinary punishment, when it pleases Him, as well as the ordinary rods of sickness, or other adversities?'"

"Very true, sir," replied Holden. "And we are undergoing this severe trial now. Fortunate are they who profit by it!"

"Hear what is said further, sir, by the king," pursued Potts. "'No man,' declares that wise prince, 'ought to presume so far as to promise any impunity to himself.' But further on he gives us courage, for he adds, 'and yet we ought not to be afraid for that, of any thing that the devil and his wicked instruments can do against us, for we daily fight against him in a hundred other ways, and therefore as a valiant captain affrays no more being at the combat, nor stays from his purpose for the rummishing shot of a cannon, nor the small clack of a pistolet; not being certain what may light on him; even so ought we boldly to go forward in fighting against the devil without any greater terror, for these his rarest weapons, than the ordinary, whereof we have daily the proof.'"

"His majesty is quite right," observed Holden, "and I am glad to hear his convincing words so judiciously cited. I myself have no fear of these wicked instruments of Satan."

"In what manner, may I ask, have you proved your courage, sir?" inquired Roger Nowell. "Have you preached against them, and denounced their wickedness, menacing them with the thunders of the Church?"

"I cannot say I have," replied Holden, rather abashed, "but I shall henceforth adopt a very different course.—Ah! here comes the ale!" he added, taking the foaming tankard from Bess; "this is the best cordial wherewith to sustain one's courage in these trying times."

"Some remedy must be found for this intolerable grievance," observed Roger Nowell, after a few moments' reflection. "Till this morning I was not aware of the extent of the

evil, but supposed that the two malignant hags, who seem to reign supreme here, confined their operations to blighting corn, maiming cattle, turning milk sour; and even these reports I fancied were greatly exaggerated; but I now find, from what I have seen at Sabden and elsewhere, that they fall very far short of the reality."

"It would be difficult to increase the darkness of the picture," said the surgeon; "but what remedy will you apply?"

"The cautery, sir," replied Potts,— "the actual cautery—we will burn out this plague-spot. The two old hags and their noxious brood shall be brought to the stake. That will effect a radical cure."

"It may when it is accomplished, but I fear it will be long ere that happens," replied the surgeon, shaking his head doubtfully. "Are you acquainted with Mother Demdike's history, sir?" he added to Potts.

"In part," replied the attorney; "but I shall be glad to hear any thing you may have to bring forward on the subject."

"The peculiarity in her case," observed Sudall, "and the circumstance distinguishing her dark and dread career from that of all other witches is, that it has been shaped out by destiny. When an infant, a malediction was pronounced upon her head by the unfortunate Abbot Paslew. She is also the offspring of a man reputed to have bartered his soul to the Enemy of Mankind, while her mother was a witch. Both parents perished lamentably, about the time of Paslew's execution at Whalley."

"It is a pity their miserable infant did not perish with them," observed Holden. "How much crime and misery would have been spared!"

"It was otherwise ordained," replied Sudall. "Bereft of her parents in this way, the infant was taken charge of and reared by Dame Croft, the miller's wife of Whalley; but even in those early days she exhibited such a malicious and vindictive disposition, and became so unmanageable, that the good dame was glad to get rid of her, and sent her into the forest, where she found a home at Rough Lee, then occupied by Miles Nutter, the grandfather of the late Richard Nutter."

"Aha!" exclaimed Potts, "was Mother Demdike so early connected with that family? I must make a note of that circumstance."

"She remained at Rough Lee for some years," returned Sudall, "and though accounted of an ill disposition, there was nothing to be alleged against her at the time; though

afterwards, it was said, that some mishaps that befell the neighbours were owing to her agency, and that she was always attended by a familiar in the form of a rat or a mole. Whether this were so or not, I cannot say; but it is certain that she helped Miles Nutter to get rid of his wife, and procured him a second spouse, in return for which services he bestowed upon her an old ruined tower on his domains."

"You mean Malkin Tower?" said Nicholas.

"Ay, Malkin Tower," replied the surgeon. "There is a legend connected with that structure, which I will relate to you anon, if you desire it. But to proceed. Scarcely had Bess Demdike taken up her abode in this lone tower, than it began to be rumoured that she was a witch, and attended sabbaths on the summit of Pendle Hill, and on Rimington Moor. Few would consort with her, and ill-luck invariably attended those with whom she quarrelled. Though of hideous and forbidding aspect, and with one eye lower set than the other, she had subtlety enough to induce a young man named Sothern to marry her, and two children, a son and a daughter, were the fruit of the union."

"The daughter I have seen at Whalley," observed Potts; "but I have never encountered the son."

"Christopher Demdike still lives, I believe," replied the surgeon, "though what has become of him I know not, for he has quitted these parts. He is as ill-reputed as his mother, and has the same strange and fearful look about the eyes."

"I shall recognise him if I see him," observed Potts.

"You are scarcely likely to meet him," returned Sudall, "for, as I have said, he has left the forest. But to return to my story. The marriage state was little suitable to Bess Demdike, and in five years she contrived to free herself from her husband's restraint, and ruled alone in the tower. Her malignant influence now began to be felt throughout the whole district, and by dint of menaces and positive acts of mischief, she extorted all she required. Whosoever refused her requests speedily experienced her resentment. When she was in the fulness of her power, a rival sprang up in the person of Anne Whittle, since known by the name of Chattox, which she obtained in marriage, and this woman disputed Bess Demdike's supremacy. Each strove to injure the adherents of her rival—and terrible was the mischief they wrought. In the end, however, Mother Demdike got the upper hand. Years have flown over the old hag's head, and her guilty career has been hitherto attended with impunity. Plans have been formed to bring her to justice, but they have ever failed. And so in the case of old Chattox. Her career has been as baneful and as successful as that of Mother Demdike."

"But their course is wellnigh run," said Potts, "and the time is come for the extirpation of the old serpents."

"Ah! who is that at the window?" cried Sudall; "but that you are sitting near me, I should declare you were looking in at us."

"It must be Master Potts's brother, the reeve of the forest," observed Nicholas, with a laugh.

"Heed him not," cried the attorney, angrily, "but let us have the promised legend of Malkin Tower."

"Willingly!" replied the chirurgeon. "But before I begin I must recruit myself with a can of ale."

The flagon being set before him, Sudall commenced his story:

The Legend of Malkin Tower.

"On the brow of a high hill forming part of the range of Pendle, and commanding an extensive view over the forest, and the wild and mountainous region around it, stands a stern solitary tower. Old as the Anglo-Saxons, and built as a stronghold by Wulstan, a Northumbrian thane, in the time of Edmund or Edred, it is circular in form and very lofty, and serves as a landmark to the country round. Placed high up in the building the door was formerly reached by a steep flight of stone steps, but these were removed some fifty or sixty years ago by Mother Demdike, and a ladder capable of being raised or let down at pleasure substituted for them, affording the only apparent means of entrance. The tower is otherwise inaccessible, the walls being of immense thickness, with no window lower than five-and-twenty feet from the ground, though it is thought there must be a secret outlet; for the old witch, when she wants to come forth, does not wait for the ladder to be let down. But this may be otherwise explained. Internally there are three floors, the lowest being placed on a level with the door, and this is the apartment chiefly occupied by the hag. In the centre of this room is a trapdoor opening upon a deep vault, which forms the basement story of the structure, and which was once used as a dungeon, but is now tenanted, it is said, by a fiend, who can be summoned by the witch on stamping her foot. Round the room runs a gallery contrived in the thickness of the walls, while the upper chambers are gained by a secret staircase, and closed by movable stones, the machinery of which is only known to the inmate of the tower. All the rooms are lighted by narrow loopholes. Thus you will see that the fortress is still capable of sustaining a siege, and old Demdike has been heard to declare that she would hold it for a month against a hundred men. Hitherto it has proved impregnable.

"On the Norman invasion, Malkin Tower was held by Ughtred, a descendant of Wulstan, who kept possession of Pendle Forest and the hills around it, and successfully resisted the aggressions of the conquerors. His enemies affirmed he was assisted by a demon, whom he had propitiated by some fearful sacrifice made in the tower, and the notion seemed borne out by the success uniformly attending his conflicts. Ughtred's prowess was stained by cruelty and rapine. Merciless in the treatment of his captives, putting them to death by horrible tortures, or immuring them in the dark and noisome dungeon of his tower, he would hold his revels over their heads, and deride their groans. Heaps of treasure, obtained by pillage, were secured by him in the tower. From his frequent acts of treachery, and the many foul murders he perpetrated, Ughtred was styled the 'Scourge of the Normans.' For a long period he enjoyed complete immunity from punishment; but after the siege of York, and the defeat of the insurgents, his destruction was vowed by Ilbert de Lacy, lord of Blackburnshire, and this fierce chieftain set fire to part of the forest in which the Saxon thane and his followers were concealed; drove them to Malkin Tower; took it after an obstinate and prolonged defence, and considerable loss to himself, and put them all to the sword, except the leader, whom he hanged from the top of his own fortress. In the dungeon were found many carcasses, and the greater part of Ughtred's treasure served to enrich the victor.

"Once again, in the reign of Henry VI., Malkin Tower became a robber's stronghold, and gave protection to a freebooter named Blackburn, who, with a band of daring and desperate marauders, took advantage of the troubled state of the country, ravaged it far and wide, and committed unheard of atrocities, even levying contributions upon the Abbeys of Whalley and Salley, and the heads of these religious establishments were glad to make terms with him to save their herds and stores, the rather that all attempts to dislodge him from his mountain fastness, and destroy his band, had failed. Blackburn seemed to enjoy the same kind of protection as Ughtred, and practised the same atrocities, torturing and imprisoning his captives unless they were heavily ransomed. He also led a life of wildest licence, and, when not engaged in some predatory exploit, spent his time in carousing with his followers.

"Upon one occasion it chanced that he made a visit in disguise to Whalley Abbey, and, passing the little hermitage near the church, beheld the votaress who tenanted it. This was Isole de Heton. Ravished by her wondrous beauty, Blackburn soon found an opportunity of making his passion known to her, and his handsome though fierce lineaments pleasing her, he did not long sigh in vain. He frequently visited her in the garb of a Cistercian monk, and, being taken for one of the brethren, his conduct brought great scandal upon the Abbey. The abandoned votaress bore him a daughter, and the infant was conveyed away by the lover, and placed under the care of a peasant's wife, at

Barrowford. From that child sprung Bess Blackburn, the mother of old Demdike; so that the witch is a direct descendant of Isole de Heton.

"Notwithstanding all precautions, Isole's dark offence became known, and she would have paid the penalty of it at the stake, if she had not fled. In scaling Whalley Nab, in the woody heights of which she was to remain concealed till her lover could come to her, she fell from a rock, shattering her limbs, and disfiguring her features. Some say she was lamed for life, and became as hideous as she had heretofore been lovely; but this is erroneous, for apprehensive of such a result, attended by the loss of her lover, she invoked the powers of darkness, and proffered her soul in return for five years of unimpaired beauty.

"The compact was made, and when Blackburn came he found her more beautiful than ever. Enraptured, he conveyed her to Malkin Tower, and lived with her there in security, laughing to scorn the menaces of Abbot Eccles, by whom he was excommunicated.

"Time went on, and as Isole's charms underwent no change, her lover's ardour continued unabated. Five years passed in guilty pleasures, and the last day of the allotted term arrived. No change was manifest in Isole's demeanour; neither remorse nor fear were exhibited by her. Never had she appeared more lovely, never in higher or more exuberant spirits. She besought her lover, who was still madly intoxicated by her infernal charms, to give a banquet that night to ten of his trustiest followers. He willingly assented, and bade them to the feast. They ate and drank merrily, and the gayest of the company was the lovely Isole. Her spirits seemed somewhat too wild even to Blackburn, but he did not check her, though surprised at the excessive liveliness and freedom of her sallies. Her eyes flashed like fire, and there was not a man present but was madly in love with her, and ready to dispute for her smiles with his captain.

"The wine flowed freely, and song and jest went on till midnight. When the hour struck, Isole filled a cup to the brim, and called upon them to pledge her. All arose, and drained their goblets enthusiastically. 'It was a farewell cup,' she said; 'I am going away with one of you.' 'How!' exclaimed Blackburn, in angry surprise. 'Let any one but touch your hand, and I will strike him dead at my feet.' The rest of the company regarded each other with surprise, and it was then discovered that a stranger was amongst them; a tall dark man, whose looks were so terrible and demoniacal that no one dared lay hands upon him. 'I am come,' he said, with fearful significance, to Isole. 'And I am ready,' she answered boldly. 'I will go with you were it to the bottomless pit,' cried Blackburn catching hold of her. 'It is thither I am going,' she answered with a scream of laughter. 'I shall be glad of a companion.'

"When the paroxysm of laughter was over, she fell down on the floor. Her lover would have raised her, when what was his horror to find that he held in his arms an old woman, with frightfully disfigured features, and evidently in the agonies of death. She fixed one look upon him and expired.

"Terrified by the occurrence the guests hurried away, and when they returned next day, they found Blackburn stretched on the floor, and quite dead. They cast his body, together with that of the wretched Isole, into the vault beneath the room where they were lying, and then, taking possession of his treasure, removed to some other retreat.

"Thenceforth, Malkin Tower became haunted. Though wholly deserted, lights were constantly seen shining from it at night, and sounds of wild revelry, succeeded by shrieks and groans, issued from it. The figure of Isole was often seen to come forth, and flit across the wastes in the direction of Whalley Abbey. On stormy nights a huge black cat, with flaming eyes, was frequently descried on the summit of the structure, whence it obtained its name of Grimalkin, or Malkin Tower. The ill-omened pile ultimately came into the possession of the Nutter family, but it was never tenanted, until assigned, as I have already mentioned, to Mother Demdike."

The surgeon's marvellous story was listened to with great attention by his auditors. Most of them were familiar with different versions of it; but to Master Potts it was altogether new, and he made rapid notes of it, questioning the narrator as to one or two points which appeared to him to require explanation. Nicholas, as may be supposed, was particularly interested in that part of the legend which referred to Isole de Heton. He now for the first time heard of her unhallowed intercourse with the freebooter Blackburn, of her compact on Whalley Nab with the fiend, of her mysterious connection with Malkin Tower, and of her being the ancestress of Mother Demdike. The consideration of all these points, coupled with a vivid recollection of his own strange adventure with the impious votaress at the Abbey on the previous night, plunged him into a deep train of thought, and he began seriously to consider whether he might not have committed some heinous sin, and, indeed, jeopardised his soul's welfare by dancing with her. "What if I should share the same fate as the robber Blackburn," he ruminated, "and be dragged to perdition by her? It is a very awful reflection. But though my fate might operate as a warning to others, I am by no means anxious to be held up as a moral scarecrow. Rather let me take warning myself, amend my life, abandon intemperance, which leads to all manner of wickedness, and suffer myself no more to be ensnared by the wiles and delusions of the tempter in the form of a fair woman. No—no—I will alter and amend my life."

I regret, however, to say that these praiseworthy resolutions were but transient, and that the squire, quite forgetting that the work of reform, if intended to be really

accomplished, ought to commence at once, and by no means be postponed till the morrow, yielded to the seductions of a fresh pottle of sack, which was presented to him at the moment by Bess, and in taking it could not help squeezing the hand of the bouncing hostess, and gazing at her more tenderly than became a married man. Oh! Nicholas—Nicholas—the work of reform, I am afraid, proceeds very slowly and imperfectly with you. Your friend, Parson. Dewhurst, would have told you that it is much easier to form good resolutions than to keep them.

Leaving the squire, however, to his cogitations and his sack, the attorney to his memorandum-book, in which he was still engaged in writing, and the others to their talk, we shall proceed to the chamber whither the poor miller had been led by Bess. When visited by the rector, he had been apparently soothed by the worthy man's consolatory advice, but when left alone he speedily relapsed into his former dark and gloomy state of mind. He did not notice Bess, who, according to Holden's directions, placed the aquavitæ bottle before him, but, as long as she stayed, remained with his face buried in his hands. As soon as she was gone he arose, and began to pace the room to and fro. The window was open, and he could hear the funeral bell tolling mournfully at intervals. Each recurrence of the dismal sound added sharpness and intensity to his grief. His sufferings became almost intolerable, and drove him to the very verge of despair and madness. If a weapon had been at hand, he might have seized it, and put a sudden period to his existence. His breast was a chaos of fierce and troubled thoughts, in which one black and terrible idea arose and overpowered all the rest. It was the desire of vengeance, deep and complete, upon her whom he looked upon as the murderess of his child. He cared not how it were accomplished so it were done; but such was the opinion he entertained of the old hag's power, that he doubted his ability to the task. Still, as the bell tolled on, the furies at his heart lashed and goaded him on, and yelled in his ear revenge—revenge! Now, indeed, he was crazed with grief and rage; he tore off handfuls of hair, plunged his nails deeply into his breast, and while committing these and other wild excesses, with frantic imprecations he called down Heaven's judgments on his own head. He was in that lost and helpless state when the enemy of mankind has power over man. Nor was the opportunity neglected; for when the wretched Baldwyn, who, exhausted by the violence of his motions, had leaned for a moment against the wall, he perceived to his surprise that there was a man in the room—a small personage attired in rusty black, whom he thought had been one of the party in the adjoining chamber.

There was an expression of mockery about this person's countenance which did not please the miller, and he asked him, sternly, what he wanted.

"Leave off grinnin, mon," he said, fiercely, "or ey may be tempted to tay yo be t' throttle, an may yo laugh o't wrong side o' your mouth."

"No, no, you will not, Richard Baldwyn, when you know my errand," replied the man. "You are thirsting for vengeance upon Mother Demdike. You shall have it."

"Eigh, eigh, you promised me vengeance afore," cried the miller—"vengeance by the law. Boh ey mun wait lung for it. Ey wad ha' it swift and sure—deep and deadly. Ey wad blast her wi' curses, os hoo blasted my poor Meary. Ey wad strike her deod at my feet. That's my vengeance, mon."

"You shall have it," replied the other.

"Yo talk differently fro' what yo did just now, mon," said the miller, regarding him narrowly and distrustfully. "An yo look differently too. There's a queer glimmer abowt your een that ey didna notice afore, and that ey mislike."

The man laughed bitterly.

"Leave off grinnin' or begone," cried Baldwyn, furiously. And he raised his hand to strike the man, but he instantly dropped it, appalled by a look which the other threw at him. "Who the dule are yo?"

"The dule must answer you, since you appeal to him," replied the other, with the same mocking smile; "but you are mistaken in supposing that you have spoken to me before. He with whom you conversed in the other room, resembles me in more respects than one, but he does not possess power equal to mine. The law will not aid you against Mother Demdike. She will escape all the snares laid for her. But she will not escape me."

"Who are ye?" cried the miller, his hair erecting on his head, and cold damps breaking out upon his brow. "Yo are nah mortal, an nah good, to tawk i' this fashion."

"Heed not who and what I am," replied the other; "I am known here as a reeve of the forest—that is enough. Would you have vengeance on the murtheress of your child?"

"Yeigh," rejoined Baldwyn.

"And you are willing to pay for it at the price of your soul?" demanded the other, advancing towards him.

Baldwyn reeled. He saw at once the fearful peril in which he was placed, and averted his gaze from the scorching glance of the reeve.

At this moment the door was tried without, and the voice of Bess was heard, saying, "Who ha' yo got wi' yo, Ruchot; and whoy ha' yo fastened t' door?"

"Your answer?" demanded the reeve.

"Ey canna gi' it now," replied the miller. "Come in, Bess; come in."

"Ey conna," she replied. "Open t' door, mon."

"Your answer, I say?" said the reeve.

"Gi' me an hour to think on't," said the miller.

"Agreed," replied the other. "I will be with you after the funeral."

And he sprang through the window, and disappeared before Baldwyn could open the door and admit Bess.

The Lancashire Witches Volume III by William Harrison Ainsworth

CHAPTER VII.—THE PERAMBULATION OF THE BOUNDARIES.

The lane along which Richard Assheton galloped in pursuit of Mother Chattox, made so many turns, and was, moreover, so completely hemmed in by high banks and hedges, that he could see nothing on either side of him, and very little in advance; but, guided by the clatter of hoofs, he urged Merlin to his utmost speed, fancying he should soon come up with the fugitives. In this, however, he was deceived. The sound that had led him on became fainter and fainter, till at last it died away altogether; and on quitting the lane and gaining the moor, where the view was wholly uninterrupted, no traces either of witch or reeve could be discerned.

With a feeling of angry disappointment, Richard was about to turn back, when a large black greyhound came from out an adjoining clough, and made towards him. The singularity of the circumstance induced him to halt and regard the dog with attention. On nearing him, the animal looked wistfully in his face, and seemed to invite him to follow; and the young man was so struck by the dog's manner, that he complied, and had not gone far when a hare of unusual size and grey with age bounded from beneath a gorse-bush and speeded away, the greyhound starting in pursuit.

Aware of the prevailing notion, that a witch most commonly assumed such a form when desirous of escaping, or performing some act of mischief, such as drying the milk of kine, Richard at once came to the conclusion that the hare could be no other than Mother Chattox; and without pausing to inquire what the hound could be, or why it should appear at such a singular and apparently fortunate juncture, he at once joined the run, and cheered on the dog with whoop and holloa.

Old as it was, apparently, the hare ran with extraordinary swiftness, clearing every stone wall and other impediment in the way, and more than once cunningly doubling upon its pursuers. But every feint and stratagem were defeated by the fleet and sagacious hound, and the hunted animal at length took to the open waste, where the run became so rapid, that Richard had enough to do to keep up with it, though Merlin, almost as furiously excited as his master, strained every sinew to the task.

In this way the chasers and the chased scoured the dark and heathy plain, skirting moss-pool and clearing dyke, till they almost reached the but-end of Pendle Hill, which rose like an impassable barrier before them. Hitherto the chances had seemed in favour of the hare; but they now began to turn, and as it seemed certain she must fall into the hound's jaws, Richard expected every moment to find her resume her natural form. The

run having brought him within, a quarter of a mile of Barley, the rude hovels composing which little booth were clearly discernible, the young man began to think the hag's dwelling must be among them, and that she was hurrying thither as to a place of refuge. But before this could be accomplished, he hoped to effect her capture, and once more cheered on the hound, and plunged his spurs into Merlin's sides. An obstacle, however, occurred which he had not counted on. Directly in the course taken by the hare lay a deep, disused limestone quarry, completely screened from view by a fringe of brushwood. When within a few yards of this pit, the hound made a dash at the flying hare, but eluding him, the latter sprang forward, and both went over the edge of the quarry together. Richard had wellnigh followed, and in that case would have been inevitably dashed in pieces; but, discovering the danger ere it was too late, by a powerful effort, which threw Merlin upon his haunches, he pulled him back on the very brink of the pit.

The young man shuddered as he gazed into the depths of the quarry, and saw the jagged points and heaps of broken stone that would have received him; but he looked in vain for the old witch, whose mangled body, together with that of the hound, he expected to behold; and he then asked himself whether the chase might not have been a snare set for him by the hag and her familiar, with the intent of luring him to destruction. If so, he had been providentially preserved.

Quitting the pit, his first idea was to proceed to Barley, which was now only a few hundred yards off, to make inquiries respecting Mother Chattox, and ascertain whether she really dwelt there; but, on further consideration, he judged it best to return without further delay to Goldshaw, lest his friends, ignorant as to what had befallen him, might become alarmed on his account; but he resolved, as soon as he had disposed of the business in hand, to prosecute his search after the hag. Riding rapidly, he soon cleared the ground between the quarry and Goldshaw Lane, and was about to enter the latter, when the sound of voices singing a funeral hymn caught his ear, and, pausing to listen to it, he beheld a little procession, the meaning of which he readily comprehended, wending its slow and melancholy way in the same direction as himself. It was headed by four men in deep mourning, bearing upon their shoulders a small coffin, covered with a pall, and having a garland of white flowers in front of it. Behind them followed about a dozen young men and maidens, likewise in mourning, walking two and two, with gait and aspect of unfeigned affliction. Many of the women, though merely rustics, seemed to possess considerable personal attraction; but their features were in a great measure concealed by their large white kerchiefs, disposed in the form of hoods. All carried sprigs of rosemary and bunches of flowers in their hands. Plaintive was the hymn they sang, and their voices, though untaught, were sweet and touching, and went to the heart of the listener.

Much moved, Richard suffered the funeral procession to precede him along the deep and devious lane, and as it winded beneath the hedges, the sight was inexpressibly affecting. Fastening his horse to a tree at the end of the lane, Richard followed on foot. Notice of the approach of the train having been given in the village, all the inhabitants flocked forth to meet it, and there was scarcely a dry eye among them. Arrived within a short distance of the church, the coffin was met by the minister, attended by the clerk, behind whom came Roger Nowell, Nicholas, and the rest of the company from the hostel. With great difficulty poor Baldwyn could be brought to take his place as chief mourner. These arrangements completed, the body of the ill-fated girl was borne into the churchyard, the minister reading the solemn texts appointed for the occasion, and leading the way to the grave, beside which stood the sexton, together with the beadle of Goldshaw and Sparshot. The coffin was then laid on trestles, and amidst profound silence, broken only by the sobs of the mourners, the service was read, and preparations made for lowering the body into the grave.

Then it was that poor Baldwyn, with a wild, heart-piercing cry, flung himself upon the shell containing all that remained of his lost treasure, and could with difficulty be removed from it by Bess and Sudall, both of whom were in attendance. The bunches of flowers and sprigs of rosemary having been laid upon the coffin by the maidens, amidst loud sobbing and audibly expressed lamentations from the bystanders, it was let down into the grave, and earth thrown over it.

Earth to earth; ashes to ashes; dust to dust.

The ceremony was over, the mourners betook themselves to the little hostel, and the spectators slowly dispersed; but the bereaved father still lingered, unable to tear himself away. Leaning for support against the yew-tree, he fiercely bade Bess, who would have led him home with her, begone. The kind-hearted hostess complied in appearance, but remained nigh at hand though concealed from view.

Once more the dark cloud overshadowed the spirit of the wretched man—once more the same infernal desire of vengeance possessed him—once more he subjected himself to temptation. Striding to the foot of the grave he raised his hand, and with terrible imprecations vowed to lay the murderess of his child as low as she herself was now laid. At that moment he felt an eye like a burning-glass fixed upon him, and, looking up, beheld the reeve of the forest standing on the further side of the grave.

"Kneel down, and swear to be mine, and your wish shall be gratified," said the reeve.

Beside himself with grief and rage, Baldwyn would have complied, but he was arrested by a powerful grasp. Fearing he was about to commit some rash act, Bess rushed forward and caught hold of his doublet.

"Bethink thee whot theaw has just heerd fro' t' minister, Ruchot," she cried in a voice of solemn warning. "'Blessed are the dead that dee i' the Lord, for they rest fro their labours.' An again, 'Suffer us not at our last hour, for onny pains o' death, to fa' fro thee.' Oh Ruchot, dear! fo' the love theaw hadst fo' thy poor chilt, who is now delivert fro' the burthen o' th' flesh, an' dwellin' i' joy an felicity wi' God an his angels, dunna endanger thy precious sowl. Pray that theaw may'st depart hence i' th' Lord, wi' whom are the sowls of the faithful, an Meary's, ey trust, among the number. Pray that thy eend may be like hers."

"Ey conna pray, Bess," replied the miller, striking his breast. "The Lord has turned his feace fro' me."

"Becose thy heart is hardened, Ruchot," she replied. "Theaw 'rt nourishin' nowt boh black an wicked thowts. Cast em off ye, I adjure thee, an come whoam wi me."

Meanwhile, the reeve had sprung across the grave.

"Thy answer at once," he said, grasping the miller's arm, and breathing the words in his ears. "Vengeance is in thy power. A word, and it is thine."

The miller groaned bitterly. He was sorely tempted.

"What is that mon sayin' to thee, Ruchot?" inquired Bess.

"Dunna ax, boh tak me away," he answered. "Ey am lost else."

"Let him lay a finger on yo if he dare," said Bess, sturdily.

"Leave him alone—yo dunna knoa who he is," whispered the miller.

"Ey con partly guess," she rejoined; "boh ey care nother fo' mon nor dule when ey'm acting reetly. Come along wi' me, Ruchot."

"Fool!" cried the reeve, in the same low tone as before; "you will lose your revenge, but you will not escape me."

And he turned away, while Bess almost carried the trembling and enfeebled miller towards the hostel.

Roger Nowell and his friends had only waited the conclusion of the funeral to set forth, and their horses being in readiness, they mounted them on leaving the churchyard, and rode slowly along the lane leading towards Rough Lee. The melancholy scene they had witnessed, and the afflicting circumstances connected with it, had painfully affected the party, and little conversation occurred until they were overtaken by Parson Holden, who, having been made acquainted with their errand by Nicholas, was desirous of accompanying them. Soon after this, also, the reeve of the forest joined them, and on seeing him, Richard sternly demanded why he had aided Mother Chattox in her night from the churchyard, and what had become of her.

"You are entirely mistaken, sir," replied the reeve, with affected astonishment. "I have seen nothing whatever of the old hag, and would rather lend a hand to her capture than abet her flight. I hold all witches in abhorrence, and Mother Chattox especially so."

"Your horse looks fresh enough, certainly," said Richard, somewhat shaken in his suspicions. "Where have you been during our stay at Goldshaw? You did not put up at the hostel?"

"I went to Farmer Johnson's," replied the reeve, "and you will find upon inquiry that my horse has not been out of his stables for the last hour. I myself have been loitering about Bess's grange and farmyard, as your grooms will testify, for they have seen me."

"Humph!" exclaimed Richard, "I suppose I must credit assertions made with such confidence, but I could have sworn I saw you ride off with the hag behind you."

"I hope I shall never be caught in such bad company, sir," replied the reeve, with a laugh. "If I ride off with any one, it shall not be with an old witch, depend upon it."

Though by no means satisfied with the explanation, Richard was forced to be content with it; but he thought he would address a few more questions to the reeve.

"Have you any knowledge," he said, "when the boundaries of Pendle Forest were first settled and appointed?"

"The first perambulation was made by Henry de Lacy, about the middle of the twelfth century," replied the reeve. "Pendle Forest, you may be aware, sir, is one of the four divisions of the great forest of Blackburnshire, of which the Lacys were lords, the three other divisions being Accrington, Trawden, and Rossendale, and it comprehends an

extent of about twenty-five miles, part of which you have traversed to-day. At a later period, namely in 1311, after the death of another Henry de Lacy, Earl of Lincoln, the last of his line, and one of the bravest of Edward the First's barons, an inquisition was held in the forest, and it was subdivided into eleven vaccaries, one of which is the place to which you are bound, Rough Lee."

"The learned Sir Edward Coke defines a vaccary to signify a dairy," observed Potts.

"Here it means the farm and land as well," replied the reeve; "and the word 'booth,' which is in general use in this district, signifies the mansion erected upon such vaccary: Mistress Nutter's residence, for instance, being nothing more than the booth of Rough Lee: while a 'lawnd,' another local term, is a park inclosed within the forest for the preservation of the deer, and the convenience of the chase, and of such inclosures we have two, namely, the Old and New Lawnd. By a commission in the reign of Henry VII., these vaccaries, originally granted only to tenants at will, were converted into copyholds of inheritance, but—and here is a legal point for your consideration, Master Potts—as it seems very questionable whether titles obtained under letters-patent are secure, not unreasonable fears are entertained by the holders of the lands lest they should be seized, and appropriated by the crown."

"Ah! ah! an excellent idea, Master Reeve," exclaimed Potts, his little eyes twinkling with pleasure. "Our gracious and sagacious monarch would grasp at the suggestion, ay, and grasp at the lands too—ha! ha! Many thanks for the hint, good reeve. I will not fail to profit by it. If their titles are uncertain, the landholders would be glad to compromise the matter with the crown, even to the value of half their estates rather than lose the whole."

"Most assuredly they would," replied the reeve; "and furthermore, they would pay the lawyer well who could manage the matter adroitly for them. This would answer your purpose better than hunting up witches, Master Potts."

"One pursuit does not interfere with the other in the slightest degree, worthy reeve," observed Potts. "I cannot consent to give up my quest of the witches. My honour is concerned in their extermination. But to turn to Pendle Forest—the greater part of it has been disafforested, I presume?"

"It has," replied the other—"and we are now in one of the purlieus."

"Pourallee is the better word, most excellent reeve," said Potts. "I tell you thus much, because you appear to be a man of learning. Manwood, our great authority in such matters, declares a pourallee to be 'a certain territory of ground adjoining unto the

forest, mered and bounded with immovable marks, meres, and boundaries, known by matter of record only.' And as it applies to the perambulation we are about to make, I may as well repeat what the same learned writer further saith touching marks, meres, and boundaries, and how they may be known. 'For although,' he saith, 'a forest doth lie open, and not inclosed with hedge, ditch, pale, or stone-wall, which some other inclosures have; yet in the eye and consideration of the law, the same hath as strong an inclosure by those marks, meres, and boundaries, as if there were a brick wall to encircle the same.' Marks, learned reeve, are deemed unremovable—*primo, quia omnes metæ forestæ sunt integræ domino regi*—and those who take them away are punishable for the trespass at the assizes of the forest. *Secundo*, because the marks are things that cannot be stirred, as rivers, highways, hills, and the like. Now, such unremoveable marks, meres, and boundaries we have between the estate of my excellent client, Master Roger Nowell, and that of Mistress Nutter, so that the matter at issue will be easily decided."

A singular smile crossed the reeve's countenance, but he made no observation.

"Unless the lady can turn aside streams, remove hills, and pluck up huge trees, we shall win," pursued Potts, with a chuckle.

Again the reeve smiled, but he forebore to speak.

"You talk of marks, meres, and boundaries, Master Potts," remarked Richard. "Are not the words synonymous?"

"Not precisely so, sir," replied the attorney; "there is a slight difference in their signification, which I will explain to you. The words of the statute are '*metas, meras, et bundas*,'—now *meta*, or mark, is an object rising from the ground, as a church, a wall, or a tree; *mera*, or mere, is the space or interval between the forest and the land adjoining, whereupon the mark may chance to stand; and *bunda* is the boundary, lying on a level with the forest, as a river, a highway, a pool, or a bog."

"I comprehend the distinction," replied Richard. "And now, as we are on this subject," he added to the reeve, "I would gladly know the precise nature of your office?"

"My duty," replied the other, "is to range daily throughout all the purlieus, or pourallees, as Master Potts more properly terms them, and disafforested lands, and inquire into all trespasses and offences against vert or venison, and present them at the king's next court of attachment or swainmote. It is also my business to drive into the forest such wild beasts as have strayed from it; to attend to the lawing and expeditation of mastiffs; and to raise hue and cry against any malefactors or trespassers within the forest."

"I will give you the exact words of the statute," said Potts—'*Si quis viderit malefactores infra metas forestæ, debet illos capere secundum posse suum, et si non possit; debet levare hutesium et clamorem.*' And the penalty for refusing to follow hue and cry is heavy fine."

"I would that that part of your duty relating to the hock-sinewing, and lawing of mastiffs, could be discontinued," said Richard. "I grieve to see a noble animal so mutilated."

"In Bowland Forest, as you are probably aware, sir," rejoined the reeve, "only the larger mastiffs are lamed, a small stirrup or gauge being kept by the master forester, Squire Robert Parker of Browsholme, and the dog whose foot will pass through it escapes mutilation."

"The practice is a cruel one, and I would it were abolished with some of our other barbarous forest laws," observed Richard.

While this conversation had been going on, the party had proceeded well on their way. For some time the road, which consisted of little more than tracts of wheels along the turf, led along a plain, thrown up into heathy hillocks, and then passing through a thicket, evidently part of the old forest, it brought them to the foot of a hill, which they mounted, and descended into another valley. Here they came upon Pendle Water, and while skirting its banks, could see at a great depth below, the river rushing over its rocky bed like an Alpine torrent. The scenery had now begun to assume a savage and sombre character. The deep rift through which the river ran was evidently the result of some terrible convulsion of the earth, and the rocky strata were strangely and fantastically displayed. On the further side the banks rose up precipitously, consisting for the most part of bare cliffs, though now and then a tree would root itself in some crevice. Below this the stream sank over a wide shelf of rock, in a broad full cascade, and boiled and foamed in the stony basin that received it, after which, grown less impetuous, it ran tranquilly on for a couple of hundred yards, and was then artificially restrained by a dam, which, diverting it in part from its course, caused it to turn the wheels of a mill. Here was the abode of the unfortunate Richard Baldwyn, and here had blossomed forth the fair flower so untimely gathered. An air of gloom hung over this once cheerful spot: its very beauty contributing to this saddening effect. The mill-race flowed swiftly and brightly on; but the wheel was stopped, windows and doors were closed, and death kept his grim holiday undisturbed. No one was to be seen about the premises, nor was any sound heard except the bark of the lonely watch-dog. Many a sorrowing glance was cast at this forlorn habitation as the party rode past it, and many a sigh was heaved for the poor girl who had so lately been its pride and ornament; but if any one had noticed the

bitter sneer curling the reeve's lip, or caught the malignant fire gleaming in his eye, it would scarcely have been thought that he shared in the general regret.

After the cavalcade had passed the mill, one or two other cottages appeared on the near side of the river, while the opposite banks began to be clothed with timber. The glen became more and more contracted, and a stone bridge crossed the stream, near which, and on the same side of the river as the party, stood a cluster of cottages constituting the little village of Rough Lee.

On reaching the bridge, Mistress Nutter's habitation came in view, and it was pointed out by Nicholas to Potts, who contemplated it with much curiosity. In his eyes it seemed exactly adapted to its owner, and formed to hide dark and guilty deeds. It was a stern, sombre-looking mansion, built of a dark grey stone, with tall square chimneys, and windows with heavy mullions. High stone walls, hoary and moss-grown, ran round the gardens and courts, except on the side of the river, where there was a terrace overlooking the stream, and forming a pleasant summer's walk. At the back of the house were a few ancient oaks and sycamores, and in the gardens were some old clipped yews.

Part of this ancient mansion is still standing, and retains much of its original character, though subdivided and tenanted by several humble families. The garden is cut up into paddocks, and the approach environed by a labyrinth of low stone walls, while miserable sheds and other buildings are appended to it; the terrace is wholly obliterated; and the grange and offices are pulled down, but sufficient is still left of the place to give an idea of its pristine appearance and character. Its situation is striking and peculiar. In front rises a high hill, forming the last link of the chain of Pendle, and looking upon Barrowford and Colne, on the further side of which, and therefore not discernible from the mansion, stood Malkin Tower. At the period in question the lower part of this hill was well wooded, and washed by the Pendle Water, which swept past it through banks picturesque and beautiful, though not so bold and rocky as those in the neighbourhood of the mill. In the rear of the house the ground gradually rose for more than a quarter of a mile, when it obtained a considerable elevation, following the course of the stream, and looking down the gorge, another hill appeared, so that the house was completely shut in by mountainous acclivities. In winter, when the snow lay on the heights, or when the mists hung upon them for weeks together, or descended in continuous rain, Rough Lee was sufficiently desolate, and seemed cut off from all communication with the outer world; but at the season when the party beheld it, though the approaches were rugged and difficult, and almost inaccessible except to the horseman or pedestrian, bidding defiance to any vehicle except of the strongest construction, still the place was not without a certain charm, mainly, however, derived from its seclusion. The scenery was stern and sombre, the hills were dark and dreary; but the very wildness of the place was

attractive, and the old house, with its grey walls, its lofty chimneys, its gardens with their clipped yews, and its rook-haunted trees, harmonised well with all around it.

As the party drew near the house, the gates were thrown open by an old porter with two other servants, who besought them to stay and partake of some refreshment; but Roger Nowell haughtily and peremptorily declined the invitation, and rode on, and the others, though some of them would fain have complied, followed him.

Scarcely were they gone, than James Device, who had been in the garden, issued from the gate and speeded after them.

Passing through a close at the back of the mansion, and tracking a short narrow lane, edged by stone walls, the party, which had received some accessions from the cottages of Rough Lee, as well as from the huts on the hill-side, again approached the river, and proceeded along its banks.

The new-comers, being all of them tenants of Mrs. Nutter, and acting apparently under the directions of James Device, who had now joined the troop, stoutly and loudly maintained that the lady would be found right in the inquiry, with the exception of one old man named Henry Mitton; and he shook his head gravely when appealed to by Jem, and could by no efforts be induced to join him in the clamour.

Notwithstanding this demonstration, Roger Nowell and his legal adviser were both very sanguine as to the result of the survey being in their favour, and Master Potts turned to ascertain from Sparshot that the two plans, which had been rolled up and consigned to his custody, were quite safe.

Meanwhile, the party having followed the course of Pendle Water through the glen for about half a mile, during which they kept close to the brawling current, entered a little thicket, and then striking off on the left, passed over the foot of a hill, and came to the edge of a wide moor, where a halt was called by Nowell.

It being now announced that they were on the confines of the disputed property, preparations were immediately made for the survey; the plans were taken out of a quiver, in which they had been carefully deposited by Sparshot, and handed to Potts, who, giving one to Roger Nowell and the other to Nicholas, and opening his memorandum-book, declared that all was ready, and the two leaders rode slowly forward, while the rest of the troop followed, their curiosity being stimulated to the highest pitch.

Presently Roger Nowell again stopped, and pointed to a woody brake.

"We are now come," he said, "to a wood forming part of my property, and which from an eruption, caused by a spring, that took place in it many years ago, is called Burst Clough."

"Exactly, sir—exactly," cried Potts; "Burst Clough—I have it here—landmarks, five grey stones, lying apart at a distance of one hundred yards or thereabouts, and giving you, sir, twenty acres of moor land. Is it not so, Master Nicholas? The marks are such as I have described, eh?"

"They are, sir," replied the squire; "with this slight difference in the allotment of the land—namely, that Mistress Nutter claims the twenty acres, while she assigns you only ten."

"Ten devils!" cried Roger Nowell, furiously. "Twenty acres are mine, and I will have them."

"To the proof, then," rejoined Nicholas. "The first of the grey stones is here."

"And the second on the left, in that hollow," said Roger Nowell. "Come on, my masters, come on."

"Ay, come on!" cried Nicholas; "this perambulation will be rare sport. Who wins, for a piece of gold, cousin Richard?"

"Nay, I will place no wager on the event," replied the young man.

"Well, as you please," cried the squire; "but I would lay five to one that Mistress Nutter beats the magistrate."

Meanwhile, the whole troop having set forward, they soon arrived at the second stone. Grey and moss-grown, it was deeply imbedded in the soil, and to all appearance had rested undisturbed for many a year.

"You measure from the clough, I presume, sir?" remarked Potts to Nowell.

"To be sure," replied the magistrate; "but how is this?—This stone seems to me much nearer the clough than it used to be."

"Yeigh, so it dun, mester," observed old Mitton.

"It does not appear to have been disturbed, at all events," said Nicholas, dismounting and examining it.

"It would seem not," said Nowell—"and yet it certainly is not in its old place."

"Yo are mistaen, mester," observed Jem Device; "ey knoa th' lond weel, an this stoan has stood where it does fo' t' last twenty year. Ha'n't it, neeburs?"

"Yeigh—yeigh," responded several voices.

"Well, let us go on to the next stone," said Potts, looking rather blank.

Accordingly they went forward, the hinds exchanging significant looks, and Roger Nowell and Nicholas carefully examining their respective maps.

"These landmarks exactly tally with my plan," said the squire, as they arrived at the third stone.

"But not with mine," said Nowell; "this stone ought to be two hundred yards to the right. Some trickery has been practised."

"Impossible!" exclaimed the squire; "these ponderous masses could never have been moved. Besides, there are several persons here who know every inch of the ground, and will give you their unbiassed testimony. What say you, my men? Are these the old boundary stones?"

All answered in the affirmative except old Mitton, who still raised a dissenting voice.

"They be th' owd boundary marks, sure enough," he said; "boh they are neaw i' their owd places."

"It is quite clear that the twenty acres belong to Mistress Nutter," observed Nicholas, "and that you must content yourself with ten, Master Nowell. Make an entry to that effect, Master Potts, unless you will have the ground measured."

"No, it is needless," replied the magistrate, sharply; "let us go on."

During this survey, some of the features of the country appeared changed to the rustics, but how or in what way they could not precisely tell, and they were easily induced by James Device to give their testimony in Mistress Nutter's favour.

A small rivulet was now reached, and another halt being called upon its sedgy banks, the plans were again consulted.

"What have we here, Master Potts—marks or boundaries?" inquired Richard, with a smile.

"Both," replied Potts, angrily. "This rivulet, which I take to be Moss Brook, is a boundary, and that sheepfold and the two posts standing in a line with it are marks. But hold! how is this?" he cried, regarding the plan in dismay; "the five acres of waste land should be on the left of the brook."

"It would doubtless suit Master Nowell better if it were so," said Nicholas; "but as they chance to be on the right, they belong to Mistress Nutter. I merely speak from the plan."

"Your plan is naught, sir," cried Nowell, furiously, "By what foul practice these changes have been wrought I pretend not to say, though I can give a good guess; but the audacious witch who has thus deluded me shall bitterly rue it."

"Hold, hold, Master Nowell!" rejoined Nicholas; "I can make great allowance for your anger, which is natural considering your disappointment, but I will not permit such unwarrantable insinuations to be thrown out against Mistress Nutter. You agreed to abide by Sir Ralph Assheton's award, and you must not complain if it be made against you. Do you imagine that this stream can have changed its course in a single night; or that yon sheepfold has been removed to the further side of it?"

"I do," replied Nowell.

"And so do I," cried Potts; "it has been accomplished by the aid of—"

But feeling himself checked by a glance from the reeve, he stammered out, "of—of Mother Demdike."

"You declared just now that marks, meres, and boundaries, were unremovable, Master Potts," said the reeve, with a sneer; "you have altered your opinion."

The crestfallen attorney was dumb.

"Master Roger Nowell must find some better plea than the imputation of witchcraft to set aside Mistress Nutter's claim," observed Richard.

"Yeigh, that he mun," cried James Device, and the hinds who supported him.

The magistrate bit his lips with vexation.

"There is witchcraft in it, I repeat," he said.

"Yeigh, that there be," responded old Mitton.

But the words were scarcely uttered, when he was felled to the ground by the bludgeon of James Device.

"Ey'd sarve thee i' t' same way, fo' two pins," said Jem, regarding Potts with a savage look.

"No violence, Jem," cried Nicholas, authoritatively—"you do harm to the cause you would serve by your outrageous conduct."

"Beg pardon, squoire," replied Jem, "boh ey winna hear lies tow'd abowt Mistress Nutter."

"No one shan speak ill on her here," cried the hinds.

"Well, Master Nowell," said Nicholas, "are you willing to concede the matter at once, or will you pursue the investigation further?"

"I will ascertain the extent of the mischief done to me before I stop," rejoined the magistrate, angrily.

"Forward, then," cried Nicholas. "Our course now lies along this footpath, with a croft on the left, and an old barn on the right. Here the plans correspond, I believe, Master Potts?"

The attorney yielded a reluctant assent.

"There is next a small spring and trough on the right, and we then come to a limestone quarry—then by a plantation called Cat Gallows Wood—so named, because some troublesome mouser has been hanged there, I suppose, and next by a deep moss-pit, called Swallow Hole. All right, eh, Master Potts? We shall now enter upon Worston Moor, and come to the hut occupied by Jem Device, who can, it is presumed, speak positively as to its situation."

"Very true," cried Potts, as if struck by an idea. "Let the rascal step forward. I wish to put a few questions to him respecting his tenement. I think I shall catch him now," he added in a low tone to Nowell.

"Here ey be," cried Jem, stepping up with an insolent and defying look. "Whot d'ye want wi' me?"

"First of all I would caution you to speak the truth," commenced Potts, impressively, "as I shall take down your answers in my memorandum book, and they will be produced against you hereafter."

"If he utters a falsehood I will commit him," said Roger Nowell, sharply.

"Speak ceevily, an ey win gi' yo a ceevil answer," rejoined Jem, in a surly tone; "boh ey'm nah to be browbeaten."

"First, then, is your hut in sight?" asked Potts.

"Neaw," replied Jem.

"But you can point out its situation, I suppose?" pursued the attorney.

"Sartinly ey con," replied Jem, without heeding a significant glance cast at him by the reeve. "It stonds behind yon kloof, ot soide o' t' moor, wi' a rindle in front."

"Now mind what you say, sirrah," cried Potts. "You are quite sure the hut is behind the clough; and the rindle, which, being interpreted from your base vernacular, I believe means a gutter, in front of it?"

The reeve coughed slightly, but failed to attract Jem's attention, who replied quickly, that he was quite sure of the circumstances.

"Very well," said Potts—"you have all heard the answer. He is quite sure as to what he states. Now, then, I suppose you can tell whether the hut looks to the north or the south; whether the door opens to the moor or to the clough; and whether there is a path leading from it to a spot called Hook Cliff?"

At this moment Jem caught the eye of the reeve, and the look given him by the latter completely puzzled him.

"Ey dunna reetly recollect which way it looks," he answered.

"What! you prevaricating rascal, do you pretend to say that you do not know which way your own dwelling stands," thundered Roger Nowell. "Speak out, sirrah, or Sparshot shall take you into custody at once."

"Ey'm ready, your worship," replied the beadle.

"Weel, then," said Jem, imperfectly comprehending the signs made to him by the reeve, "the hut looks nather to t' south naw to t' north, but to t' west; it feaces t' moor; an there is a path fro' it to Hook Cliff."

As he finished speaking, he saw from the reeve's angry gestures that he had made a mistake, but it was now too late to recall his words. However, he determined to make an effort.

"Now ey bethink me, ey'm naw sure that ey'm reet," he said.

"You must be sure, sirrah," said Roger Nowell, bending his awful brows upon him. "You cannot be mistaken as to your own dwelling. Take down his description, Master Potts, and proceed with your interrogatories if you have any more to put to him."

"I wish to ask him whether he has been at home to-day," said Potts.

"Answer, fellow," thundered the magistrate.

Before replying, Jem would fain have consulted the reeve, but the latter had turned away in displeasure. Not knowing whether a lie would serve his turn, and fearing he might be contradicted by some of the bystanders, he said he had not been at home for two days, but had returned the night before at a late hour from Whalley, and had slept at Rough Lee.

"Then you cannot tell what changes may have taken place in your dwelling during your absence?" said Potts.

"Of course not," replied Jem, "boh ey dunna see how ony chawnges con ha' happent i' so short a time."

"But I do, if you do not, sirrah," said Potts. "Be pleased to give me your plan, Master Newell. I have a further question to ask him," he added, after consulting it for a moment.

"Ey win awnser nowt more," replied Jem, gruffly.

"You will answer whatever questions Master Potts may put to you, or you are taken into custody," said the magistrate, sternly.

Jem would have willingly beaten a retreat; but being surrounded by the two grooms and Sparshot, who only waited a sign from Nowell to secure him, or knock him down if he attempted to fly, he gave a surly intimation that he was ready to speak.

"You are aware that a dyke intersects the heath before us, namely, Worston Moor?" said Potts.

Jem nodded his head.

"I must request particular attention to your plan as I proceed, Master Nicholas," pursued the attorney. "I now wish to be informed by you, James Device, whether that dyke cuts through the middle of the moor, or traverses the side; and if so, which side? I desire also to be informed where it commences, and where, it ends?"

Jem scratched his head, and reflected a moment.

"The matter does not require consideration, sirrah," cried Nowell. "I must have an instant answer."

"So yo shan," replied Jem; "weel, then, th' dyke begins near a little mound ca'd Turn Heod, about a hundert yards fro' my dwellin', an runs across th' easterly soide o't moor till it reaches Knowl Bottom."

"You will swear this?" cried Potts, scarcely able to conceal his satisfaction.

"Swere it! eigh," replied Jem.

"Eigh, we'n aw swere it," chorused the hinds.

"I'm delighted to hear it," cried Potts, radiant with delight, "for your description corresponds exactly with Master Nowell's plan, and differs materially from that of Mistress Nutter, as Squire Nicholas Assheton will tell you."

"I cannot deny it," replied Nicholas, in some confusion.

"Ey should ha' said 'westerly' i' stead o' 'yeasterly,'" cried Jem, "boh yo puzzle a mon so wi' your lawyerly questins, that he dusna knoa his reet hond fro' his laft."

"Yeigh, yeigh, we aw meant to say 'yeasterly,'" added the hinds.

"You have sworn the contrary," cried Nowell. "Secure him," he added to the grooms and Sparshot, "and do not let him go till we have completed the survey. We will now see how far the reality corresponds with the description, and what further devilish tricks have been played with the property."

Upon this the troop was again put in motion, James Device walking between the two grooms, with Sparshot behind him.

So wonderfully elated was Master Potts by the successful hit he had just made, and which, in his opinion, quite counterbalanced his previous failure, that he could not help communicating his satisfaction to Flint, and this in such manner, that the fiery little animal, who had been for some time exceedingly tractable and good-natured, took umbrage at it, and threatened to dislodge him if he did not desist from his vagaries—delivering the hint so clearly and unmistakeably that it was not lost upon his rider, who endeavoured to calm him down. In proportion as the attorney's spirits rose, those of James Device and his followers sank, for they felt they were caught in a snare, from which they could not easily escape.

By this time they had reached the borders of Worston Moor, which had been hitherto concealed by a piece of rising ground, covered with gorse and brushwood, and Jem's hut, together with the clough, the rindle, and the dyke, came distinctly into view. The plans were again produced, and, on comparing them, it appeared that the various landmarks were precisely situated as laid down by Mistress Nutter, while their disposition was entirely at variance with James Device's statement.

Master Potts then rose in his stirrups, and calling for silence, addressed the assemblage.

"There stands the hut," he said, "and instead of being behind the clough, it is on one side of it, while the door certainly does not face the moor, neither is the rindle in front of the dwelling or near it; while the dyke, which is the main and important boundary line between the properties, runs above two hundred yards further west than formerly. Now, observe the original position of these marks, meres, and boundaries—that is, of this hut, this clough, this rindle, and this dyke—exactly corresponds with the description given of them by the man Device, who dwells in the place, and who is, therefore, a person most likely to be accurately acquainted with the country; and yet, though he has only been absent two days, changes the most surprising have taken place—changes so surprising,

indeed, that he scarcely knows the way to his own house, and certainly never could find the path which he has described as leading to Hook Cliff, since it is entirely obliterated. Observe, further, all these extraordinary and incomprehensible changes in the appearance of the country, and in the situation of the marks, meres, and boundaries, are favourable to Mistress Nutter, and give her the advantage she seeks over my honoured and honourable client. They are set down in Mistress Nutter's plan, it is true; but when, let me ask, was that plan prepared? In my opinion it was prepared first, and the changes in the land made after it by diabolical fraud and contrivance. I am sorry to have to declare this to you, Master Nicholas, and to you, Master Richard, but such is my firm conviction."

"And mine, also," added Nowell; "and I here charge Mistress Nutter with sorcery and witchcraft, and on my return I will immediately issue a warrant for her arrest. Sparshot, I command you to attach the person of James Device, for aiding and abetting her in her foul practices."

"I will help you to take charge of him," said the reeve, riding forward.

Probably this was done to give Jem a chance of escape, and if so, it was successful, for as the reeve pushed among his captors, and thrust Sparshot aside, the ruffian broke from them; and running with great swiftness across the moor, plunged into the clough, and disappeared.

Nicholas and Richard instantly gave chase, as did Master Potts, but the fugitive led them over the treacherous bog in such a manner as to baffle all pursuit. A second disaster here overtook the unlucky attorney, and damped him in his hour of triumph. Flint, who had apparently not forgotten or forgiven the joyous kicks he had recently received from the attorney's heels, came to a sudden halt by the side of the quagmire, and, putting down his head, and flinging up his legs, cast him into it. While Potts was scrambling out, the animal galloped off in the direction of the clough, and had just reached it when he was seized upon by James Device, who suddenly started from the covert, and vaulted upon his back.

The Lancashire Witches Volume III by William Harrison Ainsworth

CHAPTER VIII—ROUGH LEE.

On returning from their unsuccessful pursuit of James Device, the two Asshetons found Roger Nowell haranguing the hinds, who, on the flight of their leader, would have taken to their heels likewise, if they had not been detained, partly by the energetic efforts of Sparshot and the grooms, and partly by the exhortations and menaces of the magistrate and Holden. As it was, two or three contrived to get away, and fled across the moor, whither the reeve pretended to pursue them; while those left behind were taken sharply to task by Roger Nowell.

"Listen to me," he cried, "and take good heed to what I say, for it concerns you nearly. Strange and dreadful things have come under my observation on my way hither. I have seen a whole village stricken as by a plague—a poor pedlar deprived of the use of his limbs and put in peril of his life—and a young maiden, once the pride and ornament of your own village, snatched from a fond father's care, and borne to an untimely grave. These things I have seen with my own eyes; and I am resolved that the perpetrators of these enormities, Mothers Demdike and Chattox, shall be brought to justice. As to you, the deluded victims of the impious hags, I can easily understand why you shut your eyes to their evil doings. Terrified by their threats you submit to their exactions, and so become their slaves—slaves of the bond-slaves of Satan. What miserable servitude is this! By so doing you not only endanger the welfare of your souls, by leaguings with the enemies of Heaven, and render yourselves unworthy to be classed with a religious and Christian people, but you place your lives in jeopardy by becoming accessories to the crimes of those great offenders, and render yourselves liable to like punishment with them. Seeing, then, the imminency of the peril in which you stand, you will do well to avoid it while there is yet time. Nor is this your only risk. Your servitude to Mistress Nutter is equally perilous. What if she be owner of the land you till, and the flocks you tend! You owe her no fealty. She has forfeited all title to your service—and, so far from aiding her, you ought to regard her as a great criminal, whom you are bound to bring to justice. I have now incontestable proofs of her dealing in the black art, and can show that by witchcraft she has altered the face of this country, with the intent to rob me of my land."

Holden now took up the theme. "The finger of Heaven is pointed against such robbery," he cried. "'Cursed is he,' saith the scripture, 'that removeth his neighbour's landmark.' And again, it is written, 'Cursed is he that smiteth his neighbour secretly.' Both these things hath Mistress Nutter done, and for both shall she incur divine vengeance."

"Neither shall she escape that of man," added Nowell, severely; "for our sovereign lord hath enacted that all persons employing or rewarding any evil spirit, shall be held guilty of felony, and shall suffer death. And death will be her portion, for such demoniacal agency most assuredly hath she employed."

The magistrate here paused for a moment to regard his audience, and reading in their terrified looks that his address had produced the desired impression, he continued with increased severity—

"These wicked women shall trouble the land no longer. They shall be arrested and brought to judgment; and if you do not heartily bestir yourselves in their capture, and undertake to appear in evidence against them, you shall be held and dealt with as accessories in their crimes."

Upon this, the hinds, who were greatly alarmed, declared with one accord their willingness to act as the magistrate should direct.

"You do wisely," cried Potts, who by this time had made his way back to the assemblage, covered from head to foot with ooze, as on his former misadventure. "Mistress Nutter and the two old hags who hold you in thrall would lead you to destruction. For understand it is the firm determination of my respected client, Master Roger Nowell, as well as of myself, not to relax in our exertions till the whole of these pestilent witches who trouble the country be swept away, and to spare none who assist and uphold them."

The hinds stared aghast, for so grim was the appearance of the attorney, that they almost thought Hobthurst, the lubber-fiend, was addressing them.

At this moment old Henry Mitton came up. He had partially recovered from the stunning effects of the blow dealt him by James Device, but his head was cut open, and his white locks were dabbled in blood. Pushing his way through the assemblage, he stood before the magistrate.

"If yo want a witness agen that foul murtheress and witch, Alice Nutter, ca' me, Master Roger Nowell," he said. "Ey con tay my Bible oath that the whole feace o' this keawntry has been chaunged sin yester neet, by her hondywark. Ca' me also to speak to her former life—to her intimacy wi' Mother Demdike an owd Chattox. Ca' me to prove her constant attendance at devils' sabbaths on Pendle Hill, and elsewhere, wi' other black and damning offences—an among 'em the murder, by witchcraft, o' her husband, Ruchot Nutter."

A thrill of horror pervaded the assemblage at this denunciation; and Master Potts, who was being cleansed from his sable stains by one of the grooms, cried out—

"This is the very man for us, my excellent client. Your name and abode, friend?"

"Harry Mitton o' Rough Lee," replied the old man. "Ey ha' dwelt there seventy year an uppard, an ha' known the feyther and granfeyther o' Ruchot Nutter, an also Alice Nutter, when hoo war Alice Assheton. Ca' me, sir, an aw' ye want to knoa ye shan larn."

"We will call you, my good friend," said Potts; "and, if you have sustained any private wrongs from Mistress Nutter, they shall be amply redressed."

"Ey ha' endured much ot her honts," rejoined Mitton; "boh ey dunna speak o' mysel'. It be high time that Owd Scrat should ha' his claws clipt, an honest folk be allowed to live in peace."

"Very true, my worthy friend—very true," assented Potts.

An immediate return to Whalley was now proposed by Nowell; but Master Potts was of opinion that, as they were in the neighbourhood of Malkin Tower, they should proceed thither at once, and effect the arrest of Mother Demdike, after which Mother Chattox could be sought out and secured. The presence of these two witches would be most important, he declared, in the examination of Mistress Nutter. Hue and cry for the fugitive, James Device, ought also to be made throughout the forest.

Confounded by what they heard, Richard and Nicholas had hitherto taken no part in the proceedings, but they now seconded Master Potts's proposition, hoping that the time occupied by the visit to Malkin Tower would prove serviceable to Mistress Nutter; for they did not doubt that intelligence would be conveyed to her by some of her agents, of Nowell's intention to arrest her.

Additional encouragement was given to the plan by the arrival of Richard Baldwyn, who, at this juncture, rode furiously up to the party.

"Weel, han yo settled your business here, Mester Nowell?" he asked, in breathless anxiety.

"We have so far settled it, that we have established proofs of witchcraft against Mistress Nutter," replied Nowell. "Can you speak to her character, Baldwyn?"

"Yeigh, that ey con," rejoined the miller, "an nowt good. Ey wish to see aw these mischeevous witches burnt; an that's why ey ha' ridden efter yo, Mester Nowell. Ey want your help os a magistrate agen Mother Demdike. Yo ha a constable wi' ye, and so can arrest her at wonst."

"You have come most opportunely, Baldwyn," observed Potts. "We were just considering whether we should go to Malkin Tower."

"Then decide upon 't," rejoined the miller, "or th' owd hag win escape ye. Tak her unaweaes."

"I don't know that we shall take her unawares, Baldwyn," said Potts; "but I am decidedly of opinion that we should go thither without delay. Is Malkin Tower far off?"

"About a mile fro' Rough Lee," replied the miller. "Go back wi' me to t' mill, where yo con refresh yourselves, an ey'n get together some dozen o' my friends, an then we'n aw go up to t' Tower together."

"A very good suggestion," said Potts; "and no doubt Master Nowell will accede to it."

"We have force enough already, it appears to me," observed Nowell.

"I should think so," replied Richard. "Some dozen men, armed, against a poor defenceless old woman, are surely enough."

"Owd, boh neaw defenceless, Mester Ruchot," rejoined Baldwyn. "Yo canna go i' too great force on an expedition like this. Malkin Tower is a varry strong place, os yo'n find."

"Well," said Nowell, "since we are here, I agree with Master Potts, that it would be better to secure these two offenders, and convey them to Whalley, where their examination can be taken at the same time with that of Mistress Nutter. We therefore accept your offer of refreshment, Baldwyn, as some of our party may stand in need of it, and will at once proceed to the mill."

"Well resolved, sir," said Potts.

"We'n tae th' owd witch, dead or alive," cried Baldwyn.

"Alive—we must have her alive, good Baldwyn," said Potts. "You must see her perish at the stake."

"Reet, mon," cried the miller, his eyes blazing with fury; "that's true vengeance. Ey'n ride whoam an get aw ready fo ye. Yo knoa t' road."

So saying, he struck spurs into his horse and galloped off. Scarcely was he gone than the reeve, who had kept out of his sight, came forward.

"Since you have resolved upon going to Malkin Tower," he said to Nowell, "and have a sufficiently numerous party for the purpose, my further attendance can be dispensed with. I will ride in search of James Device."

"Do so," replied the magistrate, "and let hue and cry be made after him."

"It shall be," replied the reeve, "and, if taken, he shall be conveyed to Whalley."

And he made towards the clough, as if with the intention of putting his words into execution.

Word was now given to set forward, and Master Potts having been accommodated with a horse by one of the grooms, who proceeded on foot, the party began to retrace their course to the mill.

They were soon again by the side of Pendle Water, and ere long reached Rough Lee. As they rode through the close at the back of the mansion, Roger Nowell halted for a moment, and observed with a grim smile to Richard—

"Never more shall Mistress Nutter enter that house. Within a week she shall be lodged in Lancaster Castle, as a felon of the darkest dye, and she shall meet a felon's fate. And not only shall she be sent thither, but all her partners in guilt—Mother Demdike and her accursed brood, the Devices; old Chattox and her grand-daughter, Nance Redferne: not one shall escape."

"You do not include Alizon Device in your list?" cried Richard.

"I include all—I will spare none," rejoined Nowell, sternly.

"Then I will move no further with you," said Richard.

"How!" cried Newell, "are you an upholder of these witches? Beware what you do, young man. Beware how you take part with them. You will bring suspicion upon yourself, and get entangled in a net from which you will not easily escape."

"I care not what may happen to me," rejoined Richard; "I will never lend myself to gross injustice—such as you are about to practise. Since you announce your intention of including the innocent with the guilty, of exterminating a whole family for the crimes of one or two of its members, I have done. You have made dark accusations against Mistress Nutter, but you have proved nothing. You assert that, by witchcraft, she has changed the features of your land, but in what way can you make good the charge? Old Mitton has, indeed, volunteered himself as a witness against her, and has accused her of most heinous offences; but he has at the same time shown that he is her enemy, and his testimony will be regarded with doubt. I will not believe her guilty on mere suspicion, and I deny that you have aught more to proceed upon."

"I shall not argue the point with you now, sir," replied Nowell; angrily. "Mistress Nutter will be fairly tried, and if I fail in my proofs against her, she will be acquitted. But I have little fear of such a result," he added, with a sinister smile.

"You are confident, sir, because you know there would be every disposition to find her guilty," replied Richard. "She will not be fairly tried. All the prejudices of ignorance and superstition, heightened by the published opinions of the King, will be arrayed against her. Were she as free from crime, or thought of crime, as the new-born babe, once charged with the horrible and inexplicable offence of witchcraft, she would scarce escape. You go determined to destroy her."

"I will not deny it," said Roger Newell, "and I am satisfied that I shall render good service to society by freeing it from so vile a member. So abhorrent is the crime of witchcraft, that were my own son suspected, I would be the first to deliver him to justice. Like a noxious and poisonous plant, the offence has taken deep root in this country, and is spreading its baneful influence around, so that, if it be not extirpated, it may spring up anew, and cause incalculable mischief. But it shall now be effectually checked. Of the families I have mentioned, not one shall escape; and if Mistress Nutter herself had a daughter, she should be brought to judgment. In such cases, children must suffer for the sins of the parents."

"You have no regard, then, for their innocence?" said Richard, who felt as if a weight of calamity was crushing him down.

"Their innocence must be proved at the proper tribunal," rejoined Nowell. "It is not for me to judge them."

"But you do judge them," cried Richard, sharply. "In making the charge, you know that you pronounce the sentence of condemnation as well. This is why the humane man—why the just—would hesitate to bring an accusation even where he suspected guilt—but

where suspicion could not possibly attach, he would never suffer himself, however urged on by feelings of animosity, to injure the innocent."

"You ascribe most unworthy motives to me, young sir," rejoined Nowell, sternly. "I am influenced only by a desire to see justice administered, and I shall not swerve from my duty, because my humanity may be called in question by a love-sick boy. I understand why you plead thus warmly for these infamous persons. You are enthralled by the beauty of the young witch, Alizon Device. I noted how you were struck by her yesterday—and I heard what Sir Thomas Metcalfe said on the subject. But take heed what you do. You may jeopardise both soul and body in the indulgence of this fatal passion. Witchcraft is exercised in many ways. Its professors have not only power to maim and to kill, and to do other active mischief, but to ensnare the affections and endanger the souls of their victims, by enticing them to unhallowed love. Alizon Device is comely to view, no doubt, but who shall say whence her beauty is derived? Hell may have arrayed her in its fatal charms. Sin is beautiful, but all-destructive. And the time will come when you may thank me for delivering you from the snares of this seductive siren." Richard uttered an angry exclamation.

"Not now—I do not expect it—you are too much besotted by her," pursued Nowell; "but I conjure you to cast off this wicked and senseless passion, which, unless checked, will lead you to perdition. You have heard what abominable rites are practised at those unholy meetings called Devil's Sabbaths, and how can you say that some demon may not be your rival in Alizon's love?"

"You pass all licence, sir," cried Richard, infuriated past endurance; "and, if you do not instantly retract the infamous accusation you have made, neither your age nor your office shall protect you."

"I can fortunately protect myself, young man," replied Nowell, coldly; "and if aught were wanting to confirm my suspicions that you were under some evil influence, it would be supplied by your present conduct. You are bewitched by this girl."

"It is false!" cried Richard.

And he raised his hand against the magistrate, when Nicholas quickly interposed.

"Nay, cousin Dick," cried the squire, "this must not be. You must take other means of defending the poor girl, whose innocence I will maintain as stoutly as yourself. But, since Master Roger Nowell is resolved to proceed to extremities, I shall likewise take leave to retire."

"Your pardon, sir," rejoined Nowell; "you will not withdraw till I think fit. Master Richard Assheton, forgetful alike of the respect due to age and constituted authority, has ventured to raise his hand against me, for which, if I chose, I could place him in immediate arrest. But I have no such intention. On the contrary, I am willing to overlook the insult, attributing it to the frenzy by which he is possessed. But both he and you, Master Nicholas, are mistaken if you suppose I will permit you to retire. As a magistrate in the exercise of my office, I call upon you both to aid me in the capture of the two notorious witches, Mothers Demdike and Chattox, and not to desist or depart from me till such capture be effected. You know the penalty of refusal."

"Heavy fine or imprisonment, at the option of the magistrate," remarked Potts.

"My cousin Nicholas will do as he pleases," observed Richard; "but, for my part, I will not stir a step further."

"Nor will I," added Nicholas, "unless I have Master Nowell's solemn pledge that he will take no proceedings against Alizon Device."

"You can give no such assurance, sir," whispered Potts, seeing that the magistrate wavered in his resolution.

"You must go, then," said Nowell, "and take the consequences of your refusal to act with me. Your relationship to Mistress Nutter will not tell in your favour."

"I understand the implied threat," said Nicholas, "and laugh at it. Richard, lad, I am with you. Let him catch the witches himself, if he can. I will not budge an inch further with him."

"Farewell, then, gentlemen," replied Roger Nowell; "I am sorry to part company with you thus, but when next we meet—" and he paused.

"We meet as enemies, I presume" supplied Nicholas.

"We meet no longer as friends," rejoined the magistrate, coldly.

With this he moved forward with the rest of the troop, while the two Asshetons, after a moment's consultation, passed through a gate and made their way to the back of the mansion, where they found one or two men on the look-out, from whom they received intelligence, which induced them immediately to spring from their horses and hurry into the house.

Arrived at the principal entrance of the mansion, which was formed by large gates of open iron-work, admitting a view of the garden and front of the house, Roger Nowell again called a halt, and Master Potts, at his request, addressed the porter and two other serving-men who were standing in the garden, in this fashion—

"Pay attention to what I say to you, my men," he cried in a loud and authoritative voice—"a warrant will this day be issued for the arrest of Alice Nutter of Rough Lee, in whose service you have hitherto dwelt, and who is charged with the dreadful crime of witchcraft, and with invoking, consulting, and covenanting with, entertaining, employing, feeding, and rewarding evil spirits, contrary to the laws of God and man, and in express violation of his Majesty's statute. Now take notice, that if the said Alice Nutter shall at any time hereafter return to this her former abode, or take refuge within it, you are hereby bound to deliver her up forthwith to the nearest constable, to be by him brought before the worshipful Master Roger Nowell of Read, in this county, so that she may be examined by him on these charges. You hear what I have said?"

The men exchanged significant glances, but made no reply.

Potts was about to address them, but to his surprise he saw the central door of the house thrown open, and Mistress Nutter issue from it. She marched slowly and majestically down the broad gravel walk towards the gate. The attorney could scarcely believe his eyes, and he exclaimed to the magistrate with a chuckle—

"Who would have thought of this! We have her safe enough now. Ha! ha!"

But no corresponding smile played upon Nowell's hard lips. His gaze was fixed inquiringly upon the lady.

Another surprise. From the same door issued Alizon Device, escorted by Nicholas and Richard Assheton, who walked on either side of her, and the three followed Mistress Nutter slowly down the broad walk. Such a display seemed to argue no want of confidence. Alizon did not look towards the group outside the gates, but seemed listening eagerly to what Richard was saying to her.

"So, Master Nowell," cried Mistress Nutter, boldly, "since you find yourself defeated in the claims you have made against my property, you are seeking to revenge yourself, I understand, by bringing charges against me as false as they are calumnious. But I defy your malice, and can defend myself against your violence."

"If I could be astonished at any thing in you, madam, I should be at your audacity," rejoined Nowell, "but I am glad that you have presented yourself before me; for it was

my fixed intention, on my return to Whalley, to cause your arrest, and your unexpected appearance here enables me to put my design into execution somewhat sooner than I anticipated."

Mistress Nutter laughed scornfully.

"Sparshot," vociferated Nowell, "enter those gates, and arrest the lady in the King's name."

The beadle looked irresolute. He did not like the task.

"The gates are fastened," cried Mistress Nutter.

"Force them open, then," roared Nowell, dismounting and shaking them furiously. "Bring me a heavy stone. By heaven I will not be baulked of my prey."

"My servants are armed," cried Mistress Nutter, "and the first man who enters shall pay the penalty of his rashness with life. Bring me a petronel, Blackadder."

The order was promptly obeyed by the ill-favoured attendant, who was stationed near the gate.

"I am in earnest," said Mistress Nutter, aiming the petronel, "and seldom miss my mark."

"Give attention to me, my men," cried Roger Nowell. "I charge you in the King's name to throw open the gate."

"And I charge you in mine to keep it fast," rejoined Mistress Nutter. "We shall see who will be obeyed."

One of the grooms now advanced with a large stone taken from an adjoining wall, which he threw with great force against the gates, but though it shook them violently the fastenings continued firm. Blackadder and the two other serving-men, all of whom were armed with halberts, now advanced to the gates, and, thrusting the points of their weapons through the bars, drove back those who were near them.

A short consultation now took place between Nowell and Potts, after which the latter, taking care to keep out of the reach of the halberts, thus delivered himself in a loud voice:—

"Alice Nutter, in order to avoid the serious consequences which might ensue were the necessary measures taken to effect a forcible entrance into your habitation, the worshipful Master Nowell has thought fit to grant you an hour's respite for reflection; at the expiration of which time he trusts that you, seeing the futility of resisting the law, will quietly yield yourself a prisoner. Otherwise, no further leniency will be shown you and those who may uphold you in your contumacy."

Mistress Nutter laughed loudly and contemptuously.

"At the same time," pursued Potts, on a suggestion from the magistrate, "Master Roger Nowell demands that Alizon Device, daughter of Elizabeth Device, whom he beholds in your company, and who is likewise suspected of witchcraft, be likewise delivered up to him."

"Aught more?" inquired Mistress Nutter.

"Only this," replied Potts, in a taunting tone, "the worshipful magistrate would offer a friendly counsel to Master Nicholas Assheton, and Master Richard Assheton, whom, to his infinite surprise, he perceives in a hostile position before him, that they in nowise interfere with his injunctions, but, on the contrary, lend their aid in furtherance of them, otherwise he may be compelled to adopt measures towards them, which must be a source of regret to him. I have furthermore to state, on the part of his worship, that strict watch will be kept at all the approaches of your house, and that no one, on any pretence whatever, during the appointed time of respite, will be suffered to enter it, or depart from it. In an hour his worship will return."

"And in an hour he shall have my answer," replied Mistress Nutter, turning away.

The Lancashire Witches Volume III by William Harrison Ainsworth

CHAPTER IX.—HOW ROUGH LEE WAS DEFENDED BY NICHOLAS.

When skies are darkest, and storms are gathering thickest overhead, the star of love will oft shine out with greatest brilliancy; and so, while Mistress Nutter was hurling defiance against her foes at the gate, and laughing their menaces to scorn—while those very foes were threatening Alizon's liberty and life—she had become wholly insensible to the peril environing her, and almost unconscious of any other presence save that of Richard, now her avowed lover; for, impelled by the irresistible violence of his feelings, the young man had chosen that moment, apparently so unpropitious, and so fraught with danger and alarm, for the declaration of his passion, and the offer of his life in her service. A few low-murmured words were all Alizon could utter in reply, but they were enough. They told Richard his passion was requited, and his devotion fully appreciated. Sweet were those moments to both—sweet, though sad. Like Alizon, her lover had become insensible to all around him. Engrossed by one thought and one object, he was lost to aught else, and was only at last aroused to what was passing by the squire, who, having good-naturedly removed to a little distance from the pair, now gave utterance to a low whistle, to let them know that Mistress Nutter was coming towards them. The lady, however, did not stop, but motioning them to follow, entered the house.

"You have heard what has passed," she said. "In an hour Master Nowell threatens to return and arrest me and Alizon."

"That shall never be," cried Richard, with a passionate look at the young girl. "We will defend you with our lives."

"Much may be done in an hour," observed Nicholas to Mistress Nutter, "and my advice to you is to use the time allowed you in making good your retreat, so that, when the hawks come back, they may find the doves flown."

"I have no intention of quitting my dovecot," replied Mistress Nutter, with a bitter smile.

"Unless you are forcibly taken from it, I suppose," said the squire; "a contingency not impossible if you await Roger Nowell's return. This time, be assured, he will not go away empty-handed."

"He may not go away at all," rejoined Mistress Nutter, sternly.

"Then you mean to make a determined resistance?" said Nicholas. "Recollect that you are resisting the law. I wish I could induce you to resort to the safer expedient of flight. This affair is already dark and perplexed enough, and does not require further complication. Find any place of concealment, no matter where, till some arrangement can be made with Roger Nowell."

"I should rather urge you to fly, Nicholas," rejoined the lady; "for it is evident you have strong misgivings as to the justice of my cause, and would not willingly compromise yourself. I will not surrender to this magistrate, because, by so doing, my life would assuredly be forfeited, for my innocence could never be established before the iniquitous and bloody tribunal to which I should be brought. Neither, for the same reason, will I surrender Alizon, who, with a refinement of malignity, has been similarly accused. I shall now proceed to make preparations for my defence. Go, if you think fitting—or stay—but if you do stay, I shall calculate upon your active services."

"You may," replied the squire. "Whatever I may think, I admire your spirit, and will stand by you. But time is passing, and the foe will return and find us engaged in deliberation when we ought to be prepared. You have a dozen men on the premises on whom you can rely. Half of these must be placed at the back of the house to prevent any entrance from being effected in that quarter. The rest can remain within the entrance hall, and be ready to rush forth when summoned by us; but we will not so summon them unless we are hardly put to it, and their aid is indispensable. All should be well armed, but I trust they will not have to use their weapons. Are you agreed to this, madam?"

"I am," replied Mistress Nutter, "and I will give instant directions that your wishes are complied with. All approaches to the back of the house shall be strictly guarded as you direct, and my trusty man, Blackadder, on whose fidelity and courage I can entirely rely, shall take the command of the party in the hall, and act under your orders. Your prowess will not be unobserved, for Alizon and I shall be in the upper room commanding the garden, whence we can see all that takes place."

A slight smile was exchanged between the lovers; but it was evident, from her anxious looks, that Alizon did not share in Richard's confidence. An opportunity, however, was presently afforded him of again endeavouring to reassure her, for Mistress Nutter went forth to give Blackadder his orders, and Nicholas betook himself to the back of the house to ascertain, from personal inspection, its chance of security.

"You are still uneasy, dear Alizon," said Richard, taking her hand; "but do not be cast down. No harm shall befall you."

"It is not for myself I am apprehensive," she replied, "but for you, who are about to expose yourself to needless risk in this encounter; and, if any thing should happen to you, I shall be for ever wretched. I would far rather you left me to my fate."

"And can you think I would allow you to be borne away a captive to ignominy and certain destruction?" cried Richard. "No, I will shed my heart's best blood before such a calamity shall occur."

"Alas!" said Alizon, "I have no means of requiting your devotion. All I can offer you in return is my love, and that, I fear, will prove fatal to you."

"Oh! do not say so," cried Richard. "Why should this sad presentiment still haunt you? I strove to chase it away just now, and hoped I had succeeded. You are dearer to me than life. Why, therefore, should I not risk it in your defence? And why should your love prove fatal to me?"

"I know not," replied Alizon, in a tone of deepest anguish, "but I feel as if my destiny were evil; and that, against my will, I shall drag those I most love on earth into the same dark gulf with myself. I have the greatest affection for your sister Dorothy, and yet I have been the unconscious instrument of injury to her. And you too, Richard, who are yet dearer to me, are now put in peril on my account. I fear, too, when you know my whole history, you will think of me as a thing of evil, and shun me."

"What mean you, Alizon?" he cried.

"Richard, I can have no secrets from you," she replied; "and though I was forbidden to tell you what I am now about to disclose, I will not withhold it. I was born in this house, and am the daughter of its mistress."

"You tell me only what I guessed, Alizon," rejoined the young man; "but I see nothing in this why I should shun you."

Alizon hid her face for a moment in her hands; and then looking up, said wildly and hurriedly, "Would I had never known the secret of my birth; or, knowing it, had never seen what I beheld last night!"

"What did you behold?" asked Richard, greatly agitated.

"Enough to convince me, that in gaining a mother I was lost myself," replied Alizon; "for oh! how can I survive the shock of telling you I am bound, by ties that can never be

dissevered, to one abandoned alike of God and man—who has devoted herself to the Fiend! Pity me, Richard—pity me, and shun me!"

There was a moment's dreadful pause, which the young man was unable to break.

"Was I not right in saying my love would be fatal to you?" continued Alizon. "Fly from me while you can, Richard. Fly from this house, or you are lost for ever!"

"Never, never! I will not stir without you," cried Richard. "Come with me, and escape all the dangers by which you are menaced, and leave your sinning parent to the doom she so richly merits."

"No, no; sinful though she be, she is still my mother. I cannot leave her," cried Alizon.

"If you stay, I stay, be the consequences what they may," replied the young man; "but you have rendered my arm powerless by what you have told me. How can I defend one whom I know to be guilty?"

"Therefore I urge you to fly," she rejoined.

"I can reconcile myself to it thus," said Richard—"in defending you, whom I know to be innocent, I cannot avoid defending her. The plea is not a good one, but it will suffice to allay my scruples of conscience."

At this moment Mistress Nutter entered the hall, followed by Blackadder and three other men, armed with calivers.

"All is ready, Richard," she said, "and it wants but a few minutes of the appointed time. Perhaps you shrink from the task you have undertaken?" she added, regarding him sharply; "if so, say so at once, and I will adopt my own line of defence."

"Nay, I shall be ready to go forth in a moment," rejoined the young man, glancing at Alizon. "Where is Nicholas?"

"Here," replied the squire, clapping him on the shoulder. "All is secure at the back of the house, and the horses are coming round. We must mount at once."

Richard arose without a word.

"Blackadder will attend to your orders," said Mistress Nutter; "he only waits a sign from you to issue forth with his three companions, or to fire through the windows upon the aggressors, if you see occasion for it."

"I trust it will not come to such a pass," rejoined the squire; "a few blows from these weapons will convince them we are in earnest, and will, I hope, save further trouble."

And as he spoke he took down a couple of stout staves, and gave one of them to Richard.

"Farewell, then, preux chevaliers" cried Mistress Nutter, with affected gaiety; "demean yourselves valiantly, and remember that bright eyes will be upon you. Now, Alizon, to our chamber."

Richard did not hazard a look at the young girl as she quitted the hall with her mother, but followed the squire mechanically into the garden, where they found the horses. Scarcely were they mounted than a loud hubbub, arising from the little village, proclaimed that their opponents had arrived, and presently after a large company of horse and foot appeared at the gate.

At sight of the large force brought against them, the countenance of the squire lost its confident and jovial expression. Pie counted nearly forty men, each of whom was armed in some way or other, and began to fear the affair would terminate awkwardly, and entail unpleasant consequences upon himself and his cousin. He was, therefore, by no means at his ease. As to Richard, he did not dare to ask himself how things would end, neither did he know how to act. His mind was in utter confusion, and his breast oppressed as if by a nightmare. He cast one look towards the upper window, and beheld at it the white face of Mistress Nutter, intently gazing at what was going forward, but Alizon was not to be seen.

Within the last half hour the sky had darkened, and a heavy cloud hung over the house, threatening a storm. Richard hoped it would come on fiercely and fast.

Meanwhile, Roger Newell had dismounted and advanced to the gate.

"Gentlemen," he cried, addressing the two Asshetons, "I expected to find free access given to me and my followers; but as these gates are still barred against me, I call upon you, as loyal subjects of the King, not to resist or impede the course of law, but to throw them instantly open."

"You must unbar them yourself, Master Nowell," replied Nicholas. "We shall give you no help."

"Nor offer any opposition, I hope, sir?" said the magistrate, sternly.

"You are twenty to one, or thereabout," returned the squire, with a laugh; "we shall stand a poor chance with you."

"But other defensive and offensive preparations have been made, I doubt not," said Nowell; "nay, I descry some armed men through the windows of the hall. Before coming to extremities, I will make a last appeal to you and your kinsman. I have granted Mistress Nutter and the girl with her an hour's delay, in the hope that, seeing the futility of resistance, they would quietly surrender. But I find my clemency thrown away, and undue advantage taken of the time allowed for respite; therefore, I shall show them no further consideration. But to you, my friends, I would offer a last warning. Forget not that you are acting in direct opposition to the law; that we are here armed with full authority and power to carry out our intentions; and that all opposition on your part will be fruitless, and will be visited upon you hereafter with severe pains and penalties. Forget not, also, that your characters will be irrecoverably damaged from your connexion with parties charged with the heinous offence of witchcraft. Meddle not, therefore, in the matter, but go your ways, or, if you would act as best becomes you, aid me in the arrest of the offenders."

"Master Roger Nowell," replied Nicholas, walking his horse slowly towards the gate, "as you have given me a caution, I will give you one in return; and that is, to put a bridle on your tongue when you address gentlemen, or, by my fay, you are likely to get answers little to your taste. You have said that our characters are likely to suffer in this transaction, but, in my humble opinion, they will not suffer so much as your own. The magistrate who uses the arm of the law for purposes of private vengeance, and who brings a false and foul charge against his enemy, knowing that it cannot be repelled, is not entitled to any particular respect or honour. Thus have you acted towards Mistress Nutter. Defeated by her in the boundary question, without leaving its decision to those to whom you had referred it, you instantly accuse her of witchcraft, and seek to destroy her, as well as an innocent and unoffending girl, by whom she is attended. Is such conduct worthy of you, or likely to redound to your credit? I think not. But this is not all. Aided by your crafty and unscrupulous ally, Master Potts, you get together a number of Mistress Nutter's tenants, and, by threats and misrepresentations, induce them to become instruments of your vengeance. But when these misguided men come to know the truth of the case—when they learn that you have no proofs whatever against Mistress Nutter, and that you are influenced solely by animosity to her, they are quite as likely to desert you as to stand by you. At all events, we are determined to resist this unjust arrest, and, at the hazard of our lives, to oppose your entrance into the house."

Nowell and Potts were greatly exasperated by this speech, but they were little prepared for its consequences. Many of those who had been induced to accompany them, as has been shown, wavered in their resolution of acting against Mistress Nutter, but they now began to declare in her favour. In vain Potts repeated all his former arguments. They were no longer of any avail. Of the troop assembled at the gate more than half marched off, and shaped their course towards the rear of the house—with what intention it was easy to surmise—while of those who remained it was very doubtful whether the whole of them would act.

The result of his oration was quite as surprising to Nicholas as to his opponents, and, enchanted by the effect of his eloquence, he could not help glancing up at the window, where he perceived Mistress Nutter, whose smiles showed that she was equally well pleased.

Seeing that, if any further desertions took place, his chances would be at an end, with a menacing gesture at the squire, Roger Nowell ordered the attack to commence immediately.

While some of his men, amongst whom were Baldwyn and old Mitton, battered against the gate with stones, another party, headed by Potts, scaled the walls, which, though of considerable height, presented no very serious obstacles in the way of active assailants. Elevated on the shoulders of Sparshot, Potts was soon on the summit of the wall, and was about to drop into the garden, when he heard a sound that caused him to suspend his intention.

"What are you about to do, cousin Nicholas?" inquired Richard, as the word of assault was given by the magistrate.

"Let loose Mistress Nutter's stag-hounds upon them," replied the squire. "They are kept in leash by a varlet stationed behind yon yew-tree hedge, who only awaits my signal to let them slip; and by my faith it is time he had it."

As he spoke, he applied a dog-whistle to his lips, and, blowing a loud call, it was immediately answered by a savage barking, and half a dozen hounds, rough-haired, of prodigious size and power, resembling in make, colour, and ferocity, the Irish wolf-hound bounded towards him.

"Aha!" exclaimed Nicholas, clapping his hands to encourage them: "we could have dispersed the whole rout with these assistants. Hyke, Tristam!—hyke, Hubert! Upon them!—upon them!"

It was the savage barking of the hounds that had caught the ears of the alarmed attorney, and made him desirous to scramble back again. But this was no such easy matter. Sparshot's broad shoulders were wanting to place his feet upon, and while he was bruising his knees against the roughened sides of the wall in vain attempts to raise himself to the top of it unaided, Hubert's sharp teeth met in the calf of his leg, while those of Tristram were fixed in the skirts of his doublet, and penetrated deeply into the flesh that filled it. A terrific yell proclaimed the attorney's anguish and alarm, and he redoubled his efforts to escape. But, if before it was difficult to get up, the feat was now impossible. All he could do was to cling with desperate tenacity to the coping of the wall, for he made no doubt, if dragged down, he should be torn in pieces. Roaring lustily for help, he besought Nicholas to have compassion upon him; but the squire appeared little moved by his distress, and laughed heartily at his yells and vociferations.

"You will not come again on a like errand, in a hurry, I fancy Master Potts," he said.

"I will not, good Master Nicholas," rejoined Potts; "for pity's sake call off these infernal hounds. They will rend me asunder as they would a fox."

"You were a cunning fox, in good sooth, to come hither," rejoined Nicholas, in a taunting tone; "but will you go hence if I liberate you?"

"I will—indeed I will!" replied Potts.

"And will no more molest Mistress Nutter?" thundered Nicholas.

"Take heed what you promise," roared Nowell from the other side of the wall.

"If you do not promise it, the hounds shall pull you down, and make a meal of you!" cried Nicholas.

"I do—I swear—whatever you desire!" cried the terrified attorney.

The hounds were then called off by the squire, and, nerved by fright, Potts sprang upon the wall, and tumbled over it upon the other side, alighting upon the head of his respected and singular good client, whom he brought to the ground.

Meanwhile, all those unlucky persons who had succeeded in scaling the wall were attacked by the hounds, and, unable to stand against them, were chased round the garden, to the infinite amusement of the squire. Frightened to death, and unable otherwise to escape, for the gate allowed them no means of exit, the poor wretches fled towards the terrace overlooking Pendle Water, and, leaping into the stream, gained the

opposite bank. There they were safe, for the hounds were not allowed to follow them further. In this way the garden was completely cleared of the enemy, and Nicholas and Richard were left masters of the field.

Leaning out of the window, Mistress Nutter laughingly congratulated them on their success, and, as no further disposition was manifested on the part of Nowell and such of his troop that remained to renew the attack, the contest, for the present at least, was supposed to be at an end.

By this time, also, intimation had been conveyed by the deserters from Nowell's troop, who, it will be remembered, had made their way to the back of the premises, that they were anxious to offer their services to Mistress Nutter; and, as soon as this was told her, she ordered them to be admitted, and descended to give them welcome. Thus things wore a promising aspect for the besieged, while the assailing party were proportionately disheartened.

Long ere this, Baldwyn and old Mitton had desisted from their attempts to break open the gate, and, indeed, rejoiced that such a barrier was interposed between them and the hounds, whose furious onslaughts they witnessed. A bolt was launched against these four-footed guardians of the premises by the bearer of the crossbow, but the man proved but an indifferent marksman, for, instead of hitting the hound, he disabled one of his companions who was battling with him. Finding things in this state, and that neither Nowell nor Potts returned to their charge, while their followers were withdrawn from before the gate, Nicholas thought he might fairly infer that a victory had been obtained. But, like a prudent leader, he did not choose to expose himself till the enemy had absolutely yielded, and he therefore signed to Blackadder and his men to come forth from the hall. The order was obeyed, not only by them, but by the seceders from the hostile troop, and some thirty men issued from the principal door, and, ranging themselves upon the lawn, set up a deafening and triumphant shout, very different from that raised by the same individuals when under the command of Nowell. At the same moment Mistress Nutter and Alizon appeared at the door, and at the sight of them the shouting was renewed.

The unexpected turn in affairs had not been without its effect upon Richard and Alizon, and tended to revive the spirits of both. The immediate danger by which they were threatened had vanished, and time was given for the consideration of new plans. Richard had been firmly resolved to take no further part in the affray than should be required for the protection of Alizon, and, consequently, it was no little satisfaction to him to reflect that the victory had been accomplished without him, and by means which could not afterwards be questioned.

Meanwhile, Mistress Nutter had joined Nicholas, and the gates being unbarred by Blackadder, they passed through them. At a little distance stood Roger Nowell, now altogether abandoned, except by his own immediate followers, with Baldwin and old Mitton. Poor Potts was lying on the ground, piteously bemoaning the lacerations his skin had undergone.

"Well, you have got the worst of it, Master Nowell," said Nicholas, as he and Mistress Nutter approached the discomfited magistrate, "and must own yourself fairly defeated."

"Defeated as I am, I would rather be in my place than in yours, sir," retorted Nowell, sourly.

"You have had a wholesome lesson read you, Master Nowell," said Mistress Nutter; "but I do not come hither to taunt you. I am quite satisfied with the victory I have obtained, and am anxious to put an end to the misunderstanding between us."

"I have no misunderstanding with you, madam," replied Nowell; "I do not quarrel with persons like you. But be assured, though you may escape now, a day of reckoning will come."

"Your chief cause of grievance against me, I am aware," replied Mistress Nutter, calmly, "is, that I have beaten you in the matter of the land. Now, I have a proposal to make to you respecting it."

"I cannot listen to it," rejoined Nowell, sternly; "I can have no dealings with a witch."

At this moment his cloak was plucked behind by Potts, who looked at him as much as to say, "Do not exasperate her. Hear what she has got to offer."

"I shall be happy to act as mediator between you, if possible," observed Nicholas; "but in that case I must request you, Master Nowell, to abstain from any offensive language."

"What is it you have to propose to me, then, madam!" demanded the magistrate, gruffly.

"Come with me into the house, and you shall hear," replied Mistress Nutter.

Nowell was about to refuse peremptorily, when his cloak was again plucked by Potts, who whispered him to go.

"This is not a snare laid to entrap me, madam?" he said, regarding the lady suspiciously.

"I will answer for her good faith," interposed Nicholas.

Nowell still hesitated, but the counsel of his legal adviser was enforced by a heavy shower of rain, which just then began to descend upon them.

"You can take shelter beneath my roof," said Mistress Nutter; "and before the shower is over we can settle the matter."

"And my wounds can be dressed at the same time," said Potts, with a groan, "for they pain me sorely."

"Blackadder has a sovereign balsam, which, with a patch or two of diachylon, will make all right," replied Nicholas, unable to repress a laugh. "Here, lift him up between you," he added to the grooms, "and convey him into the house."

The orders were obeyed, and Mistress Nutter led the way through the now wide-opened gates; her slow and majestic march by no means accelerated by the drenching shower. What Roger Nowell's sensations were at following her in such a way, after his previous threats and boastings, may be easily conceived.

The Lancashire Witches Volume III by William Harrison Ainsworth

CHAPTER X.—ROGER NOWELL AND HIS DOUBLE.

The magistrate was ushered by the lady into a small chamber, opening out of the entrance-hall, which, in consequence of having only one small narrow window, with a clipped yew-tree before it, was extremely dark and gloomy. The walls were covered with sombre tapestry, and on entering, Mistress Nutter not only carefully closed the door, but drew the arras before it, so as to prevent the possibility of their conversation being heard outside. These precautions taken, she motioned the magistrate to a chair, and seated herself opposite him.

"We can now deal unreservedly with each other, Master Nowell," she said, fixing her eyes steadily upon him; "and, as our discourse cannot be overheard and repeated, may use perfect freedom of speech."

"I am glad of it," replied Nowell, "because it will save circumlocution, which I dislike; and therefore, before proceeding further, I must tell you, directly and distinctly, that if there be aught of witchcraft in what you are about to propose to me, I will have nought to do with it, and our conference may as well never begin."

"Then you really believe me to be a witch?" said the lady.

"I do," replied Nowell, unflinchingly.

"Since you believe this, you must also believe that I have absolute power over you," rejoined Mistress Nutter, "and might strike you with sickness, cripple you, or kill you if I thought fit."

"I know not that," returned Nowell. "There are limits even to the power of evil beings; and your charms and enchantments, however strong and baneful, may be wholly inoperative against a magistrate in the discharge of his duty. If it were not so, you would scarcely think it worth while to treat with me."

"Humph!" exclaimed the lady. "Now, tell me frankly, what you will do when you depart hence?"

"Ride off with the utmost speed to Whalley," replied Nowell, "and, acquainting Sir Ralph with all that has occurred, claim his assistance; and then, with all the force we can jointly muster, return hither, and finish the work I have left undone."

"You will forego this intention," said Mistress Nutter, with a bitter smile.

The magistrate shook his head.

"I am not easily turned from my purpose," he remarked.

"But you have not yet quitted Rough Lee," said the lady, "and after such an announcement I shall scarce think of parting with you."

"You dare not detain me," replied Nowell. "I have Nicholas Assheton's word for my security, and I know he will not break it. Besides, you will gain nothing by my detention. My absence will soon be discovered, and if living I shall be set free; if dead, avenged."

"That may, or may not be," replied Mistress Nutter; "and in any case I can, if I choose, wreak my vengeance upon you. I am glad to have ascertained your intentions, for I now know how to treat with you. You shall not go hence, except on certain conditions. You have said you will proclaim me a witch, and will come back with sufficient force to accomplish my arrest. Instead of doing this, I advise you to return to Sir Ralph Assheton, and admit to him that you find yourself in error in respect to the boundaries of the land—"

"Never," interrupted Nowell.

"I advise you to do this," pursued the lady, calmly, "and I advise you, also, on quitting this room, to retract all you have uttered to my prejudice, in the presence of Nicholas Assheton and other credible witnesses; in which case I will not only lay aside all feelings of animosity towards you, but will make over to you the whole of the land under dispute, and that without purchase money on your part."

Roger Nowell was of an avaricious nature, and caught at the bait.

"How, madam!" he cried, "the whole of the land mine without payment?"

"The whole," she replied.

"If she should be arraigned and convicted it will be forfeited to the crown," thought Nowell; "the offer is tempting."

"Your attorney is here, and can prepare the conveyance at once," pursued Mistress Nutter; "a sum can be stated to lend a colour to the proceeding, and I will give you a

private memorandum that I will not claim it. All I require is, that you clear me completely from the dark aspersions cast upon my character, and you abandon your projects against my adopted daughter, Alizon, as well as against those two poor old women, Mothers Demdike and Chattox."

"How can I be sure that I shall not be deluded in the matter?" asked Nowell; "the writing may disappear from the parchment you give me, or the parchment itself may turn to ashes. Such things have occurred in transactions with witches. Or it be that, by consenting to the compact, I may imperil my own soul."

"Tush!" exclaimed Mistress Nutter; "these are idle fears. But it is no idle threat on my part, when I tell you you shall not go forth unless you consent."

"You cannot hinder me, woman," cried Nowell, rising.

"You shall see," rejoined the lady, making two or three rapid passes before him, which instantly stiffened his limbs, and deprived him of the power of motion. "Now, stir if you can," she added with a laugh.

Nowell essayed to cry out, but his tongue refused its office. Hearing and sight, however, were left him, and he saw Mistress Nutter take a large volume, bound in black, from the shelf, and open it at a page covered with cabalistic characters, after which she pronounced some words that sounded like an invocation.

As she concluded, the tapestry against the wall was raised, and from behind it appeared a figure in all respects resembling the magistrate: it had the same sharp features, the same keen eyes and bushy eyebrows, the same stoop in the shoulders, the same habiliments. It was, in short, his double.

Mistress Nutter regarded him with a look of triumph.

"Since you refuse, with my injunctions," she said, "your double will prove more tractable. He will go forth and do all I would have you do, while I have but to stamp upon the floor and a dungeon will yawn beneath your feet, where you will lie immured till doomsday. The same fate will attend your crafty associate, Master Potts—so that neither of you will be missed—ha! ha!"

The unfortunate magistrate fully comprehended his danger, but he could now neither offer remonstrance nor entreaty. What was passing in his breast seemed known to Mistress Nutter; for she motioned the double to stay, and, touching the brow of Nowell with the point of her forefinger, instantly restored his power of speech.

"I will give you a last chance," she said. "Will you obey me now?"

"I must, perforce," replied Nowell: "the contest is too unequal."

"You may retire, then," she cried to the double. And stepping backwards, the figure lifted up the tapestry, and disappeared behind it.

"I can breathe, now that infernal being is gone," cried Nowell, sinking into the chair. "Oh! madam, you have indeed terrible power."

"You will do well not to brave it again," she rejoined. "Shall I summon Master Potts to prepare the conveyance?"

"Oh! no—no!" cried Nowell. "I do not desire the land. I will not have it. I shall pay too dearly for it. Only let me get out of this horrible place?"

"Not so quickly, sir," rejoined Mistress Nutter. "Before you go hence, I must bind you to the performance of my injunctions. Pronounce these words after me,—'May I become subject to the Fiend if I fail in my promise.'"

"I will never utter them!" cried Nowell, shuddering.

"Then I shall recall your double," said the lady.

"Hold, hold!" exclaimed Nowell. "Let me know what you require of me."

"I require absolute silence on your part, as to all you have seen and heard here, and cessation of hostility towards me and the persons I have already named," replied Mistress Nutter; "and I require a declaration from you, in the presence of the two Asshetons, that you are fully satisfied of the justice of my claims in respect to the land; and that, mortified by your defeat, you have brought a false charge against me, which you now sincerely regret. This I require from you; and you must ratify the promise by the abjuration I have proposed. 'May I become subject to the Fiend if I fail in my promise.'"

The magistrate repeated the words after her. As he finished, mocking laughter, apparently resounding from below, smote his ears.

"Enough!" cried Mistress Nutter, triumphantly; "and now take good heed that you swerve not in the slightest degree from your word, or you are for ever lost."

Again the mocking laughter was heard, and Nowell would have rushed forth, if Mistress Nutter had not withheld him.

"Stay!" she cried, "I have not done with you yet! My witnesses must hear your declaration. Remember!"

And placing her finger upon her lips, in token of silence, she stepped backwards, drew aside the tapestry, and, opening the door, called to the two Asshetons, both of whom instantly came to her, and were not a little surprised to learn that all differences had been adjusted, and that Roger Nowell acknowledged himself entirely in error, retracting all the charges he had brought against her; while, on her part, she was fully satisfied with his explanations and apologies, and promised not to entertain any feelings of resentment towards him.

"You have made up the matter, indeed," cried Nicholas, "and, as Master Roger Nowell is a widower, perhaps a match may come of it. Such an arrangement"—

"This is no occasion for jesting, Nicholas," interrupted the lady, sharply.

"Nay, I but threw out a hint," rejoined the squire. "It would set the question of the land for ever at rest."

"It is set at rest—for ever!" replied the lady, with a side look at the magistrate.

"May I become subject to the Fiend if I fail in my promise," repeated Nowell to himself. "Those words bind me like a chain of iron. I must get out of this accursed house as fast as I can."

As if his thoughts had been divined by Mistress Nutter, she here observed to him, "To make our reconciliation complete, Master Nowell, I must entreat you to pass the day with me. I will give you the best entertainment my house affords—nay, I will take no denial; and you too, Nicholas, and you, Richard, you will stay and keep the worthy magistrate company."

The two Asshetons willingly assented, but Roger Nowell would fain have been excused. A look, however, from his hostess enforced compliance.

"The proposal will be highly agreeable, I am sure, to Master Potts," remarked Nicholas, with a laugh; "for though much better, in consequence of the balsam applied by Blackadder, he is scarcely in condition for the saddle."

"I will warrant him well to-morrow morning," said Mistress Nutter.

"Where is he?" inquired Nowell.

"In the library with Parson Holden," replied Nicholas; "making himself as comfortable as circumstances will permit, with a flask of Rhenish before him."

"I will go to him, then," said Nowell.

"Take care what you say to him," observed Mistress Nutter, in a low tone, and raising her finger to her lips.

Heaving a deep sigh, the magistrate then repaired to the library, a small room panelled with black oak, and furnished with a few cases of ancient tomes. The attorney and the divine were seated at a table, with a big square-built bottle and long-stemmed glasses before them, and Master Potts, with a wry grimace, excused himself from rising on his respected and singular good client's approach.

"Do not disturb yourself," said Nowell, gruffly; "we shall not leave Rough Lee to-day."

"I am glad to hear it," replied Potts, moving the cushions on his chair and eyeing the square-built bottle affectionately.

"Nor to-morrow, it may be—nor the day after—nor at all, possibly," said Nowell.

"Indeed!" exclaimed Potts, starting, and wincing with pain. "What is the meaning of all this, worthy sir?"

"May I become the subject of the Fiend if I fail in my promise," rejoined Nowell, with a groan.

"What promise, worshipful sir?" cried Potts, staring with surprise.

The magistrate got out the words, "My promise to—" and then he stopped suddenly.

"To Mistress Nutter?" suggested Potts.

"Don't ask me," exclaimed Nowell, fiercely. "Don't draw any erroneous conclusions, man. I mean nothing—I say nothing!"

"He is certainly bewitched," observed Parson Holden in an under-tone to the attorney.

"It was by your advice I entered this house," thundered Nowell, "and may all the ill arising from it alight upon your head!"

"My respected client!" implored Potts.

"I am no longer your client!" shrieked the infuriated magistrate. "I dismiss you. I will have nought to do with you more. I wish I had never seen your ugly little face!"

"You were quite right, reverend sir," observed Potts aside to the divine; "he is certainly bewitched, or he never would behave in this way to his best friend. My excellent sir," he added to Nowell, "I beseech you to calm yourself, and listen to me. My motive for wishing you to comply with Mistress Nutter's request was this: We were in a dilemma from which there was no escape, my wounded condition preventing me from flight, and all your followers being dispersed. Knowing your discretion, I apprehended that, finding the tables turned against you, you would not desire to play a losing game, and I therefore counselled apparent submission as the best means of disarming your antagonist. Whatever arrangement you have made with Mistress Nutter is neither morally nor legally binding upon you."

"You think not!" cried Nowell. "'May I become subject to the Fiend if I violate my promise!'"

"What promise have you made, sir?" inquired Potts and Holden together.

"Do not question me," cried Nowell; "it is sufficient that I am tied and bound by it."

The attorney reflected a little, and then observed to Holden, "It is evident some unfair practices have been resorted to with our respected friend, to extort a promise from him which he cannot violate. It is also possible, from what he let fall at first, that an attempt may be made to detain us prisoners within this house, and, for aught I know, Master Nowell may have given his word not to go forth without Mistress Nutter's permission. Under these circumstances, I would beg of you, reverend sir, as an especial favour to us both, to ride over to Whalley, and acquaint Sir Ralph Assheton with our situation."

As this suggestion was made, Nowell's countenance brightened up. The expression was not lost upon the attorney, who perceived he was on the right tack.

"Tell the worthy baronet," continued Potts, "that his old and esteemed friend, Master Roger Nowell, is in great jeopardy—am I not right, sir?"

The magistrate nodded.

"Tell him he is forcibly detained a prisoner, and requires sufficient force to effect his immediate liberation. Tell him, also, that Master Nowell charges Mistress Nutter with robbing him of his land by witchcraft."

"No, no!" interrupted Nowell; "do not tell him that. I no longer charge her with it."

"Then, tell him that I do," cried Potts; "and that Master Nowell has strangely, very strangely, altered his mind."

"May I become subject to the Fiend if I violate my promise!" said the magistrate.

"Ay, tell him that," cried the attorney—"tell him the worthy gentleman is constantly repeating that sentence. It will explain all. And now, reverend sir, let me entreat you to set out without delay, or your departure may be prevented."

"I will go at once," said Holden.

As he was about to quit the apartment, Mistress Nutter appeared at the door. Confusion was painted on the countenances of all three.

"Whither go you, sir?" demanded the lady, sharply.

"On a mission which cannot be delayed, madam," replied Holden.

"You cannot quit my house at present," she rejoined, peremptorily. "These gentlemen stay to dine with me, and I cannot dispense with your company."

"My duty calls me hence," returned the divine. "With all thanks for your proffered hospitality, I must perforce decline it."

"Not when I command you to stay," she rejoined, raising her hand; "I am absolute mistress here."

"Not over the servants of heaven, madam," replied the divine, taking a Bible from his pocket, and placing it before him. "By this sacred volume I shield myself against your spells, and command you to let me pass."

And as he went forth, Mistress Nutter, unable to oppose him, shrank back.

The Lancashire Witches Volume III by William Harrison Ainsworth

CHAPTER XI.—MOTHER DEMDIKE.

The heavy rain, which began to fall as Roger Nowell entered Rough Lee, had now ceased, and the sun shone forth again brilliantly, making the garden look so fresh and beautiful that Richard proposed a stroll within it to Alizon. The young girl seemed doubtful at first whether to comply with the invitation; but she finally assented, and they went forth together alone, for Nicholas, fancying they could dispense with his company, only attended them as far as the door, where he remained looking after them, laughing to himself, and wondering how matters would end. "No good will come of it, I fear," mused the worthy squire, shaking his head, "and I am scarcely doing right in allowing Dick to entangle himself in this fashion. But where is the use of giving advice to a young man who is over head and ears in love? He will never listen to it, and will only resent interference. Dick must take his chance. I have already pointed out the danger to him, and if he chooses to run headlong into the pit, why, I cannot hinder him. After all, I am not much surprised. Alizon's beauty is quite irresistible, and, were all smooth and straightforward in her history, there could be no reason why—pshaw! I am as foolish as the lad himself. Sir Richard Assheton, the proudest man in the shire, would disown his son if he married against his inclinations. No, my pretty youthful pair, since nothing but misery awaits you, I advise you to make the most of your brief season of happiness. I should certainly do so were the case my own."

Meanwhile, the objects of these ruminations had reached the terrace overlooking Pendle Water, and were pacing slowly backwards and forwards along it.

"One might be very happy in this sequestered spot, Alizon," observed Richard. "To some persons it might appear dull, but to me, if blessed with you, it would be little short of Paradise."

"Alas! Richard," she replied, forcing a smile, "why conjure up visions of happiness which never can be realised? But even with you I do not think I could be happy here. There is something about the house which, when I first beheld it, filled me with unaccountable terror. Never since I was a mere infant have I been within it till to-day, and yet it was quite familiar to me—horribly familiar. I knew the hall in which we stood together, with its huge arched fireplace, and the armorial bearings upon it, and could point out the stone on which were carved my father's initials 'R.N.,' with the date '1572.' I knew the tapestry on the walls, and the painted glass in the long range windows. I knew the old oak staircase, and the gallery beyond it, and the room to which my mother led me. I knew the portraits painted on the panels, and at once recognised my father. I knew the

great carved oak bedstead in this room, and the high chimney-piece, and the raised hearthstone, and shuddered as I gazed at it. You will ask me how these things could be familiar to me? I will tell you. I had seen them repeatedly in my dreams. They have haunted me for years, but I only to-day knew they had an actual existence, or were in any way connected with my own history. The sight of that house inspired me with a horror I have not been able to overcome; and I have a presentiment that some ill will befall me within it. I would never willingly dwell there."

"The warning voice within you, which should never be despised, prompts you to quit it," cried Richard; "and I also urge you in like manner."

"In vain," sighed Alizon. "This terrace is beautiful," she added, as they resumed their walk, "and I shall often come hither, if I am permitted. At sunset, this river, and the woody heights above it, must be enchanting; and I do not dislike the savage character of the surrounding scenery. It enhances, by contrast, the beauty of this solitude. I only wish the spot commanded a view of Pendle Hill."

"You are like my cousin Nicholas, who thinks no prospect complete unless that hill forms part of it," said Richard; "but since I find that you will often come hither at sunset, I shall not despair of seeing and conversing with you again, even if I am forbidden the house by Mistress Nutter. That thicket is an excellent hiding-place, and this stream is easily crossed."

"We can have no secret interviews, Richard," replied Alizon; "I shall come hither to think of you, but not to meet you. You must never return to Rough Lee again—that is, not unless some change takes place, which I dare not anticipate—but, hark! I am called. I must go back to the house."

"The voice came from the other side of the river," said Richard—"and, hark! it calls again. Who can it be?"

"It is Jennet," replied Alizon; "I see her now."

And she pointed out the little girl standing beside an alder on the opposite bank.

"Yo didna notice me efore, Alizon," cried Jennet in her sharp tone, and with her customary provoking laugh, "boh ey seed yo plain enuff, an heer'd yo too; and ey heer'd Mester Ruchot say he wad hide i' this thicket, an cross the river to meet ye at sunset. Little pigs, they say, ha' lang ears, an mine werena gi'en me fo' nowt."

"They have somewhat misinformed you in this instance," replied Alizon; "but how, in the name of wonder, did you come here?"

"Varry easily," replied Jennet, "boh ey hanna time to tell ye now. Granny Demdike has sent me hither wi' a message to ye and Mistress Nutter. Boh may be ye winna loike Mester Ruchot to hear what ey ha' gotten to tell ye."

"I will leave you," said Richard, about to depart.

"Oh! no, no!" cried Alizon, "she can have nothing to say which you may not hear."

"Shan ey go back to Granny Demdike, an tell her yo're too proud to receive her message?" asked the child.

"On no account," whispered Richard. "Do not let her anger the old hag."

"Speak, Jennet," said Alizon, in a tone of kind persuasion.

"Ey shanna speak onless ye cum ower t' wetur to me," replied the little girl; "an whot ey ha to tell consarns ye mitch."

"I can easily cross," observed Alizon to Richard. "Those stones seem placed on purpose."

Upon this, descending from the terrace to the river's brink, and springing lightly upon the first stone which reared its head above the foaming tide, she bounded to another, and so in an instant was across the stream. Richard saw her ascend the opposite bank, and approach Jennet, who withdrew behind the alder; and then he fancied he perceived an old beldame, partly concealed by the intervening branches of the tree, advance and seize hold of her. Then there was a scream; and the sound had scarcely reached the young man's ears before he was down the bank and across the river, but when he reached the alder, neither Alizon, nor Jennet, nor the old beldame were to be seen.

The terrible conviction that she had been carried off by Mother Demdike then smote him, and though he continued his search for her among the adjoining bushes, it was with fearful misgivings. No answer was returned to his shouts, nor could he discover any trace of the means by which Alizon had been spirited away.

After some time spent in ineffectual search, uncertain what course to pursue, and with a heart full of despair, Richard crossed the river, and proceeded towards the house, in front of which he found Mistress Nutter and Nicholas, both of whom seemed surprised when they perceived he was unaccompanied by Alizon. The lady immediately, and

somewhat sharply, questioned him as to what had become of her adopted daughter, and appeared at first to doubt his answer; but at length, unable to question his sincerity, she became violently agitated.

"The poor girl has been conveyed away by Mother Demdike," she cried, "though for what purpose I am at a loss to conceive. The old hag could not cross the running water, and therefore resorted to that stratagem."

"Alizon must not be left in her hands, madam," said Richard.

"She must not," replied the lady. "If Blackadder, whom I have sent after Parson Holden, were here, I would despatch him instantly to Malkin Tower."

"I will go instead," said Richard.

"You had better accept his offer," interposed Nicholas; "he will serve you as well as Blackadder."

"Go I shall, madam," cried Richard; "if not on your account, on my own."

"Come, then, with me," said the lady, entering the house, "and I will furnish you with that which shall be your safeguard in the enterprise."

With this, she proceeded to the closet where her interview with Roger Nowell had been held; and, unlocking an ebony cabinet, took from a drawer within it a small flat piece of gold, graven with mystic characters, and having a slender chain of the same metal attached to it. Throwing the chain over Richard's neck, she said, "Place this talisman, which is of sovereign virtue, near your heart, and no witchcraft shall have power over you. But be careful that you are not by any artifice deprived of it, for the old hag will soon discover that you possess some charm to protect you against her spells. You are impatient to be gone, but I have not yet done," she continued, taking down a small silver bugle from a hook, and giving it him. "On reaching Malkin Tower, wind this horn thrice, and the old witch will appear at the upper window. Demand admittance in my name, and she will not dare to refuse you; or, if she does, tell her you know the secret entrance to her stronghold, and will have recourse to it. And in case this should be needful, I will now disclose it to you, but you must not use it till other means fail. When opposite the door, which you will find is high up in the building, take ten paces to the left, and if you examine the masonry at the foot of the tower, you will perceive one stone somewhat darker than the rest. At the bottom of this stone, and concealed by a patch of heath, you will discover a knob of iron. Touch it, and it will give you an opening to a vaulted

chamber, whence you can mount to the upper room. Even then you may experience some difficulty, but with resolution you will surmount all obstacles."

"I have no fear of success, madam," replied Richard, confidently.

And quitting her, he proceeded to the stables, and calling for his horse, vaulted into the saddle, and galloped off towards the bridge.

Fast as Richard rode up the steep hill-side, still faster did the black clouds gather over his head. No natural cause could have produced so instantaneous a change in the aspect of the sky, and the young man viewed it with uneasiness, and wished to get out of the thicket in which he was now involved, before the threatened thunder-storm commenced. But the hill was steep and the road bad, being full of loose stones, and crossed in many places by bare roots of trees. Though ordinarily surefooted, Merlin stumbled frequently, and Richard was obliged to slacken his pace. It grew darker and darker, and the storm seemed ready to burst upon him. The smaller birds ceased singing, and screened themselves under the thickest foliage; the pie chattered incessantly; the jay screamed; the bittern flew past, booming heavily in the air; the raven croaked; the heron arose from the river, and speeded off with his long neck stretched out; and the falcon, who had been hovering over him, swept sidelong down and sought shelter beneath an impending rock; the rabbit scudded off to his burrow in the brake; and the hare, erecting himself for a moment, as if to listen to the note of danger, crept timorously off into the long dry grass.

It grew so dark at last that the road was difficult to discern, and the dense rows of trees on either side assumed a fantastic appearance in the deep gloom. Richard was now more than half-way up the hill, and the thicket had become more tangled and intricate, and the road narrower and more rugged. All at once Merlin stopped, quivering in every limb, as if in extremity of terror.

Before the rider, and right in his path, glared a pair of red fiery orbs, with something dusky and obscure linked to them; but whether of man or beast he could not distinguish.

Richard called to it. No answer. He struck spurs into the reeking flanks of his horse. The animal refused to stir. Just then there was a moaning sound in the wood, as of some one in pain. He turned in the direction, shouted, but received no answer. When he looked back the red eyes were gone.

Then Merlin moved forward of his own accord, but ere he had gone far, the eyes were visible again, glaring at the rider from the wood. This time they approached, dilating, and increasing in glowing intensity, till they scorched him like burning-glasses.

Bethinking him of the talisman, Richard drew it forth. The light was instantly extinguished, and the indistinct figure accompanying it melted into darkness.

Once more Merlin resumed his toilsome way, and Richard was marvelling that the storm so long suspended its fury, when the sky was riven by a sudden blaze, and a crackling bolt shot down and struck the earth at his feet. The affrighted steed reared aloft, and was with difficulty prevented from falling backwards upon his rider. Almost before he could be brought to his feet, an awful peal of thunder burst overhead, and it required Richard's utmost efforts to prevent him from rushing madly down the hill.

The storm had now fairly commenced. Flash followed flash, and peal succeeded peal, without intermission. The rain descended hissing and spouting, and presently ran down the hill in a torrent, adding to the horseman's other difficulties and dangers. To heighten the terror of the scene, strange shapes, revealed by the lightning, were seen flitting among the trees, and strange sounds were heard, though overpowered by the dreadful rolling of the thunder.

But Richard's resolution continued unshaken, and he forced Merlin on. He had not proceeded far, however, when the animal uttered a cry of fright, and began beating the air with his fore hoofs. The lightning enabled Richard to discern the cause of this new distress. Coiled round the poor beast's legs, all whose efforts to disengage himself from the terrible assailant were ineffectual, was a large black snake, seemingly about to plunge its poisonous fangs into the flesh. Again having recourse to the talisman, and bending down, Richard stretched it towards the snake, upon which the reptile instantly darted its arrow-shaped head against him, but instead of wounding him, its forked teeth encountered the piece of gold, and, as if stricken a violent blow, it swiftly untwined itself, and fled, hissing, into the thicket.

Richard was now obliged to dismount and lead his horse. In this way he toiled slowly up the hill. The storm continued with unabated fury: the red lightning played around him, the brattling thunder stunned him, and the pelting rain poured down upon his head. But he was no more molested. Save for the vivid flashes, it had become dark as night, but they served to guide him on his way.

At length he got out of the thicket, and trod upon the turf, but it was rendered so slippery by moisture, that he could scarcely keep his feet, while the lightning no longer aided him. Fearing he had taken a wrong course, he stood still, and while debating with himself a blaze of light illumined the wide heath, and showed him the object of his search, Malkin Tower, standing alone, like a beacon, at about a quarter of a mile's distance, on the further side of the hill. Was it disturbed fancy, or did he really behold on

the summit of the structure a grisly shape resembling—if it resembled any thing human—a gigantic black cat, with roughened staring skin, and flaming eyeballs?

Nerved by the sight of the tower, Richard was on his steed's back in an instant, and the animal, having in some degree recovered his spirits, galloped off with him, and kept his feet in spite of the slippery state of the road. Erelong, another flash showed the young man that he was drawing rapidly near the tower, and dismounting, he tied Merlin to a tree, and hurried towards the unhallowed pile. When within twenty paces of it, mindful of Mistress Nutter's injunctions, he placed the bugle to his lips, and winded it thrice. The summons, though clear and loud, sounded strangely in the portentous silence.

Scarcely had the last notes died away, when a light shone through the dark red curtains hanging before a casement in the upper part of the tower. The next moment these were drawn aside, and a face appeared, so frightful, so charged with infernal wickedness and malice, that Richard's blood grew chill at the sight. Was it man or woman? The white beard, and the large, broad, masculine character of the countenance, seemed to denote the former, but the garb was that of a female. The face was at once hideous and fantastic—the eyes set across—the mouth awry—the right cheek marked by a mole shining with black hair, and horrible from its contrast to the rest of the visage, and the brow branded as if by a streak of blood. A black thrum cap constituted the old witch's head-gear, and from beneath it her hoary hair escaped in long elf-locks. The lower part of her person was hidden from view, but she appeared to be as broad-shouldered as a man, and her bulky person was wrapped in a tawny-coloured robe. Throwing open the window, she looked forth, and demanded in harsh imperious tones—

"Who dares to summon Mother Demdike?"

"A messenger from Mistress Nutter," replied Richard. "I am come in her name to demand the restitution of Alizon Device, whom thou hast forcibly and wrongfully taken from her."

"Alizon Device is my grand-daughter, and, as such, belongs to me, and not to Mistress Nutter," rejoined Mother Demdike.

"Thou knowest thou speakest false, foul hag!" cried Richard. "Alizon is no blood of thine. Open the door and cast down the ladder, or I will find other means of entrance."

"Try them, then," rejoined Mother Demdike. And she closed the casement sharply, and drew the curtains over it.

After reconnoitring the building for a moment, Richard moved quickly to the left, and counting ten paces, as directed by Mistress Nutter, began to search among the thick grass growing near the base of the tower for the concealed entrance. It was too dark to distinguish any difference in the colour of the masonry, but he was sure he could not be far wrong, and presently his hand came in contact with a knob of iron. He pressed it, but it did not yield to the touch. Again more forcibly, but with like ill success. Could he be mistaken? He tried the next stone, and discovered another knob upon it, but this was as immovable as the first. He went on, and then found that each stone was alike, and that if amongst the number he had chanced upon the one worked by the secret spring, it had refused to act. On examining the structure so far as he was able to do in the gloom, he found he had described the whole circle of the tower, and was about to commence the search anew, when a creaking sound was heard above, and a light streamed suddenly down upon him. The door had been opened by the old witch, and she stood there with a lamp in her hand, its yellow flame illumining her hideous visage, and short, square, powerfully built frame. Her throat was like that of a bull; her hands of extraordinary size; and her arms, which were bare to the shoulder, brawny and muscular.

"What, still outside?" she cried in a jeering tone, and with a wild discordant laugh. "Methought thou affirmedst thou couldst find a way into my dwelling."

"I do not yet despair of finding it," replied Richard.

"Fool!" screamed the hag. "I tell thee it is in vain to attempt it without my consent. With a word, I could make these walls one solid mass, without window or outlet from base to summit. With a word, I could shower stones upon thy head, and crush thee to dust. With a word, I could make the earth swallow thee up. With a word, I could whisk thee hence to the top of Pendle Hill. Ha! ha! Dost fear me now?"

"No," replied Richard, undauntedly. "And the word thou menaced me with shall never be uttered."

"Why not?" asked Mother Demdike, derisively.

"Because thou wouldst not brave the resentment of one whose power is equal to thine own—if not greater," replied the young man.

"Greater it is not—neither equal," rejoined the old hag, haughtily; "but I do not desire a quarrel with Alice Nutter. Only let her not meddle with me."

"Once more, art thou willing to admit me?" demanded Richard.

"Ay, upon one condition," replied Mother Demdike. "Thou shalt learn it anon. Stand aside while I let down the ladder."

Richard obeyed, and a pair of narrow wooden steps dropped to the ground.

"Now mount, if thou hast the courage," cried the hag.

The young man was instantly beside her, but she stood in the doorway, and barred his further progress with her extended staff. Now that he was face to face with her, he wondered at his own temerity. There was nothing human in her countenance, and infernal light gleamed in her strangely-set eyes. Her personal strength, evidently unimpaired by age, or preserved by magical art, seemed equal to her malice; and she appeared as capable of executing any atrocity, as of conceiving it. She saw the effect produced upon him, and chuckled with malicious satisfaction.

"Saw'st thou ever face like mine?" she cried. "No, I wot not. But I would rather inspire aversion and terror than love. Love!—foh! I would rather see men shrink from me, and shudder at my approach, than smile upon me and court me. I would rather freeze the blood in their veins, than set it boiling with passion. Ho! ho!"

"Thou art a fearful being, indeed!" exclaimed Richard, appalled.

"Fearful, am I?" ejaculated the old witch, with renewed laughter. "At last thou own'st it. Why, ay, I am fearful. It is my wish to be so. I live to plague mankind—to blight and blast them—to scare them with my looks—to work them mischief. Ho! ho! And now, let us look at thee," she continued, holding the lamp over him. "Why, soh?—a comely youth! And the young maids doat upon thee, I doubt not, and praise thy blooming cheeks, thy bright eyes, thy flowing locks, and thy fine limbs. I hate thy beauty, boy, and would mar it!—would canker thy wholesome flesh, dim thy lustrous eyes, and strike thy vigorous limbs with palsy, till they should shake like mine! I am half-minded to do it," she added, raising her staff, and glaring at him with inconceivable malignity.

"Hold!" exclaimed Richard, taking the talisman from his breast, and displaying it to her. "I am armed against thy malice!"

Mother Demdike's staff fell from her grasp.

"I knew thou wert in some way protected," she cried furiously. "And so it is a piece of gold—with magic characters upon it, eh?" she added, suddenly changing her tone; "Let me look at it."

"Thou seest it plain enough," rejoined Richard. "Now, stand aside and let me pass, for thou perceivest I have power to force an entrance."

"I see it—I see it," replied Mother Demdike, with affected humility. "I see it is in vain to struggle with thee, or rather with the potent lady who sent thee. Tarry where thou art, and i will bring Alizon to thee."

"I almost mistrust thee," said Richard—"but be speedy."

"I will be scarce a moment," said the witch; "but I must warn thee that she is—"

"What—what hast thou done to her, thou wicked hag?" cried Richard, in alarm.

"She is distraught," said Mother Demdike.

"Distraught!" echoed Richard.

"But thou canst easily cure her," said the old hag, significantly.

"Ay, so I can," cried Richard with sudden joy—"the talisman! Bring her to me at once."

Mother Demdike departed, leaving him in a state of indescribable agitation. The walls of the tower were of immense thickness, and the entrance to the chamber towards which the arched doorway led was covered by a curtain of old arras, behind which the hag had disappeared. Scarcely had she entered the room when a scream was heard, and Richard heard his own name pronounced by a voice which, in spite of its agonised tones, he at once recognised. The cries were repeated, and he then heard Mother Demdike call out, "Come hither! come hither!"

Instantly rushing forward and dashing aside the tapestry, he found himself in a mysterious-looking circular chamber, with a massive oak table in the midst of it. There were many strange objects in the room, but he saw only Alizon, who was struggling with the old witch, and clinging desperately to the table. He called to her by name as he advanced, but her bewildered looks proved that she did not know him.

"Alizon—dear Alizon! I am come to free you," he exclaimed.

But in place of answering him she uttered a piercing scream.

"The talisman, the talisman?" cried the hag. "I cannot undo my own work. Place the chain round her neck, and the gold near her heart, that she may experience its full virtue."

Richard unsuspectingly complied with the suggestion of the temptress; but the moment he had parted with the piece of gold the figure of Alizon vanished, the chamber was buried in gloom, and, amidst a hubbub of wild laughter, he was dragged by the powerful arm of the witch through the arched doorway, and flung from it to the ground, the shock of the fall producing immediate insensibility.

The Lancashire Witches Volume III by William Harrison Ainsworth

CHAPTER XII.—THE MYSTERIES OF MALKIN TOWER.

It was a subterranean chamber; gloomy, and of vast extent; the roof low, and supported by nine ponderous stone columns, to which rings and rusty chains were attached, still retaining the mouldering bones of those they had held captive in life. Amongst others was a gigantic skeleton, quite entire, with an iron girdle round the middle. Fragments of mortality were elsewhere scattered about, showing the numbers who had perished in the place. On either side were cells closed by massive doors, secured by bolts and locks. At one end were three immense coffers made of oak, hooped with iron, and fastened by large padlocks. Near them stood a large armoury, likewise of oak, and sculptured with the ensigns of Whalley Abbey, proving it had once belonged to that establishment. Probably it had been carried off by some robber band. At the opposite end of the vault were two niches, each occupied by a rough-hewn statue—the one representing a warlike figure, with a visage of extraordinary ferocity, and the other an anchoress, in her hood and wimple, with a rosary in her hand. On the ground beneath lay a plain flag, covering the mortal remains of the wicked pair, and proclaiming them to be Isole de Heton and Blackburn, the freebooter. The pillars were ranged in three lines, so as to form, with the arches above them, a series of short passages, in the midst of which stood an altar, and near it a large caldron. In front, elevated on a block of granite, was a marvellous piece of sculpture, wrought in jet, and representing a demon seated on a throne. The visage was human, but the beard that of a goat, while the feet and lower limbs were like those of the same animal. Two curled horns grew behind the ears, and a third, shaped like a conch, sprang from the centre of the forehead, from which burst a blue flame, throwing a ghastly light on the objects surrounding it.

The only discernible approach to the vault was a steep narrow stone staircase, closed at the top by a heavy trapdoor. Other outlet apparently there was none. Some little air was admitted to this foul abode through flues contrived in the walls, the entrances to which were grated, but the light of day never came there. The flame, however, issuing from the brow of the demon image, like the lamps in the sepulchres of the disciples of the Rosy Cross, was ever-burning. Behind the sable statue was a deep well, with water as black as ink, wherein swarmed snakes, and toads, and other noxious reptiles; and as the lurid light fell upon its surface it glittered like a dusky mirror, unless when broken by the horrible things that lurked beneath, or crawled about upon its slimy brim. But snakes and toads were not the only tenants of the vault. At the head of the steps squatted a monstrous and misshapen animal, bearing some resemblance to a cat, but as big as a tiger. Its skin was black and shaggy; its eyes glowed like those of the hyæna; and its cry

was like that of the same treacherous beast. Among the gloomy colonnades other swart and bestial shapes could be indistinctly seen moving to and fro.

In this abode of horror were two human beings—one, a young maiden of exquisite beauty; and the other, almost a child, and strangely deformed. The elder, overpowered by terror, was clinging to a pillar for support, while the younger, who might naturally be expected to exhibit the greatest alarm, appeared wholly unconcerned, and derided her companion's fears.

"Oh, Jennet!" exclaimed the elder of the two, "is there no means of escape?"

"None whatever," replied the other. "Yo mun stay here till Granny Demdike cums fo ye."

"Oh! that the earth would open and snatch me from these horrors," cried Alizon. "My reason is forsaking me. Would I could kneel and pray for deliverance! But something prevents me."

"Reet!" replied Jennet. "It's os mitch os yer loife's worth to kneel an pray here, onless yo choose to ge an throw yersel at th' feet o' yon black image."

"Kneel to that idol—never!" exclaimed Alizon. And while striving to call upon heaven for aid, a sharp convulsion seized her, and deprived her of the power of utterance.

"Ey towd yo how it wad be," remarked Jennet, who watched her narrowly. "Yo 're neaw i' a church here, an if yo want to warship, it mun be at yon altar. Dunna yo hear how angry the cats are—how they growl an spit? An see how their een gliss'n! They'll tare yo i' pieces, loike so many tigers, if yo offend em."

"Tell me why I am brought here, Jennet?" inquired Alizon, after a brief pause.

"Granny Demdike will tell yo that," replied the little girl; "boh to my belief," she added, with a mocking laugh, "hoo means to may a witch o' ye, loike aw the rest on us."

"She cannot do that without my consent," cried Alizon, "and I would die a thousand deaths rather than yield it."

"That remains to be seen," replied Jennet, tauntingly. "Yo 're obstinate enuff, nah doubt. Boh Granny Demdike is used to deal wi' sich folk."

"Oh! why was I born?" cried Alizon, bitterly.

"Yo may weel ask that," responded Jennet, with a loud unfeeling laugh; "fo ey see neaw great use yo're on, wi' yer protty feace an bright een, onless it be to may one hate ye."

"Is it possible you can say this to me, Jennet?" cried Alizon. "What have I done to incur your hatred? I have ever loved you, and striven to please and serve you. I have always taken your part against others, even when you were in the wrong. Oh! Jennet, you cannot hate me."

"Boh ey do," replied the little girl, spitefully. "Ey hate yo now warser than onny wan else. Ey hate yo because yo are neaw lunger my sister—becose yo 're a grand ledy's dowter, an a grand ledy yersel. Ey hate yo becose yung Ruchot Assheton loves yo—an becose yo ha better luck i' aw things than ey have, or con expect to have. That's why I hate yo, Alizon. When yo are a witch ey shan love yo, for then we shan be equals once more."

"That will never be, Jennet," said Alizon, sadly, but firmly. "Your grandmother may immure me in this dungeon, and scare away my senses; but she will never rob me of my hopes of salvation."

As the words were uttered, a clang like that produced by a stricken gong shook the vault; the beasts roared fiercely; the black waters of the fountain bubbled up, and were lashed into foam by the angry reptiles; and a larger jet of flame than before burst from the brow of the demon statue.

"Ey ha' warned ye, Alizon," said Jennet, alarmed by these demonstrations; "boh since ye pay no heed to owt ey say, ey'st leave yo to yer fate."

"Oh! stay with me, stay with me, Jennet!" shrieked Alizon, "By our past sisterly affection I implore you to remain! You are some protection to me from these dreadful beings."

"Ey dunna want to protect yo onless yo do os yo're bidd'n," replied Jennet! "Whoy should yo be better than me?"

"Ah! why, indeed?" cried Alizon. "Would I had the power to turn your heart—to open your eyes to evil—to save you, Jennet."

These words were followed by another clang, louder and more brattling than the first. The solid walls of the dungeon were shaken, and the heavy columns rocked; while, to Alizon's affrighted gaze, it seemed as if the sable statue arose upon its ebon throne, and stretched out its arm menacingly towards her. The poor girl was saved from further terror by insensibility.

How long she remained in this condition she could not tell, nor did it appear that any efforts were made to restore her; but when she recovered, she found herself stretched upon a rude pallet within an arched recess, the entrance to which was screened by a piece of tapestry. On lifting it aside she perceived she was no longer in the vault, but in an upper chamber, as she judged, and not incorrectly, of the tower. The room was lofty and circular, and the walls of enormous thickness, as shown by the deep embrasures of the windows; in one of which, the outlet having been built up, the pallet was placed. A massive oak table, two or three chairs of antique shape, and a wooden stool, constituted the furniture of the room. The stool was set near the fireplace, and beside it stood a strangely-fashioned spinning-wheel, which had apparently been recently used; but neither the old hag nor her grand-daughter were visible. Alizon could not tell whether it was night or day; but a lamp was burning upon the table, its feeble light only imperfectly illumining the chamber, and scarcely revealing several strange objects dangling from the huge beams that supported the roof. Faded arras were hung against the walls, representing in one compartment the last banquet of Isole de Heton and her lover, Blackburn; in another, the Saxon Ughtred hanging from the summit of Malkin Tower; and in a third, the execution of Abbot Paslew. The subjects were as large as life, admirably depicted, and evidently worked at wondrous looms. As they swayed to and fro in the gusts, that found entrance into the chamber through some unprotected loopholes, the figures had a grim and ghostly air.

Weak, trembling, bewildered, Alizon stepped forth, and staggering towards the table sank upon a chair beside it. A fearful storm was raging without—thunder, lightning, deluging rain. Stunned and blinded, she covered her eyes, and remained thus till the fury of the tempest had in some degree abated. She was roused at length by a creaking sound not far from her, and found it proceeded from a trapdoor rising slowly on its hinges.

A thrum cap first appeared above the level of the floor; then a broad, bloated face, the mouth and chin fringed with a white beard like the whiskers of a cat; then a thick, bull throat; then a pair of brawny shoulders; then a square, thick-set frame; and Mother Demdike stood before her. A malignant smile played upon her hideous countenance, and gleamed from her eyes—those eyes so strangely placed by nature, as if to intimate her doom, and that of her fated race, to whom the horrible blemish was transmitted. As the old witch leaped heavily upon the ground, the trapdoor closed behind her.

"Soh, you are better, Alizon, and have quitted your couch, I find," she cried, striking her staff upon the floor. "But you look faint and feeble still. I will give you something to revive you. I have a wondrous cordial in yon closet—a rare restorative—ha! ha! It will make you well the moment it has passed your lips. I will fetch it at once."

"I will have none of it," replied Alizon; "I would rather die."

"Rather die!" echoed Mother Demdike, sarcastically, "because, forsooth, you are crossed in love. But you shall have the man of your heart yet, if you will only follow my counsel, and do as I bid you. Richard Assheton shall be yours, and with your mother's consent, provided—"

"I understand the condition you annex to the promise," interrupted Alizon, "and the terms upon which you would fulfil it: but you seek in vain to tempt me, old woman. I now comprehend why I am brought hither."

"Ay, indeed!" exclaimed the old witch. "And why is it, then, since you are so quick-witted?"

"You desire to make an offering to the evil being you serve," cried Alizon, with sudden energy. "You have entered into some dark compact, which compels you to deliver up a victim in each year to the Fiend, or your own soul becomes forfeit. Thus you have hitherto lengthened out your wretched life, and you hope to extend the term yet farther through me. I have heard this tale before, but I would not believe it. Now I do. This is why you have stolen me from my mother—have braved her anger—and brought me to this impious tower."

The old hag laughed hoarsely.

"The tale thou hast heard respecting me is true," she said. "I have a compact which requires me to make a proselyte to the power I serve within each year, and if I fail in doing so, I must pay the penalty thou hast mentioned. A like compact exists between Mistress Nutter and the Fiend."

She paused for a moment, to watch the effect of her words on Alizon, and then resumed.

"Thy mother would have sacrificed thee if thou hadst been left with her; but I have carried thee off, because I conceive I am best entitled to thee. Thou wert brought up as my grand-daughter, and therefore I claim thee as my own."

"And you think to deal with me as if I were a puppet in your hands?" cried Alizon.

"Ay, marry, do I," rejoined Mother Demdike, with a scream of laughter, "Thou art nothing more than a puppet—a puppet—ho! ho."

"And you deem you can dispose of my soul without my consent?" said Alizon.

"Thy full consent will be obtained," rejoined the old hag.

"Think it not! think it not!" exclaimed Alizon. "Oh! I shall yet be delivered from this infernal bondage."

At this moment the notes of a bugle were heard.

"Saved! saved!" cried the poor girl, starting. "It is Richard come to my rescue!"

"How know'st thou that?" cried Mother Demdike, with a spiteful look.

"By an instinct that never deceives," replied Alizon, as the blast was again heard.

"This must be stopped," said the hag, waving her staff over the maiden, and transfixing her where she sat; after which she took up the lamp, and strode towards the window.

The few words that passed between her and Richard have been already recounted. Having closed the casement and drawn the curtain before it, Mother Demdike traced a circle on the floor, muttered a spell, and then, waving her staff over Alizon, restored her power of speech and motion.

"'Twas he!" exclaimed the young girl, as soon as she could find utterance. "I heard his voice."

"Why, ay, 'twas he, sure enough," rejoined the beldame. "He has come on a fool's errand, but he shall never return from it. Does Mistress Nutter think I will give up my prize the moment I have obtained it, for the mere asking? Does she imagine she can frighten me as she frightens others? Does she know whom she has to deal with? If not, I will tell her. I am the oldest, the boldest, and the strongest of the witches. No mystery of the black art but is known to me. I can do what mischief I will, and my desolating hand has been felt throughout this district. You may trace it like a pestilence. No one has offended me but I have terribly repaid him. I rule over the land like a queen. I exact tributes, and, if they are not rendered, I smite with a sharper edge than the sword. My worship is paid to the Prince of Darkness. This tower is his temple, and yon subterranean chamber the place where the mystical rites, which thou wouldst call impious and damnable, are performed. Countless sabbaths have I attended within it; or upon Rumbles Moor, or on the summit of Pendle Hill, or within the ruins of Whalley Abbey. Many proselytes have I made; many unbaptised babes offered up in sacrifice. I am high-priestess to the Demon, and thy mother would usurp mine office."

"Oh! spare me this horrible recital!" exclaimed Alizon, vainly trying to shut out the hag's piercing voice.

"I will spare thee nothing," pursued Mother Demdike. "Thy mother, I say, would be high-priestess in my stead. There are degrees among witches, as among other sects, and mine is the first. Mistress Nutter would deprive me of mine office; but not till her hair is as white as mine, her knowledge equal to mine, and her hatred of mankind as intense as mine—not till then shall she have it."

"No more of this, in pity!" cried Alizon.

"Often have I aided thy mother in her dark schemes," pursued the implacable hag; "nay, no later than last night I obliterated the old boundaries of her land, and erected new marks to serve her. It was a strong exercise of power; but the command came to me, and I obeyed it. No other witch could have achieved so much, not even the accursed Chattox, and she is next to myself. And how does thy mother purpose to requite me? By thrusting me aside, and stepping into my throne."

"You must be in error," cried Alizon, scarcely knowing what to say.

"My information never fails me," replied the hag, with a disdainful laugh. "Her plans are made known to me as soon as formed. I have those about her who keep strict watch upon her actions, and report them faithfully. I know why she brought thee so suddenly to Rough Lee, though thou know'st it not."

"She brought me there for safety," remarked the young girl, hoping to allay the beldame's fury, "and because she herself desired to know how the survey of the boundaries would end."

"She brought thee there to sacrifice thee to the Fiend!" cried the hag, infernal rage and malice blazing in her eyes. "She failed in propitiating him at the meeting in the ruined church of Whalley last night, when thou thyself wert present, and deliveredst Dorothy Assheton from the snare in which she was taken. And since then all has gone wrong with her. Having demanded from her familiar the cause why all things ran counter, she was told she had failed in the fulfilment of her promise—that a proselyte was required—and that thou alone wouldst be accepted."

"I!" exclaimed Alizon, horror-stricken.

"Ay, thou!" cried the hag. "No choice was allowed her, and the offering must be made to-night. After a long and painful struggle, thy mother consented."

"Oh! no—impossible! you deceive me," cried the wretched girl.

"I tell thee she consented," rejoined Mother Demdike, coldly; "and on this she made instant arrangements to return home, and in spite—as thou know'st—of Sir Ralph and Lady Assheton's efforts to detain her, set forth with thee."

"All this I know," observed Alizon, sadly—"and intelligence of our departure from the Abbey was conveyed to you, I conclude, by Jennet, to whom I bade adieu."

"Thou art right—it was," returned the hag; "but I have yet more to tell thee, for I will lay the secrets of thy mother's dark breast fully before thee. Her time is wellnigh run. Thou wert made the price of its extension. If she fails in offering thee up to-night, and thou art here in my keeping, the Fiend, her master, will abandon her, and she will be delivered up to the justice of man."

Alizon covered her face with horror.

After awhile she looked up, and exclaimed, with unutterable anguish—

"And I cannot help her!"

The unpitying hag laughed derisively.

"She cannot be utterly lost," continued the young girl. "Were I near her, I would show her that heaven is merciful to the greatest sinner who repents; and teach her how to regain the lost path to salvation."

"Peace!" thundered the witch, shaking her huge hand at her, and stamping her heavy foot upon the ground. "Such words must not be uttered here. They are an offence to me. Thy mother has renounced all hopes of heaven. She has been baptised in the baptism of hell, and branded on the brow by the red finger of its ruler, and cannot be wrested from him. It is too late."

"No, no—it never can be too late!" cried Alizon. "It is not even too late for you."

"Thou know'st not what thou talk'st about, foolish wench," rejoined the hag. "Our master would tear us instantly in pieces if but a thought of penitence, as thou callest it, crossed our minds. We are both doomed to an eternity of torture. But thy mother will go first—ay, first. If she had yielded thee up to-night, another term would have been allowed her; but as I hold thee instead, the benefit of the sacrifice will be mine. But, hist!

what was that? The youth again! Alice Nutter must have given him some potent counter-charm."

"He comes to deliver me," cried Alizon. "Richard!"

And she arose, and would have flown to the window, but Mother Demdike waved her staff over her, and rooted her to the ground.

"Stay there till I require thee," chuckled the hag, moving, with ponderous footsteps, to the door.

After parleying with Richard, as already related, Mother Demdike suddenly returned to Alizon, and, restoring her to sensibility, placed her hideous face close to her, breathing upon her, and uttering these words, "Be thine eyes blinded and thy brain confused, so that thou mayst not know him when thou seest him, but think him another."

The spell took instant effect. Alizon staggered towards the table, Richard was summoned, and on his appearance the scene took place which has already been detailed, and which ended in his losing the talisman, and being ejected from the tower.

Alizon had been rendered invisible by the old witch, and was afterwards dragged into the arched recess by her, where, snatching the piece of gold from the young girl's neck, she exclaimed triumphantly—

"Now I defy thee, Alice Nutter. Thou canst never recover thy child. The offering shall be made to-night, and another year be added to my long term."

Alizon groaned deeply, but, at a gesture from the hag, she became motionless and speechless.

A dusky indistinctly-seen figure hovered near the entrance of the embrasure. Mother Demdike beckoned it to her.

"Convey this girl to the vault, and watch over her," she said. "I will descend anon."

Upon this the shadowy arms enveloped Alizon, the trapdoor flew open, and the figure disappeared with its inanimate burthen.

The Lancashire Witches Volume III by William Harrison Ainsworth

CHAPTER XIII.—THE TWO FAMILIARS.

After seeing Richard depart on his perilous mission to Malkin Tower, Mistress Nutter retired to her own chamber, and held long and anxious self-communion. The course of her thoughts may be gathered from the terrible revelations made by Mother Demdike to Alizon. A prey to the most agonising emotions, it may be questioned if she could have endured greater torment if her heart had been consumed by living fire, as in the punishment assigned to the damned in the fabled halls of Eblis. For the first time remorse assailed her, and she felt compunction for the evil she had committed. The whole of her dark career passed in review before her. The long catalogue of her crimes unfolded itself like a scroll of flame, and at its foot were written in blazing characters the awful words, JUDGMENT AND CONDEMNATION! There was no escape—none! Hell, with its unquenchable fires and unimaginable horrors, yawned to receive her; and she felt, with anguish and self-reproach not to be described, how wretched a bargain she had made, and how dearly the brief gratification of her evil passions had been purchased at the cost of an eternity of woe and torture.

This change of feeling had been produced by her newly-awakened affection for her daughter, long supposed dead, and now restored to her, only to be snatched away again in a manner which added to the sharpness of the loss. She saw herself the sport of a juggling fiend, whose aim was to win over her daughter's soul through her instrumentality, and she resolved, if possible, to defeat his purposes. This, she was aware, could only be accomplished by her own destruction, but even this dread alternative she was prepared to embrace. Alizon's sinless nature and devotion to herself had so wrought upon her, that, though she had at first resisted the better impulses kindled within her bosom, in the end they completely overmastered her.

Was it, she asked herself, too late to repent? Was there no way of breaking her compact? She remembered to have read of a young man who had signed away his own soul, being restored to heaven by the intercession of the great reformer of the church, Martin Luther. But, on the other hand, she had heard of many others, who, on the slightest manifestation of penitence, had been rent in pieces by the Fiend. Still the idea recurred to her. Might not her daughter, armed with perfect purity and holiness, with a soul free from stain as an unspotted mirror; might not she, who had avouched herself ready to risk all for her—for she had overheard her declaration to Richard;—might not she be able to work out her salvation? Would confession of her sins and voluntary submission to earthly justice save her? Alas!—no. She was without hope. She had an inexorable

master to deal with, who would grant her no grace, except upon conditions she would not assent to.

She would have thrown herself on her knees, but they refused to bend. She would have prayed, but the words turned to blasphemies. She would have wept, but the fountains of tears were dry. The witch could never weep.

Then came despair and frenzy, and, like furies, lashed her with whips of scorpions, goading her with the memory of her abominations and idolatries, and her infinite and varied iniquities. They showed her, as in a swiftly-fleeting vision, all who had suffered wrong by her, or whom her malice had afflicted in body or estate. They mocked her with a glimpse of the paradise she had forfeited. She saw her daughter in a beatified state about to enter its golden portals, and would have clung to her robes in the hope of being carried in with her, but she was driven away by an angel with a flaming sword, who cried out, "Thou hast abjured heaven, and heaven rejects thee. Satan's brand is upon thy brow and, unless it be effaced, thou canst never enter here. Down to Tophet, thou witch!" Then she implored her daughter to touch her brow with the tip of her finger; and, as the latter was about to comply, a dark demoniacal shape suddenly rose, and, seizing her by the hair, plunged with her down—down—millions of miles—till she beheld a world of fire appear beneath her, consisting of a multitude of volcanoes, roaring and raging like furnaces, boiling over with red-hot lava, and casting forth huge burning stones. In each of these beds of fire thousands upon thousands of sufferers were writhing, and their groans and lamentations arose in one frightful, incessant wail, too terrible for human hearing.

Over this place of torment the demon held her suspended. She shrieked aloud in her agony, and, shaking off the oppression, rejoiced to find the vision had been caused by her own distempered imagination.

Meanwhile, the storm, which had obstructed Richard as he climbed the hill, had come on, though Mistress Nutter had not noticed it; but now a loud peal of thunder shook the room, and rousing herself she walked to the window. The sight she beheld increased her alarm. Heavy thunder-clouds rested upon the hill-side, and seemed ready to discharge their artillery upon the course which she knew must be taken by the young man.

The chamber in which she stood, it has been said, was large and gloomy, with a wainscoting of dark oak. On one of the panels was painted a picture of herself in her days of youth, innocence, and beauty; and on another, a portrait of her unfortunate husband, who appeared a handsome young man, with a stern countenance, attired in a black velvet doublet and cloak, of the fashion of Elizabeth's day. Between these paintings stood a carved oak bedstead, with a high tester and dark heavy drapery, opposite which

was a wide window, occupying almost the whole length of the room, but darkened by thick bars and glass, crowded with armorial bearings, or otherwise deeply dyed. The high mantelpiece and its carvings have been previously described, as well as the bloody hearthstone, where the tragical incident occurred connected with Alizon's early history.

As Mistress Nutter returned to the fireplace, a plaintive cry arose from it, and starting—for the sound revived terrible memories within her breast—she beheld the ineffaceable stains upon the flag traced out by blue phosphoric fire, while above them hovered the shape of a bleeding infant. Horror-stricken, she averted her gaze, but it encountered another object, equally appalling—her husband's portrait; or rather, it would seem, a phantom in its place; for the eyes, lighted up by infernal fire, glared at her from beneath the frowning and contracted brows, while the hand significantly pointed to the hearthstone, on which the sanguinary stains had now formed themselves into the fatal word "VENGEANCE!"

In a few minutes the fiery characters died away, and the portrait resumed its wonted expression; but ere Mistress Nutter had recovered from her terror the back of the fireplace opened, and a tall swarthy man stepped out from it. As he appeared, a flash of lightning illumined the chamber, and revealed his fiendish countenance. On seeing him, the lady immediately regained her courage, and addressed him in a haughty and commanding tone—

"Why this intrusion? I did not summon thee, and do not require thee."

"You are mistaken, madam," he replied; "you had never more occasion for me than at this moment; and, so far from intruding upon you, I have avoided coming near you, even though enjoined to do so by my lord. He is perfectly aware of the change which has just taken place in your opinions, and the anxiety you now feel to break the contract you have entered into with him, and which he has scrupulously fulfilled on his part; but he wishes you distinctly to understand, that he has no intention of abandoning his claims upon you, but will most assuredly enforce them at the proper time. I need not remind you that your term draws to a close, and ere many months must expire; but means of extending it have been offered you, if you choose to avail yourself of them."

"I have no such intention," replied Mistress Nutter, in a decided tone.

"So be it, madam," replied the other; "but you will not preserve your daughter, who is in the hands of a tried and faithful servant of my lord, and what you hesitate to do that servant will perform, and so reap the benefit of the sacrifice."

"Not so," rejoined Mistress Nutter.

"I say yea," retorted the familiar.

"Thou art my slave, I command thee to bring Alizon hither at once."

The familiar shook his head.

"Thou refusest!" cried Mistress Nutter, menacingly.

"Knows't thou not I have the means of chastising thee?"

"You had, madam," replied the other; "but the moment a thought of penitence crossed your breast, the power you were invested with departed. My lord, however, is willing to give you an hour of grace, when, if you voluntarily renew your oaths to him, he will accept them, and place me at your disposal once more; but if you still continue obstinate—"

"He will abandon me," interrupted Mistress Nutter; "I knew it. Fool that I was to trust one who, from the beginning, has been a deceiver."

"You have a short memory, and but little gratitude, madam and seem entirely to forget the important favour conferred upon you last night. At your solicitation, the boundaries of your property were changed, and large slips of land filched from another, to be given to you. But if you fail in your duty, you cannot expect this to continue. The boundary marks will be set up in their old places, and the land restored to its rightful owner."

"I expected as much," observed Mistress Nutter, disdainfully.

"Thus all our pains will be thrown away," pursued the familiar; "and though you may make light of the labour, it is no easy task to change the face of a whole country—to turn streams from their course, move bogs, transplant trees, and shift houses, all of which has been done, and will now have to be undone, because of your inconstancy. I, myself, have been obliged to act as many parts as a poor player to please you, and now you dismiss me at a moment's notice, as if I had played them indifferently, whereas the most fastidious audience would have been ravished with my performance. This morning I was the reeve of the forest, and as such obliged to assume the shape of a rascally attorney. I felt it a degradation, I assure you. Nor was I better pleased when you compelled me to put on the likeness of old Roger Nowell; for, whatever you may think, I am not so entirely destitute of personal vanity as to prefer either of their figures to my own. However, I showed no disinclination to oblige you. You are strangely unreasonable to-day. Is it my lord's fault if your desire of vengeance expires in its fruition—if, when you

have accomplished an object, you no longer care for it? You ask for revenge—for power. You have them, and cast them aside like childish baubles!"

"Thy lord is an arch deceiver," rejoined Mistress Nutter; "and cannot perform his promises. They are empty delusions—profitless, unsubstantial as shadows. His power prevails not against any thing holy, as I myself have just now experienced. His money turns to withered leaves; his treasures are dust and ashes. Strong only is he in power of mischief, and even his mischief, like curses, recoils on those who use it. His vengeance is no true vengeance, for it troubles the conscience, and engenders remorse; whereas the servant of heaven heaps coals of fire on the head of his adversary by kindness, and satisfies his own heart."

"You should have thought of all this before you vowed yourself to him," said the familiar; "it is too late to reflect now."

"Perchance not," rejoined Mistress Nutter.

"Beware!" thundered the demon, with a terrible gesture; "any overt act of disobedience, and your limbs shall be scattered over this chamber."

"If I do not dare thee to it, it is not because I fear thee," replied Mistress Nutter, in no way dismayed by the threat. "Thou canst not control my tongue. Thou speakest of the services rendered by thy lord, and I repeat they are like his promises, naught. Show me the witch he has enriched. Of what profit is her worship of the false deity—of what avail the sacrifices she makes at his foul altars? It is ever the same spilling of blood, ever the same working of mischief. The wheels Of crime roll on like the car of the Indian idol, crushing all before them. Doth thy master ever help his servants in their need? Doth he not ever abandon them when they are no longer useful, and can win him no more proselytes? Miserable servants—miserable master! Look at the murderous Demdike and the malignant Chattox, and examine the means whereby they have prolonged their baleful career. Enormities of all kinds committed, and all their families devoted to the Fiend—all wizards or witches! Look at them, I say. What profit to them is their long service? Are they rich? Are they in possession of unfading youth and beauty? Are they splendidly lodged? Have they all they desire? No!—the one dwells in a solitary turret, and the other in a wretched hovel; and both are miserable creatures, living only on the dole wrung by threats from terrified peasants, and capable of no gratification but such as results from practices of malice."

"Is that nothing?" asked the familiar. "To them it is every thing. They care neither for splendid mansions, nor wealth, nor youth, nor beauty. If they did, they could have them all. They care only for the dread and mysterious power they possess, to be able to

fascinate with a glance, to transfix by a gesture, to inflict strange ailments by a word, and to kill by a curse. This is the privilege they seek, and this privilege they enjoy."

"And what is the end of it all?" demanded Mistress Nutter, sternly. "Erelong, they will be unable to furnish victims to their insatiate master, who will then abandon them. Their bodies will go to the hangman, and their souls to endless bale!"

The familiar laughed as if a good joke had been repeated to him, and rubbed his hands gleefully.

"Very true," he said; "very true. You have stated the case exactly, madam. Such will certainly be the course of events. But what of that? The old hags will have enjoyed a long term—much longer than might have been anticipated. Mother Demdike, however, as I have intimated, will extend hers, and it is fortunate for her she is enabled to do so, as it would otherwise expire an hour after midnight, and could not be renewed."

"Thou liest!" cried Mistress Nutter—"liest like thy lord, who is the father of lies. My innocent child can never be offered up at his impious shrine. I have no fear for her. Neither he, nor Mother Demdike, nor any of the accursed sisterhood, can harm her. Her goodness will cover her like armour, which no evil can penetrate. Let him wreak his vengeance, if he will, on me. Let him treat me as a slave who has cast off his yoke. Let him abridge the scanty time allotted me, and bear me hence to his burning kingdom; but injure my child, he cannot—shall not!"

"Go to Malkin Tower at midnight, and thou wilt see," replied the familiar, with a mocking laugh.

"I will go there, but it shall be to deliver her," rejoined Mistress Nutter. "And now get thee gone! I need thee no more."

"Be not deceived, proud woman," said the familiar. "Once dismissed, I may not be recalled, while thou wilt be wholly unable to defend thyself against thy enemies."

"I care not," she rejoined; "begone!"

The familiar stepped back, and, stamping upon the hearthstone, it sank like a trapdoor, and he disappeared beneath it, a flash of lightning playing round his dusky figure.

Notwithstanding her vaunted resolution, and the boldness with which she had comported herself before the familiar, Mistress Nutter now completely gave way, and for awhile abandoned herself to despair. Aroused at length by the absolute necessity of

action, she again walked to the window and looked forth. The storm still raged furiously without—so furiously, indeed, that it would be madness to brave it, now that she was deprived of her power, and reduced to the ordinary level of humanity. Its very violence, however, assured her it must soon cease, and she would then set out for Malkin Tower. But what chance had she now in a struggle with the old hag, with all the energies of hell at her command?—what hope was there of her being able to effect her daughter's liberation? No matter, however desperate, the attempt should be made. Meanwhile, it would be necessary so see what was going on below, and ascertain whether Blackadder had returned with Parson Holden. With this view, she descended to the hall, where she found Nicholas Assheton fast asleep in a great arm-chair, and rocked rather than disturbed by the loud concussions of thunder. The squire was, no doubt, overcome by the fatigues of the day, or it might be by the potency of the wine he had swallowed, for an empty flask stood on the table beside him. Mistress Nutter did not awaken him, but proceeded to the chamber where she had left Nowell and Potts prisoners, both of whom rose on her entrance.

"Be seated, gentlemen, I pray you," she said, courteously. "I am come to see if you need any thing; for when this fearful storm abates, I am going forth for a short time."

"Indeed, madam," replied Potts. "For myself I require nothing further; but perhaps another bottle of wine might be agreeable to my honoured and singular good client."

"Speak for yourself, sir," cried Roger Nowell, sharply.

"You shall have it," interposed Mistress Nutter. "I shall be glad of a word with you before I go, Master Nowell. I am sorry this dispute has arisen between us."

"Humph!" exclaimed the magistrate.

"Very sorry," pursued Mistress Nutter; "and I wish to make every reparation in my power."

"Reparation, madam!" cried Nowell. "Give back the land you have stolen from me—restore the boundary lines—sign the deed in Sir Ralph's possession—that is the only reparation you can make."

"I will," replied Mistress Nutter.

"You will!" exclaimed Nowell. "Then the fellow did not deceive us, Master Potts."

"Has any one been with you?" asked the lady, uneasily.

"Ay, the reeve of the forest," replied Nowell. "He told us you would be with us presently, and would make fair offers to us."

"And he told us also why you would make them, madam," added Potts, in an insolent and menacing tone; "he told us you would make a merit of doing what you could not help—that your power had gone from you—that your works of darkness would be destroyed—and that, in a word, you were abandoned by the devil, your master."

"He deceived you," replied Mistress Nutter. "I have made you the offer out of pure goodwill, and you can reject it or not, as you please. All I stipulate, if you do accept it, is, that you pledge me your word not to bring any charge of witchcraft against me."

"Do not give the pledge," whispered a voice in the ear of the magistrate.

"Did you speak?" he said, turning to Potts.

"No, sir," replied the attorney, in a low tone; "but I thought you cautioned me against—"

"Hush!" interrupted Nowell; "it must be the reeve. We cannot comply with your request, madam," he added, aloud.

"Certainly not," said Potts. "We can make no bargain with an avowed witch. We should gain nothing by it; on the contrary, we should be losers, for we have the positive assurance of a gentleman whom we believe to be upon terms of intimacy with a certain black gentleman of your acquaintance, madam, that the latter has given you up entirely, and that law and justice may, therefore, take their course. We protest against our unlawful detention; but we give ourselves small concern about it, as Sir Ralph Assheton, who will be advised of our situation by Parson Holden, will speedily come to our liberation."

"Yes, we are now quite easy on that score, madam," added Nowell; "and to-morrow we shall have the pleasure of escorting you to Lancaster Castle."

"And your trial will come on at the next assizes, about the middle of August," said Potts, "You have only four months to run."

"That is indeed my term," muttered the lady. "I shall not tarry to listen to your taunts," she added, aloud. "You may possibly regret rejecting my proposal."

So saying, she quitted the room.

As she returned to the hall, Nicholas awoke.

"What a devil of a storm!" he exclaimed, stretching himself and rubbing his eyes. "Zounds! that flash of lightning was enough to blind me, and the thunder wellnigh splits one's ears."

"Yet you have slept through louder peals, Nicholas," said Mistress Nutter, coming up to him. "Richard has not returned from his mission, and I must go myself to Malkin Tower. In my absence, I must entrust you with the defence of my house."

"I am willing to undertake it," replied Nicholas, "provided no witchcraft be used."

"Nay, you need not fear that," said the lady, with a forced smile.

"Well, then, leave it to me," said the squire; "but you will not set out till the storm is over?"

"I must," replied Mistress Nutter; "there seems no likelihood of its cessation, and each moment is fraught with peril to Alizon. If aught happens to me, Nicholas—if I should—whatever mischance may befall me—promise me you will stand by her."

The squire gave the required promise.

"Enough, I hold you to your word," said Mistress Nutter. "Take this parchment. It is a deed of gift, assigning this mansion and all my estates to her. Under certain circumstances you will produce it."

"What circumstances? I am at a loss to understand you, madam," said the squire.

"Do not question me further, but take especial care of the deed, and produce it, as I have said, at the fitting moment. You will know when that arrives. Ha! I am wanted."

The latter exclamation had been occasioned by the appearance of an old woman at the further end of the hall, beckoning to her. On seeing her, Mistress Nutter immediately quitted the squire, and followed her into a small chamber opening from this part of the hall, and into which she retreated.

"What brings you here, Mother Chattox?" exclaimed the lady, closing the door.

"Can you not guess?" replied the hag. "I am come to help you, not for any love I bear you, but to avenge myself on old Demdike. Do not interrupt me. My familiar, Fancy, has told me all. I know how you are circumstanced. I know Alizon is in old Demdike's clutches, and you are unable to extricate her. But I can, and will; because if the hateful old hag fails in offering up her sacrifice before the first hour of day, her term will be out, and I shall be rid of her, and reign in her stead. To-morrow she will be on her way to Lancaster Castle. Ha! ha! The dungeon is prepared for her—the stake driven into the ground—the fagots heaped around it. The torch has only to be lighted. Ho! Ho!"

The Ride Through the Murky Air.

"Shall we go to Malkin Tower?" asked Mistress Nutter, shuddering.

"No; to the summit of Pendle Hill," rejoined Mother Chattox; "for there the girl will be taken, and there only can we secure her. But first we must proceed to my hut, and make some preparations. I have three scalps and eight teeth, taken from a grave in Goldshaw churchyard this very day. We can make a charm with them."

"You must prepare it alone," said Mistress Nutter; "I can have nought to do with it."

"True—true—I had forgotten," cried the hag, with a chuckling laugh—"you are no longer one of us. Well, then, I will do it alone. But come with me. You will not object to mount upon my broomstick. It is the only safe conveyance in this storm of the devil's raising. Come—away!"

And she threw open the window and sprang forth, followed by Mistress Nutter.

Through the murky air, and borne as if on the wings of the wind, two dark forms are flying swiftly. Over the tops of the tempest-shaken trees they go, and as they gain the skirts of the thicket an oak beneath is shivered by a thunderbolt. They hear the fearful crash, and see the splinters fly far and wide; and the foremost of the two, who, with her skinny arm extended, seems to direct their course, utters a wild scream of laughter, while a raven, speeding on broad black wing before them, croaks hoarsely. Now the torrent rages below, and they see its white waters tumbling over a ledge of rock; now they pass over the brow of a hill; now skim over a dreary waste and dangerous morass. Fearful it is to behold those two flying figures, as the lightning shows them, bestriding their fantastical steed; the one an old hag with hideous lineaments and distorted person, and the other a proud dame, still beautiful, though no longer young, pale as death, and her loose jetty hair streaming like a meteor in the breeze.

The ride is over, and they alight near the door of a solitary hovel. The raven has preceded them, and, perched on the chimney top, flies down it as they enter, and greets them with hoarse croaking. The inside of the hut corresponds with its miserable exterior, consisting only of two rooms, in one of which is a wretched pallet; in the other are a couple of large chests, a crazy table, a bench, a three-legged stool, and a spinning-wheel. A caldron is suspended above a peat fire, smouldering on the hearth. There is only one window, and a thick curtain is drawn across it, to secure the inmate of the hut from prying eyes.

Mother Chattox closes and bars the door, and, motioning Mistress Nutter to seat herself upon the stool, kneels down near the hearth, and blows the turf into a flame, the raven helping her, by flapping his big black wings, and uttering a variety of strange sounds, as the sparks fly about. Heaping on more turf, and shifting the caldron, so that it may receive the full influence of the flame, the hag proceeds to one of the chests, and takes out sundry small matters, which she places one by one with great care on the table. The raven has now fixed his great talons on her shoulder, and chuckles and croaks in her ear as she pursues her occupation. Suddenly a piece of bone attracts his attention, and darting out his beak, he seizes it, and hops away.

"Give me that scalp, thou mischievous imp!" cries the hag, "I need it for the charm I am about to prepare. Give it me, I say!"

But the raven still held it fast, and hopped here and there so nimbly that she was unable to catch him. At length, when he had exhausted her patience, he alighted on Mistress Nutter's shoulder, and dropped it into her lap. Engrossed by her own painful thoughts, the lady had paid no attention to what was passing, and she shuddered as she took up the fragment of mortality, and placed it upon the table. A few tufts of hair, the texture of which showed they had belonged to a female, still adhered to the scalp. Mistress Nutter regarded it fixedly, and with an interest for which she could not account.

After sharply chiding the raven, Mother Chattox put forth her hand to grasp the prize she had been robbed of, when Mistress Nutter checked her by observing, "You said you got this scalp from Goldshaw churchyard. Know you ought concerning it?"

"Ay, a good deal," replied the old woman, chuckling. "It comes from a grave near the yew-tree, and not far from Abbot Cliderhow's cross. Old Zachariah Worms, the sexton, dug it up for me. That yellow skull had once a fair face attached to it, and those few dull tufts were once bright flowing tresses. She who owned them died young; but, young as she was, she survived all her beauty. Hollow cheeks and hollow eyes, wasted flesh, and cruel cough, were hers—and she pined and pined away. Folks said she was

forespoken, and that I had done it. I, forsooth! She had never done me harm. You know whether I was rightly accused, madam."

"Take it away," cried Mistress Nutter, hurriedly, and as if struggling against some overmastering feeling. "I cannot bear to look at it. I wanted not this horrible reminder of my crimes."

"This was the reason, then, why Ralph stole the scalp from me," muttered the hag, as she threw it, together with some other matters, into the caldron. "He wanted to show you his sagacity. I might have guessed as much."

"I will go into the other room while you make your preparations," said Mistress Nutter, rising; "the sight of them disturbs me. You can summon me when you are ready."

"I will, madam," replied the old hag, "and you must control your impatience, for the spell requires time for its confection."

Mistress Nutter made no reply, but, walking into the inner room, closed the door, and threw herself upon the pallet. Here, despite her anxiety, sleep stole upon her, and though her dreams were troubled, she did not awake till Mother Chattox stood beside her.

"Have I slept long?" she inquired.

"More than three hours," replied the hag.

"Three hours!" exclaimed Mistress Nutter. "Why did you not wake me before? You would have saved me from terrible dreams. We are not too late?"

"No, no," replied Mother Chattox; "there is plenty of time. Come into the other room. All is ready."

As Mistress Nutter followed the old hag into the adjoining room, a strong odour, arising from a chafing-dish, in which herbs, roots, and other ingredients were burning, assailed her, and, versed in all weird ceremonials, she knew that a powerful suffumigation had been made, though with what intent she had yet to learn. The scanty furniture had been cleared away, and a circle was described on the clay floor by skulls and bones, alternated by dried toads, adders, and other reptiles. In the midst of this magical circle, the caldron, which had been brought from the chimney, was placed, and, the lid being removed, a thick vapour arose from it. Mistress Nutter looked around for the raven, but

the bird was nowhere to be seen, nor did any other living thing appear to be present beside themselves.

Taking the lady's hand, Mother Chattox drew her into the circle, and began to mutter a spell; after which, still maintaining her hold of her companion, she bade her look into the caldron, and declare what she saw.

"I see nothing," replied the lady, after she had gazed upon the bubbling waters for a few moments. "Ah! yes—I discern certain figures, but they are confused by the steam, and broken by the agitation of the water."

"Caldron—cease boiling! and smoke—disperse!" cried Mother Chattox, stamping her foot. "Now, can you see more plainly?"

"I can," replied Mistress Nutter; "I behold the subterranean chamber beneath Malkin Tower, with its nine ponderous columns, its altar in the midst of them, its demon image, and the well with waters black as Lethe beside it."

"The water within the caldron came from that well," said Mother Chattox, with a chuckling laugh; "my familiar risked his liberty to bring it, but he succeeded. Ha! ha! My precious Fancy, thou art the best of servants, and shalt have my best blood to reward thee to-morrow—thou shalt, my sweetheart, my chuck, my dandyprat. But hie thee back to Malkin Tower, and contrive that this lady may hear, as well as see, all that passes. Away!"

Mistress Nutter concluded that the injunction would be obeyed; but, as the familiar was invisible to her, she could not detect his departure.

"Do you see no one within the dungeon?" inquired Mother Chattox.

"Ah! yes," exclaimed the lady; "I have at last discovered Alizon. She was behind one of the pillars. A little girl is with her. It is Jennet Device, and, from the spiteful looks of the latter, I judge she is mocking her. Oh! what malice lurks in the breast of that hateful child! She is a true descendant of Mother Demdike. But Alizon—sweet, patient Alizon—she seems to bear all her taunts with a meekness and resignation enough to move the hardest heart. I would weep for her if I could. And now Jennet shakes her hand at her, and leaves her. She is alone. What will she do now? Has she no thoughts of escape? Oh, yes! She looks about her distractedly—runs round the vault—tries the door of every cell: they are all bolted and barred—there is no outlet—none!"

"What next?" inquired the hag.

"She shrieks aloud," rejoined Mistress Nutter, "and the cry thrills through every fibre in my frame. She calls upon me for aid—upon me, her mother, and little thinks I hear her, and am unable to help her. Oh! it is horrible. Take me to her, good Chattox—take me to her, I implore you!"

"Impossible!" replied the hag: "you must await the fitting time. If you cannot control yourself, I shall remove the caldron."

"Oh! no, no," cried the distracted lady. "I will be calm. Ah! what is this I see?" she added, belying her former words by sudden vehemence, while rage and astonishment were depicted upon her countenance. "What infernal delusion is practised upon my child! This is monstrous—intolerable. Oh! that I could undeceive her—could warn her of the snare!"

"What is the nature of the delusion?" asked Mother Chattox, with some curiosity. "I am so blind I cannot see the figures on the water."

"It is an evil spirit in my likeness," replied Mistress Nutter.

"In your likeness!" exclaimed the hag. "A cunning device—and worthy of old Demdike—ho! ho!"

"I can scarce bear to look on," cried Mistress Nutter; "but I must, though it tears my heart in pieces to witness such cruelty. The poor girl has rushed to her false parent—has thrown her arms around her, and is weeping on her shoulder. Oh! it is a maddening sight. But it is nothing to what follows. The temptress, with the subtlety of the old serpent, is pouring lies into her ear, telling her they both are captives, and both will perish unless she consents to purchase their deliverance at the price of her soul, and she offers her a bond to sign—such a bond as, alas! thou and I, Chattox, have signed. But Alizon rejects it with horror, and gazes at her false mother as if she suspected the delusion. But the temptress is not to be beaten thus. She renews her entreaties, casts herself on the ground, and clasps my child's knees in humblest supplication. Oh! that Alizon would place her foot upon her neck and crush her. But it is not so the good act. She raises her, and tells her she will willingly die for her; but her soul was given to her by her Creator, and must be returned to him. Oh! that I had thought of this."

"And what answer makes the spirit?" asked the witch.

"It laughs derisively," replied Mistress Nutter; "and proceeds to use all those sophistical arguments, which we have so often heard, to pervert her mind, and overthrow her

principles. But Alizon is proof against them all. Religion and virtue support her, and make her more than a match for her opponent. Equally vain are the spirit's attempts to seduce her by the offer of a life of sinful enjoyment. She rejects it with angry scorn. Failing in argument and entreaty, the spirit now endeavours to work upon her fears, and paints, in appalling colours, the tortures she will have to endure, contrasting them with the delight she is voluntarily abandoning, with the lover she might espouse, with the high worldly position she might fill. 'What are worldly joys and honours compared with those of heaven!' exclaims Alizon; 'I would not exchange them.' The spirit then, in a vision, shows her her lover, Richard, and asks her if she can resist his entreaties. The trial is very sore, as she gazes on that beloved form, seeming, by its passionate gestures, to implore her to assent, but she is firm, and the vision disappears. The ordeal is now over. Alizon has triumphed over all their arts. The spirit in my likeness resumes its fiendish shape, and, with a dreadful menace against the poor girl, vanishes from her sight."

"Mother Demdike has not done with her yet," observed Chattox.

"You are right," replied Mistress Nutter. "The old hag descends the staircase leading to the vault, and approaches the miserable captive. With her there are no supplications—no arguments; but commands and terrible threats. She is as unsuccessful as her envoy. Alizon has gained courage and defies her."

"Ha! does she so?" exclaimed Mother Chattox. "I am glad of it."

"The solid floor resounds with the stamping of the enraged witch," pursued Mistress Nutter. "She tells Alizon she will take her to Pendle Hill at midnight, and there offer her up as a sacrifice to the Fiend. My child replies that she trusts for her deliverance to Heaven—that her body may be destroyed—that her soul cannot be harmed. Scarcely are the words uttered than a terrible clangour is heard. The walls of the dungeon seem breaking down, and the ponderous columns reel. The demon statue rises on its throne, and a stream of flame issues from its brow. The doors of the cells burst open, and with the clanking of chains, and other dismal noises, skeleton shapes stalk forth, from them, each with a pale blue light above its head. Monstrous beasts, like tiger-cats, with rough black skins and flaming eyes, are moving about, and looking as if they would spring upon the captive. Two gravestones are now pushed aside, and from the cold earth arise the forms of Blackburn, the robber, and his paramour, the dissolute Isole de Heton. She joins the grisly throng now approaching the distracted girl, who falls insensible to the ground."

"Can you see aught more?" asked the hag, as Mistress Nutter still bent eagerly over the caldron.

"No; the whole chamber is buried in darkness," replied the lady; "I can see nothing of my poor child. What will become of her?"

"I will question Fancy," replied the hag, throwing some fresh ingredients into the chafing-dish; and, as the smoke arose, she vociferated, "Come hither, Fancy; I want thee, my fondling, my sweet. Come quickly! ha! thou art here."

The familiar was still invisible to Mistress Nutter, but a slight sound made her aware of his presence.

"And now, my sweet Fancy," pursued the hag, "tell us, if thou canst, what will be done with Alizon, and what course we must pursue to free her from old Demdike?"

"At present she is in a state of insensibility," replied a harsh voice, "and she will be kept in that condition till she is conveyed to the summit of Pendle Hill. I have already told you it is useless to attempt to take her from Malkin Tower. It is too well guarded. Your only chance will be to interrupt the sacrifice."

"But how, my sweet Fancy? how, my little darling?" inquired the hag.

"It is a perplexing question," replied the voice; "for, by showing you how to obtain possession of the girl, I disobey my lord."

"Ay, but you serve me—you please me, my pretty Fancy," cried the hag. "You shall quaff your fill of blood on the morrow, if you do this for me. I want to get rid of my old enemy—to catch her in her own toils—to send her to a dungeon—to burn her—ha! ha! You must help me, my little sweetheart."

"I will do all I can," replied the voice; "but Mother Demdike is cunning and powerful, and high in favour with my lord. You must have mortal aid as well as mine. The officers of justice must be there to seize her at the moment when the victim is snatched from her, or she will baffle all your schemes."

"And how shall we accomplish this?" asked Mother Chattox.

"I will tell you," said Mistress Nutter to the hag. "Let him put on the form of Richard Assheton, and in that guise hasten to Rough Lee, where he will find the young man's cousin, Nicholas, to whom he must make known the dreadful deed about to be enacted on Pendle Hill. Nicholas will at once engage to interrupt it. He can arm himself with the

weapons of justice by taking with him Roger Nowell, the magistrate, and his myrmidon, Potts, the attorney, both of whom are detained prisoners in the house by my orders."

"The scheme promises well, and shall be adopted," replied the hag; "but suppose Richard himself should appear first on the scene. Dost know where he is, my sweet Fancy?"

"When I last saw him," replied the voice, "he was lying senseless on the ground, at the foot of Malkin Tower, having been precipitated from the doorway by Mother Demdike. You need apprehend no interference from him."

"It is well," replied Mother Chattox. "Then take his form, my pet, though it is not half as handsome as thy own."

"A black skin and goat-like limbs are to thy taste, I know," replied the familiar, with a laugh.

"Let me look upon him before he goes, that I may be sure the likeness is exact," said Mistress Nutter.

"Thou hearest, Fancy! Become visible to her," cried the hag.

And as she spoke, a figure in all respects resembling Richard stood before them.

"What think you of him? Will he do?" said Mother Chattox.

"Ay," replied the lady; "and now send him off at once. There is no time to lose."

"I shall be there in the twinkling of an eye," said the familiar; "but I own I like not the task."

"There is no help for it, my sweet Fancy," cried the hag. "I cannot forego my triumph over old Demdike. Now, away with thee, and when thou hast executed thy mission, return and tell us how thou hast sped in the matter."

The familiar promised obedience to her commands, and disappeared.

The Lancashire Witches Volume III by William Harrison Ainsworth

CHAPTER XIV.—HOW ROUGH LEE WAS AGAIN BESIEGED.

Parson Holden, it will be remembered, left Rough Lee, charged by Potts with a message to Sir Ralph Assheton, informing him of his detention and that of Roger Nowell, by Mistress Nutter, and imploring him to come to their assistance without delay. Congratulating himself on his escape, but apprehensive of pursuit, the worthy rector, who, as a keen huntsman, was extremely well mounted, made the best of his way, and had already passed the gloomy gorge through which Pendle Water swept, had climbed the hill beyond it, and was crossing the moor now alone lying between him and Goldshaw, when he heard a shout behind him, and, turning at the sound, beheld Blackadder and another mounted serving-man issuing from a thicket, and spurring furiously after him. Relying upon the speed of his horse, he disregarded their cries, and accelerated his pace; but, in spite of this, his pursuers gained upon him rapidly.

While debating the question of resistance or surrender, the rector descried Bess Whitaker coming towards him from the opposite direction—a circumstance that greatly rejoiced him; for, aware of her strength and courage, he felt sure he could place as much dependence upon her in this emergency as on any man in the county. Bess was riding a stout, rough-looking nag, apparently well able to sustain her weight, and carried the redoubtable horsewhip with her.

On the other hand, Holden had been recognised by Bess, who came up just as he was overtaken and seized by his assailants, one of whom caught hold of his cassock, and tore it from his back, while the other, seizing hold of his bridle, endeavoured, in spite of his efforts to the contrary, to turn his horse round. Many oaths, threats, and blows were exchanged during the scuffle, which no doubt would have terminated in the rector's defeat, and his compulsory return to Rough Lee, had it not been for the opportune arrival of Bess, who, swearing as lustily as the serving-men, and brandishing the horsewhip, dashed into the scene of action, and, with a few well-applied cuts, liberated the divine. Enraged at her interference, and smarting from the application of the whip, Blackadder drew a petronel from his girdle, and levelled it at her head; but, ere he could discharge it, the weapon was stricken from his grasp, and a second blow on the head from the but-end of the whip felled him from his horse. Seeing the fate of his companion, the other serving-man fled, leaving Bess mistress of the field.

The rector thanked her heartily for the service she had rendered him, and complimented her on her prowess.

"Ey'n neaw dun mitch to boast on i' leatherin' them two seawr-feaced rapscallions," said Bess, with becoming modesty. "Simon Blackadder an ey ha' had mony a tussle together efore this, fo he's a feaw tempert felly, an canna drink abowt fightin', boh he has awlus found me more nor his match. Boh save us, your reverence, what were the ill-favort gullions ridin' after ye for? Firrups tak 'em! they didna mean to rob ye, surely?"

"Their object was to make me prisoner, and carry me back to Rough Lee, Bess," replied Holden. "They wished to prevent my going to Whalley, whither I am bound, to procure help from Sir Ralph Assheton to liberate Master Roger Nowell and his attorney, who are forcibly detained by Mistress Nutter."

"Yo may spare yer horse an yersel the jorney, then, reverend sir," replied Bess; "for yo'n foind Sir Tummus Metcawfe, wi' some twanty or throtty followers, armed wi' bills, hawberts, petronels, and calivers, at Goldshaw, an they win go wi' ye at wanst, ey'm sartin. Ey heerd sum o' t' chaps say os ow Sir Tummus is goin' to tak' possession o' Mistress Robinson's house, Raydale Ha', i' Wensley Dale, boh nah doubt he'n go furst wi' yer rev'rence, 'specially as he bears Mistress Nutter a grudge."

"At all events, I will ask him," said Holden. "Are he and his followers lodged at your house, Bess?"

"Yeigh," replied the hostess, "some on 'en are i' th' house, some i' th' barn, an some i' th' stables. The place is awtogether owerrun wi' 'em. Ey wur so moydert an wurrotit wi' their ca'in an bawlin fo' ele an drink, that ey swore they shouldna ha' another drawp wi' my consent; an, to be os good os my word, ey clapt key o' t' cellar i' my pocket, an leavin' our Margit to answer 'em, ey set out os yo see, intendin' to go os far as t' mill, an comfort poor deeavely Ruchot Baldwyn in his trouble."

"A most praiseworthy resolution, Bess," said the rector; "but what is to be done with this fellow?" he added, pointing to Blackadder, who, though badly hurt, was trying to creep towards the petronel, which was lying at a little distance from him on the ground.

Perceiving his intention, Bess quickly dismounted, and possessing herself of the weapon, stepped aside, and slipping off one of the bands that confined the hose on her well-shaped leg, grasped the wounded man by the shoulders, and with great expedition tied his hands behind his back. She then lifted him up with as much ease as if he had been an infant, and set him upon his horse, with his face towards the tail. This done, she gave the bridle to the rector, and handing him the petronel at the same time, told him to take care of his prisoner, for she must pursue her journey. And with this, in spite of his renewed entreaties that she would go back with him, she sprang on her horse and rode off.

On arriving at Goldshaw with his prisoner, the rector at once proceeded to the hostel, in front of which he found several of the villagers assembled, attracted by the numerous company within doors, whose shouts and laughter could be heard at a considerable distance. Holden's appearance with Blackadder occasioned considerable surprise, and all eagerly gathered round him to learn what had occurred; but, without satisfying their curiosity, beyond telling them he had been attacked by the prisoner, he left him in their custody and entered the house, where he found all the benches in the principal room occupied by a crew of half-drunken roysterers, with flagons of ale before them; for, after Bess's departure with the key, they had broken into the cellar, and, broaching a cask, helped themselves to its contents. Various weapons were scattered about the tables or reared against the walls, and the whole scene looked like a carouse by a band of marauders. Little respect was shown the rector, and he was saluted by many a ribald jest as he pushed his way towards the inner room.

Sir Thomas was drinking with a couple of desperadoes, whose long rapiers and tarnished military equipments seemed to announce that they had, at some time or other, belonged to the army, though their ruffianly looks and braggadocio air and discourse, strongly seasoned with oaths and slang, made it evident that they were now little better than Alsatian bullies. They had, in fact, been hired by Sir Thomas for the expedition on which he was bent, as he could find no one in the country upon whom he could so well count as on them. Eyeing the rector fiercely, as he intruded upon their privacy, they glanced at their leader to ask whether they should turn him out; but, receiving no encouragement for such rudeness, they contented themselves with scowling at him from beneath their bent brows, twisting up their shaggy mustaches, and trifling with the hilts of their rapiers. Holden opened his business at once; and as soon as Sir Thomas heard it, he sprang to his feet, and, swearing a great oath, declared he would storm Rough Lee, and burn it to the ground, if Mistress Nutter did not set the two captives free.

"As to the audacious witch herself, I will carry her off, in spite of the devil, her master!" he cried. "How say you, Captain Gauntlet—and you too, Captain Storks, is not this an expedition to your tastes—ha?"

The two worthies appealed to responded joyously, that it was so; and it was then agreed that Blackadder should be brought in and interrogated, as some important information might be obtained from him. Upon this, Captain Gauntlet left the room to fetch him, and presently afterwards returned dragging in the prisoner, who looked dogged and angry, by the shoulders.

"Harkye, fellow," said Sir Thomas, sternly, "if you do not answer the questions I shall put to you, truly and satisfactorily, I will have you taken out into the yard, and shot like a

dog. Thus much premised, I shall proceed with my examination. Master Roger Nowell and Master Thomas Potts, you are aware, are unlawfully detained prisoners by Mistress Alice Nutter. Now I have been called upon by the reverend gentleman here to undertake their liberation, but, before doing so, I desire to know from you what defensive and offensive preparations your mistress has made, and whether you judge it likely she will attempt to hold out her house against us?"

"Most assuredly she will," replied Blackadder, "and against twice your force. Rough Lee is as strong as a castle; and as those within it are well-armed, vigilant, and of good courage, there is little fear of its capture. If your worship should propose terms to my mistress for the release of her prisoners, she may possibly assent to them; but if you approach her in hostile fashion, and demand their liberation, I am well assured she will resist you, and well assured, also, she will resist you effectually."

"I shall approach her in no other sort than that of an enemy," rejoined Sir Thomas; "but thou art over confident, knave. Unless thy mistress have a legion of devils at her back, and they hold us in check, we will force a way into her dwelling. Fire and fury! dost presume to laugh at me, fellow? Take him hence, and let him be soundly cudgeled for his insolence, Gauntlet."

"Pardon me, your worship," cried Blackadder, "I only smiled at the strange notions you entertain of my mistress."

"Why, dost mean to deny that she is a witch?" demanded Metcalfe.

"Nay, if your worship will have it so, it is not for me to contradict you," replied Blackadder.

"But I ask thee is she not a servant of Satan?—dost thou not know it?—canst thou not prove it?" cried the knight. "Shall we put him to the torture to make him confess?"

"Ay, tie his thumbs together till the blood burst forth, Sir Thomas," said Gauntlet.

"Or hang him up to yon beam by the heels," suggested Captain Storks.

"On no account," interposed Holden. "I did not bring him hither to be dealt with in this way, and I will not permit it. If torture is to be administered it must be by the hands of justice, into which I require him to be delivered; and then, if he can testify aught against his mistress, he will be made to do it."

"Torture shall never wring a word from me, whether wrongfully or rightfully applied," said Blackadder, doggedly; "though I could tell much if I chose. Now give heed to me, Sir Thomas. You will never take Rough Lee, still less its mistress, without my help."

"What are thy terms, knave?" exclaimed the knight, pondering upon the offer. "And take heed thou triflest not with me, or I will have thee flogged within an inch of thy life, in spite of parson or justice. What are thy terms, I repeat?"

"They are for your worship's ear alone," replied Blackadder.

"Beware what you do, Sir Thomas," interposed Holden. "I hold it my duty to tell you, you are compromising justice in listening to the base proposals of this man, who, while offering to betray his mistress, will assuredly deceive you. You will equally deceive him in feigning to agree to terms which you cannot fulfil."

"Cannot fulfil!" ejaculated the knight, highly offended; "I would have you to know, sir, that Sir Thomas Metcalfe's word is his bond, and that whatsoever he promises he will fulfil in spite of the devil! Body o' me! but for the respect I owe your cloth, I would give you a very different answer, reverend sir. But since you have chosen to thrust yourself unasked into the affair, I take leave to say that I will hear this knave's proposals, and judge for myself of the expediency of acceding to them. I must pray you therefore, to withdraw. Nay, if you will not go hence peaceably, you shall perforce. Take him away, gentlemen."

Thus enjoined, the Alsatian captains took each an arm of the rector, and forced him out of the room, leaving Sir Thomas alone with the prisoner. Greatly incensed at the treatment he had experienced, Holden instantly quitted the house, hastened to the rectory, which adjoined the church, and having given some messages to his household, rode off to Whalley, with the intention of acquainting Sir Ralph Assheton with all that had occurred.

Sir Thomas Metcalfe remained closeted with the prisoner for a few minutes, and then coming forth, issued orders that all should get ready to start for Rough Lee without delay; whereupon each man emptied his flagon, pocketed the dice he had been coggling, pushed aside the shuffle-board, left the loggats on the clay floor of the barn, and, grasping his weapon—halbort or caliver, as it might be—prepared to attend his leader. Sir Thomas did not relate, even to the Alsatian captains, what had passed between him and Blackadder; but it did not appear that he placed entire confidence in the latter; for though he caused his hands to be unbound, and allowed him in consideration of his wounded state to ride, he secretly directed Gauntlet and Storks to keep near him, and shoot him through the head if he attempted to escape. Both these personages were

provided with horses as well as their leader, but all the rest of the party were on foot. Metcalfe made some inquiries after the rector, but finding he was gone, he did not concern himself further about him. Before starting, the knight, who, with all his recklessness, had a certain sense of honesty, called the girl who had been left in charge of the hostel by Bess, and gave her a sum amply sufficient to cover all the excesses of his men, adding a handsome gratuity to herself.

The first part of the journey was accomplished without mischance, and the party bade fair to arrive at the end of it in safety; but as they entered the gorge, at the extremity of which Rough Lee was situated, a terrific storm burst upon them, compelling them to seek shelter in the mill, from which they were luckily not far distant at the time. The house was completely deserted, but they were well able to shift for themselves, and not over scrupulous in the manner of doing so; and as the remains of the funeral feast were not removed from the table, some of the company sat down to them, while others found their way to the cellar.

The storm was of long continuance, much longer than was agreeable to Sir Thomas, and he paced the room to and fro impatiently, ever and anon walking to the window or door, to see whether it had in any degree abated, and was constantly doomed to disappointment. Instead of diminishing, it increased in violence, and it was now impossible to quit the house with safety. The lightning blazed, the thunder rattled among the overhanging rocks, and the swollen stream of Pendle Water roared at their feet. Blackadder was left under the care of the two Alsatians, but while they had shielded their eyes from the glare of the lightning, he threw open the window, and, springing through it, made good his retreat. In such a storm it was in vain to follow him, even if they had dared to attempt it.

In vain Sir Thomas Metcalfe fumed and fretted—in vain he heaped curses upon the bullies for their negligence—in vain he hurled menaces after the fugitive: the former paid little heed to his imprecations, and the latter was beyond his reach. The notion began to gain ground amongst the rest of the troop that the storm was the work of witchcraft, and occasioned general consternation. Even the knight's anger yielded to superstitious fear, and as a terrific explosion shook the rafters overhead, and threatened to bring them down upon him, he fell on his knees, and essayed, with unaccustomed lips, to murmur a prayer. But he was interrupted; for amid the deep silence succeeding the awful crash, a mocking laugh was heard, and the villainous countenance of Blackadder, rendered doubly hideous by the white lightning, was seen at the casement. The sight restored Sir Thomas at once. Drawing his sword he flew to the window, but before he could reach it Blackadder was gone. The next flash showed what had befallen him. In stepping backwards, he tumbled into the mill-race; and the current, increased in depth and force by the deluging rain, instantly swept him away.

Half an hour after this, the violence of the storm had perceptibly diminished, and Sir Thomas and his companions began to hope that their speedy release was at hand. Latterly the knight had abandoned all idea of attacking Rough Lee, but with the prospect of fair weather his courage returned, and he once more resolved to attempt it. He was moving about among his followers, striving to dispel their fears, and persuade them that the tempest was only the result of natural causes, when the door was suddenly thrown open, giving entrance to Bess Whitaker, who bore the miller in her arms. She stared on seeing the party assembled, and knit her brows, but said nothing till she had deposited Baldwyn in a seat, when she observed to Sir Thomas, that he seemed to have little scruple in taking possession of a house in its owner's absence. The knight excused himself for the intrusion by saying, he had been compelled by the storm to take refuge there with his followers—a plea readily admitted by Baldwyn, who was now able to speak for himself; and the miller next explained that he had been to Rough Lee, and after many perilous adventures, into the particulars of which he did not enter, had been brought away by Bess, who had carried him home. That home he now felt would be a lonely and insecure one unless she would consent to occupy it with him; and Bess, on being thus appealed to, affirmed that the only motive that would induce her to consent to such an arrangement would be her desire to protect him from his mischievous neighbours. While they were thus discoursing, Old Mitton, who it appeared had followed them, arrived wellnigh exhausted, and Baldwyn went in search of some refreshment for him.

By this time the storm had sufficiently cleared off to allow the others to take their departure; and though the miller and Bess would fain have dissuaded the knight from the enterprise, he was not to be turned aside, but, bidding his men attend him, set forth. The rain had ceased, but it was still very dark. Under cover of the gloom, however, they thought they could approach the house unobserved, and obtain an entrance before Mistress Nutter could be aware of their arrival. In this expectation they pursued their way in silence, and soon stood before the gates. These were fastened, but as no one appeared to be on the watch, Sir Thomas, in a low tone, ordered some of his men to scale the walls, with the intention of following himself; but scarcely had a head risen above the level of the brickwork than the flash of an arquebuss was seen, and the man jumped backwards, luckily just in time to avoid the bullet that whistled over him. An alarm was then instantly given, voices were heard in the garden, mingled with the furious barking of hounds. A bell was rung from the upper part of the house, and lights appeared at the windows.

Meanwhile, some of the men, less alarmed than their comrade, contrived to scramble over the wall, and were soon engaged hand to hand with those on the opposite side. But not alone had they to contend with adversaries like themselves. The stag-hounds, which

had done so much execution during the first attack upon the house by Roger Nowell, raged amongst them like so many lions, rending their limbs, and seizing their throats. To free themselves from these formidable antagonists was their first business, and by dint of thrust from pike, cut from sword, and ball from caliver, they succeeded in slaughtering two of them, and driving the others, badly wounded, and savagely howling, away. In doing this, however, they themselves had sustained considerable injury. Three of their number were lying on the ground, in no condition, from their broken heads, or shattered limbs, for renewing the combat.

Thus, so far as the siege had gone, success seemed to declare itself rather for the defenders than the assailants, when a new impulse was given to the latter, by the bursting open of the gates, and the sudden influx of Sir Thomas Metcalfe and the rest of his troop. The knight was closely followed by the Alsatian captains, who, with tremendous oaths in their mouths, and slashing blades in their hands, declared they would make minced meat of any one opposing their progress. Sir Thomas was equally truculent in expression and ferocious in tone, and as the whole party laid about them right and left, they speedily routed the defenders of the garden, and drove them towards the house. Flushed by their success, the besiegers shouted loudly, and Sir Thomas roared out, that ere many minutes Nowell and Potts should be set free, and Alice Nutter captured. But before he could reach the main door, Nicholas Assheton, well armed, and attended by some dozen men, presented himself at it. These were instantly joined by the retreating party, and the whole offered a formidable array of opponents, quite sufficient to check the progress of the besiegers. Two or three of the men near Nicholas carried torches, and their light revealed the numbers on both sides.

"What! is it you, Sir Thomas Metcalfe?" cried the squire. "Do you commit such outrages as this—do you break into habitations like a robber, rifle them, and murder their inmates? Explain yourself, sir, or I will treat you as I would a common plunderer; shoot you through the head, or hang you to the first tree if I take you."

"Zounds and fury!" rejoined Metcalfe. "Do you dare to liken me to a common robber and murderer? Take care you do not experience the same fate as that with which you threaten me, with this difference only, that the hangman—the common hangman of Lancaster—shall serve your turn. I am come hither to arrest a notorious witch, and to release two gentlemen who are unlawfully detained prisoners by her; and if you do not instantly deliver her up to me, and produce the two individuals in question, Master Roger Nowell and Master Potts, I will force my way into the house, and all injury done to those who oppose me will rest on your head."

"The two gentlemen you have named are perfectly safe and contented in their quarters," replied Nicholas; "and as to the foul and false aspersions you have thrown out against

Mistress Nutter, I cast them back in your teeth. Your purpose in coming hither is to redress some private wrong. How is it you have such a rout with you? How is it I behold two notorious bravos by your side—men who have stood in the pillory, and undergone other ignominious punishment for their offences? You cannot answer, and their oaths and threats go for nothing. I now tell you, Sir Thomas, if you do not instantly withdraw your men, and quit these premises, grievous consequences will ensue to you and them."

"I will hear no more," cried Sir Thomas, infuriated to the last degree. "Follow me into the house, and spare none who oppose you."

"You are not in yet," cried Nicholas.

And as he spoke a row of pikes bristled around him, holding the knight at bay, while a hook was fixed in the doublet of each of the Alsatian captains, and they were plucked forward and dragged into the house. This done, Nicholas and his men quickly retreated, and the door was closed and barred upon the enraged and discomfited knight.

The Lancashire Witches Volume III by William Harrison Ainsworth

CHAPTER XV.—THE PHANTOM MONK.

Many hours had passed by, and night had come on—a night profoundly dark. Richard was still lying where he had fallen at the foot of Malkin Tower; for though he had regained his sensibility, he was so bruised and shaken as to be wholly unable to move. His limbs, stiffened and powerless, refused their office, and, after each unsuccessful effort, he sank back with a groan.

His sole hope was that Mistress Nutter, alarmed by his prolonged absence, might come to her daughter's assistance, and so discover his forlorn situation; but as time flew by, and nothing occurred, he gave himself up for lost.

On a sudden the gloom was dispersed, and a silvery light shed over the scene. The moon had broken through a rack of clouds, and illumined the tall mysterious tower, and the dreary waste around it. With the light a ghostly figure near him became visible to Richard, which under other circumstances would have excited terror in his breast, but which now only filled him with wonder. It was that of a Cistercian monk; the vestments were old and faded, the visage white and corpse-like. Richard at once recognised the phantom he had seen in the banquet-hall at the Abbey, and had afterwards so rashly followed to the conventual church. It touched him with its icy fingers, and a dullness like death shot through his heart.

"Why dost thou trouble me thus, unhappy spirit?" said the young man. "Leave me, I adjure thee, and let me die in peace!"

"Thou wilt not die yet, Richard Assheton," returned the phantom; "and my intention is not to trouble thee, but to serve thee. Without my aid thou wouldst perish where thou liest, but I will raise thee up, and set thee on thy way."

"Wilt thou help me to liberate Alizon?" demanded Richard.

"Do not concern thyself further about her," replied the phantom; "she must pass through an ordeal with which nothing human may interfere. If she escape it you will meet again. If not, it were better thou shouldst be in thy grave than see her. Take this phial. Drink thou the liquid it contains, and thy strength will return to thee."

"How do I know thou art not sent hither by Mother Demdike to tempt me?" demanded Richard, doubtfully. "I have already fallen into her snares," he added, with a groan.

The Phantom Monk.

"I am Mother Demdike's enemy, and the appointed instrument of her punishment," replied the monk, in a tone that did not admit of question. "Drink, and fear nothing."

Richard obeyed, and the next moment sprang to his feet.

"Thou hast indeed restored me!" he cried. "I would fain reach the secret entrance to the tower."

"Attempt it not, I charge thee!" cried the phantom; "but depart instantly for Pendle Hill."

"Wherefore should I go thither?" demanded Richard.

"Thou wilt learn anon," returned the monk. "I cannot tell thee more now. Dismount at the foot of the hill, and proceed to the beacon. Thou know'st it?"

"I do," replied Richard. "There a fire was lighted which was meant to set all England in a blaze."

"And which led many good men to destruction," said the monk, in a tone of indescribable sadness. "Alas! for him who kindled it. The offence is not yet worked out. But depart without more delay; and look not back."

As Richard hastened towards the spot where he had left Merlin, he fancied he was followed by the phantom; but, obedient to the injunction he received, he did not turn his head. As he mounted the horse, who neighed cheerily as he drew near, he found he was right in supposing the monk to be behind him, for he heard his voice calling out, "Linger not by the way. To the beacon!—to the beacon!"

Thus exhorted, the young man dashed off, and, to his great surprise, found Merlin as fresh as if he had undergone no fatigue during the day. It would almost seem, from his spirit, that he had partaken of the same wondrous elixir which had revived his master. Down the hill he plunged, regardless of the steep descent, and soon entered the thicket where the storm had fallen upon them, and where so many acts of witchcraft were performed. Now, neither accident nor obstacle occurred to check the headlong pace of the animal, though the stones rattled after him as he struck them with his flying hoof. The moonlight quivered on the branches of the trees, and on the tender spray, and all looked as tranquil and beautiful as it had so lately been gloomy and disturbed. The wood

was passed, and the last and steepest descent cleared. The little bridge was at hand, and beneath was Pendle Water, rushing over its rocky bed, and glittering like silver in the moon's rays. But here Richard had wellnigh received a check. A party of armed men, it proved, occupied the road leading to Rough Lee, about a bow-shot from the bridge, and as soon as they perceived he was taking the opposite course, with the apparent intention of avoiding them, they shouted to him to stay. This shout made Richard aware of their presence, for he had not before observed them, as they were concealed by the intervention of some small trees; but though surprised at the circumstance, and not without apprehension that they might be there with a hostile design to Mistress Nutter, he did not slacken his pace. A horseman, who appeared to be their leader, rode after him for a short distance, but finding pursuit futile, he desisted, pouring forth a volley of oaths and threats, in a voice that proclaimed him as Sir Thomas Metcalfe. This discovery confirmed Richard in his supposition that mischief was intended Mistress Nutter; but even this conviction, strengthened by his antipathy to Metcalfe, was not sufficiently strong to induce him to stop. Promising himself to return on the morrow, and settle accounts with the insolent knight, he speeded on, and, passing the mill, tracked the rocky gorge above it, and began to mount another hill. Despite the ascent, Merlin never slackened his pace, but, though his master would have restrained him, held on as before. But the brow of the hill attained, Richard compelled him to a brief halt.

By this time the sky was comparatively clear, but small clouds were sailing across the heavens, and at one moment the moon would be obscured by them, and the next, burst forth with sudden effulgence. These alternations produced corresponding effects on the broad, brown, heathy plain extending below, and fantastic shadows were cast upon it, which it needed not Richard's heated imagination to liken to evil beings flying past. The wind, too, lay in the direction of the north end of Pendle Hill, whither Richard was about to shape his course, and the shadows consequently trooped off towards that quarter. The vast mass of Pendle rose in gloomy majesty before him, being thrown into shade, except at its crown, where a flood of radiance rested.

Like an eagle swooping upon his prey, Richard descended into the valley, and like a stag pursued by the huntsman he speeded across it. Neither dyke, morass, nor stone wall checked him, or made him turn aside; and almost as fast as the clouds hurrying above him, and their shadows travelling at his feet, did he reach the base of Pendle Hill.

Making up to a shed, which, though empty, luckily contained a wisp or two of hay, he turned Merlin into it, and commenced the ascent of the hill on foot. After attaining a considerable elevation, he looked down from the giddy heights upon the valley he had just traversed. A few huts, forming the little village of Barley, lay sleeping in the moonlight beneath him, while further off could be just discerned Goldshaw, with its

embowered church. A line of thin vapour marked the course of Pendle Water, and thicker mists hovered over the mosses. The shadows were still passing over the plain.

Pressing on, Richard soon came among the rocks protruding from the higher part of the hill, and as the path was here not more than a foot wide, rarely taken except by the sheep and their guardians, it was necessary to proceed with the utmost caution, as a single false step would have been fatal. After some toil, and not without considerable risk, he reached the summit of the hill.

As he bounded over the springy turf, and inhaled the pure air of that exalted region, his spirits revived, and new elasticity was communicated to his limbs. He shaped his course near the edge of the hill, so that the extensive view it commanded was fully displayed. But his eye rested on the mountainous range on the opposite side of the valley, where Malkin Tower was situated. Even in broad day the accursed structure would have been invisible, as it stood on the further side of the hill, overlooking Barrowford and Colne; but Richard knew its position well, and while his gaze was fixed upon the point, he saw a star shoot down from the heavens and apparently alight near the spot. The circumstance alarmed him, for he could not help thinking it ominous of ill to Alizon.

Nothing, however, followed to increase his misgivings, and ere long he came in sight of the beacon. The ground had been gradually rising, and if he had proceeded a few hundred yards further, a vast panorama would have opened upon him, comprising a large part of Lancashire on the one hand, and on the other an equally extensive portion of Yorkshire. Forest and fell, black moor and bright stream, old castle and stately hall, would have then been laid before him as in a map. But other thoughts engrossed him, and he went straight on. As far as he could discern he was alone on the hill top; and the silence and solitude, coupled with the ill report of the place, which at this hour was said to be often visited by foul hags, for the performance of their unhallowed rites, awakened superstitious fears in his breast.

He was soon by the side of the beacon. The stones were still standing as they had been reared by Paslew, and on looking at them he was astonished to find the hollow within them filled with dry furze, brushwood, and fagots, as if in readiness for another signal. In passing round the circle, his surprise was still further increased by discovering a torch, and not far from it, in one of the interstices of the stones, a dark lantern, in which, on removing the shade, he found a candle burning. It was now clear the beacon was to be kindled that night, though for what end he could not conjecture, and equally clear that he was brought thither to fire it. He put back the lantern into its place, took up the torch, and held himself in readiness.

Half an hour elapsed, and nothing occurred. During this interval it had become dark. A curtain of clouds was drawn over the moon and stars.

Suddenly, a hurtling noise was heard in the air, and it seemed to the watcher as if a troop of witches were alighting at a distance from him.

A loud hubbub of voices ensued—then there was a trampling of feet, accompanied by discordant strains of music—after which a momentary silence ensued, and a harsh voice asked—

"Why are we brought hither?"

"It is not for a sabbath," shouted another voice, "for there is neither fire nor caldron."

"Mother Demdike would not summon us without good reason," cried a third. "We shall learn presently what we have to do."

"The more mischief the better," rejoined another voice.

"Ay, mischief! mischief! mischief!" echoed the rest of the crew.

"You shall have enough of it to content you," rejoined Mother Demdike. "I have called you hither to be present at a sacrifice."

Hideous screams of laughter followed this announcement, and the voice that had spoken first asked—

"A sacrifice of whom?"

"An unbaptised babe, stolen from its sleeping mother's breast," rejoined another. "Mother Demdike has often played that trick before—ho! ho!"

"Peace!" thundered the hag—"It is no babe I am about to kill, but a full-grown maid—ay, and one of rarest beauty, too. What think ye of Alizon Device?"

"Thy grand-daughter!" cried several voices, in surprise.

"Alice Nutter's daughter—for such she is," rejoined the hag. "I have held her captive in Malkin Tower, and have subjected her to every trial and temptation I could devise, but I have failed in shaking her courage, or in winning her over to our master. All the horrors

of the vault have been tried upon her in vain. Even the last terrible ordeal, which no one has hitherto sustained, proved ineffectual. She went through it unmoved."

"Heaven be praised!" murmured Richard.

"It seems I have no power over her soul" pursued the hag; "but I have over her body, and she shall die here, and by my hand. But mind me, not a drop of blood must fall to the ground."

"Have no fear," cried several voices, "we will catch it in our palms and quaff it."

"Hast thou thy knife, Mould-heels?" asked Mother Demdike.

"Ay," replied the other, "it is long and sharp, and will do thy business well. Thy grandson, Jem Device, notched it by killing swine, and my goodman ground it only yesterday. Take it."

"I will plunge it to her heart!" cried Mother Demdike, with an infernal laugh. "And now I will tell you why we have neither fire nor caldron. On questioning the ebon image in the vault as to the place where the sacrifice should be made, I received for answer that it must be here, and in darkness. No human eye but our own must behold it. We are safe on this score, for no one is likely to come hither at this hour. No fire must be kindled, or the sacrifice will result in destruction to us all. Ye have heard, and understand?"

"We do," replied several husky voices.

"And so do I," said Richard, taking hold of the dark lantern.

"And now for the girl," cried Mother Demdike.

The Lancashire Witches Volume III by William Harrison Ainsworth

CHAPTER XVI.—ONE O'CLOCK!

Mistress Nutter and Mother Chattox were still at the hut, impatiently awaiting the return of Fancy. But nearly an hour elapsed before he appeared.

"What has detained thee so long?" demanded the hag, sharply, as he stood before them.

"You shall hear, mistress," replied Fancy: "I have had a busy time of it, I assure you, and thought I should never accomplish my errand. On arriving at Rough Lee, I found the place invested by Sir Thomas Metcalfe and a host of armed men, who had been sent thither by Parson Holden, for the joint purpose of arresting you, madam," addressing Mistress Nutter, "and liberating Nowell and Potts. The knight was in a great fume; for, in spite of the force brought against it, the house had been stoutly defended by Nicholas Assheton, who had worsted the besieging party, and captured two Alsatian captains, hangers on of Sir Thomas. Appearing in the character of an enemy, I was immediately surrounded by Metcalfe and his men, who swore they would cut my throat unless I undertook to procure the liberation of the two bravos in question, as well as that of Nowell and Potts. I told them I was come for the express purpose of setting free the two last-named gentlemen; but, with respect to the former, I had no instructions, and they must arrange the matter with Master Nicholas himself. Upon this Sir Thomas became exceedingly wroth and insolent, and proceeded to such lengths that I resolved to chastise him, and in so doing performed a feat which will tend greatly to exalt Richard's character for courage and strength."

"Let us hear it, my doughty champion," cried Mother Chattox.

"While Metcalfe was pouring forth his rage, and menacing me with uplifted hand," pursued the familiar, "I seized him by the throat, dragged him from his horse, and in spite of the efforts of his men, whose blows fell upon me thick as hail, and quite as harmlessly, I bore him through the garden to the back of the house, where my shouts soon brought Nicholas and others to my assistance, and after delivering my captive to them, I dismounted. The squire, you will imagine, was astonished to see me, and greatly applauded my prowess. I replied, with the modesty becoming my assumed character, that I had done nothing, and, in reality, the feat was nothing to me; but I told him I had something of the utmost importance to communicate, and which could not be delayed a moment; whereupon he led me to a small room adjoining the hall, while the crestfallen knight was left to vent his rage and mortification on the grooms to whose custody he was committed."

"You acted your part to perfection," said Mistress Nutter.

"Ay, trust my sweet Fancy for that," said the hag—"there is no familiar like him—none whatever."

"Your praises make me blush," rejoined Fancy. "But to proceed. I fulfilled your instructions to the letter, and excited Nicholas's horror and indignation by the tale I told him. I laughed in my sleeve all the while, but I maintained a very different countenance with him. He thought me full of anguish and despair. He questioned me as to my proceedings at Malkin Tower, and I amazed him with the description of a fearful storm I had encountered—of my interview with old Demdike, and her atrocious treatment of Alizon—to all of which he listened with profound interest. Richard himself could not have moved him more—perhaps not so much. As soon as I had finished, he vowed he would rescue Alizon from the murderous hag, and prevent the latter from committing further mischief; and bidding me come with him, we repaired to the room in which Nowell and Potts were confined. We found them both fast asleep in their chairs; but Nicholas quickly awakened them, and some explanations ensued, which did not at first appear very clear and satisfactory to either magistrate or attorney, but in the end they agreed to accompany us on the expedition, Master Potts declaring it would compensate him for all his mischances if he could arrest Mother Demdike."

"I hope he may have his wish," said Mother Chattox.

"Ay, but he declared that his next step should be to arrest you, mistress," observed Fancy, with a laugh.

"Arrest me!" cried the hag. "Marry, let him touch me, if he dares. My term is not out yet, and, with thee to defend me, my brave Fancy, I have no fear."

"Right!" replied the familiar; "but to go on with my story. Sir Thomas Metcalfe was next brought forward; and after some warm altercation, peace was at length established between him and the squire, and hands were shaken all round. Wine was then called for by Nicholas, who, at the same time, directed that the two Alsatian captains should be brought up from the cellar, where they had been placed for safety. The first part of the order was obeyed, but the second was found impracticable, inasmuch as the two heroes had found their way to the inner cellar, and had emptied so many flasks that they were utterly incapable of moving. While the wine was being discussed, an unexpected arrival took place."

"An arrival!—of whom?" inquired Mistress Nutter, eagerly.

"Sir Ralph Assheton and a large party," replied Fancy. "Parson Holden, it seems, not content with sending Sir Thomas and his rout to the aid of his friends, had proceeded for the same purpose to Whalley, and the result was the appearance of the new party. A brief explanation from Nicholas and myself served to put Sir Ralph in possession of all that had occurred, and he declared his readiness to accompany the expedition to Pendle Hill, and to take all his followers with him. Sir Thomas Metcalfe expressed an equally strong desire to go with him, and of course it was acceded to. I am bound to tell you, madam," added Fancy to Mistress Nutter, "that your conduct is viewed in a most suspicious light by every one of these persons, except Nicholas, who made an effort to defend you."

"I care not what happens to me, if I succeed in rescuing my child," said the lady. "But have they set out on the expedition?"

"By this time, no doubt they have," replied Fancy. "I got off by saying I would ride on to Pendle Hill, and, stationing myself on its summit, give them a signal when they should advance upon their prey. And now, good mistress, I pray you dismiss me. I want to cast off this shape, which I find an incumbrance, and resume my own. I will return when it is time for you to set out."

The hag waved her hand, and the familiar was gone.

Half an hour elapsed, and he returned not. Mistress Nutter became fearfully impatient. Three-quarters, and even the old hag was uneasy. An hour, and he stood before them—dwarfish, fiendish, monstrous.

"It is time," he said, in a harsh voice; but the tones were music in the wretched mother's ears.

"Come, then," she cried, rushing wildly forth.

"Ay, ay, I come," replied the hag, following her. "Not so fast. You cannot go without me."

"Nor either of you without me," added Fancy. "Here, good mistress, is your broomstick."

"Away for Pendle Hill!" screamed the hag.

"Ay, for Pendle Hill!" echoed Fancy.

And there was a whirling of dark figures through the air as before.

Presently they alighted on the summit of Pendle Hill, which seemed to be wrapped in a dense cloud, for Mistress Nutter could scarcely see a yard before her. Fancy's eyes, however, were powerful enough to penetrate the gloom, for stepping back a few yards, he said—

"The expedition is at the foot of the hill, where they have made a halt. We must wait a few moments, till I can ascertain what they mean to do. Ah! I see. They are dividing into three parties. One detachment, headed by Nicholas Assheton, with whom are Potts and Nowell, is about to make the ascent from the spot where they now stand; another, commanded by Sir Ralph Assheton, is moving towards the but-end of the hill; and the third, headed by Sir Thomas Metcalfe, is proceeding to the right. These are goodly preparations—ha! ha! But, what do I behold? The first detachment have a prisoner with them. It is Jem Device, whom they have captured on the way, I suppose. I can tell from the rascal's looks that he is planning an escape. Patience, madam, I must see how he executes his design. There is no hurry. They are all scrambling up the hill-sides. Some one slips, and rolls down, and bruises himself severely against the loose stones. Ho! ho! it is Master Potts. He is picked up by James Device, who takes him on his shoulders. What means the knave by such attention? We shall see anon. They continue to fight their way upward, and have now reached the narrow path among the rocks. Take heed, or your necks will be broken. Ho! ho! Well done, Jem,—bravo! lad. Thy scheme is out now—ho! ho!"

"What has he done?" asked Mother Chattox.

"Run off with the attorney—with Master Potts," replied Fancy; "disappeared in the gloom, so that it is impossible Nicholas can follow him—ho! ho!"

"But my child!—where is my child?" cried Mistress Nutter, in agitated impatience.

"Come with me, and I will lead you to her," replied Fancy, taking her hand; "and do you keep close to us, mistress," he added to Mother Chattox.

Moving quickly along the heathy plain, they soon reached a small dry hollow, about a hundred paces from the beacon, in the midst of which, as in a grave, was deposited the inanimate form of Alizon. When the spot was indicated to her by Fancy, the miserable mother flew to it, and, with indescribable delight, clasped her child to her breast. But the next moment, a new fear seized her, for the limbs were stiff and cold, and the heart had apparently ceased to beat.

"She is dead!" exclaimed Mistress Nutter, frantically.

"No; she is only in a magical trance," said Fancy; "my mistress can instantly revive her."

"Prithee do so, then, good Chattox," implored the lady.

"Better defer it till we have taken her hence," rejoined the hag.

"Oh! no, now—now! Let me be assured she lives!" cried Mistress Nutter.

Mother Chattox reluctantly assented, and, touching Alizon with her skinny finger, first upon the heart and then upon the brow, the poor girl began to show symptoms of life.

"My child—my child!" cried Mistress Nutter, straining her to her breast; "I am come to save thee!"

"You will scarce succeed, if you tarry here longer," said Fancy. "Away!"

"Ay, come away!" shrieked the hag, seizing Alizon's arm.

"Where are you about to take her?" asked Mistress Nutter.

"To my hut," replied Mother Chattox.

"No, no—she shall not go there," returned the lady.

"And wherefore not?" screamed the hag. "She is mine now, and I say she shall go."

"Right, mistress," said Fancy; "and leave the lady here if she objects to accompany her. But be quick."

"You shall not take her from me!" shrieked Mistress Nutter, holding her daughter fast. "I see through your diabolical purpose. You have the same dark design as Mother Demdike, and would sacrifice her; but she shall not go with you, neither will I."

"Tut!" exclaimed the hag, "you have lost your senses on a sudden. I do not want your daughter. But come away, or Mother Demdike will surprise us."

"Do not trifle with her longer," whispered Fancy to the hag; "drag the girl away, or you will lose her. A few moments, and it will be too late."

Mother Chattox made an attempt to obey him, but Mistress Nutter resisted her.

"Curses on her!" she muttered, "she is too strong for me. Do thou help me," she added, appealing to Fancy.

"I cannot," he replied; "I have done all I dare to help you. You must accomplish the rest yourself."

"But, my sweet imp, recollect—"

"I recollect I have a master," interrupted the familiar.

"And a mistress, too," cried the hag; "and she will chastise thee if thou art disobedient. I command thee to carry off this girl."

"I have already told you I dare not, and I now say I will not," replied Fancy.

"Will not!" shrieked the hag. "Thou shalt smart for this. I will bury thee in the heart of this mountain, and make thee labour within it like a gnome. I will set thee to count the sands on the river's bed, and the leaves on the forest trees. Thou shalt know neither rest nor respite."

"Ho! ho! ho!" laughed Fancy, mockingly.

"Dost deride me?" cried the hag. "I will do it, thou saucy jackanapes. For the last time, wilt obey me?"

"No," replied Fancy, "and for this reason—your term is out. It expired at midnight."

"It is false!" shrieked the hag, in accents of mixed terror and rage. "I have months to run, and will renew it."

"Before midnight, you might have done so; but it is now too late—your reign is over," rejoined Fancy. "Farewell, sweet mistress. We shall meet once again, though scarcely under such pleasant circumstances as heretofore."

"It cannot be, my darling Fancy; thou art jesting with me," whimpered the hag; "thou wouldst not delude thy doating mistress thus."

"I have done with thee, foul hag," rejoined the familiar, "and am right glad my service is ended. I could have saved thee, but would not, and delayed my return for that very purpose. Thy soul was forfeited when I came back to thy hut."

"Then curses on thee for thy treachery," cried the hag, "and on thy master, who deceived me in the bond he placed before me."

The familiar laughed hoarsely.

"But what of Mother Demdike?" pursued the hag. "Hast thou no comfort for me? Tell me her hour is likewise come, and I will forgive thee. But do not let her triumph over me."

The familiar made no answer, but, laughing derisively, stamped upon the ground, and it opened to receive him.

"Alizon!" cried Mistress Nutter, who in the mean time had vainly endeavoured to rouse her daughter to full consciousness, "fly with me, my child. The enemy is at hand."

"What enemy?" asked Alizon, faintly. "I have so many, that I know not whom you mean."

"But this is the worst of all—this is Mother Demdike," cried Mistress Nutter. "She would take your life. If we can but conceal ourselves for a short while, we are safe."

"I am too weak to move," said Alizon; "besides, I dare not trust you. I have been deceived already. You may be an evil spirit in the likeness of my mother."

"Oh! no, I am indeed your own—own mother," rejoined Mistress Nutter. "Ask this old woman if it is not so."

"She is a witch herself," replied Alizon. "I will not trust either of you. You are both in league with Mother Demdike."

"We are in league to save thee from her, foolish wench!" cried Mother Chattox, "but thy perverseness will defeat all our schemes."

"Since you will not fly, my child," cried Mistress Nutter, "kneel down, and pray earnestly for deliverance. Pray, while there is yet time."

As she spoke, a growl like thunder was heard in the air, and the earth trembled beneath their feet.

"Nay, now I am sure you are my mother!" cried Alizon, flinging herself into Mistress Nutter's arms; "and I will go with you."

But before they could move, several dusky figures were seen rushing towards them.

"Be on your guard!" cried Mother Chattox; "here comes old Demdike with her troop. I will aid you all I can."

"Down on your knees!" exclaimed Mistress Nutter.

Alizon obeyed, but ere a word could pass her lips, the infuriated hag, attended by her beldame band, stood beside them.

"Ha! who is here?" she cried. "Let me see who dares interrupt my mystic rites."

And raising her hand, the black cloud hanging over the hill was rent asunder, and the moon shone down upon them, revealing the old witch, armed with the sacrificial knife, her limbs shaking with fury, and her eyes flashing with preternatural light. It revealed, also, her weird attendants, as well as the group before her, consisting of the kneeling figure of Alizon, protected by the outstretched arms of her mother, and further defended by Mother Chattox, who planted herself in front of them.

Mother Demdike eyed the group for a moment as if she would, annihilate them.

"Out of my way, Chattox!" she vociferated—"out of my way, or I will drive my knife to thy heart." And as her old antagonist maintained her ground, she unhesitatingly advanced upon her, smote her with the weapon, and, as she fell to the ground, stepped over her bleeding body.

"Now what dost thou here, Alice Nutter?" she cried, menacing her with the reeking blade.

"I am come for my child, whom thou hast stolen from me," replied the lady.

"Thou art come to witness her slaughter," replied the witch, fiercely. "Begone, or I will serve thee as I have just served old Chattox."

"I am not sped yet," cried the wounded hag; "I shall live to see thee bound hand and foot by the officers of justice, and, certain thou wilt perish miserably, I shall die content."

"Spit out thy last drops of venom, black viper," rejoined Mother Demdike; "when I have done with the others, I will return and finish thee. Alice Nutter, thou knowest it is vain to struggle with me. Give me up the girl."

"Wilt thou accept my life for hers?" said Mistress Nutter.

"Of what account would thy life be to me?" rejoined Mother Demdike, disdainfully. "If it would profit me to take it, I would do so without thy consent, but I am about to make an oblation to our master, and thou art his already. Snatch her child from her—we waste time," she added, to her attendants.

And immediately the weird crew rushed forward, and in spite of the miserable mother's efforts tore Alizon from her.

"I told you it was in vain to contend with me," said Mother Demdike.

"Oh, that I could call down heaven's vengeance upon thy accursed head!" cried Mistress Nutter; "but I am forsaken alike of God and man, and shall die despairing."

"Rave on, thou wilt have ample leisure," replied the hag. "And now bring the girl this way," she added to the beldames; "the sacrifice must be made near the beacon."

And as Alizon was borne away, Mistress Nutter uttered a cry of anguish.

"Do not stay here," said Mother Chattox, raising herself with difficulty. "Go after her; you may yet save your daughter."

"But how?" cried Mistress Nutter, distractedly. "I have no power now."

As she spoke a dusky form rose up beside her. It was her familiar.

"Will you return to your duty if I help you in this extremity?" he said.

"Ay, do, do!" cried Mother Chattox. "Anything to avenge yourself upon that murderous hag."

"Peace!" cried the familiar, spurning her with his cloven foot.

"I do not want vengeance," said Mistress Nutter; "I only want to save my child."

"Then you consent on that condition?" said the familiar.

"No!" replied Mistress Nutter, firmly. "I now perceive I am not utterly lost, since you try to regain me. I have renounced thy master, and will make no new bargain with him. Get hence, tempter!"

"Think not to escape us," cried the familiar; "no penitence—no absolution can save thee. Thy name is written on the judgment scroll, and cannot be effaced. I would have aided thee, but, since my offer is rejected, I leave thee."

"You will not let him go!" screamed Mother Chattox. "Oh that the chance were mine!"

"Be silent, or I will beat thy brains out!" said the familiar. "Once more, am I dismissed?"

"Ay, for ever!" replied Mistress Nutter.

And as the familiar disappeared, she flew to the spot where her child had been taken.

About twenty paces from the beacon, a circle had again been formed by the unhallowed crew, in the midst of which stood Mother Demdike, with the gory knife in her hand, muttering spells and incantations, and performing mystical ceremonials.

Every now and then her companions joined in these rites, and chanted a song couched in a wild, unintelligible jargon. Beside the witch knelt Alizon, with her hands tied behind her back, so that she could not raise them in supplication; her hair unbound, and cast loosely over her person, and a thick bandage fastened over her eyes and mouth.

The initiatory ceremonies over, the old hag approached her victim, when Mistress Nutter forced herself through the circle, and cast herself at her feet.

"Spare her!" she cried, clinging to her knees; "it shall be well for thee if thou dost so."

"Again interrupted!" cried the witch, furiously. "This time I will show thee no mercy. Take thy fate, meddling woman!"

And she raised the knife, but ere the weapon could descend, it was seized by Mistress Nutter, and wrested from her grasp. In another instant, Alizon's arms were liberated, and the bandage removed from her eyes.

"Now it is my turn to threaten. I have thee in my power, infernal hag!" cried Mistress Nutter, holding the knife to the witch's throat, and clasping her daughter with the other arm. "Wilt let us go?"

"No!" replied Mother Demdike, springing nimbly backwards. "You shall both die. I will soon disarm thee."

And making one or two passes with her hands, Mistress Nutter dropped the weapon, and instantly became fixed and motionless, with her daughter, equally rigid, in her arms. They looked as if suddenly turned to marble.

"Now to complete the ceremonial," cried Mother Demdike, picking up the knife.

And then she began to mutter an impious address preparatory to the sacrifice, when a loud clangour was heard like the stroke of a hammer upon a bell.

"What was that?" exclaimed the witch, in alarm.

"Were there a clock here, I should say it had struck one," replied Mould-heels.

"It must be our master's timepiece," said another witch.

"One o'clock!" exclaimed Mother Demdike, who appeared stupefied with fear, "and the sacrifice not made—then I am lost!"

A derisive laugh reached her ears. It proceeded from Mother Chattox, who had contrived to raise herself to her feet, and, tottering forward, now passed through the appalled circle.

"Ay, thy term is out—thy soul is forfeited like mine—ha! ha!" And she fell to the ground.

"Perhaps it may not be too late," cried Mother Demdike, grasping the knife, and rushing towards Alizon.

But at this moment a bright flame shot up from the beacon.

Astonishment and terror seized the hag, and she uttered a loud cry, which was echoed by the rest of the crew.

The flame mounted higher and higher, and burnt each moment more brightly, illumining the whole summit of the hill. By its light could be seen a band of men, some of whom were on horseback, speeding towards the place of meeting.

Scared by the sight, the witches fled, but were turned by another band advancing from the opposite quarter. They then made towards the spot where their broomsticks were deposited, but ere they could reach it, a third party gained the summit of the hill at this precise point, and immediately started in pursuit of them.

Meanwhile, a young man issuing from behind the beacon, flew towards Mistress Nutter and her daughter. The moment the flame burst forth, the spell cast over them by Mother Demdike was broken, and motion and speech restored.

"Alizon!" exclaimed the young man, as he came up, "your trials are over. You are safe."

"Oh, Richard!" she replied, falling into his arms, "have we been preserved by you?"

"I am a mere instrument in the hands of Heaven," he replied.

Mother Demdike made no attempt at flight with the rest of the witches, but remained for a few moments absorbed in contemplation of the flaming beacon. Her hand still grasped the murderous weapon she had raised against Alizon, but it had dropped to her side when the fire burst forth. At length she turned fiercely to Richard, and demanded—

"Was it thou who kindled the beacon?"

"It was!" replied the young man.

"And who bade thee do it—who brought thee hither?" pursued the witch.

"An enemy of thine, old woman!" replied Richard, "His vengeance has been slow in coming, but it has arrived at last."

"But who is he? I see him not!" rejoined Mother Demdike.

"You will see him before yon flame expires," said Richard. "I should have come to your assistance sooner, Alizon," he continued, turning to her, "but I was forbidden. And I knew I should best ensure your safety by compliance with the injunctions I had received."

"Some guardian spirit must have interposed to preserve us," replied Alizon; "for such only could have successfully combated with the evil beings from whom we have been delivered."

"Thy spirit is unable to preserve thee now!" cried Mother Demdike, aiming a deadly blow at her with the knife. But, fortunately, the attempt was foreseen by Richard, who caught her arm, and wrested the weapon from her.

"Curses on thee, Richard Assheton!" cried the infuriated hag,— "and on thee too, Alizon Device, I cannot work ye the immediate ill I wish. I cannot make ye loathsome in one another's eyes. I cannot maim your limbs, or blight your beauty. I cannot deliver you over to devilish possession. But I can bequeath you a legacy of hate. What I say will come to pass. Thou, Alizon, wilt never wed Richard Assheton—never! Vainly shall ye struggle with your destiny—vainly indulge hopes of happiness. Misery and despair, and an early grave, are in store for both of you. He shall be to you your worst enemy, and you shall be to him destruction. Think of the witch's prediction and tremble, and may her deadliest curse rest upon your heads."

"Oh, Richard!" exclaimed Alizon, who would have sunk to the ground if he had not sustained her. "Why did you not prevent this terrible malediction?"

"He could not," replied Mother Demdike, with a laugh of exultation; "it shall work, and thy doom shall be accomplished. And now to make an end of old Chattox, and then they may take me where they please."

And she was approaching her old enemy with the intention of putting her threat into execution, when James Device, who appeared to start from the ground, rushed swiftly towards her.

"What art thou doing here, Jem?" cried the hag, regarding him with angry surprise. "Dost thou not see we are surrounded by enemies. I cannot escape them—but thou art young and active. Away with thee!"

"Not without yo, granny," replied Jem. "Ey ha' run os fast os ey could to help yo. Stick fast howld on me," he added, snatching her up in his arms, "an ey'n bring yo clear off yet."

And he set off at a rapid pace with his burthen, Richard being too much occupied with Alizon to oppose him.

The Lancashire Witches Volume III by William Harrison Ainsworth

CHAPTER XVII.—HOW THE BEACON FIRE WAS EXTINGUISHED.

Soon after this, Nicholas Assheton, attended by two or three men, came up, and asked whither the old witch had flown.

Mistress Nutter pointed out the course taken by the fugitive, who had run towards the northern extremity of the hill, down the sides of which he had already plunged.

"She has been carried off by her grandson, Jem Device," said Mistress Nutter; "be quick, or you will lose her."

"Ay, be quick—be quick!" added Mother Chattox. "Yonder they went, to the back of the beacon."

Casting a look at the wretched speaker, and finding she was too grievously wounded to be able to move, Nicholas bestowed no further thought upon her, but set off with his companions in the direction pointed out. He speedily arrived at the edge of the hill, and, looking down it, sought in vain for any appearance of the fugitives. The sides were here steep and shelving, and some hundred yards lower down were broken into ridges, behind one of which it was possible the old witch and her grandson might be concealed; so, without a moment's hesitation, the squire descended, and began to search about in the hollows, scrambling over the loose stones, or sliding down for some paces with the uncertain boggy soil, when he fancied he heard a plaintive cry. He looked around, but could see no one. The whole side of the mountain was lighted up by the fire from the beacon, which, instead of diminishing, burnt with increased ardour, so that every object was as easily to be discerned as in the day-time; but, notwithstanding this, he could not detect whence the sound proceeded. It was repeated, but more faintly than before, and Nicholas almost persuaded himself it was the voice of Potts calling for help. Motioning to his followers, who were engaged in the search like himself, to keep still, the squire listened intently, and again caught the sound, being this time convinced it arose from the ground. Was it possible the unfortunate attorney had been buried alive? Or had he been thrust into some hole, and a stone placed over it, which he found it impossible to remove? The latter idea seemed the more probable, and Nicholas was guided by a feeble repetition of the noise towards a large fragment of rock, which, on examination, had evidently been rolled from a point immediately over the mouth of a hollow. The squire instantly set himself to work to dislodge the ponderous stone, and, aided by two of his men, who lent their broad shoulders to the task, quickly accomplished his object, disclosing what appeared to be the mouth of a cavernous recess. From out of this, as

soon as the stone was removed, popped the head of Master Potts, and Nicholas, bidding him be of good cheer, laid hold of him to draw him forth, as he seemed to have some difficulty in extricating himself, when the attorney cried out—

"Do not pull so hard, squire! That accursed Jem Device has got hold of my legs. Not so hard, sir, I entreat."

"Bid him let go," said Nicholas, unable to refrain from laughing, "or we will unearth him from his badger's hole."

"He pays no heed to what I say to him," cried Potts. "Oh, dear! oh, dear! he is dragging me down again!"

And, as he spoke, the attorney, notwithstanding all Nicholas's efforts to restrain him, was pulled down into the hole. The squire was at a loss what to do, and was considering whether he should resort to the tedious process of digging him out, when a scrambling noise was heard, and the captive's head once more appeared above ground.

"Are you coming out now?" asked Nicholas.

"Alas, no!" replied the attorney, "unless you will make terms with the rascal. He declares he will strangle me, if you do not promise to set him and his grandmother free."

"Is Mother Demdike with him?" asked Nicholas.

"To be sure," replied Potts; "and we are as badly off for room as three foxes in a hole."

"And there is no other outlet said the squire?"

"I conclude not," replied the attorney. "I groped about like a mole when I was first thrust into the cavern by Jem Device, but I could find no means of exit. The entrance was blocked up by the great stone which you had some difficulty in moving, but which Jem could shift at will; for he pushed it aside in a moment, and brought it back to its place, when he returned just now with the old hag; but probably that was effected by witchcraft."

"Most likely," said Nicholas, "But for your being in it, we would stop up this hole, and bury the two wretches alive."

"Get me out first, good Master Nicholas, I implore of you, and then do what you please," cried Potts. "Jem is tugging at my legs as if he would pull them off."

"We will try who is strongest," said Nicholas, again seizing hold of Potts by the shoulders.

"Oh, dear! oh, dear! I can't bear it—let go!" shrieked the attorney. "I shall be stretched to twice my natural length. My joints are starting from their sockets, my legs are coming off—oh! oh!"

"Lend a hand here, one of you," cried Nicholas to the men; "we'll have him out, whatever be the consequence."

"But I won't come!" roared Potts. "You have no right to use me thus. Torture! oh! oh! my loins are ruptured—my back is breaking—I am a dead man.—The hag has got hold of my right leg, while Jem is tugging with all his force at the left."

"Pull away!" cried Nicholas; "he is coming."

"My legs are off," yelled Potts, as he was plucked suddenly forth, with a jerk that threw the squire and his assistants on their backs. "I shall never be able to walk more. No, Heaven be praised!" he added, looking down on his lower limbs, "I have only lost my boots."

"Never mind it, then," cried Nicholas; "but thank your stars you are above ground once more. Hark'ee, Jem!" he continued, shouting down the hole; "If you don't come forth at once, and bring Mother Demdike with you, we'll close up the mouth of this hole in such a way that you sha'n't require another grave. D'ye hear?"

"Yeigh," replied Jem, his voice coming hoarsely and hollowly up like the accents of a ghost. "Am ey to go free if ey comply?"

"Certainly not," replied the squire. "You have a choice between this hole and the hangman's cord at Lancaster, that is all. In either case you will die by suffocation. But be quick—we have wasted time enough already with you."

"Then if that's aw yo'll do fo' me, squire, eyn e'en stay wheere ey am," rejoined Jem.

"Very well," replied Nicholas. "Here, my man, stop up this hole with earth and stones. Master Potts, you will lend a hand to the task."

"Readily, sir," replied the attorney, "though I shall lose the pleasure I had anticipated of seeing that old carrion crow roasted alive."

"Stay a bit, squoire," roared Jem, as preparations were actively made for carrying Nicholas's orders into execution. "Stay a bit, an ey'n cum owt, an bring t' owd woman wi' me."

"I thought you'd change your mind," replied Nicholas, laughing. "Be upon your guard," he added, in a low tone to the others, "and seize him the moment he appears."

But Jem evidently found it no easy matter to perform his promise, for stifled shrieks and other noises proclaimed that a desperate struggle was going on between him and his grandmother.

"Aha!" exclaimed Nicholas, placing his ear to the hole. "The old hag is unwilling to come forth, and spits and scratches like a cat-a-mountain, while Jem gripes her like a terrier. It is a hard tussle between them, but he is getting the better of it, and is pushing her forth. Now look out."

And as he spoke, Mother Demdike's terrible head protruded from the ground, and, despite of the execrations she poured forth upon her enemies, she was instantly seized by them, drawn out of the cavern, and secured. While the men were thus engaged, and while Nicholas's attention was for an instant diverted, Jem bounded forth as suddenly as a wolf from his lair, and, dashing aside all opposition, plunged down the hill.

"It is useless to pursue him," said Nicholas. "He will not escape. The whole country will be roused by the beacon fire, and hue and cry shall be made after him."

"Right!" exclaimed Potts; "and now let some one creep into that cavern, and bring out my boots, and then I shall be in a better condition to attend you."

The request being complied with, and the attorney being once more equipped for walking, the party climbed the hill-side, and, bringing Mother Demdike with them, shaped their course towards the beacon.

And now to see what had taken place in the interim.

Scarcely had the squire quitted Mistress Nutter than Sir Ralph Assheton rode up to her.

"Why do you loiter here, madam?" he said, in a stern tone, somewhat tempered by sorrow. "I have held back to give you an opportunity of escape. The hill is invested by your enemies. On that side Roger Nowell is advancing, and on this Sir Thomas Metcalfe

and his followers. You may possibly effect a retreat in the opposite direction, but not a moment must be lost."

"I will go with you," said Alizon.

"No, no," interposed Richard. "You have not strength for the effort, and will only retard her."

"I thank you for your devotion, my child," said Mistress Nutter, with a look of grateful tenderness; "but it is unneeded. I have no intention of flying. I shall surrender myself into the hands of justice."

"Do not mistake the matter, madam," said Sir Ralph, "and delude yourself with the notion that either your rank or wealth will screen you from punishment. Your guilt is too clearly established to allow you a chance of escape, and, though I myself am acting wrongfully in counselling flight to you, I am led to do so from the friendship once subsisting between us, and the relationship which, unfortunately, I cannot destroy."

"It is you who are mistaken, not I, Sir Ralph," replied Mistress Nutter. "I have no thought of turning aside the sword of justice, but shall court its sharpest edge, hoping by a full avowal of my offences, in some degree to atone for them. My only regret is, that I shall leave my child unprotected, and that my fate will bring dishonour upon her."

"Oh, think not of me, dear mother!" cried Alizon, "but persist unhesitatingly in the course you have laid down. Far rather would I see you act thus—far rather hear the sentiments you have uttered, even though they may be attended by the saddest, consequences, than behold you in your former proud position, and impenitent. Think not of me, then. Or, rather, think only how I rejoice that your eyes are at length opened, and that you have cast off the bonds of iniquity. I can now pray for you with the full hope that my intercessions will prevail, and in parting with you in this world shall be sustained by the conviction that we shall meet in eternal happiness hereafter."

Mistress Nutter threw her arms about her daughter's neck, and they mingled their tears together, Sir Ralph Assheton was much moved.

"It is a pity she should fall into their hands," he observed to Richard.

"I know not how to advise," replied the latter, greatly troubled.

"Ah! it is too late," exclaimed the knight; "here come Nowell and Metcalfe. The poor lady's firmness will be severely tested."

The next moment the magistrate and the knight came up, with such of their attendants as were not engaged in pursuing the witches, several of whom had already been captured. On seeing Mistress Nutter, Sir Thomas Metcalfe sprang from his horse, and would have seized her, but Sir Ralph interposed, saying "She has surrendered herself to me. I will be answerable for her safe custody."

"Your pardon, Sir Ralph," observed Nowell; "the arrest must be formally made, and by a constable. Sparshot, execute your warrant."

Upon this, the official, leaping from his horse, displayed his staff and a piece of parchment to Mistress Nutter, telling her she was his prisoner.

The lady bowed her head.

"Shan ey tee her hands, yer warship?" demanded the constable of the magistrate.

"On no account, fellow," interposed Sir Ralph. "I will have no indignity offered her. I have already said I will be responsible for her."

"You will recollect she is arrested for witchcraft, Sir Ralph," observed Nowell.

"She shall answer to the charges brought against her. I pledge myself to that," replied Sir Ralph.

"And by a full confession," said Mistress Nutter. "You may pledge yourself to that also, Sir Ralph."

"She avows her guilt," cried Nowell. "I take you all to witness it."

"I shall not forget it," said Sir Thomas Metcalfe.

"Nor I—nor I!" cried Sparshot, and two or three others of the attendants.

"This girl is my prisoner," said Sir Thomas Metcalfe, dismounting, and advancing towards Alizon, "She is a witch, as well as the rest."

"It is false," cried Richard! "and if you attempt to lay hands upon her I will strike you to the earth."

"Sdeath!" exclaimed Metcalfe, drawing his sword, "I will not let this insolence pass unpunished. I have other affronts to chastise. Stand aside, or I will cut your throat."

"Hold, Sir Thomas," cried Sir Ralph Assheton, authoritatively. "Settle your quarrels hereafter, if you have any to adjust; but I will have no fighting now. Alizon is no witch. You are well aware that she was about to be impiously and cruelly sacrificed by Mother Demdike, and her rescue was the main object of our coming hither."

"Still suspicion attaches to her," said Metcalfe; "whether she be the daughter of Elizabeth Device or Alice Nutter, she comes of a bad stock, and I protest against her being allowed to go free. However, if you are resolved upon it, I have nothing more to say. I shall find other time and place to adjust my differences with Master Richard Assheton."

"When you please, sir," replied the young man, sternly.

"And I will answer for the propriety of the course I have pursued," said Sir Ralph; "but here comes Nicholas with Mother Demdike."

"Demdike taken! I am glad of it," cried Mother Chattox, slightly raising herself as she spoke. "Kill her, or she will 'scape you."

When Nicholas came up with the old hag, both Sir Ralph Assheton and Roger Nowell put several questions to her, but she refused to answer their interrogations; and, horrified by her blasphemies and imprecations, they caused her to be removed to a short distance, while a consultation was held as to the course to be pursued.

"We have made half a dozen of these miscreants prisoners," said Roger Nowell, "and the whole of them had better be taken to Whalley, where they can be safely confined in the old dungeons of the Abbey, and after their examination on the morrow can be removed to Lancaster Castle."

"Be it so," replied Sir Ralph; "but must yon unfortunate lady," he added, pointing to Mistress Nutter, "be taken with them?"

"Assuredly," replied Nowell. "We can make no distinction among such offenders; or, if there are any degrees in guilt, hers is of the highest class."

"You had better take leave of your daughter," said Sir Ralph to Mistress Nutter.

"I thank you for the hint," replied the lady. "Farewell, dear Alizon," she added, straining her to her bosom. "We must part for some time. Once more before I quit this world, in which I have played so wicked a part, I would fain look upon you—fain bless you, if I have the power—but this must be at the last, when my trials are wellnigh over, and when all is about to close upon me!"

"Oh! must it be thus?" exclaimed Alizon, in a voice half suffocated by emotion.

"It must," replied her mother. "Do not attempt to shake my resolution, my sweet child—do not weep for me. Amidst all the terrors that surround me, I am happier now than I have been for years. I shall strive to work out my redemption by prayers."

"And you will succeed!" cried Alizon.

"Not so!" shrieked Mother Demdike; "the Fiend will have his own. She is bound to him by a compact which nought can annul."

"I should like to see the instrument," said Potts. "I might give a legal opinion upon it. Perhaps it might be avoided; and in any case its production in court would have an admirable effect. I think I see the counsel examining it, and hear the judges calling for it to be placed before them. His infernal Majesty's signature must be a curiosity in its way. Our gracious and sagacious monarch would delight in it."

"Peace!" exclaimed Nicholas; "and take care," he cried, "that no further interruptions are offered by that infernal hag. Have you done, madam?" he added to Mistress Nutter, who still remained with her daughter folded in her arms.

"Not yet," replied the lady. "Oh! what happiness I have thrown away! What anguish—what remorse brought upon myself by the evil life I have led! As I gaze on this fair face, and think it might long, long have brightened my dark and desolate life with its sunshine—as I think upon all this, my fortitude wellnigh deserts me, and I have need of support from on high to carry me through my trial. But I fear it will be denied me. Nicholas Assheton, you have the deed of the gift of Rough Lee in your possession. Henceforth Alizon is mistress of the mansion and domains."

"Provided always they are not forfeited to the crown, which I apprehend will be the case," suggested Potts.

"I will take care she is put in possession of them," said Nicholas.

"As to you, Richard," continued Mistress Nutter, "the time may come when your devotion to my daughter may be rewarded and I could not bestow a greater boon upon you than by giving you her hand. It may be well I should give my consent now, and, if no other obstacle should arise to the union, may she be yours, and happiness I am sure will attend you!"

Overpowered by conflicting emotions, Alizon hid her face in her mother's bosom, and Richard, who was almost equally overcome, was about to reply, when Mother Demdike broke upon them.

"They will never be united!" she screamed. "Never! I have said it, and my words will come true. Think'st thou a witch like thee can bless an union, Alice Nutter? Thy blessings are curses, thy wishes disappointments and despair. Thriftless love shall be Alizon's, and the grave shall be her bridal bed. The witch's daughter shall share the witch's fate."

These boding words produced a terrible effect upon the hearers.

"Heed her not, my sweet child—she speaks falsely," said Mistress Nutter, endeavouring to re-assure her daughter; but the tone in which the words were uttered showed that she herself was greatly alarmed.

"I have cursed them both, and I will curse them again," yelled Mother Demdike.

"Away with the old screech-owl," cried Nicholas. "Take her to the beacon, and, if she continues troublesome, hurl her into the flame."

And, notwithstanding the hag's struggles and imprecations, she was removed.

"Whatever may betide, Alizon," cried Richard, "my life shall be devoted to you; and, if you should not be mine, I will have no other bride. With your permission, madam," he added, to Mistress Nutter, "I will take your daughter to Middleton, where she will find companionship and solace, I trust, in the attentions of my sister, who has the strongest affection for her."

"I could wish nothing better," replied the lady, "and now to put an end to this harrowing scene. Farewell, my child. Take her, Richard, take her!" she cried, as she disengaged herself from the relaxing embrace of her daughter. "Now, Master Nowell, I am ready."

"It is well, madam," he replied. "You will join the other prisoners, and we will set forth."

But at this juncture a terrific shriek was heard, which drew all eyes towards the beacon.

When Mother Demdike had been removed, in accordance with the squire's directions, her conduct became more violent and outrageous than ever, and those who had charge of her threatened, if she did not desist, to carry out the full instructions they had received, and cast her into the flames. The old hag defied and incensed them to such a degree by her violence and blasphemies, that they carried her to the very edge of the fire.

At this moment the figure of a monk, in mouldering white habiliments, came from behind the beacon, and stood beside the old hag. He slowly raised his hood, and disclosed features that looked like those of the dead.

"Thy hour is come, accursed woman!" cried the phantom, in thrilling accents. "Thy term on earth is ended, and thou shalt be delivered to unquenchable fire. The curse of Paslew is fulfilled upon thee, and will be fulfilled upon all thy viperous brood."

"Art thou the abbot's shade?" demanded the hag.

"I am thy implacable enemy," replied the phantom. "Thy judgment and thy punishment are committed to me. To the flames with her!"

Such was the awe inspired by the monk, and such the authority of his tones and gesture, that the command was unhesitatingly obeyed, and the witch was cast, shrieking, into the fire.

She was instantly swallowed up as in a gulf of flame, which raged, and roared, and shot up in a hundred lambent points, as if exulting in its prey.

The wretched creature was seen for a moment to rise up in it in extremity of anguish, with arms extended, and uttering a dreadful yell, but the flames wreathed round her, and she sank for ever.

When those who had assisted at this fearful execution looked around for the mysterious being who had commanded it, they could nowhere behold him.

Then was heard a laugh of gratified hate—such a laugh as only a demon, or one bound to a demon, can utter—and the appalled listeners looked around, and beheld Mother Chattox standing behind them.

"My rival is gone!" cried the hag. "I have seen the last of her. She is burnt—ah! ah!"

Further triumph was not allowed her. With one accord, and as if prompted by an irresistible impulse, the men rushed upon her, seized her, and cast her into the fire.

Her wild laughter was heard for a moment above the roaring of the flames, and then ceased altogether.

Again the flame shot high in air, again roared and raged, again broke into a multitude of lambent points, after which it suddenly expired.

All was darkness on the summit of Pendle Hill.

And in silence and in gloom scarcely more profound than that Weighing in every breast, the melancholy troop pursued its way to Whalley.

Freeeditorial 