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FERN FAIRY.

FRIENDS AND FOES FROM FAIRY LAND.

BY THE

RIGHT HON. LORD BRABOURNE,

AUTHOR OF "HIGGLEDY-PIGGLEDY," "WHISPERS FROM FAIRY LAND," ETC.

With numerous Illustrations

BY LINLEY SAMBOURNE.

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Dedication.

TO

ALL LOVERS OF FAIRY LORE,

IN COMPLIANCE WITH

MANY REQUESTS FROM OLD-YOUNG FRIENDS,

THESE THREE TALES,

WRITTEN IN STRAY MOMENTS,

ARE AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED BY

The Author.

INTRODUCTION.

THE three tales which form the present volume tell of fairies, good and bad, of evil witches, and of fanciful elves—some friends, some foes to mankind. There are wise people who call such tales frivolous, and think the time wasted which is employed on them.

But, in the first place, so far as I am concerned, the tales are written only in the most leisure of leisure moments, as a relaxation from heavier work; and, in the second place, I cannot think any time wasted which contributes to the amusement of the young. To my mind there is enough of dry, prosy matter stuffed into their poor brains in these dull times, and a little lighter food is as useful as it is welcome to them.

So the wise people may talk just as much wisdom as they please, and my fairies and I will only laugh at them, as long as boys and girls love us as well as *we* love *them*, and recognize in us pleasant friends with whom sometimes to pass an idle hour.

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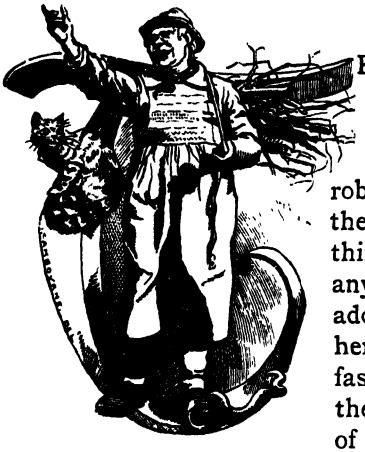
THE CAT-MAN.



THERE was once a man who was so unfortunate as to offend a powerful fairy — which, next to robbing a parish church, is the most foolish and unlucky thing which can happen to anybody. Without more ado the evil creature took her revenge after a cruel fashion. She commanded the nearest cat to jump out of her skin, which immediately fitted itself upon the man.

I fancy it was rather a tight fit, and was consequently very uncomfortable to the wearer. Also

it was rather hard upon the cat, who had done nothing particularly wrong, and by no means deserved such treatment. What became of its body I never exactly heard, but I believe that in that country such articles were always easily disposed of; and the sausage trade was said to be very brisk just at that time. But the man's condition was truly pitiable, for he found himself not only clothed with a skin which he did not at all want, but actually transformed into an animal to which he had always had an especial objection.

A moment's reflection will show that a man in a man's form and shape could not be covered by the skin of one cat, and therefore the fairy changed that form and shape so that this might be possible; after which, although the skin was both tight and unpleasant, it was certainly a better fit.

When she had completed this transformation, which was effected by the mere touch of her magic wand, and the recital of some words which I will not mention—because, even at this distance of time, they might have some unknown and unwholesome effect upon those who read them—she looked upon her unhappy victim with an air of ferocious exultation, and asked him how he liked it? He only groaned in reply, and even that groan terminated in a "*miauw*" so cat-like, and so dissimilar from his former manly voice, that his cruel enemy laughed outright.

"You will make a famous cat, John Dickson," she [illegible]d although I infer, from the sound to which you [illegible]e just given utterance, that you do

not like the prospect, you may probably enjoy your new existence more when you are used to it. At all events, you shall have every opportunity of giving it a fair trial. You shall not resume your original shape until a mouse shall of its own accord ask you to be so good as to eat it, and you shall find yourself able to refuse to do so."

As she spoke these words, the fairy smiled maliciously upon the poor man, who, as he heard them, knew but too well that their meaning was to condemn him to continue in his present miserable condition and shape for the rest of his natural life. For such had been the power of the wicked fairy's magic, that he had scarcely assumed the form of the animal with whose skin she had just endowed him, than he began to experience all the feelings and to partake of the nature of a cat; and an indescribable longing for mice seemed already to have taken possession of his heart, which never before had wished for anything of the kind. Therefore it was that he heard the words of his enemy with sadness and alarm, for it seemed to him that there was no chance that any mouse in its senses would ever ask a cat to eat it; and even if this most unlikely event should take place, he felt that unless some miracle was worked within him, any mouse which made such a fool of itself would be halfway down his throat before it had well finished its ridiculous request. This was no doubt present to the fairy's mind when she fixed the conditions upon which alone her unhappy victim might regain his natural shape, and resume the ordinary life of a man.

When she had pronounced the fatal words, and

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sufficiently glutted her malicious spirit with the contemplation of the misery she had inflicted, she spurned the wretched man-cat with her foot; and bidding him be gone about his business, flew off to do some evil thing in another part of the world, leaving the poor creature to the comfort of his own reflections.

You may well believe that this comfort was but small, for no human being can be stripped of his form and nature, and condemned to the condition of one of the inferior animals, without being made exceedingly uncomfortable by the transaction; and no reflection can make matters better in such a case.

John Dickson had been the husband of a loving wife and the father of a little daughter, to whom he was greatly devoted. His first thought, then, under the melancholy change which had befallen him, was for those dear objects of his affection. What would become of them, and how would they ever know what had become of *him?* His wife would think he had deserted her, and fled from his happy home. No! agonizing indeed was the thought for one moment, but the next brought consolation. She knew him too well to believe that he would ever willingly leave her. But then came another thought nearly as painful—the poor woman would think he had been murdered or kidnapped; the more she trusted him, the more would she feel assured that some fatal accident or misfortune must have befallen him, and her affliction would be extreme. His child, too, his loving little Amy—would she not miss his fond caresses? but [redacted]w long would she remember him? She was still [redacted]tender age—could he hope that he would

be long unforgotten? Should he ever see her again as she was when he last took her upon his knee, and listened with delight to her baby prattle?

Thus far had poor Dickson pursued his melancholy train of thought, when a field mouse happening to cross the pathway in which he was lying where the fairy had left him, everything gave way to the powerful instinct which possessed him on the moment, and he darted in swift pursuit, forgetful alike of wife and child, and conscious only of the presence of the little creature which excited his feline appetite. With a shrill shriek of dismay, the mouse sought refuge in the trunk of an adjoining tree; but her enemy was too quick for her, and in a second the hapless wretch was seized and devoured with a relish which her destroyer had never before experienced save for an oyster, a truffle, a golden plover, or some similar delicacy with which the greedy portion of mankind occasionally regale themselves. Poor John Dickson, how changed indeed was his nature! That very morning he had breakfasted like a Christian off a beefsteak, properly underdone; and here he was not only calmly supping off a mouse, not done at all, but positively enjoying it quite as much as his morning repast. When the meal was over, however, memory reasserted her powers; and, calling to mind what he had been, and how far he had fallen from his high position among men, he gave vent to his feelings in a long and pitiful "miauw;" and casting his eyes with a despairing glance upon that sun which at its rising had seen him a man, and was now about to leave him a cat at its setting, he gave way to the

feelings of grief which overpowered him, and wept bitterly.

I do not know how long he would have continued to enjoy this luxury of sorrow, had not his thoughts been diverted into another channel by an unexpected

CAT MIAWING.

interruption. A short, sharp bark, which sounded as if close in his ears, betokened the presence of a dog, which but a few short hours ago the poor man would ha[illegible]rded with indifference—if, indeed, he had not welcom[illegible] animal as a friend. Now, however,

the case was very different. His heart, as the saying is, leapt into his mouth. His new-born instinct told him that a cruel enemy was at hand, the memories of wife and child passed out of sight, and his immediate and only desire was to escape as fast as possible from his foe. He had not much time to think about it, for the dog was close upon him, running along the footpath as fast as he could, evidently bent upon mischief. Our cat, indeed, would have had but small chance of escape, if it had not so happened that his recent chase of the mouse had brought him to the foot of the tree to which the little animal had fled for refuge; and of this he took advantage without the loss of a second. As it was, he was only just in time, for the dog made a spring and a snap at him with such savage speed that it only missed his tail by about half an inch, as he scrambled up the trunk of the tree and made for the nearest branch. There he was out of reach of the attack of the dog, who danced about frantically beneath the branch, barking furiously, and abusing the luckless cat as if it had been the greatest rascal which the world had ever produced. I cannot give his exact words, because those who told me this story did not say what they were. Perhaps he spoke dog-Latin, which is always difficult to understand; but at any rate our cat understood perfectly well that neither his manner nor language was that of a friend. He was a large black terrier with a white chest; and having worked himself up into a great passion, continued to bark at the cat until he was tired of doing so, and then went away, leaving our poor friend in no happier mood

than when he had first arrived. He knew now that he would be surrounded and beset by enemies in his new life; and that among these must be included those animals which had ever been regarded as the special friends of man, and for whom he had himself always cherished a particular affection. Indeed, he had owned more than one, and it was a sad thought which crossed his mind that in future he would have to avoid his own dogs, should he chance to meet them; for doubtless they would see in him nothing more nor less than a hated cat, and would treat him in that manner which, alas! he had never discouraged in their behaviour to creatures of that which was now his own species. He groaned within himself as these reflections occurred to him, and the wretched vision passed before his eyes of his beloved terrier Pincher attacking and worrying his own master, under the firm conviction that he was only dealing with a common cat, as that master might himself have permitted or even encouraged.

Such were the man-cat's musings upon the branch of the old tree, and he would have mused on much longer had he not been roused by a little rustling noise near him, which he presently found to proceed from a venerable owl, who came out of a hollow part of the tree, evidently about to proceed upon her evening flight. Seeing the cat, and being of a polite disposition (to which, indeed, your well-bred owl is always inclined), she at once accosted him with the following words:

"Good evening, puss; I hope you are in good heart[illegible] have found a pleasant resting-place!"

OWL AND CAT.

This being the first time that our friend had ever been accosted by a bird, upon terms, too, of the most perfect equality, he hardly knew how to reply. He felt, however, that any air of superiority, such as man usually employs when dealing with what he is pleased to call "the inferior creation" would be altogether out of place, and that the owl was now every bit as good as he, if not rather better. So he answered her with great civility, rather mistrusting his voice as he did so, and being somewhat surprised and pleased to find that he could still speak English and that the owl did the same. He did not think it necessary to disclose his real history to the bird; but thanked her for her kind inquiries, told her that his health was perfectly good, and asked a question as to the quantity and quality of the mice in that neighbourhood, to which he professed himself a stranger.

The owl was by no means indisposed to afford him such information as lay in her power.

"Within this tree," she replied, smoothing her breast-feathers with her right foot as she spoke, "there is but a casual mouse to be seen. It has been my home for some years, and mice fight shy of it in consequence. But the meadows around are very fairly supplied, and I pick up many a supper by flitting over them at eventide, especially just after hay-time. Then it is that the mice, deprived of the long grass which has hitherto hid them from the eyes of an honest owl, are compelled to show themselves, and are consequently an easy prey to me and my friends. But if you really want a good preserve of mice, I know of none better than the large barn

at Donthorpe Farm hard by. It is full of the little wretches, and I believe they are of very good quality, being principally fed on Farmer Mossop's corn, which is very fattening food, and much improves the flavour of the mouse."

The cat thanked the worthy owl for this information, and having asked the best way to the barn, wished her good evening, and presently saw her flit quietly away upon her own business.

Then he bethought himself that he had better attend to *his*, and being certainly and beyond doubt a cat, follow the occupations of such an animal to the best of his ability. So he quietly descended the tree, having first looked round on every side to see that the coast was clear, and no enemy at hand; and having accomplished this feat, trotted a little way down the footpath and began to make the best of his way towards the barn which had been so well recommended to him, and where he thought he would, at all events for the present, take up his abode. He did not keep long to the footpath, because his new instinct told him that it was a place too public for the safety of a cat at that time of the evening, when enemies in the shape of men and dogs were to be dreaded, and unknown dangers might at any moment be met. So he struck off to the right, across the meadow to the nearest hedge, and, keeping as close to it as he could, crept along in a manner very unlike the manly walk which had been his former way of advancing, and with cautious and timid tread drew gradually nearer and nearer to the place he had been advised to seek.

It was a very large barn, which formed one side of the farmyard to which it belonged, and which it completely sheltered from the wind and rain which might come from that quarter. There was neither wind nor rain, however, upon the evening of which we write, and our cat crept up to the barn without any interruption. The sun had nearly gone down now, and in the half-darkness of the coming night our friend stole round the building to find out the best way of entrance. This was not difficult to discover, for the barn was old, and not in a particularly good state of repair, so that it was not long before the searcher came upon a hole in the boarding through which he managed without difficulty to find his way inside. Then he stood still and listened; but hearing nothing to inspire him with distrust or alarm, he peered cautiously around and began to examine the inside of the place which he had entered. At the end where he found himself there was no hay or straw, or corn of any kind to be seen, but this part of the barn seemed to be used for other purposes. There was litter of various kinds lying about, a few hurdles leaning against one side of the building, some sacks and other articles; but nothing very tempting to a cat, and probably only things put there for a time, until the space should be wanted for the storage of crops.

But on the other side of the threshing-floor, which occupied the middle of the barn, was a more inviting sight. A quantity of straw was stacked here, which seemed likely to afford a very proper resting-place for a weary cat, and possibly might harbour some of

those animals upon which it placed its chief reliance for food. Accordingly our friend glided across the barn to this straw, and, finding nobody to hinder him, made himself a nice bed in it and curled himself quietly up to sleep. This, however, was but for a short time, for he felt rather hungry, having only partaken of one small field-mouse since he had assumed his present form; and he soon began to think that it would be well to see whether the owl had given a correct account of the contents of the barn. He was able to satisfy himself upon this point without the necessity of long delay; for scarcely had he raised his head from the straw upon which he lay, when the first glance he gave around showed him that the account he had received was true enough, and that the barn not only contained other occupants besides himself, but occupants of the very description that he most desired.

A number of mice, at first peeping timidly out from their various places of concealment, presently became bolder and bolder, and, evidently unaware of the presence of so dreadful an enemy of their kind, began to engage in friskings and gambols upon the threshing-floor as if it had been put there on purpose for their amusement. They ran races, jumped one over the other, leaped up and down in joyous glee, and squeaked with pleasure, as if satisfied that they might safely indulge in that play to which mice proverbially betake themselves in the absence of the cat.

Alas! in the present instance they reckoned without their host; or rather, being a host in themselves,

they either forgot to reckon at all, or, if they did so, reckoned without knowledge of a hostile presence. Only too soon, however, did they discover their mistake.

With so many mice immediately before him, no feelings of a man remained within the breast of our friend: he was all cat in an instant—cat in heart and nature as well as in form and features, and unmistakably cat also in the spirit and intention with which he gazed upon the little creatures who so unsuspiciously played before him. His gaze was earnest; nay, ravenous. The nature of the tiger within his breast was thoroughly awakened, and as the mice came nearer and nearer to him in their playful antics, he could presently restrain himself no longer, but swiftly and silently dashed in among them, and in an instant converted their playful cries of joy into shrill shrieks of affright and dismay.

So sudden and unexpected was the onslaught of their enemy, that the poor little animals were completely taken unawares, and fled in every direction without knowing what to do or where to go to for safety. The cat was undoubtedly master of the situation, and had slaughter been his only or even his principal object, a vast number of mice would have quickly fallen victims to his furious attack. Happily for them, however, he had the more immediate and reasonable object of satisfying his hunger, and therefore, when some half-dozen mice had been disabled by the quick strokes which he dealt with his paws right and left, he ceased to kill in order that he might eat. This he forthwith pro-

ceeded to do without any unnecessary delay, and made an excellent supper off the fallen mice, for the first time since his childhood requiring neither knife nor fork, and finding the threshing-floor quite as good a table as he desired. Never had he been better pleased in the days of his manhood with a supper of lobster salad and champagne, and neither remorse nor pity disturbed his cat-like heart as he feasted upon the remains of his luckless victims.

The repast occupied him for at least a quarter of an hour, and it was not until it had been completed for several minutes, and his appetite fully satisfied, that some feelings of his old man-nature, not yet wholly extinct, began to revive within him, and a shudder passed through him at the thought of what had just occurred. Perhaps it was part of the punishment which the wicked fairy had determined to inflict upon the unhappy wretch, that whilst compelled to adopt the nature, habits, and disposition of a cat, memory should still live within his breast, and so much of man-nature should remain to him as should from time to time make him conscious of the sad change which he had undergone, and shrink with horror from things which instinct and his new nature nevertheless compelled him to do. I do not know whether it was so, because I am not well acquainted with the plans and customs of wicked fairies; but if this was part of her arrangement, it succeeded perfectly in the present instance. Remorse awakened within the cat-man: he had done that which was horrible to human nature—attacked little creatures far smaller and weaker than himself, who

had done him no harm whatever; and not only attacked them, but killed and eaten several of them then and there. The cruelty of which he had been guilty afflicted him less, I fear, than the feeling of disgust that he should have been able to enjoy—as he certainly had enjoyed—such a meal; and he felt so utterly miserable that he hardly knew how to endure such an existence any longer. Cats, however, are not in the habit of putting an end to their own lives, and cat-nature had possessed him too strongly to allow of his doing that which no animal but man is ever foolish or wicked enough to attempt.

He sat still, therefore, agitated by the uncomfortable thoughts to which I have alluded; and finding that the best refuge from them was that sleep which would enable him to forget his sad condition for a time, turned round to seek again the bed which he had made for himself in the straw. Just as he was about to do so, however, his attention was attracted by a low, purring sound near him; and casting his eyes in the direction from which it seemed to proceed, he saw, to his surprise, an animal of his own species stealing quietly towards him. Strange indeed were the sensations which he experienced at this moment. I have already hinted that, as a man, he had never been partial to cats, and at the first sight of the newcomer the old feeling seemed at once to rise within him. It was, however, almost immediately stifled and overcome by the new sensation with which his instinct recognized the approach of one of his own kind, to whom, in spite of the past, he was at once attracted by his present nature and feelings. It was

a cat, too, of pleasant appearance, and she evidently entertained no unfriendly sentiments towards our hero. On the contrary, she came close up to him in the most confiding manner, and accosting him in the cat language (which he somehow understood perfectly well), said that she was very glad to see him there, and to have the pleasure of making the acquaintance of such a fine cat as he appeared to be.

The courtesy of this address was not lost upon our hero, who replied to it by an appropriate compliment to the grace and beauty of his new friend, and regretted at the same time that he had not known of her coming before, since he had just concluded his supper, from which only one small morsel was left uneaten. This, however, he was delighted to place at her disposal; and she, graciously accepting the gift without demur or hesitation, soon made an end of the food provided for her, and expressed her obligation for the same.

The two cats then began to converse, and to inquire of each other the history of their past lives. Our worthy man-cat thought it best to conceal his, and to palm off upon his new friend such an account of himself as would satisfy her, and prevent disagreeable questions. He therefore told her that he had lived in woods at a great distance off for a long time past, and had started upon a journey of adventure, when he had by chance fallen in with an owl, who had directed him to the barn in which they then stood, as a convenient place for a wandering cat to seek a night's lodging.

The other replied that she belonged to the farm-

house, and was the daughter of the favourite cat of the place, who had recently died of old age and too much cream, having been accidentally locked into the dairy and profited too greedily by the circumstance. She said there were several other cats about the place, and that their lives were upon the whole easy and secure. Her name was "Minnie"—and here she paused and asked her new acquaintance to impart his name in return for this disclosure. The request rather puzzled our friend, but being a fellow of somewhat ready invention he told her that he was called "Bob;" with which she was quite satisfied, and said that she thought it a very pretty name—as I dare say she would have said of any name which he had been pleased to adopt on the spur of the moment. She further told him that there was no reason why he should not join their cat-family at Donthorpe Farm, for there was plenty of food for all, and it seemed a pity that he should pass his life in wandering about when such was the case. Nobody, she assured him, would interfere with or annoy him; and if he would only make up his mind to this course, she would be happy to introduce him to the rest of the family the first thing in the morning.

To this our friend raised no objection, for nothing of his old nature remained strong enough within him to prevent his feeling desirous of the companionship of others of his new species. Accordingly he agreed to all that Minnie proposed, and consented to join the party at the farm, and to take up his abode there for the future. They had some more conversation as they nestled up comfortably in the straw; and in

talking over the various delights and privileges of cat-dom, the excellence of young rats and mice, the tenderness of birds just fledged, the delicious taste of new milk or cream, and the intense enjoyment of basking on the window-sill on a real hot day, all thoughts of the more refined diet and intellectual pleasures of his former existence passed from the mind of the transformed man—whom we had better call by his assumed name of Bob, now that he is fairly launched among the tribe of cats, and has qualified himself for their society.

It was rather a trying time when he was introduced to the family the next morning. Effie and Jenny, indeed, the sister and cousin of his first friend Minnie, showed themselves amiable enough, and were very glad to welcome the new-comer as one of themselves; but Tom and Nipper, the gentlemen of the party, were by no means of the same opinion, and showed a disposition to resent the addition of another individual to a number of cats which they said was already sufficient for the food which the place could afford. They muttered something about travelling beggars and interlopers, and showed themselves so disagreeable and inclined to quarrel, that but for the kindness and persuasion of Minnie, poor Bob would have very soon been driven out of the place. This estimable lady, however, smoothed away all difficulties, told the two sulky cats that they ought to be ashamed of themselves for not showing more kindness to a stranger; and by her judicious management soon put things upon a better footing.

There was in reality plenty of food to be had at

the farm, which not only abounded with mice, but, from the nests of the swallows and sparrows under the eaves and in the thatch, and from those of the robins, hedge-sparrows, and other birds in the hedges near the farm and the ivy on the barn, supplied so many fledglings as to afford a pleasant variety in the food with which the cats regaled themselves, and a constant excitement during the nesting season. Fortunately for Master Bob, the farmer and his family were fond of cats, and raised no objection to the new addition to those who were already about the place. There was, indeed, only one drawback to the happiness which these animals might have enjoyed, and this existed in the bitter hostility of a certain white terrier, Grip by name, who was at open war with the whole race of cats, and made no exception in favour of those who belonged to the farm.

Unfortunately for them, Grip was a favourite with the farmer, on account of his being such a capital dog for a rat or other kind of vermin. There was no chance, therefore, of getting rid of him, and the only comfort was that, partly owing to his behaviour towards the cats, he was not allowed indoors, and it was only outside the house that they had to fear him. There was real cause for fear there, for Grip was not one of those dogs who merely run round a cat and bark at her, but are careful not to come within reach of her claws. This was not his practice, but if ever he got the chance he rushed right in upon a cat that was within his reach, and, in spite of spitting and scratching, laid hold of her in such a manner as made it more than doubtful whether she

ever escaped alive from his attack. Bob was very soon warned of this enemy by his friend Minnie, and consequently took great care to avoid him.

It happened, however, when he had only been at the farm for two or three days, that he was basking on the roof of one of the out-buildings close to the farmhouse, when, somewhat to his surprise, he was accosted very civilly by the cat Nipper, who told him that he had found a new sparrow's nest, and asked him to come and see whether the young birds were out yet. Bob thought it best to comply at once, hoping from this invitation that the prejudice against him on the part of Nipper, if not also of Tom, had passed away, and that if they were prepared to be friends he had better meet them half-way. So he followed the other cat across the roof of the out-house, and so along the gutter that joined on to the stable, at one end of which, outside, was an old empty barrel, turned lengthways, with some straw inside it, which commonly served as the resting-place of the celebrated Grip. It was a broad, old-fashioned gutter, which ran round the stable roof; and when the two cats had reached that part of it which immediately overhung Grip's barrel, Nipper told his companion that the nest was close to the chimney just above them, and that if he would stand on his hind-legs and creep up by the pipe which ran down from the base of the chimney to the gutter, he would be able to see it for himself. Suspecting no evil, Bob prepared to follow these directions; but no sooner had he stood upon his hind-legs in order to begin to climb, than his treacherous companion pushed them from under

him so as to destroy his balance, and gave him a violent thrust over the gutter, exclaiming at the same time in a savage tone: "Go to Grip, you strange brute!"

There can be no doubt that this wicked cat had watched Grip go to his barrel, and had then determined to lay this trap in order to destroy the newcomer whom he so much hated. Such wickedness, however, sometimes meets with a reward which its perpetrator scarcely expected, and such was the case in this instance. Our friend fell, not from, but towards his comrade, so that, in spite of being taken at such disadvantage, he had time to try to save himself by catching at Nipper, which he did to such good purpose that the latter also lost his balance, and the two cats rolled off the gutter together, and fell right on the top of the barrel below. Out rushed Grip, naturally startled by the noise, and seeing two cats rolling off his barrel, made at once for the nearest of them, which happened to be the treacherous Nipper. The latter had no time to fly, and although he struck fiercely at the dog, he was taken at such disadvantage that he could do nothing. Grip had him by the throat in an instant, shook him fiercely to and fro without ever for a moment relinquishing his hold, and did not leave him until the breath was out of his body, and he had met the very fate into which he had tried to betray his confiding companion.

Bob, as you may well suppose, did not stay to watch the end of the affair, but as soon as he saw how matters stood, made off at the top of his speed to a place of safety. When he told the story to the other

cats, they expressed great horror at the conduct of Nipper, and I do not think he was much regretted at the farm. Indeed, from this time forward Bob seemed to have more than ever won the friendship of the farm cats; and if he had never been anything *but* a cat, I dare say his life would have been one of unclouded happiness. But in this case the revenge of the fairy would have been incomplete, and therefore from time to time the memories of manhood still returned, and the man-cat had bitter moments which could hardly be sweetened by the tenderest mouse, the most delicate young birds, or the kindest attentions paid him by Minnie and her companions.

Still, life glided on calmly enough at the farm; and if it had always been so, I do not know that Bob could have had any reasonable cause of complaint. If he had not the privileges, neither had he the cares, troubles, and responsibilities of a man. The tightness of his skin had long passed away, and he had all the enjoyments of a cat, of which magic could not deprive him as long as he retained the shape of that animal. Under these conditions, then, life was after all endurable, and many a man who has lived upon earth would have readily changed places with our hero.

One day, however, an event occurred which changed the whole current of Bob's life, and proved that the happiness of neither cat nor man is secure in this uncertain world. The autumn and winter had passed away; spring had re-visited the earth—the yellow primroses decked the ground with their cheerful splendour, birds began to build and sing, and, as the poets say, Nature appeared to re-awaken

from her frost-bound sleep. The cats at the farm, though they had not been frost-bound, began to re-awaken too, and thoughts of young birds filled their tender breasts as they watched the old ones flying to and fro and preparing for the nesting season. Young birds, however, were not the only things of which they thought and dreamed. Whispers passed round amongst them that the rabbits were now breeding, and that the woods would shortly contain plenty of these interesting animals, so dear to the heart and mouth of any cat who has ever been thrown into their company.

At the distance of only two or three fields from the farm was a wood of good repute as regarded rabbits; it was of good size, and had a large dry bank in it, the very best place in the world for rabbits-earths, for which purpose it was largely used by the little animals. Bowser Wood was well known by name and reputation to the farm cats, and although there were traditions among them of cats who had gone there and mysteriously disappeared, the present generation knew nothing of this for certain, and had heard tales from their mother which had filled their youthful hearts with varied feelings in connection with the wood. She, worthy cat, spoke of it as a feeding-ground of most desirable character, and told of visits to it which had been amply repaid and had caused much pleasure to those concerned. It is true that she also spoke of risks which had to be run—of keepers, dogs, guns, and traps, and solemnly warned her children to keep away from it and dwell quietly at home; but inasmuch as she had spoken first of the

pleasures and delights of the place, it was but natural that the minds of the young cats should dwell upon these, and that the warnings should be forgotten. Accordingly, whenever they talked together, the wood and its contents formed a principal topic of conversation; and Effie and Tom generally led the way to this subject, because they were the only two of the cats who had really been to the wood. Tom had coaxed Effie to come with him one summer's evening, shortly before the arrival of Bob at the farm; and although, being young and timid, they had only prowled along the outside for a little distance, they had seen enough to make them certain that it was a charming place, and had very nearly caught a young pheasant who was sitting on a stake and bind hedge without any suspicion of an enemy. As it was, they just missed him, and he made such a noise in his escape that, being new at such work, they were afraid to stay there any longer, and hurried off home as fast as they could. But the loss of that bird was always a sore point with the two cats, and the recollection of that evening clung fondly to their hearts.

Now Effie, so to speak, had lately been rather setting her cap at Bob, who, although faithful to his first friend Minnie, was not insensible to the attentions paid him by the other two ladies of the family, and was very ready to be friends with all. He listened therefore with a willing ear to the proposals which Effie often made that they should take an evening stroll together, and when she hinted that a visit to the wood would be a pleasant thing, he did not see any objection to the plan. Effie begged him not to tell the others;

Minnie, she said, would be sure to object out of jealousy of her; Jenny would be telling everybody she met, which was not desirable; and as for Tom, of course he would say that *he* ought to go rather than Bob. So on all accounts the matter should be kept quiet, and they two would go together. Now Effie was a tortoiseshell cat, handsome in appearance and easy-going by disposition; she was very good at bird-catching, and an agreeable companion at all times. Bob, who was rather soft-hearted, was easily coaxed by her into doing what she wanted; and accordingly, one fine evening they stole away unperceived by the other cats, crept under the farmyard gate into the orchard, and, stealing quietly along the hedge of that field and a ploughed field beyond, came into the little green meadow which lay between the latter and the wood. Here they paused a minute, and looked around to see that everything was safe. All was still and silent, so they stole quietly across the field and safely reached the wood-hedge on the other side. They crept along this hedge for a little way, finding that between it and themselves there was a ditch with a little water and a great many brambles in it; and as no well-bred cat likes either to wet her feet or to tear her fur if she can possibly avoid doing so, they looked out for some dry spot at which they might be able to enter the wood. Presently they came to the very place of which they were in search. A small plank had been thrown across the ditch, and there was an opening in the hedge, with only a hurdle laid across it, by pushing which aside the keepers probably made their way to

and from the path which the cats could now see in the wood. They could not, it is true, push aside the hurdle, but they could creep under it, which did quite as well, and by this means they entered the wood. It was certainly a pleasant-looking place. There were a good many tall trees scattered about in it, and a fine growth of underwood which afforded excellent protection to the game. No living thing, however, met their eyes as they passed silently along the path, and they began to wonder what they had better do, and where they were likely to find those young rabbits the desire for which had drawn them to the wood. Presently the path divided, and, for some reason best known to themselves, they took that which led to the right, and soon found that they had not been mistaken in doing so. Just before them was the large bank, or rather hill, of which I have spoken, on which the underwood grew more thickly on account of the sandy soil, but which was particularly well suited for rabbits, and bore every appearance of being a place much frequented by these creatures, several of whom the cats saw as they advanced. Not content with seeing, however, they crept silently up, and managed to cut off an innocent young rabbit from the earth to which he belonged. He saw Bob, indeed, and started off at full speed, but was so unlucky as to run right into Effie's mouth, who folded her loving paws around him in such a manner as speedily put an end to his innocent existence. The two cats, being hungry after their walk, did not think it necessary to delay their supper, but forthwith made a hearty meal upon their unfortunate

victim. He was too small, however, to satisfy their appetites, and they determined to look around them and explore the place a little more carefully. There were a good many rabbits' holes, of greater or less size: some quite small, and some large enough for a cat to enter. One of the latter really looked very inviting—it was evident that rabbits were either then within or had been so very recently; and after looking at it for a little while, Effie proposed to Bob that he should try to creep in, whilst she waited outside till he returned. Being, as I have already remarked, of a good-natured disposition, Bob readily complied, and began to advance to the mouth of the hole; but scarcely had he set foot upon the earth in front of it when he heard a sharp click, and before he had time to retreat, the cunningly contrived trap upon which he had stepped sprang together and seized him fast by the leg. The keepers had set it so cleverly, and covered it so carefully with a thin sprinkling of sand, that no cat could possibly have discovered it; and the moment our poor friend trod upon the spring, the trap closed its iron teeth upon him and there he was, a prisoner without hope of escape. The pain was considerable, for although, fortunately for him, the trap was an old one, and the teeth consequently not very sharp, for all that they held him like a vice and squeezed him in a most unpleasant manner. This, however, was not so bad as the feeling which instantly arose within him, that he would now be entirely at the mercy of the keeper, or of any dog which chanced to pass that way before the man came to visit his traps, What a terrible fate! In an instant all the past

flashed across his mind, and he felt most keenly the bitterness and humiliation of his position. He, a man, who had lived and walked and talked among men, to be held there by the leg, in the form of an inferior animal, waiting to be knocked on the head, and without being able to explain the truth to those who would perform that kindly office for him. It was too horrible!

Meanwhile, his companion's behaviour was heartless in the extreme. As soon as she saw what had happened, she started back in affright, and uttered a low cry of surprise and horror, but the next moment fear for her own safety prevailed over every other feeling. She had indeed the grace to tell Bob how sorry she was for his misfortune—"but," she continued, "you see I can't help you, poor fellow, and if the keepers come and find me here I shall be in as bad a plight as you are." With these words Miss Effie made no more ado, but scuttled off home as fast as she could, leaving her comrade to his fate.

Bob did not try to detain her, nor indeed could she have been of any use to him if she had stayed. The trap held him with a power which no cat could have overcome, and he had nothing for it but to remain, bearing as well as he could his double pain of body and mind until the morning. Oh what a weary night that was! Never did he go through such a time, before or since. He thought it would never end, and felt as if a knock on the head would really be rather a comfort than otherwise. If his old enemy the fairy had been there, she surely would have been satisfied with his misery, for indeed it was

grievous, and almost more than either the nature of man or cat could endure. But, like other things in this world of ours, the night came to an end at last. The sun began to light up the earth again, the birds began to twitter, the squirrels to chatter, the rabbits to come out and nibble the young grass, and, in fact, all nature was once more astir.

With the rest of the world, John Noggins the keeper awoke again, and set off in the early morn to visit his traps according to the common custom of keepers. As luck would have it, his little boy Bill had asked leave to go with him that day, and accordingly the two trudged off together—the father with his gun on his shoulder, in case he should find any magpie, jay, stoat, or weasel impertinent enough to be enjoying the fine morning as well as himself; and the son with a stick in one hand and a bag in the other, in which to put a hedgehog if he could find one, since his mother had been complaining of the black beetles in their little cellar, and everybody knows that there is nothing like a hedgehog to settle the business of black beetles. Thus armed, Mr. Noggins and his son left their cottage, which was very near the wood in which poor Bob had met with his misfortune, and after looking at a trap or two in a neighbouring plantation, came at once to the wood, and inspected all the traps one after another. In one of these they found a wretched weasel, of whom they made short work, and in another an unlucky hen-pheasant had stepped, and left her foot behind her, which was a misfortune which the best of keepers cannot always avoid. A pheasant, if it happens to tread on a trap,

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will spring it as well as any other bird, and thus the very contrivance which has been set to protect it against its enemies works the poor bird's ruin, and either cuts off its foot, or holds it by the leg so as to inflict a terrible injury. In some of the traps there was nothing at all, and it was not till the keeper and his son came to the rabbits' earths on the dry bank in the wood that they both perceived at the same moment that a cat was in that particular trap.

"Hallo, Bill!" cried worthy John Noggins to his son, "here's a thief nicely caught! I wonder if it's one of them dratted cats from the farm. Where's Viper?"

Now Viper was the keeper's terrier, a dreadful enemy to all cats, but by singular good luck he had been left at home that morning, and Bob therefore escaped what would have been a very awkward attack in his then defenceless condition. The keeper's next remark, however, was not calculated to make him feel more comfortable than before.

"Lend a hand with the gun, boy," he said, addressing his son, "till I knock her on the head with your stick."

When he heard these words, Bob thought it was all up with him, and prepared to meet his fate as a man-cat should do. But to his relief and surprise (for he knew what boys are, and that mercy is not one of their most common qualities where a cat is concerned) Bill answered his father in an unexpected manner.

"Oh, Dad," he said, "don't go for to kill that cat —'tis a mortal pretty one. Let's bag it and take it home to mother."

"You'll not find that so easy, mate," said the keeper, with a smile; "them cats is terrible vicious and sharp-bitten, 'specially when they be caught like this be. You'll never get her into the bag, boy!"

"Let's try, anyhow," replied Bill; and opening the mouth of his bag as wide as he could, he approached the unhappy captive.

Our poor friend was about as miserable as you can imagine any animal to be who has passed a long night in the cruel grip of a steel trap. It had, moreover, sorely tried his temper, as was not unnatural, and all the wildest and fiercest passions of his cat-nature rose within his breast, prompting him to spit, scratch, bite, and savagely resist the approach of the boy in every possible way. Had he done so, it is probable that the elder Noggins would have settled matters with him without further delay. Happily, however, man-nature prevailed, and, well understanding that his only chance of life was to submit to the boy he only gave one long "miauw" of pain, and suffered the bag to be put over his head without a struggle. Then the keeper loosened the trap, and in a moment Bob was safe in the bag, which was soon tied in such a manner that escape was out of the question. Indeed, had he wished it and been able to get out, he could only have gone away on three legs, for the hind-leg which had been in the trap was quite disabled.

The boy, meanwhile, was delighted with his success. "There, Dad!" he cried, "I knew I should get her into the bag all right. Won't mother be pleased? She was saying only t'other morning how

much she wanted a cat about the place, and now here is the very thing."

"Yes," answered his father, "if you can tame her and keep her, Bill; but I misdoubt she'll be off to the woods again the first chance, and then you'll wish you'd let me knock her on the head."

"No I sha'n't," returned the boy, sturdily. "'Tis worth a trial, Dad, anyhow; and if she don't stay, 'twill only be one cat more or less, and I guess she won't be over-sweet on our wood again after this."

"We shall see," said his father, and on they went to finish their rounds.

Our friend was in no very comfortable condition. The bag—which I should rather have called a sack, for such it really was—hung over the boy's shoulder, and would in no case have been a very pleasant kind of conveyance; but at the present moment his wounded leg added to the discomfort of the cat's position, and every time the boy stumbled, or stepped over a hedge or ditch, or shifted the sack from one shoulder to the other, the jolting and shaking gave the poor creature great pain, and more than once made him doubt whether it would not have been better to have been knocked on the head at once. At last, however, the rounds of the keeper came to an end: the hour of breakfast was at hand, and keepers, like other men, must have their breakfast or know the reason why. So John Noggins and his son found their way to their cottage about the time when they knew that this meal would be ready for them, and the sack and its contents were safely deposited at the feet of Mrs. Noggins. She, although

as a keeper's wife bound to regard all vermin as her natural enemies, and cats quite as much so as stoats, jays, hawks, and even, I fear, foxes, was still a kind-hearted woman, and withal sensible enough to know that where rats and mice abound, as was the case in her husband's cottage, a cat may play the part of a valuable friend. She therefore gave the stranger a ready welcome, and was much pleased with Bill's remembrance of her wish, and thoughtfulness in bringing the animal home. The next question was as to where the cat should be kept until he grew tame enough to be allowed his liberty. This was soon settled. There was a large empty ferret-house in one of the lodges in which the keeper kept various things belonging to his profession. It had iron bars in front, too close together for a cat to slip through, and a heavy lid which secured it safely enough when shut down. A little clean straw was put in this, some milk in a wooden platter placed in one corner of it, and then our poor friend was shot out of the sack into the straw, the lid was closed, and he was left to his own reflections. These, you may well suppose, were not particularly pleasant. The life he had led at the farm was about as happy a life as a cat could desire to have. Plenty of food, plenty of amusement, pleasant companions, and that liberty which is dear to every animal, had rendered it an existence really to be envied. And now all was changed. Confined within the narrow walls of a prison, with no companion to speak to, no friend near, and in constant pain from his wounded limb, he seemed to have nothing to look forward to but a

life of captivity, as cheerless and wretched a prospect as he could imagine. There seemed no hope of escape, and his heart sank within him as he pondered upon his miserable condition. Being, however, somewhat of a philosopher, he presently determined within himself that it was no use groaning and moaning over what could not be helped, and that he would therefore make the best of it, and hope that things might turn out better than they appeared likely to do at that moment. He was, at all events, safe from danger for the present, and it was foolish to worry himself for no good purpose. So he crawled to the corner in which the milk had been placed, and without more ado lapped up every drop of it. Then, arranging his wounded leg as comfortably as he could, he curled himself up in the straw and tried to forget his troubles in sleep, as many have done before and will do after him. It was very lucky for him that the trap in which he had been caught happened to be an old one, the teeth of which had been somewhat blunted and the spring weakened by time and exposure to the weather. Consequently it had neither cut nor broken, but only bruised the leg by which it had held him; and although the bruise was a bad one, and caused him much pain, there was nothing in it but what care and patience would enable him to get over. He did not sleep much, it is true, for, as is often the case when the body and mind are both ill at ease, frequent dreams disturbed his rest, and the visions of owls, other cats, dogs, rabbits and traps, flitted across his brain, varied every now and then by the recollection of the

wicked fairy, whose cruel face and mocking smile seemed present before his eyes, and startled him from the repose of which he stood so much in need. Still, somehow or other, the hours slipped away, and at last he was roused by the careful opening of the lid of his prison, and the kindly face of Dame Noggins peered in upon him. Her intentions were so evidently of a friendly character, that our friend very wisely determined to show that he was a cat who deserved good treatment, and not to appear more wild or frightened than he really was. So instead of flying at her as a savage cat might have done, or crouching down in the farthest corner of the hutch as would have been the course of a cowed and timid cat, he looked her straight in the face and gave a "miauw" which at once touched her heart and excited her pity.

"Bless me," she exclaimed, as she opened the lid somewhat wider, "this poor creature is tame enough, poor thing. I wonder how ever it come out in the woods and got trapped. Deary me, how its poor leg have swelled! I'll see if I can't bind it up a bit. Pussy, pussy, poor pussy!" and so saying the good woman began to coax the cat with kind words, and, what was more to the purpose, refilled the platter with milk and placed it within reach of the suffering animal.

Partly in order to show his confidence in the giver, and partly because he was getting hungry again, our friend lapped up the milk without any unnecessary delay; and as this showed Mrs. Noggins more plainly than ever that he was a tame cat, she

thought she might venture to stroke him, and accordingly did so. As he received her advances with readiness, she then proceeded to get some rag, and, having bathed it, bound it up in a manner which made him feel much more comfortable, and then left him to himself. Next day she attended to him again, and so quiet and docile did our friend appear, that on the third day she took him out and let him sit on a piece of old blanket before the kitchen fire, as snug and as much at home as if he had belonged to the place all his life. Under this favourable treatment the bad leg soon got well, and in a very short time the man-cat was almost himself again. He was introduced to the dog Viper, who, although a sworn foe to cats, perfectly well understood that he must be friends with any animal, be it what it might, which had its home with the Noggins family, and who therefore never attempted to interfere with Bob, but treated him with a civil kind of contempt which was the best behaviour he could show to a cat.

So Bob felt safe enough, and before long gained the approval of his new mistress by catching a fine young rat, who unwisely came out of the faggot stack while he was prowling around, and met with his fate accordingly. Here, then, our friend had found a resting-place where he might apparently have passed the rest of his days in peace and tranquillity. But this was not to be. Whether it was part of the sentence passed upon him by his enemy, or whether it was only that nature which is so powerful both in man and beast, certain it is that a restless craving for change possessed the breast of

the man-cat—an intense desire to do something else, and to *be* something else than what he was. The remembrance of his former state did not come upon him so often as at first, but when it *did* come it came as intensely as ever, and excited thoughts and feelings which made it absolutely impossible that he should settle down to a quiet and contented existence in the keeper's cottage. There, indeed, he had met with nothing but kindness, but he felt—he knew—that somehow and somewhere he had a destiny to work out above and beyond that of a common cat; and at any cost, at any sacrifice, at any risk to himself, this must be done! So he made up his mind to move on, to leave the hospitable cottage and his kind friends, and to seek his fortune still further afield. It was not without regret that he did so, but he knew he had got to do it, and therefore only watched his opportunity. It came soon enough.

One afternoon Mrs. Noggins and Bill both went off hopping, and the keeper having his woods to look to, the cottage was left alone for some hours. This gave Bob plenty of time to get a good start before he should be missed, and he therefore determined to take advantage of so favourable an occasion. He made all his preparations early in the afternoon, and having neither luggage to take with him nor servant to give orders to, these were not many, as may be easily understood.

He wished the cottage good-bye about four o'clock, stole quietly away down an old lane at the back of it, and went out once more into the wide world. He met nobody in the lane but a donkey munching

thistles, who took no notice of him, and an old jay who asked him what he was after, and gave a hoarse screech at him when he told her in reply to mind her own business. On he went until he came to a place where the lane joined a road, which he crossed quickly, and entered a large beech-wood which extended for a mile or more along the side of a hill, and through which he could travel without fear of being seen. This was his great object, and he knew that if he could by this means get away a few miles from the cottage before evening fell, he should be able to go much farther by night, and should probably find some place where he could safely take up his abode until fortune decided for him what should be his next step.

There was very little underwood beneath the beeches; a few holly trees were scattered here and there, and an occasional bramble-bush met the eye of our friend as he trotted quietly along. But there was nothing to check the journey of an honest cat from one end of the wood to the other, and as he made the best of his way forward, before night he was quite as far from the keeper's cottage as he had expected. His journey had given him an appetite which he did not very well know how to satisfy, and I really think that he would have begun even thus soon to regret the cottage on this account, if he had not luckily stumbled upon a wounded partridge in the very first field after he left the wood. It was a stubble-field, on which a covey of birds were quietly feeding in the late afternoon's sun, and their wounded companion with them. He, of course,

could not fly up as the others did when the cat came out from the wood, and being cut off from the latter, saw escape to be hopeless, and yielded himself to his fate with scarce an effort to flutter away. The cat made a hearty meal off the unlucky bird, and after taking a short rest proceeded on his journey.

The country, when the friendly wood had been left behind, was somewhat too open for a person who wished to travel without being seen by everybody, which was the course suggested to our friend by his cat-nature, and was certainly the wisest for an animal of his species. However, from the hill on which he stood he saw tall trees in the far distance, which seemed to belong to another wood, and he at once determined to turn his steps in that direction. Slowly he crept along the hedgerows, and when the moon rose he took still greater precautions not to be seen, lest any enemy of the race to which he belonged should by chance be at hand—for cats have many enemies, and never care to meet them if it can be avoided.

It was a lovely night, and our friend really enjoyed it, and met with no interruption to his journey until he came very near to the tall trees which he had seen from the hill. He soon found that these stood in a gentleman's park, which was evidently of some size, and was surrounded by a high wooden fence. Finding a gap in this, the cat presently crept through, and at once perceived that he had come into a pleasant place. There was a quantity of fern, in the midst of which huge old pollarded oaks and beeches were scattered about, and here and there gigantic

fir-trees towered up above every other growing thing. There were signs, moreover, of much game in the place; pheasants could be seen at roost on some of the trees close at hand, and the rabbit tracks all around showed that this was a spot much frequented by those animals.

This, then, was the very spot for a cat who required solitude to make existence endurable, but who also wished for food with which to sustain and enliven that solitude. The only fear would be that where game abounded, keepers, dogs, and guns would also be found; and there might also be such things as traps, at the very thought of which a cold shudder ran through our friend, and the recollection of that terrible night in the steel trap came back to him in a vivid manner. He had not long to wait, however, before an unexpected sight turned the current of his thoughts and caused him the greatest surprise.

That which I am about to relate may seem strange and unlikely to some of those who read it; but they must recollect that dogs and cats—and other animals too, for the matter of that—have powers of seeing things which we human beings have not, although we think ourselves so much better and wiser than the other animals. No one need deny this, for unless the person who does so has been a dog or a cat himself, he cannot know better than I do, and probably not so well, seeing how much I have read and heard and seen about fairies and their doings.

At all events, our man-cat saw what he never had seen before when he was a man, and what I

do not for a moment believe that he ever would have seen if he had not been turned into a cat. He saw, as plainly as he had ever seen anything, a number of little elves dancing under a large oak, and evidently keeping holiday with the greatest possible delight. They were none of them above six or eight inches high, but they were all of perfect shape, with well-formed limbs and queer little faces—all of which, however, had a pleasant expression upon them, and showed that their owners were persons of a good-tempered and happy disposition. The elves were disporting themselves in the moonlight—which, as everybody knows, is the favourite time with these little people for their amusements; and it was wonderful to see how gracefully they danced, and how light and active was their every movement.

Bob had not, however, much time for observation, for the dancers perceived him at the same moment that he saw them, and all at once ceased their dancing, set up a chorus of shrill cries, "A cat! a cat!" and came running up and surrounded him before he knew where he was. The cat did not know what to make of it. Escape was impossible, even if he had wished it; and he had no particular reason for doing so, inasmuch as the little people did not seem to have any unfriendly intention, if he might judge by their manner and appearance. In fact he knew at once by his natural instinct that he had fallen in with a tribe of those woodland elves, who, although gifted with a spirit of mischief which leads them to play tricks now and then on man or beast, are of a kindly disposition, and have seldom

if ever been known to do real harm to any living creature. No one has ever yet discovered the exact condition of these little elves, or the extent of power which they actually possess; and a great many human beings, having never seen them, do not believe in their existence. But people who can only believe in what they have seen themselves are neither the best nor the happiest among us, and it does not make the least difference to the elves whether they are believed in or not.

At all events, our cat had no doubts as to who and what were the beings who now ran up to him, danced gaily round him, and even went so far as to stroke his back and scratch his head as if they had known him all their lives.

"Puss, puss, *poor* puss!" cried a score of little voices, and they one and all seemed ready to bid him a hearty welcome. Presently, one of them, who seemed about an inch taller than the rest, and was treated by the others with a respect which seemed to show that he was an elf of rank, came forward and stood in front of the cat, whom he looked steadily in the face. Then he suddenly turned head over heels three times, looked again very closely at Bob, and, turning to his companions, spoke some words in a strange language, which had an extraordinary effect upon those to whom it was addressed. One and all they threw their little arms up in the air, and exclaimed, as if with one voice, "Poor fellow!" And at once the cat felt that his sad story was known to the little elves, and that their tender hearts were filled with pity for his unhappy condition.

It is not, however, the custom of elves, even when sorry or distressed about anything, to give way long to expressions of regret, or to allow themselves to be oppressed by melancholy feelings. These little creatures greatly prefer to be merry whenever they possibly can, in which it would be well if certain dull and gloomy human beings followed their example. In the present instance the conduct of the elves afforded no exception to the general rule. Having once given vent to the expression of their sorrow for our friend's misfortune, they appeared to have got over it very soon, and began laughing and joking again after their usual fashion. They joined hands and danced merrily round the cat for several seconds; then one or two of them, as if to display their agility, jumped over him, and roared with laughter as soon as they had accomplished this feat. They tempted him to all kinds of play, in which, however, he had no inclination to join; but as they did him no harm, and were evidently so kindly disposed towards him, he bore all their fun with great patience.

But as, by the laws of this world of ours, everything in it comes, sooner or later, to an end, even so did the gambols of the little elves. Then their chief came up and asked the cat whether they could be of any use to him, as, if so, they would be very glad.

Our friend hardly knew what to say—for his two natures were struggling within him, and whilst the man would have desired aid in the recovery of his lost form and being, the cat would have desired

nothing better than that some kindly elf should cause one of the roosting pheasants to drop off his branch, or a plump young rabbit to be brought at once within his reach.

However, luckily for our friend, the nature of the man prevailed; and although he had to speak in the voice of a cat, he told his new acquaintance that what he most wanted was to return to his former condition, and if the elves could only assist him in doing so he should be grateful to them to the very last day of his life.

As soon as he had spoken thus, the elf fell back upon his old habit, and immediately repeated his amusement of turning head over heels four times before saying or doing anything else. Then, suddenly bringing himself to a standstill bolt upright before the bewildered Bob, he looked the latter straight in the face, and exclaimed in a shrill, clear voice—

"You should go to Dame Mummery for that; *she's* the girl for cats!"

These words naturally excited our friend's curiosity to the utmost, and he begged for more information as to the person thus mentioned. The elf made no secret about the matter, but told him at once that in an old cottage just outside the park in which they then were, an ancient crone lived who had the reputation of being a witch, and who kept a number of cats who were supposed to have some share in her magic work. Elves and witches never agree very well, for the former, though fond of mischief, are not cruel as are too often the latter, and do not like their wicked

practices or resemble them in their ill-will against mankind. Therefore the elf did not recommend Dame Mummery as a friend to Bob, but merely told him of the power she was said to possess, and of the number of cats which made her house their home.

Our friend heard this with interest, and was not long in making up his mind what to do. This old woman, he thought, might have the power, if she had but the will also, to give him back his lost form; and at any rate she was not likely to turn him into anything worse than he really was, if he was careful not to offend her. At all events, it was worth the trial, and try it he would. So he thanked the elf for what he had told him, asked the way to the witch's cottage, and then set off to find it as soon as he could. He crept quietly through the fern, keeping to the rabbit-tracks as much as he could, and looking carefully around from side to side to see that no enemy was there. At last he got to the place to which he had been directed, and, sure enough, just outside the park fence, which seemed to be old, broken down, and out of repair at that part, stood a low thatched cottage, at the edge of a wood, between which and the park was an old lane, evidently little used by travellers. A thin column of smoke which made its way upwards from the chimney of the cottage showed that it was inhabited, and that the inmates were astir even at that late or early hour—whichever we may please to call it; for I imagine it must have been somewhere about two o'clock in the morning, though, as his watch had been lost when he changed his skin, poor Bob could take little

account of time. He did not hesitate to creep through the fence and enter the little garden which was before the cottage, and which it was easy enough to enter, as the hedge which had once separated it from the road had long since been destroyed, and the garden itself was filled with nothing better than weeds and nettles. Scarcely had the cat crossed the lane when he found himself directly opposite to another animal of his own species, who appeared so suddenly that he seemed to have come up out of the ground or fallen from the skies. This was a very big cat, with a head, eyes, and whiskers larger than any our friend had ever seen, and enough to frighten anybody, man or cat, of a nervous disposition. However, when a fellow has been changed into a cat he is very seldom frightened at anything worse being likely to happen to him; so our friend felt no fear upon the present occasion, but looked the other in the face, and made the most polite miauw which he could; to which the big cat replied with a deep, hoarse exclamation of the same kind, after which he demanded of the new-comer what he wanted and why he came there at that time?

Bob replied in the meek tone which becomes a person who is addressing another of twice his own size and strength; and not thinking it necessary to tell his whole story, merely explained that he had heard of the wisdom and power of Dame Mummery, and of her kindness to cats, and had therefore come to her abode with an humble desire to obtain her favour.

At this the other cat gave a deep and unearthly

chuckle; but, turning quickly round, told Bob to follow him, and straightway proceeded to the door of the cottage, which, when he had scratched at it three times, opened to him of its own accord, and he forthwith entered, making a sign to Bob to follow him, which he accordingly did.

It was not very difficult to see that Dame Mummery was a real witch, and nothing but a witch. She was seated in a crouching position such as that which witches generally take up when they have business in view, and was glaring steadily at a large iron pot which was placed in the ashes of a wood fire immediately before her, and murmuring to herself in witch-like tones whilst the contents of the pot simmered and bubbled as it grew hotter and hotter. She did not look round when the two cats entered her apartment, but continued to murmur as if wholly intent on the business with which she was occupied.

I do not know exactly what that business was: it may have been the working of some awful spell; it may have been the preparation of some deadly poison; or, after all, the old woman may have been merely preparing a meal for herself, though at a somewhat unusual time. I never heard, however, what the truth upon this point was, and those who told me the story either did not know, or did not think it worth while to relate it. Anyhow, Dame Mummery was too busy at the moment to pay attention to anything else, and Bob had leisure and opportunity to look round the room and see as much of it and its contents as the imperfect light would admit. There was very little furniture in the room, and such as

there was appeared to be very common and very bad. A crazy old armchair in one corner of the fireplace, a broken down bed beyond it, one or two rickety chairs, and a table which had seen its best days (if, indeed, it ever had any days which could fairly be called "best") completed all that was furniture in any sense of the word. Everything seemed as if it was at least a hundred years old, and the owner and occupier of the place did not look as if she was much younger. A shrivelled-up, withered appearance she had, like a crab-apple turned into an old woman, and the wrinkles on her face were so numerous that there really seemed to be more wrinkles than face. Her toothless mouth—toothless all but two huge fangs which stuck prominently out, and in nowise improved her personal appearance; her nose curved like the beak of a hawk; her chin, which turned up at the end as if it thought it had got far enough and wished to return to the face; all betokened great age, and no one could have glanced at her once without feeling a desire to take a second and longer look at so curious a creature. This was our friend's first thought, and he gazed upon her with mingled astonishment and fear as she sat croning over the embers of the fire, and muttering in tones which had something awful in their very indistinctness.

This continued for full five minutes before the big cat ventured to interrupt its mistress, which it then did by a sound hardly like that of an ordinary cat, and something worse than the cry in which animals of this kind indulge in the dead of the night upon the roof of the house. It is not surprising that such

a noise should have at once attracted the old woman's attention. It certainly did so, and she presently turned round her head and fixed her eyes upon the two cats. Such eyes they were! Sunk far back in her head, they hardly bore the appearance of human eyes, and the glare which came from them seemed so strange and weird to our friend that he felt as if he would have liked to sink into the ground to escape it.

After a moment, she gave a smile at the big cat—if such a grimace as she made could properly be called a smile—and spoke words which Bob could by no means understand, but which he afterwards declared to have been something like this, "Wumbleby jumbleby, crumbleby Marloch." To which the other replied in words of the same kind, which Bob could never sufficiently remember to repeat. He never forgot, however, what happened next, for the old woman raised one of her lean and skinny hands, and, taking hold of a crutch which stood by her side, pointed at him with it as if it was a gun with which she intended immediately to shoot him, and pronounced the following mysterious words:

> "Muffiny, crumpety, teatum and toast,
> Are you a man, or a cat, or a ghost?"

As soon as the witch (for such, in Bob's opinion, she undoubtedly was) had uttered these words, she rose slowly from her seat and hobbled towards him. He was too much alarmed and confused to make any answer at first, for the question seemed to show that she knew well enough that he was no common

cat, and this filled him with all kinds of hopes and fears combined. If she knew he had been a man, she might also have knowledge of means whereby he might regain his lost condition. On the other hand, she might exact terms for doing so which might be hard and severe, and she certainly did not look as if she was a very kind or good-natured person. He had no time, however, to collect his thoughts, and when he tried to speak, his tongue seemed to dry up within his mouth, and his lips refused to perform their usual duties. Dame Mummery came up close to him, waved her crutch over his head, and again muttered dark and extraordinary words to herself; after which she turned to the big cat and said—

"I see how it is now; I know all about it: cat he is and cat he must remain, unless magic helps him. He may as well go among the other slaves. There, take him away!"

This speech, as may be well supposed, did not make our friend feel any more comfortable than the former words of the old woman; so, as his voice came partially back to him, he set up a pitiful miauw, and began to beg for mercy and assistance.

"Oh, drat your squalling!" said the person he addressed. "Go off with Barnaby directly, or it will be the worse for you!"

At the same moment Barnaby—for this was apparently the name of the big cat—laid hold of Bob's ear with one of his tremendous claws, and gave him such a grip as convinced him that any resistance would be worse than useless. With a deep groan, therefore, which had no other effect than to produce

a chuckle from the witch, and a hoarse laugh of scorn and derision from the big cat, poor Bob prepared to follow the latter and to submit to whatever he might be called upon to endure.

Barnaby hauled him along to a far corner of the room, where was a low door in the wall, which he had not previously observed. Opening this, he half dragged and half pushed the unresisting Bob down a couple of wooden steps into a kind of cellar or outhouse, where he suddenly found himself in the midst of at least twenty other cats, of different sorts and sizes. Black and white, tabby and tortoiseshell, were all crowded together in a moment around the new-comer, and many inquiries were at once addressed to Barnaby, who seemed to hold some superior position among the other cats, and was treated by all of them with a respect not unmingled with terror.

"Here, you slaves," he exclaimed, in a loud voice, "I have brought you another mate; see that he does his duty, or our Dame will know the reason why!"

These were not exactly words of comfort, but poor Bob dared not resent them, and indeed had no means of doing so. He was at once surrounded by the other cats, who pushed and pulled him about, and examined him all over without any such attempts at polite and kindly welcome which a company of well-bred cats would certainly have made upon the appearance of a stranger. Dame Mummery's cats, however, I am sorry to say, had not the slightest pretensions to be called well-bred. In fact, they were the very riff-raff of cats, who had been badly

trained in every respect from their growth up, and who were now the wretched slaves of the old witch, obliged to obey her in everything, and subject to the will of the cruel and crafty Barnaby, who acted as the old woman's overlooker, and took care that every cat did its work. This work consisted in performing all the household duties which Dame Mummery would otherwise have had to perform herself, or hire a girl to perform for her; and moreover to go abroad and rob, steal, beg, and do anything and everything else which might bring food and money to their mistress. There were keepers to look after the park, and dogs and traps not a few; but in spite of these dangers the unhappy cats had to go and hunt for game, rabbits, eggs, and anything else which the park afforded, or which could be got from any of the neighbouring farms or cottages.

Sometimes one of the luckless creatures was caught, shot at, wounded, or even killed. The old witch never seemed to care, and although she had once resented the loss of a particularly useful cat which had been shot by a neighbouring farmer, and had bewitched and ruined his best cow by way of revenge, still this had done the cat no good, and had not been done for that purpose.

All these things Bob soon learned from his companions' conversation, and found that, however kind and well-intentioned the advice of the elves might have been, he had certainly jumped out of the frying-pan into the fire when he followed it by seeking the cottage of Dame Mummery. Even as regarded food he found that he was no better off, for after he had

been in the cellar for a short time, Barnaby, who had left him with the others, returned for the purpose of serving out the breakfast of the whole party, which consisted of some broken scraps which did not look very inviting anyhow, but for which there was such a rush and scrimmage that not a mouthful fell to the share of the new slave, who was only jeered at and scratched when he put in his claim for a share.

Never in all his life had Bob felt so hopeless and so miserable, and never had he so much regretted the misfortune into which he had fallen. What would be the end of it? He crept into a corner of the cellar and gave himself up to the most melancholy reflections for several minutes, which appeared hours to him, so utterly wretched was his present state and so dark his prospects for the future. Whilst musing in this manner, he felt something touch his shoulder, and looking round, perceived a small brown and white kitten, whom he had not previously observed among the other cats.

"Poor fellow!" she said to him, in a low and gentle voice, "you do indeed seem very unhappy. But pray cheer up; the darkest day comes to an end, you know, if one only has patience to wait for it."

Pleased and touched by the kitten's sympathy, Bob replied by a grateful purr, and followed it up by asking her who she was and how she happened to be there?

The kitten had no reason to conceal her history, but answered, with that sweet modesty which is so charming in a young female, that she was a person of humble extraction, being the daughter of a re-

spectable cat belonging to a farmhouse at no great distance from the park. Her name, she said, was Pearl, and very early in life she had been adopted as a favourite by the farmer's eldest daughter, who had treated her with the greatest kindness and affection.

CHILD AND KITTEN.

Unfortunately, however, she had attracted the attention of the old witch, who, by threatening her mistress that all her hens' eggs should turn out rotten unless she complied with her request, had obliged the girl to make her a present of poor Pearl.

She had been in the possession of Dame Mummery, said the kitten, only a few days, and had not yet forgotten the milk and other comforts of the farm-house. She did not complain, however, knowing that patience was the best and only remedy for her misfortune, and strongly recommended Bob to take the same view.

At these words he sighed deeply. "Ah!" said he, "it is all very well for you to talk; but you do not know the whole of the facts in my case."

"I think I do," meekly answered the kitten; "for I heard Barnaby saying that Dame Mummery had told him that you had been another animal before you were a cat; and of course if you were happy as you were, it must be worse for you than for the rest of us."

"Indeed it is," sighed the poor fellow. "You do not know how much worse it is."

Then the kitten purred softly in his ear and tried to comfort him in the best way she could; and it really was a comfort to him to find he had a friend in that dismal place. They were presently interrupted by others of the party, and the kitten stole away into the darker part of the cellar; but her words had put our poor friend into better heart, and he determined to do what wise people do under every misfortune in life—namely, to make the best of it.

He had not very long come to this determination before the cellar door was thrown open and the cats told that they must go out, do their work, and then set forth and forage for the day—not without an assurance from Barnaby that any cat who came

back without something which would be useful to their mistress, would either be whipped, scratched, or given to the keepers.

Thus encouraged, the miserable slaves set to work to perform their accustomed task, and then sallied forth in different directions to forage as they could.

Bob, knowing nothing of the country, but finding he was expected to do what the others did, set off along the lane in front of the cottage, but had not gone far before he was overtaken by Barnaby, who gave him a pull by the tail, which made him feel as if that useful appendage was about to be plucked out by the roots.

"Stop a bit, my friend," said the big cat, with a mischievous leer in his eyes. "It is as well you should know something at once which you will be wise if you always remember. Perhaps you think you have nothing to do but to run away if you do not like the looks of our place. Make no mistake about *that*. When once you have entered the cottage of our mistress, you are no longer free to do as you please. *She* will stand no nonsense and no tricks. Although you may not know it, her eye is upon you wherever you go, and if you try to escape you will only be brought back to be laughed at the first time, and skinned alive if you try it again."

Having said this, the cruel wretch gave the poor victim another wrench by the tail, and a parting scratch on the face, and then left him to ponder over what had been said and take his own course. From what he had already seen and heard, Bob felt that he had no reason to doubt the truth of Barnaby's

statement, and that it was more than probable that the witch really did possess the power for which he gave her credit. If this was so, it would be useless to follow the plan which had already entered into his head, namely, to steal quietly off and bid the cottage and its inhabitants farewell for ever. It would indeed be dreadful to be brought back again in disgrace, and punished in some terrible fashion, as seemed very likely to be the result of failure; and if fate had decreed that he should be Dame Mummery's slave, it would be useless to struggle for liberty. Better to submit, at all events for the present, and wait until something turned up of which he might take advantage.

With these thoughts in his mind, the unhappy Bob crept slowly along by the side of the park fence until he found a convenient hole through which to enter, and was just about to do so, when he heard a little noise behind him, and looking round, perceived the friendly kitten following his footsteps. He pulled himself through the fence, and seeing that she evidently intended to do the same, politely pulled aside a bramble which was somewhat in the way, and assisted her through to the park side.

"It is very kind of you," he said, "Miss Pearl, to come with a poor wretch like me; but I am afraid I shall only bring you bad luck, for everything seems to go wrong, do what I will."

"What worse luck could I bring," replied the kitten, in her gentle voice, "than that which has already come to both of us, in making us slaves to Dame Mummery?"

"Oh!" said Bob, "that is bad enough, no doubt; but I fear we have not seen the worst of it, for that horrible Barnaby tells me that cats who do not bring home something to the mistress are fearfully punished, and he looks for all the world as if he would delight in getting one into a scrape if he could."

"I dare say he would," returned the kitten; "but as yet we are all right, and perhaps things may turn out better than we expect. Let us creep gently into the patch of fern which is just before us, and whilst we lie down and watch for game, tell me a little more of your history, and how you came to be here."

Bob was much pleased that the kitten should take so much interest in his affairs, and somehow or other found his heart warm towards her so much, that he made no difficulty in telling her his story from the very beginning. Strange to say, moreover, his man-nature seemed to come upon him as he spoke, and he told her all about his wife and child, and the happy home which he had lost, just as one human creature might have told such a story to another.

The kitten listened with great attention, and when he came to a pause he saw large tears rolling down her cheeks, so much did she seem to be affected by his misfortunes. Presently, after she had dried her tears by curling round her tail and using the end of it as a towel, she purred gently for a moment, and then laying her fore-paw upon Bob's shoulder, said in a low voice—

"Perhaps I can find a way out of the trouble."

Bob stared at her for a moment in great astonishment. It seemed so unlikely that a kitten should be

able to do anything for him in such a dreadful case as his, that he thought for a moment that she was only in jest.

"Do not mock my misery," he groaned rather than said. "The power of the cruel fairy is too much for me, and I fear that neither you nor any other kind friend can overcome it."

To this Miss Pearl made no reply, but walked once round him with a pleasant purr, and crept out of the fern in the direction of a large chestnut-tree which stood at a short distance. Our friend silently followed her, thinking it the best thing he could do under the circumstances, and presently they both stood beneath the tree, the chestnuts of which plentifully strewed the ground on all sides of them.

With great care and deliberation the kitten proceeded to choose three of them, which she placed in a row. Then she sat down before them, and signified to Bob that he should do the same, which he did without any hesitation, though full of astonishment at proceedings which he had never before witnessed on the part of a kitten or anybody else. Miss Pearl next raised her right fore-paw up to her nose, then did the same with her left fore-paw, and then laid each paw upon the chestnut opposite to it, leaving the middle chestnut uncovered. Then bending gently forward over this chestnut she purred rather than sang the following words:

> "Chestnut, chestnut, succour give,
> Quickly, quickly, change and live!"

Three times she repeated these words in the same

tone, and as soon as ever she had finished the third time of saying them, in the twinkling of an eye the chestnut, to Bob's intense amazement, utterly and entirely changed its form and appearance, and became a real live mouse sitting before him. The next moment the kitten removed her two fore-paws from the other chestnuts, and making rapid passes over the little creature in front of her, pronounced these words in precisely the same purring tone as before:

> "Mousy, mousy, ere too late,
> Speak, oh speak the words of fate!"

It was only necessary for the kitten to say these words once, for hardly were they out of her mouth than the little mouse sat up on its hind-legs, lifted its fore-paws to Bob in an imploring manner, and exclaimed in the most earnest and pathetic tones: "Please eat me! oh, *do* eat me!" which it repeated several times, each time more earnestly than the last.

I have often thought that this must have been the critical moment of our friend's fate. No one can suppose that the desire to be eaten would remain long with any mouse; and if he had hesitated for an instant about his reply, or if the cat-nature within him had been strong enough to make a struggle in his breast with that of the man, the opportunity might have been lost, and the result entirely different from that which I have to tell.

Happily for him it was not so. The tale which he had just been telling to the kitten—the tender memories of wife and child which had been thereby

recalled, had so strengthened the man and stifled the cat within him, that the natural horror of eating a live mouse which the former would certainly feel was the only sensation which possessed his breast.

"Eat you!" he exclaimed, "you poor little

THE MAN-CAT REFUSES THE MOUSE.

wretch—not for the world! I couldn't do it for golden guineas! Go off and be happy!"

Scarcely had he spoken when he became conscious of a wondrous change which was taking place within him. His cat-skin fell off, his face and form changed, the whole spirit of humanity awoke within

him; and in less time than you could have said "Jack Robinson" (which everybody invariably says on such occasions) he stood upright under the chestnut-tree, the very same John Dickson that he had been upon the morning which saw the wicked fairy's cruel wrath exercised upon him.

Kitten, mouse, cat-skin, had all disappeared in a moment of time, and he shouted for sheer joy as he felt himself once more so much a man that he could with difficulty believe he had ever been anything else. He looked around once, twice, thrice, in utter bewilderment, and then gave vent to another shout of joy at his delightful transformation, almost too good to be true. Suddenly, however, his shouting and his joy came to an end together.

"What is all this noise about?" said a harsh voice close at hand; and, looking round, he saw no less a person than his fairy enemy, standing at a little distance and looking steadfastly at him.

"Oh!" she said, with a long whistle of surprise as she saw her victim once more in his proper shape; "that's it, is it? Somebody has been teaching you the chestnut trick, have they? But I haven't done with you yet, John Dickson—not by a good bit. Why, you haven't been a cat for above a couple of months yet; you can't know how you like it! Back you must go to the shape of that pretty animal, unless you like to be a toad or a snake instead."

The fairy spoke in a taunting, cruel tone, and our poor friend's heart sank within him as he listened to her words. Nor did matters look better when she lifted a shrill whistle to her mouth, and blew a shrill

call upon it which, to Bob's infinite surprise and horror, brought no less a person than the big cat Barnaby to the spot.

"How is this?" asked the wicked fairy; "I told you to keep a look out in case a cat, whom I described to you, came this way; and if he did so, to make life bad for him at Mother Mummery's. Why have you neglected your duty, so that I find he has got back his old form and skin?"

Barnaby crouched submissively at her feet.

"I know not, dread fairy," he replied, "how it can have happened; he only came in last night, and as soon as we knew what he was, I spoke to the mistress about him, and we would have worried him out of his life in a couple of days. Here she comes to speak for herself."

In the midst of the terror which these words inspired, Bob could not help looking up, and there, as sure as fate, came old Dame Mummery, hobbling along towards them as fast as she could, and muttering something which sounded very unlike blessings as she came along. As soon as she was near enough, the wicked fairy accosted her after the same fashion.

"How is it, Dame Mummery, that you have permitted this enemy of mine to regain his shape? I shall have double trouble now to put him in his cat-skin again. How did it happen?"

The old witch mumbled out that she didn't know, and that it wasn't her fault; and made sundry other excuses, to which the fairy paid very little attention. She told the cat Barnaby that he must keep a better look out for the future; and reminded Dame Mum-

mery that if she was careless in these matters there were ways of punishing witches which she would know sooner than she liked. Then turning to our luckless friend, who all this time was standing half paralyzed with terror and dismay, she again accosted him in a taunting tone.

"So you are not satisfied, are you not? We will see whether Dame Mummery and Barnaby cannot keep you better next time; and if I was them, I should give you a good dose of torture for so nearly giving them the slip. You will not do it so easily next time, I think, for if they are wise they will tie a log of wood to your hind-leg, which will not permit you to get so far as this from your happy home in the cellar. Kneel down, wretch, and learn that a fairy's vengeance is not to be so easily evaded."

Half stunned by the weight of this new misfortune, our poor friend staggered forward for a pace or two; and feeling compelled to go down on his knees, began tremblingly to do so, when a strange and wonderful thing interrupted the proceedings. The wicked fairy had actually lifted her wand above her head, and had uttered the first word of the spell which would doubtless have turned the poor man back into a cat, when a clear but pleasant voice pronounced the words—

"Stand fast there!"

The fairy's arm remained outstretched, the witch and Barnaby stood rooted to the spot, and our friend half recovered himself, as all turned their eyes in the direction of the chestnut-tree close by, from behind which there suddenly stepped forward a young lady

of noble stature and surpassing beauty, wearing upon her head a crown of fern and oak leaves, with a light hazel wand held loosely in her hand. I do not pretend to describe her dress, but I know that it was both simple and becoming; and her whole appearance was one of grace and dignity, mingled with an air of conscious power. Her presence produced a very different effect upon the four persons who beheld her. The threatened man felt at once that she was a friend, and plucked up courage in an instant. A low groan of anguish escaped from the old witch; Barnaby quivered with fear, and shook in every limb; and an uncontrollable look of mingled hatred, wrath, and fear, passed over the face of the wicked fairy, as she muttered to herself in a tone of surprise and disgust: "The Fern Fairy, by all the powers of evil!"

Yes, it was indeed her—the kind, good fern fairy; always doing some act of friendship towards mortals, punishing vice, and helping the virtuous and worthy. No one who had ever seen or heard of her could mistake her for another, especially when the little fern owl upon her shoulder showed her beyond all doubt to be what she really was. She did not hesitate for one moment as to what she should do in the case before her, but at once demanded by what right the wicked fairy had dared to enter a park which the fern around them proved to belong to her, a fairy of far superior rank and power to the daring intruder?

The latter, quite unable to defend herself, began to talk about a rascal and a runaway slave, and that things were come to a pretty pass if a fairy could not punish an enemy without being interfered with.

"Punish an enemy!" exclaimed the fern fairy, in great wrath; "is that the name by which you dignify your act of cruelty in breaking up a happy home and degrading an honest man to the condition of an inferior animal? Shame on you who call yourself a fairy! You are no better than that wretched old witch, and are one of those who will certainly be turned out of fairyland altogether—where, indeed, you are only admitted to the very outskirts of the kingdom, and will probably soon be banished altogether. Away, wretch! quit this park directly; and if ever you trouble this man again, I will bring the case before the high courts of fairyland, and have you shut up in some cave or mountain for a thousand years. Be off at once, and be thankful to be let off so easily!"

The wicked one was doubtless very angry at this address, but she knew the power of the other too well to make any reply, so she muttered something about being very sorry, and not having known that the man was a friend of the fern fairy's; and with that she disappeared as fast as she could, and never troubled John Dickson again as long as he lived.

Then the fern fairy turned to the old witch and Barnaby, and bade them begone at once; but warned them that their punishment was at hand—which, indeed, was the case. As no magic could protect them when they were within the domain of the fern fairy while she herself was there, they had not got halfway out of the park before they were met by some of the keepers, who had lately been much annoyed by the thefts committed by Dame Mummery's cats. Seeing one of these, as they supposed,

with her, they set two savage dogs upon it without delay; and although Barnaby made a dash for it, knowing that he should be safe if once outside the park, they were too quick for him, and worried the life out of him in a few seconds. As this is the only death by which creatures of his evil class can be killed, the event was most fortunate to everybody except Dame Mummery. Furious at the attack upon Barnaby, the old woman, forgetting where she was, began to abuse and threaten the keepers to such an extent that they presently stopped her by putting her into a pond not twenty yards from the park fence; and as she of course floated, being a witch, they pelted her with stones, till not even a witch could help sinking to the bottom—where, as far as I know, she remains to this day. The slave cats soon found out what had been done, and all ran away the next night; but as an unusual number of cats were killed in that neighbourhood during the following week, I am inclined to think that not many of them made any change for the better.

As soon as his enemies were gone, John Dickson, as I may now fairly call him, turned round to thank the gracious fern fairy who had wrought such a good work on his behalf. He would have fallen at her feet and kissed them in an ecstasy of joy and gratitude, but she motioned to him with her hand to remain where he was.

"John," she said, "you have had a sore trial, and have come happily out of it; but take notice that you would not have done so had you not been a loving husband and good father. Had you been the

reverse, not even my power could have saved you from your enemy. You will always find it so through life. If you try to be good, virtuous, and honest, you will have help in all the trials of life; but if you are careless, selfish, vicious, and neglectful of your duties, your enemies will have more power over you, and you will be answerable for your own misfortunes. Now go home as fast as you can to your wife and child, and in their company and love try to forget the trouble you have endured, only remembering it so as to have a kindly thought for the kitten who has been so good a friend to you."

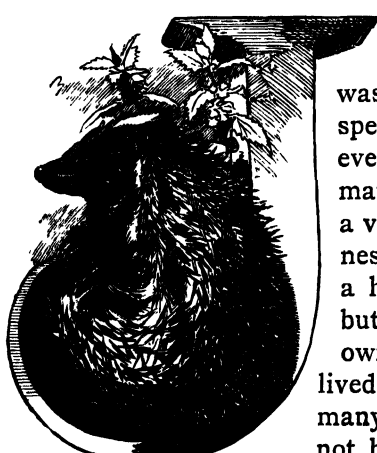
Having spoken these words, the fern fairy waved her hand in a friendly manner to John, and before he could find words to express his gratitude, stepped behind the chestnut-tree and vanished from his sight.

For a full minute our friend stood staring at the tree, dumb with wonder at the extraordinary events which had occurred beneath its leafy branches. Then it came into his head that he had better make the best of his way home as fast as he could. As the keepers were about this time fortunately occupied with Dame Mummery, he met none of them, got safely out of the wood, and strode off in the direction of his own house. How he got there, or how long the journey took him, he could never exactly tell; but during his walk he took many good resolutions to be a tender husband and devoted father, according to the fairy's advice, and never to give his enemy the wicked fairy the slightest chance of regaining an advantage over him. There was only one thing which annoyed him in the whole matter. He found his wife engaged

in the homely occupation of making an apple-pudding in the kitchen, and instead of expressing surprise or joy at his return after so long an absence, she merely remarked that he was rather late, and that she hoped he had had a comfortable nap in the orchard, under the big cherry-tree—where his little daughter had said she had seen him lying, fast asleep, with his head on his arm, and his wide-awake over his face to keep off the gnats. Our friend commenced an indignant denial, and would fain have told his whole story and explained the cause of his long absence. It was utterly useless, however: when a woman takes an idea rootedly into her head, it is not an easy task to get it out again; and to this day the only subject of dispute between John Dickson and his wife is whether the events which he declared to have befallen him really did happen, or whether everything had gone on just as usual, and that under a cherry-tree, instead of a chestnut-tree, his dreaming brain had invented the whole story.

We, who have heard of the fern fairy before, and know how careful fairies are to prevent their doings from being known to ordinary mortals, may be pretty sure that there was no dreaming about it. But, since nobody ever dragged the pond for the body of Dame Mummery, and no fairy, good or bad, visited the Dickson family again, the matter must be left as it is; and it is a fortunate thing for the husband and wife that this is the only subject upon which they seriously differ.

THE WITCHES OF HEADCORN.



JOHN CHEESEMAN of Headcorn was one of the most respectable farmers that ever attended Ashford market. He was not in a very great way of business, for he only farmed a hundred and ten acres; but then it was all his own, and at the time he lived (which was a good many years ago) people did not have nearly such large farms as they do nowadays. They reaped their wheat in those good old times, and left long stubble, good

both for gleaners and partridges, and they thrashed with great wooden flails, the sound of which you might have heard, regular as clock-work, as you walked along near their barns, and a cheery, homely kind of sound it was. Very different sounds greet our ears now; the shrill whistle of the steam-engine, which cuts our roads to pieces as it moves from farm to farm, the loud puffing of the steam and the whirring sound after the engine gets really to work, altogether deafen our ears and confuse our intellects, making us fancy that we are standing at some great railway junction-station, instead of in the country which was once so quiet and peaceful. John Cheeseman, however, lived long before rail-roads were invented, and was consequently never annoyed by the various screeching, bellowing, puffing, and groaning noises attendant upon the work of a steam threshing or ploughing machine. He threshed, like his neighbours, with flails, and he ploughed with four horses, which his heavy clay land required—or at least he thought it did, which came to the same thing. His house was his own, too, and it stood between two and three hundred yards from the parish church, nearly in a line with the Great Oak, on the Ashford side; and it had two windows in the roof, above all the rest, and was not much larger than a cottage, but a comfortable dwelling withal. I think I made it out the other day from the rail-road, and there was a meeting-house just beyond it; but there was none there in John Cheeseman's time, for the parish church was big enough for everybody in those days, and instead of meeting-houses and

"clergy of all denominations," there were abbots and priors, monks and nuns, parish priests and wandering friars, and the religion of Rome had not yet been uprooted from the land. There were also other things of which we hear but little in the present day—witches, warlocks, and wise people were constantly abroad, and the neighbourhood of Headcorn and the great wood or Weald of Kent was somewhat notorious as a favourite resort of such creatures; though I do not mean to say that in this respect it equalled the town of Wye, always so well known to be their head-quarters.

John Cheeseman was not a man who troubled himself about such people as these. Of course he believed that they existed, because his neighbours all thought so, and could some of them relate strange experiences bearing upon the subject, and affording what was to their minds conclusive evidence upon which to rest their belief. But honest John went his way through the world without searching for any such evidence, or inquiring into matters which did not concern him. If he did not interfere with such things, they probably would not interfere with him, and he was about the last man whom you would have judged likely to be connected with witches or warlocks. But very unlikely things happen in this world, and just as quiet and demure people turn out to be the greatest rogues, loud-talking and swaggering fellows the greatest cowards, and professed water-drinkers the greatest tipplers on the sly, so people who, to judge by their usual appearance and general character, are the least

likely to be brought into any sort of connection with the strange and weird creatures of whom we are writing, turn out to be the very people who, somehow or other, and often in spite of themselves, are in the very thick of witchcraft, and are surrounded by unholy agents and mysterious practices.

Not far from John Cheeseman's house was the abode of an aged crone whose reputation was none of the best. She had a scriptural name, too, having been called Kezia, after the daughter of Job, doubtless with the best intentions on the part of her parents and god-parents. This name, however, had, according to common report, been totally unable to protect her from the machinations of the evil one, and she was looked upon as a witch beyond all possible doubt. Stories there were concerning her of a strange and terrible character: wild and unearthly cries had been heard from her dwelling at night; queer shadows had been seen flitting past her windows; flashes of bright light had gleamed from her abode when all else was dark and silent; and there were those who must have actually seen more than they cared to tell, for at the mention of her name they would turn pale, tremble all over, and with mysterious shakings of the head and sighings from the soul, seek to turn the subject into another channel as soon as possible.

Kezia Mummery was certainly a woman to be spoken of and dealt with cautiously. She was old, infirm and decrepid, bent nearly double with rheumatism, and, to the casual observer, scarce able to creep about at a snail's pace. But the wise ones of

the village knew better. There were legends which savoured of the marvellous, but which were darkly whispered from cottage to cottage: legends of broomsticks endued with wondrous power of locomotion, of cats with glowing eyes, of uncanny forms riding upon the storm and cleaving the midnight air when good people were abed and asleep, and of unhallowed gatherings of weird creatures in secluded places, where the eye of mortal was unlikely to penetrate.

In all these legends the name of Kezia Mummery was generally introduced, and popular belief pointed to her as the principal agent in most of the strange doings of which I have spoken. She lived in a wretched hovel, on the very edge of the great woods, which came up at that time within a few hundred yards of John Cheeseman's house, and her dwelling was distinctly visible from the windows of the latter.

Now the Cheeseman family consisted of five persons. There was worthy John himself and his wife, who was as worthy as he was, and a great deal more talkative and bustling. Then there were Jack and Jem, the two sons, who worked with their father on the farm, and were as good, honest lads as you would meet in a week of Sundays, as the saying is; and lastly there was Jemima, the only daughter of the house of Cheeseman. To say that she was a fine girl would be to say little more than that she was a Kentish girl, for it is well known that, among the maids of Kent, beauty is the rule and not the exception. But Jemima Cheeseman was the picture of good looks and good health; she was active and

strong, bright and sharp, merry and good-tempered, and the light and life of her father's household. Everybody had a good word for Jemima, which after all was only fair and reasonable, since Jemima had a good word for everybody.

It need scarcely be added that, under these circumstances, the young woman in question was the apple of her father's eye, the petted darling of her brothers, and the favourite child of her doating mother. It was also currently reported that Tom Pearson, the son of the well-to-do butcher of Ashford, thought more of Jemima Cheeseman than of any other girl in the neighbourhood, and that a match between the two was an event more than likely to come off at some time or other. So that, at the time my story begins, the Cheeseman family was one which might be called fairly prosperous, and honest John could go to bed on a Saturday night as well content with himself and his belongings as any of his neighbours far or near. True it was that he sometimes—or I might even say *most* times without wronging the good man—took an extra snooze on a Sunday morning; but then that was the habit of a good many of his class, and in those days a man was held none the worse for such a failing as this, although, of course, in the present day no one would ever dream for a moment of being guilty of such a grave offence. No one blamed the good Headcorn farmer, however, for this little habit, and, in a word, John Cheeseman and his family could compare favourably enough with other people, and might have passed through the world quietly

and creditably, and without special notice, but for the events which I am going to relate.

It so fell out that upon one pleasant afternoon in the autumn time of year, Mrs. Cheeseman bethought herself that it was some weeks since she had heard anything of her old aunt, Mrs. Homewood, of Smarden, who, being a widow in tolerable circumstances, was not to be neglected by those who were fortunate enough to be able to claim relationship with her. So as Dame Cheeseman did not happen to be able to leave home conveniently at the time, she suggested to her daughter that it would be a good thing for her to walk over to Smarden and pay a visit to the old lady. There had been some heavy showers in the morning, but the sun had thought it time to put a stop to that kind of thing about the middle of the day, by shining out in a vigorous manner, which quickly sent all the dark clouds to the right about, and resulted in bestowing upon the world a fine October afternoon.

Not at all averse to a walk upon such a day, Jemima put on her thick boots, took a little basket on her arm, which contained a few home-made cakes for which her mother was famous, and a couple of pats of butter, on the making of which she also prided herself much; and thus provided with the means of making her visit acceptable, started upon her journey.

As she was quietly walking along the road which led towards Smarden (which was not such an easy task either, considering the very small attention paid to road-making in those days, and the quantity of soft, deep mud which abounded on all sides), she suddenly

perceived a sight which she had never seen before. An enormous hedgehog was proceeding in the same direction as herself, and was, in fact, only a short distance before her. But the first glance told her that it was no ordinary hedgehog.

It is well known that these animals, although when in a quiescent state they roll themselves up into a ball, presenting a bristling surface of sharp quills to any one who ventures to touch them, quit this shape when inclination or necessity compels them to travel. Then, indeed, having unrolled himself from the ball shape, the hedgehog appears only as a diminutive specimen of the pig race, with his prickly armour upon his back, into which he can at once retreat and roll himself up again if he feels it necessary to do so. But the particular hedgehog which forms the subject of our present story did not condescend to travel after the usual fashion of its kind. It kept itself rolled up as tightly as if it had been in immediate danger of attack, and rolled steadily forward in the most extraordinary manner, now and then jumping over holes or puddles for all the world as if it had been propelled by the kick of a human foot. It presented, in fact, a most unusual and extraordinary appearance, and one that filled Jemima with the greatest surprise, since she had never seen a hedgehog behave in such a curious manner before.

At the first view of this strange creature the girl stopped short, in doubt whether to watch its proceedings, or to hurry past it as quickly as she could. Turning back was of course out of the question, for

she had her mother's errand to perform, and it would be but a poor excuse for its non-performance to allege that she had been frightened by a hedgehog. Her hesitation was but short, since it seemed to her that the best plan was most undeniably that which was also the simplest; namely, to walk straight on as if she had seen nothing unusual, and take no notice whatever of the animal. This was, however, a determination far more easy to take than to carry out. The girl walked as much as possible upon the opposite side of the road to that upon which the hedgehog was travelling when she first observed it; but the creature moved into the middle of the way as she came near it, and although she quickened her pace and tried to leave it behind, she found that she was unable to do so. It came rolling and jumping along after the same curious fashion which had at first attracted her attention, and kept exactly level with her at only a couple of yards' distance. This continued for nearly a quarter of a mile, during which distance Jemima found it absolutely impossible either to shake off her strange companion by hurrying on, or to get rid of it by dawdling so that it might go on ahead of her. Neither course was successful: the animal accommodated itself to her pace, and appeared resolved not to part company with her. At last, when they came to an unusually muddy and uneven bit of road, the hedgehog gave one of its usual bounds, as if intending to leap over a hole before it; and apparently miscalculating the distance, fell plump into the hole, which was larger, deeper, and dirtier than usual, and in so doing splashed the girl

not a little with mud and water, and almost disappeared from sight in its cradle of soft mud.

Forgetful of herself, Jemima's first thought was that the animal would be drowned, or would stick fast in the mud; so, without a thought of possible consequences, she cried out aloud at once—

"Oh, you poor creature, what a sad pity! I'm terrible sorry for you, that I am!"

"Help me out then," replied a snuffling voice from the hole; and Jemima perceived the snout of the hedgehog peering up from the mud in an apparently helpless and pitiable manner.

Although not a little astonished at being thus answered, she lost not an instant in complying with the request, and bending over the hole assisted the hedgehog to the best of her ability, not without some damage to her dress in the way of mud splashing, in addition to that which she had already undergone. She was too good-natured, however, to be over careful about this, in the performance of an act of kindness, and she presently succeeded in landing the animal again on dry ground; for which you would have expected that he would have returned her his grateful thanks. That which he said, however, was of a nature by no means thankful, for he observed, putting out his snout and peering at the girl with a wicked look—

"Remember, *you* spoke to *me* first, you did, so I can speak to *you* now."

This expression was by no means pleasant to Jemima, or reassuring as to the true character of her strange companion. She had often heard that

witches and evil things could not address mortals unless previously accosted by them, and vague fears entered her mind that, by taking this course with the strange creature before her, she might have unwittingly put herself in his power. She hesitated, therefore, as to what she had better do or say under the circumstances, and ended—as is not unfrequently the case with persons similarly situated—by saying and doing nothing at all, but stepping on one side and beginning to walk on just as if nothing had happened.

This, however, was evidently not what the hedgehog wished, and she had not taken two steps before he called out in a most unmelodious grunt—

"Don't do *that!* What do you mean by running off in such a rude fashion, and leaving a fellow all alone when he has just tumbled into a puddle?"

This remark rather disconcerted Jemima, who hardly knew what to make of it. There was no reason, indeed, why she should delay her journey on account of an animal which she had never seen before, and with which she had really nothing to do. If he had come out alone and unattended upon his travels, he surely must have known the difficulties of the way, and had no right to expect that they should be lightened by any traveller whom he might chance to meet. She was therefore perfectly justified in leaving him where he was, and attending to her own, or rather her mother's, concerns.

But there was something about the hedgehog which made her rather fearful of offending him; and, after all, there was no particular hurry about her

business, nor could she well make it an excuse for leaving the animal if he was really in want of her assistance. So she stopped short, turned towards the speaker, and answered him in a civil tone.

"Really, sir, I didn't mean anything rude; only I thought—I wanted—I didn't know——"

"You thought—you wanted—you didn't know,' sneered the hedgehog in an unpleasant manner. "The dove thought she was safe, the hawk wanted to get her, and the old owl in the hollow tree didn't know how it would end."

To this strange and apparently unmeaning speech Jemima could make no reply, but stood staring in wonder at the animal, who very shortly resumed his talk in the following manner.

"Jemima Cheeseman," he said (and the girl started at hearing her name thus distinctly pronounced by her strange companion), "did you ever see such a hedgehog as I am before?"

Jemima looked at him with a confused feeling that she might possibly offend him by the only answer which she could give, which of course was to the effect that "she never did."

"Nor ever will!" cried he, triumphantly. "Nor ever will in all your life! You know it! and I know it! and the great Kampophlicon knows it as well as the light off the Goodwin sands!"

Jemima began to feel a little frightened at the extraordinary words of the hedgehog. She had not the smallest idea who the great Kampophlicon might be, or what the animal intended by the allusion, but she knew that it was useless and might be dangerous

for her to stand talking there when she ought to be making the best of her way to Smarden. So she spoke once again in a civil tone, making a curtsey at the same time by way of showing a friendly disposition.

"If you please, Mr. Hedgehog," she said, "I must make the best of my way up to Smarden to carry this basket for mother up to Aunt Homewood; so if so be that you don't want anything particular, I'll make bold to go, if you please."

"You'll do no such thing, Jemima Cheeseman," replied the animal, gruffly; "and as to old Dame Homewood, you've no call to go *there;* she died at half-past one o'clock this very day, so you'll just lose your labour if you go on."

Jemima started back at these words, thoroughly frightened at the intelligence which they conveyed, and at the news, if true, of her relation's death being known to the hedgehog before her own family had heard anything about it.

"Deary me, sir!" she cried, "surely you don't mean for to say so! Aunt Homewood dead! Goodness gracious, I hope you ain't serious, Mr. Hedgehog!"

"Never more so in my life," responded the person addressed. "The old girl was took with a fit just before one, and before the clock had sounded the hour it was all over with her."

"But, sir," timidly observed the maiden, "it's scarcely two o'clock yet, and however could you have heard the news so soon?"

"Never you mind, Jemima," grunted the beast.

"Perhaps a bird came and told me—perhaps it didn't. Anyhow, I *do* know, and your old Aunt Homewood will want none of your cakes and butter to-day, nor, for the matter of that, ever again."

Jemima started again; how could the hedgehog know that her basket contained cakes and butter? This was certainly the oddest adventure that had ever happened to her, and she had evidently fallen in with a very remarkable being. She paused, uncertain what to say or how to act, when the hedgehog followed the matter up by a further remark.

"'Twould be a pity the butter and cakes should be wasted, my girl. Why not give them in charity? You are not far from Dame Mummery's cottage. Turn in and bestow a gift upon *her*."

These words were hardly calculated to lull the girl's rising suspicions as to the nature of the company into which she had fallen. If the creature whom she had encountered was indeed one of an evil sort, there could be little doubt, according to the notions with which she had been brought up, that Kezia Mummery knew all about it: and his direct reference to the old woman, and proposal that upon her should be bestowed the dainties originally intended for poor Dame Homewood, appeared distinctly to confirm this view of the question. Jemima therefore determined forthwith to be more than ever upon her guard, and was just about to excuse herself from complying with the animal's suggestion, when a shrill whistle sounded through the air, and in an instant the hedgehog vanished from her sight. Jemima looked round with amazement; where had the

animal gone to? He had disappeared as suddenly as if the earth had swallowed him up, and no traces of him were left behind. However, the girl very wisely thought that it would be foolish and perhaps dangerous for her to dawdle about the place, and that she had better push forward on her journey without delay. So she grasped her basket firmly, and stepped along, pondering as she went upon the strange adventure which had just occurred to her.

At no great distance from where the hedgehog had left her was a footpath by which a short cut could be taken to the place for which she was bound. To get into this footpath on leaving the main road, the traveller had to pass through one of those gates which are called in Kent "kissing-gates," because they open with a fence so constructed as to oblige a delay in passing through them, which affords opportunity and leisure for two people to indulge in that amusing pastime.

Jemima turned when she came to this gate, with the intention of going along the footpath, and as she did so the cottage of old Kezia Mummery was in sight, only a little way beyond the gate, on the road she was about to leave. So, in turning to go through the kissing-gate, the girl glanced towards the cottage almost without knowing it, and saw the owner of the dwelling standing opposite the door, leaning upon her stick, with her large black cat by her side. As soon as Jemima's eyes fell upon the old woman, she felt an uncomfortable shiver go right through her, and could not withdraw her gaze. It was like the bird of which one sometimes reads, to whom glides

the serpent and fascinates it with its awful eye, so that it cannot keep away from the monster who wishes to destroy it. There was nothing very awful in old Kezia Mummery to look at, and certainly nothing very fascinating, according to the meaning we generally attach to that word nowadays. But, somehow or other, Jemima Cheeseman could not take her eyes off her, and when the old woman raised her arm and beckoned to her, she felt an inclination to obey the summons which was quite beyond her control. It was not really an inclination either; she wished to go on, but something seemed to make her turn back in spite of herself, and so she did. Slowly she turned round from the little gate which opened on to the footpath, faced Mrs. Mummery's cottage, and took a step or two towards it. Then she stopped, and, with a violent effort over the power within her which seemed drawing her on, half turned round again. At this moment old Kezia spoke, in tones which were somewhat cracked indeed, and not exactly musical, but still in gracious words, and with a manner evidently intended to be friendly.

"Good morrow, Miss Cheeseman," said she, fixing her eyes (which sparkled in her head like two live coals) intently upon the girl. "Whither away this afternoon? It seems to betoken rain. Do not wet thy tender feet, but turn in and take shelter here."

Even as she spoke a dark cloud seemed to have come up over the woods, and one or two large drops of rain had begun to fall.

Jemima made no reply to this address; words did not seem to come to her, but almost without knowing

it she gave up her attempt to turn away from the cottage, and once more slowly began to approach it.

"Come, fair Jemima," again said the hag, over whose withered features stole a smile which she might have meant to be pleasant and inviting, but which was in reality a grimace of no common ugliness. "Come, my charming child," she said, "come and rest in old Kezia's cottage. Thou wast coming, I know, to bring the poor old woman a little present, but anyhow thou art welcome."

As she spoke these words, her cat also lifted up its voice, and gave a "miauw" of great intelligence, which seemed to invite Jemima to approach, almost as plainly as the words of its mistress. Slowly and still unwillingly the poor girl drew near, for she felt that a power forced her onward in spite of herself.

I do not know how it came about, for Jemima Cheeseman was a good girl; could say her catechism with very few mistakes, went regularly to church, and never fell asleep during the sermon. So you would have supposed that nothing evil could have had any power over her, and that witches and such-like creatures would have been afraid to deal with her.

Perhaps, however, she had done wrong in talking to the hedgehog, whom she should have suspected from the first; perhaps it was her very goodness which made the evil ones wish to get hold of her: at all events, there must have been some reason for what happened, and I can only tell you the story as it was told to me.

Jemima Cheeseman walked right up to the spot

upon which Kezia Mummery stood, and as soon as she got close to the latter, the old hag lifted her crutch and laid it on the girl's shoulder, lightly but firmly, while she looked her straight in the face and mumbled some words which Jemima could neither understand nor remember afterwards. But no sooner had she heard them than all seemed changed around her. Kezia Mummery appeared to be a really beautiful and dignified lady, the cat a magnificent creature, and the cottage more like a gentleman's house than the miserable abode which it had lately seemed to be. Jemima no longer felt the slightest wish to be anywhere else but where she was, but cheerfully handing her basket to the old woman, followed her into the cottage, while the cat, grinning like any Cheshire animal of its species, came behind and also entered the dwelling. The door closed after them, and at the same time the storm, which had been gathering round rapidly during the last few minutes, burst with great violence over the house. The thunder rolled heavily, peal after peal roaring through the air as if heaven was opening its artillery upon the wicked earth to avenge a long course of impious deeds; the lightning flashed terribly across the sky, and presently the rain and hail descended as rain and hail had not descended in that part of the country for many years. In a word, there was a very great storm, and everybody that had any house to go into went into it with the least possible delay, whilst those who were not so lucky, or who were caught by the bad weather in the open air, fled to the nearest shelter they could get, and there made the best of it whilst the storm lasted.

It may easily be guessed that worthy Mrs. Cheeseman saw the coming of this sudden storm with some concern. She naturally feared that Jemima, who could not yet have reached the place for which she had started, would be caught in the rain, and get a thorough wetting; and in anticipation of such an event she began to bustle about and make every preparation, in case the girl should have turned back from her journey in consequence of the rain, and presently come home in a drenched condition. Much more would the good woman have been excited and alarmed if she could but have known the true state of the case. This, however, never for a moment entered her head, for although, living in such a neighbourhood as she did, Mrs. Cheeseman of course believed in witches and well understood that they existed, somehow or other she had never herself met one of the creatures, and had troubled herself very little about them.

After a time the storm cleared away, and as no Jemima appeared, her mother began to think that either she had found shelter elsewhere, or that some one might chance to have been passing in a cart and given her a lift which had brought her to old Dame Homewood's house before the rain came on. The afternoon passed slowly away, and still no thought of evil crossed Mrs. Cheeseman's mind, although she began to wonder that Jemima had not yet returned.

But when the shades of evening began to fall, and her husband and his two sons both came in from work, Mrs. Cheeseman began to feel rather uneasy, and to think that something unusual must have

detained her daughter. Could it be that her aunt had kept her to stay the night? She never would have done so without sending word. It was very odd, and she could not understand it. Worthy John Cheeseman was not likely to aid her in doing so, though he looked round the room with a disappointed air when he came in, and was rather vexed that his little daughter Jemima was not there as usual to greet him with her own bright smile. Jem and Jack laughed at first, and asked whether Tom Pearson had been about that afternoon; but they, as well as their father and mother, began ere long to think more seriously of the matter, and to become alarmed lest some mischief should have befallen the girl. It was getting too late for her to be out alone, and the young men offered to go out and search for her. They started off, therefore, with the intention of walking to Smarden, hoping to meet their sister on the way.

After they had been gone some minutes, their father also rose, and telling his wife that he felt fidgety about Jemima, and must go and have a look round, he also left the house. As Dame Homewood's house was fully two and a half miles from his own, he knew that his sons could not be back for some time, unless they met their sister on the way. As he had no idea where else to look for her, he strolled slowly on towards the church, every now and then stopping to listen attentively, in the hope of hearing Jemima's voice, and being thus assured of her safety. In a little while he approached the parish church, and found himself standing close to the old oak, which he, in common with every other respectable person

in and about Headcorn, regarded with the utmost reverence. At the present day time has done its work upon the tree, and it bears evident tokens of its great age. It was in different condition at the time of which I write, and although even then called an old tree, was in a state of great beauty and vigour, spreading out its mighty branches on every side, and delighting the eye of him who looked upon its great size and magnificent foliage. Near to the great oak drew honest John Cheeseman, and stood close to the low stone wall of the churchyard, gazing upon the tree with the respectful affection which he felt bound, as a native of Headcorn, to entertain towards it. Suddenly he started. Amid the low rustle of the leaves which was caused by the faint breath of wind in the evening air, he heard a sound which was certainly not created by the wind. It was a sigh—a distinct and audible sigh as of some one in mental or bodily pain, and it seemed to come from the very centre of the great oak. Now some men would have been frightened out of their wits at hearing such a sound at such a time and in such a place; others, again, would have paid not the slightest attention to any sound of the kind, but have gone on their way just the same as if they had heard nothing at all. John Cheeseman, however, was neither of one sort nor the other. He was not frightened, because that was never the habit of a yeoman of Kent; and he was not unmoved, because the sound was strange and unexpected. Besides, at that particular moment he was rather excited and anxious about his daughter, and somehow or other—why, he could not tell—he

connected this sigh with her, and was accordingly all the less disposed to pass it by without notice. So without any delay or hesitation, he forthwith asked the question aloud—"Who is there?" There was no answer, and the good man stood listening for a moment longer in suspense, when there broke upon his ear another sigh, equally audible and distinct. "Who is there?" again asked Cheeseman, boldly. "Is there any one in distress; or what is it?" The wind rose for an instant, and seemed to shake the leaves upon the great tree more roughly than before; and then it fell as suddenly, and as they became still again a voice spoke from among them, a calm, low voice, every note of which pierced the ear of the listener like the clear sound of some bugle heard from afar through the still summer air. And these were the words which came from the great oak—

"From the door of cottage home
Hither doth the father come;
Would he find his daughter lost?
Great the pain and high the cost!"

As these words were uttered, a pang shot through the heart of the old farmer. Then for the first time it flashed across him that the powers of evil might be concerned in the disappearance of his daughter. All the old stories he had heard about witches and wizards, and the like plagues of mankind, came crowding together upon his recollection, and he felt at once that if any of these creatures had begun to interfere with his household, misery had indeed come upon him.

Being, however, as I have already hinted, of a dauntless nature, he overcame his sudden fears by a mighty effort of will, and at once addressed the unknown speaker in terms of earnest entreaty for more particular information upon the subject of his daughter. The proper thing, no doubt, would have been to have spoken in verse, but that was rather beyond John Cheeseman's powers, and indeed his agitation and anxiety were too great to have allowed him to arrange his poetical ideas even had they been more numerous than was actually the case.

"Whosumdever you be in the oak," he gasped forth, "if you know where my 'Mima is, don't go for to hide it up. The wench is mine only daughter, and I'd as lief die outright as that aught of ill came to her!"

Calmly and clearly again sounded the voice through the still air.

"Woven by the powers of hell,
Deep and dark the mystic spell
O'er the maiden spoken;
Yet the word of knowledge saith
That by valour and by faith
May that spell be broken!"

It will easily be believed that these words did not allay the apprehensions of honest John Cheeseman as to the present position of his beloved daughter, though at the same time they inspired him with hope that he should recover her. The information hitherto given him, however, was so scanty, that he did not see how valour and faith could avail him, unless he knew a little more with regard to the

direction in which they were to be employed. So once again he boldly addressed the mysterious being, who had evidently the power to tell more if he chose to do so.

"What be I to do, master?" he cried; "and where be I to go for to find my little wench? There ain't no fear but what I'll try main hard to get her back, if so be as I knows how."

And again the voice gave back an answer, which John Cheeseman at first feared was only a repetition of the former rhyme, until he had listened to the end.

"Woven by the powers of hell,
Deep and dark the mystic spell
O'er the maiden spoken;
But the lawless demon bands
Know full well that nought withstands
Him who holds the Token."

This was quite a new idea to the worthy farmer. To get back his daughter he must hold "the Token." But what "token?" Where was he to find it? Who would give it him? This was as yet a mystery, and as the voice had ceased to speak, it did not seem likely to be cleared up then and there. So after an anxious pause, he again asked in tones of great earnestness—

"What be the token, master? An' I know where to get it, I'll have it, I reckon, if it is to behad. Where be I to look after it, master?"

There was no reply. The wind rose again, and rustled the oak-leaves, faintly sighing through the upper branches, but the voice had ceased, and the unhappy father could obtain no further information.

He implored the unseen being to tell him only this one thing—where to go for the token; but it seemed as if he might as well have spoken to a stick or a stone. No one answered, and it was quite plain that he must try elsewhere for information. Almost beside himself with doubts and fears for the safety of his darling, he now turned away from the oak and took the direction of Smarden, hoping to meet his sons and obtain from them some news of their lost sister. As far as the first hope was concerned it was soon realized, for when at a short distance from the kissing-gate already mentioned, the old man heard voices in eager conversation, and in a few seconds the two young men came up, breathless from the speed with which they had hurried homewards. Alas! they had no good news to come. As regarded their aunt, they had to relate the sad tidings which the hedgehog had (though they knew it not) imparted to Jemima that morning. She had been carried off by a fit at half-past one that day, and one would have thought the news would have reached the family of the Cheesemans before. But Mrs. Homewood had lived alone with only one servant girl, and as she was "terribly put about," as she said, at her mistress's being thus suddenly taken off, and as what is everybody's business is nobody's business, and people were slow travellers in those days, no one had taken the trouble to go over to Headcorn to tell the news. It was true enough, though, and the young men could tell this to their father. But of their sister they could tell nothing. She had not been to Dame Homewood's, that was

certain: the servant girl must have seen her if she had, as she had been about the house all day. None of the neighbours had noticed her, and it seemed perfectly certain that she could never have reached Smarden. Where, then, was she? Jack and Jem had seen nothing whatever suspicious on their journey, and had met no one who had been able to give them the smallest information upon the subject. They looked at their father, and he returned their gaze in dumb amazement, for none of the three had the slightest idea what to do. They were standing, had they known it, close to the spot where the last scene between Jemima and the hedgehog had taken place, and almost in sight of Kezia Mummery's cottage; but even had they known the truth, I do not know that they would have gained much by going then and there to the place into which the poor girl had been allured. At all events, they had no present reason for going there, and they stood looking at each other in a confused and undecided manner for some moments. Suddenly a low, mocking laugh smote upon their ears. It seemed to come from the neighbouring woods, and sounded, as old Cheeseman afterwards said, for all the world as if some evil spirit was sneering gladly at human weakness and sorrow. The three men all started, and turned towards the spot from whence the laughter had seemed to proceed. There was a pause for full half a minute, and then arose the same jeering sound, and presently died away in a kind of wail which struck sadness to the very hearts of those who listened.

"Holy saints protect us!" said old Cheeseman, in

a voice scarce above a whisper. "What can this mean?"

His sons glanced anxiously at each other, and neither of them could make any suggestion.

"'Tis just as if some one was a-mocking of us," said Jem, to which his brother assented.

Then their father spoke again. "Look here, lads," he cried, "our 'Mima's in trouble, somehow and somewhere; that's certain sure."

Then he proceeded to tell them exactly what had happened to him since they left the house for Smarden, and how he had received strange news from some one who had spoken from the oak. When he had got as far in his story as the mention of the mystic spell, a sudden burst of hilarious laughter broke out again from the woods, as if a dozen fiends at least were scoffing at the party; but as he boldly went on and repeated the whole of the words regarding the token, the laughter again died away into a yell which faded away in the most melancholy cadence.

The three men were now fully convinced that their loved one had been spirited away by some evil ones, and also that it was possible to recover her if they only knew the way. If the two young men had entertained any doubt with respect to their father's story (which, indeed, being dutiful sons, they did not), such doubt would have been removed by the unearthly sounds which they had just heard; and they both shared his opinion to the fullest extent, and felt perfectly sure that it was no common or mortal agency to which Jemima's disappearance was

to be attributed. The question then remained—what was to be done?

Presently Jack broke silence. "Father," said he, "let's go down to old Will."

"Jack!" replied the old man, "you're right, my lad. Old Will is the man for us in this trouble, and to him will we go."

And without another word the three turned round and walked off in the direction of their own house. Not very far from the said house, down a sandy lane which was so full of ruts that a cart could with difficulty be drawn along it, was an abode, which, as well as its owner, deserves a somewhat particular description. It was, in fact, the village smithy, and the person who occupied it was, as may perhaps be guessed from the foregoing statement, the village blacksmith. The building was amply large enough for all purposes for which it was required, and although rather low-pitched, was strongly and substantially built. When you entered the outside lodge in which the horses stood to be shod, you saw the door of the forge immediately on your right, and the furnace, some little way in, lighting up the front part thereof with its cheerful blaze. Behind the furnace, the wide building extended I know not how far back, and there the darkness was sufficient to have concealed almost any number of people who had chosen to hide there. But there was no fear of any wicked thing in that darkness, for, as is well known, all creatures of the evil sort avoid blacksmiths' forges with the greatest care ever since St. Dunstan played the chief evil one a trick with a

pair of tongs, which made him vow never to come near a blacksmith again—which must be a fortunate thing for the men in that trade. Besides, the horse-shoes which are so plentiful in a blacksmith's shop are of themselves a great protection, so that if you want to avoid witches and the like, it is well either to live near a blacksmith, or to marry a blacksmith, or to be a blacksmith, according as your circumstances make the one or other of the three things possible or convenient.

Old Will Prebble was quite "a character" in those parts, and would have probably been so even if he had not enjoyed the advantage of being a blacksmith into the bargain. He was a man of middle height, with a head covered with black, crisp locks of hair, which had a tinge of grey in them at the time of which we write, and a countenance which betokened, as plain as countenance ever did, a cheery and yet a knowing spirit within. There was something in the twinkle of his eye which seemed to tell you at once that Will Prebble was a shrewd and withal a pleasant fellow, and as you got better acquainted with him you found that his looks did not belie him. He had a merry jest and friendly welcome for every one, always seemed to be in good humour and in good spirits, and was ever ready for a chat. Many a drooping soul had he cheered by his jovial manner and conversation, never being without an encouraging word to say to everybody, and a plan of looking always at the bright side of things which had a very inspiriting effect upon his neighbours and acquaintance. From Monday morning to

Saturday night did "Old Will"—as he was familiarly termed by the villagers—work heartily in his forge, with his leathern apron on, and his face blackened with the smoke of the furnace, so that his two eyes twinkled like stars in a dark sky: from early morn till sunset he worked, I say, save only during the moments—and they certainly were not a few—which he snatched for gossip with the numerous visitors who dropped in from time to time. The only week-day on which you might not always find old Will in his forge was Ashford market-day, which all the world knows has been Tuesday from time immemorial. Now and then he would visit Ashford on these days, when business called him thither, and his coming was always welcome to a large circle of friends. For the worthy blacksmith was widely popular, as indeed he deserved to be; and it was not unnatural, this being the case, that his shop was the favourite resort of the gossips of the neighbourhood, besides those who came upon regular and lawful business. On Sundays, however, old Will appeared in quite a different character. The working-day dress and leathern apron were laid aside, the face and hands were carefully washed, and a respectable suit of rusty black clothes put on which led to no suspicion of the wearer's usual employment. Had he lived in these days, indeed, he would certainly have been taken for the parish clerk, so staid and sober was his appearance, and so regular his attendance at all the services of the church.

To this old and tried friend, then, did John Cheeseman betake himself in his difficulty and sorrow

about his daughter, and without more ado he and his sons set off in the direction of the forge. Will Prebble, as may be supposed, did not actually live in the forge, which indeed was closed for the night by the time that the father and brothers of Jemima reached it. His house was opposite to his shop, on the other side of the lane; an ordinary red-brick house, somewhat larger than a cottage, with honeysuckle growing against the wall, and a quickset hedge running from the gate parallel with the lane for some little way, enclosing a slip of ground which the good man devoted to a flower garden. When you opened the gate, you had but three or four yards to walk to the front door of the blacksmith's house, and the first thing that struck your eye was an enormous horse-shoe nailed up over the knocker, whether as an emblem of his trade or a protection against witches it is impossible to say.

John Cheeseman did not stop to think of this or of anything else, but, being eagerly set upon his business, walked up, with his sons behind him, and knocked at the door. It was almost immediately opened by the blacksmith, who had only just closed his forge for the night, and had not yet put off his working dress.

"Who is it a-knocking?" he said; "who are ye, my mates?" Then catching sight of his visitors, he exclaimed: "What, neighbour Cheeseman, is it you, old friend? And your boys with you, I do declare! Come in, come in and sit down, whatever may be your errand. And how's the missis and pretty Miss Jemima?"

As he uttered the last name, John Cheeseman broke out into a groan which he could not restrain; whereupon the blacksmith hastily added: "Nothing wrong at home, I hope, neighbour? All well with wife and daughter? You seem in trouble, like! Jem, Jack, what ails with your father?"

"Alas, Master Prebble," answered Jem, mournfully, "father and we be in a terrible bad plight, surely!"

"Why, what is it? speak out and tell us, man, can't ye?" hastily asked old Will; and then farmer Cheeseman found his voice, and told him the whole story from beginning to end.

Old Will listened with great attention and interest, and asked several questions upon particular points. "This must be seen to—this must be seen to at once!" he muttered; and then turning to his visitors, told them that he felt no doubt but that he could, as he certainly would endeavour to, help them in their trouble. Nothing, however, could be done that night by them. He would give the matter his best attention, and if they would be with him early the next morning, they should receive his counsel and assistance.

So much confidence had they in the worthy blacksmith, that they felt much comforted by these words, and forthwith returned home, though with heavy hearts. That night was probably one of the saddest ever known in John Cheeseman's house. When his poor wife heard all that had happened, and how fruitless had been the search for Jemima, she was almost beside herself with grief. To think of her

own, her darling daughter, being in the power of the evil ones! It was more than human nature could bear, and she broke out into tears and lamentations of a most distressing kind. Her husband and sons did their best to appease her, but she would not be appeased; and if she had known what direction to take, I believe she would have sallied forth into the night then and there, and boldly visited the cottage into which her hapless daughter had been decoyed. But as neither she nor any one else knew where that was, and were profoundly ignorant as to who or what had taken Jemima away, no action of this sort was possible, and Mrs. Cheeseman, like the others, had to bear her misfortune as best she could. Like them, however, she placed great faith in Will Prebble, and comforted herself as well as she could with hopes of what might be effected by his skill and courage.

It was not without reason that the Cheeseman family so trusted the blacksmith. Scarcely had his visitors disappeared than he opened his house door again, proceeded to his forge, entered it, and struck a light. Then he advanced to his furnace, which was still smouldering, and occupied himself therewith for full half an hour; after which he again went out, shut up the forge, and returning to his own house, lost no time in seeking the rest which he had well earned by the labour of the day.

So night fell upon the village of Headcorn, and for the first time in her life Jemima Cheeseman slept not beneath her father's roof.

Very early in the morning, John Cheeseman and his sons were afoot on their way to the blacksmith's

forge. Yet, early as it was, the good man was before them, and they heard the ringing sound of his hammer as they approached the shop. He ceased working, however, as soon as he perceived the father and brothers of the missing damsel, and coming forward, stood with his arms akimbo upon the threshold of his forge.

"Good morrow, neighbour Cheeseman, good morrow!" said he, in his usual cheery tone; "I have not been idle about thy business."

"Good morrow, Master Prebble, and thank thee kindly," replied Cheeseman; and at the invitation of the worthy blacksmith he walked into the forge of the latter, followed by his sons.

When they stood within a short distance of the furnace, the owner of the place bade them wait a moment, whilst he went into the recess behind the furnace, whence he presently returned, bringing with him something which he held carefully and reverently in his hand. To the eyes of the casual observer this seemed to be nothing more nor less than a common little flat piece of metal, with a hole bored through it; but the visitors were soon to learn that it was much more than it appeared at first sight. Old Will displayed it before the three men, holding it out in his open hand for a moment, and then proceeded to explain all about it.

"This," he said, "is one of those relics which was no doubt alluded to by the unseen being who mentioned 'the token.' It has been handed down to me by my father, who got it from his father, and so through all our generations for long time past.

'Tis said to be a piece of the shovel which St. Dunstan was wont to use in his forge, and, anyhow, it is a very holy relic, and against him who holds it nothing evil can prevail. If thou hast this with thee, neighbour Cheeseman, it will mightily aid thee against witches or warlocks, and if I were in thy place I would hang it round my neck at once. Then, if thou art in doubt what to do, go with this around thy neck to the great oak once more. To him who bears the token more will be told, and do not doubt that all shall in the end be well with thee."

John Cheeseman listened to this advice with the greatest respect, and determined in his own mind that he would follow it without delay. As he had not the least idea where his daughter had gone to, he wisely opined that he might go entirely on a wrong scent unless he first of all obtained some information as to the quarter in which he should test the virtue of the relic. This he took, with many thanks to the friendly giver, who moreover supplied him with a strong chain, which, having passed it through the hole in the piece of metal, he put round his neck, so that the token might be safe. He had scarcely done so before he found his spirits revive; hope seemed to spring anew in his bosom, and he felt a confidence of ultimate success which enabled him to cheer his sons, and filled his heart with courage and vigour. In the honest simplicity of his nature he would have rushed off then and there to the great tree, but the more experienced blacksmith warned him against doing any such thing.

"Thou will gain nothing," said he, "an' thou

goest in broad daylight. Wait thou must till eventide, and comfort thy wife meanwhile with good words of hope. Bide till the shadows begin to fall around, and then go as thou didst go yesterday, and trust in Heaven for what shall follow."

Both Cheeseman and his sons saw the wisdom of this advice, and were the further encouraged by other wise sayings of the man of the hammer and anvil, who told them that in such cases as these no witch or warlock had power over a maiden, unless she had joined them by her own free will, until they had kept her with them for a year and a day, and no one had during that time come to her aid. Then, indeed, danger might begin; but until that time, though they might keep her from her friends, and perhaps annoy her in various way, her soul would be safe, and no lasting injury could be done to her. Indeed, said old Will, the evil ones often tried coaxing and blandishments, and endeavoured to make themselves appear beautiful and their ways of life attractive, so as to induce a maiden thus carried off to join them of her own free will; and when once this had been done, and the wicked rites performed by which they admitted a new witch into their sisterhood, the poor creature was utterly lost, and could only be saved by a miracle.

Jemima was so good and pure-minded a girl, that these words vastly reassured her father and brothers. They felt very certain that she would never willingly join herself to any evil company, and this inspired them with a strong hope and belief that they should succeed in recovering her by means pointed out to

them through the blacksmith's help. They took leave of the latter therefore, with many thanks and hearty graspings of the hand, and forthwith returned to their own home. There they found it difficult to console the good wife and mother, to whom every moment of suspense appeared an age, and who could hardly endure to exist during the long hours of the day before taking any steps to recover her lost treasure. So unwilling, indeed, was she to wait, and so irksome was the delay to her impatient spirit, that when her husband and boys had gone out to perform some of the farm work, which they thought it would do no good to neglect, she stole quietly off herself to the churchyard, and boldly advanced towards the great oak. It was a fine day, the sun shining with that pleasant warmth which mellows the autumn air to a comfortable temperature without making one feel inclined to throw off one's coat on account of the heat, and there was only the faintest breath of wind stirring, just enough to freshen the atmosphere. There was no one in sight as Mrs. Cheeseman approached the oak, although there were several houses within a short distance of the churchyard, and occasionally certain idlers would sit upon the low stone wall, which was just of a convenient height for that kind of thing. But no one happened to be there at this particular time, and the good woman seemed to have the place all to herself. She marched right up to within a few yards of the old tree, and regarded it for a moment with a determined air; but, for all that, with a very undecided notion of how to address herself to the oracle which had

spoken with her husband. As, however, a woman's wit is seldom at a loss where speech is concerned, Mrs. Cheeseman was not long delayed by any doubt or indecision. Indeed, her momentary hesitation arose from no fear or other unworthy sentiment, but from a want of knowledge as to the form of address which she ought to employ towards a being of whose character and position in this or any other world she was profoundly ignorant. She got over her difficulty, however, in the best way which occurred to her, by commencing her speech in an ordinary manner, just as she would have done if she had been attempting to attract the attention of some friend or neighbour who was not listening to her at the moment.

"I say!" she exclaimed; and then after the pause of a second or two—"I say, Master Oak, or whatever you be, sir, as lives in the oak, I be Molly Cheeseman, come for news of my gal; do ye tell us now where my 'Mima has got to!"

She paused for a reply, but there was no sound of voice, or any token of her being heard. The wind gently whispered in the leaves, the well-known stroke of the flails, hard at work in the neighbouring barn, fell heavily and regularly upon her ears, and the distant mooing of a cow which was bemoaning the absence of its calf came up across the meadow with the light breeze; but there was no answer to her appeal, and no sign of sympathy with her distress. The poor mother tried again after a very short pause.

"I beant no great hand at sperrits and such-like," she said, as if apologizing to the being in the oak for having perhaps made some mistake in her

manner of addressing him; "but if so be as you can tell me about my 'Mima, I'd take it very kindly, I would. I'm terribly put about now she's gone, and if you would but help me! Now do, Mister Whatever-you-be, and I'll say a good word for ye for ever and a day!"

Good Mrs. Cheeseman spoke earnestly and with much energy, but her prayers and entreaties appeared to produce not the smallest effect upon the spirit of the oak. Perhaps he did not live there in the middle of the day—perhaps it was his time for sleeping; but, at any rate, all that the worthy woman could say proved utterly useless, and she turned round and went home in great and bitter disappointment.

The rest of the day was longer than any day she had ever known, and never was she more rejoiced than when the approach of evening brought in her husband and sons, and the time for further action was at hand. The good mother pleaded hard that she might be allowed to go to the tree where the inquiries were to be made; but this her husband resolutely forbade, since it was to him that the advice of the blacksmith had been given that he should go with the token round his neck, and the presence of any one who had not got such an ornament might very possibly ruin the whole affair.

So Mrs. Cheeseman and her sons were obliged to stay at home, whilst the father of the lost maiden sallied forth alone. With slow and steady steps he marched towards the churchyard as the shades of evening were falling fast around him, and presently stood in the self-same spot where he had first received

the communications vouchsafed by the mysterious being of the oak.

He did not, as on the former occasion, wait to be spoken to—which, as it will be remembered, he had by no means expected when he first visited the place. He had not then known that the oak was inhabited by any speaking power, but being better informed now he at once commenced after the following fashion—

"Sir," he said—though why he should have supposed the being to have been a gentleman rather than a lady, I cannot tell—"Sir, I be John Cheeseman, and I come for news of my darter, which I makes bold for to ask by virtue of the token."

Scarcely had he uttered these words than the same voice which he had heard before announced to him from the oak—

"Charm so potent holds the maid
Spell-bound in the woodland shade,
That her rescuing to plan
Passeth all the skill of man.
Yet by aid from heaven sent
E'en the deepest spell is rent;
And the token, tried and true,
More than mortal strength can do!
Father! now the work is thine,
Hie thee to St. Thomas' shrine;
By the martyr's altar stand,
With the token in thine hand;
If within thine hand it burn,
Haste thee quickly to return;
And beneath this sacred tree,
Succour shall be sent to thee!"

John Cheeseman listened to these words with

great attention, and well understood the command which they conveyed to him. He was to go as quickly as he could to the shrine of St. Thomas of Canterbury, and there, by the means stated to him, to find out whether by help of the token he would be allowed to recover his daughter.

If such a command had been given to anybody in these later times, they might or might not have obeyed it; but to do so, as far as concerned making the journey, would have been easier by far than in the days of which we write. Vans and carriers' carts ran from Ashford to Canterbury until the railroad was made; and since that happy event, a man living at Headcorn has only got to walk down to the station and take his ticket to Canterbury, in order to be perfectly sure of arriving safe there in a little more than an hour from the time of leaving his home.

But it was very different in John Cheeseman's time. There were no vans or coaches by which to travel, and if there was a carrier's cart, it was one to journey by which was not much faster than walking. Railroads had never been heard of, and the roads were neither good nor safe for the traveller. It was therefore a serious matter for the honest farmer to have to undertake a journey to Canterbury, although no thought of refusing to do so ever crossed his mind for a moment. If he had been told to go off to London he would have done so without hesitation; and indeed I do not know what there is which he would have refused to attempt for the chance of recovering his beloved daughter. For one instant, indeed, he was staggered, as the words of the being

of the oak fell upon his ears, but it was from no fear on his own account, but rather from a doubt whether he should be able to do all that might be required of him. He had never been to Canterbury in his life, for people did not move far from home in those days, and it seemed to him an undertaking of great magnitude.

Some answer he felt to be due to the mysterious voice, and he gave it without delay.

"I humbly thank ye, sir; that I do indeed. No fear but what I'll go, neither. I and my boys will be off at daybreak, as sure as anything."

But the voice here interrupted the good man in his speech.

> "He who bears the mystic sign,
> Must alone approach the shrine;
> On the token rest thy stay,
> Trust no mortal on the way.
> Trust no strength of mortal arm,
> Idle against spell and charm;
> Trust no cunning of thine own,
> Trust the token's aid alone."

Although he would gladly have had the company of his sons in his proposed expedition, the brave farmer no sooner heard these words than he resolved to undertake it single-handed, and to face any and every danger which might stand in his way. One sigh, indeed, he heaved, as he thought of the troubles which probably lay before him, and how much they would have been lightened by the company of his true-hearted and loving boys; but this was but a momentary feeling. There was no shrinking from

the enterprise in thought or word, and he answered again, in his homely way—

"Thank ye, sir; thank ye kindly again. If so be as I are to go alone, alone I'll go, and be sure I'll mind your words about this here token."

The voice spoke no more, and indeed the good man had no more to ask, for he had received clear and precise information as to what he was to do. Having, therefore, again offered his thanks to the oracle who had spoken from the oak, he left the great tree and walked calmly back to his house.

There he found his wife and sons eagerly expecting his arrival, and naturally full of mingled doubts and hopes as to the news he might bring. Great was their disappointment when they heard what had been told him, for there were several reasons why they should be disappointed.

The good mother could ill bear the separation from her husband with which she was threatened, especially as he was in all probability about to be exposed to dangers, all the more terrible because unknown. Moreover, she was anxious to do something herself towards the recovery of her daughter, and the delay would be very trying to a woman of her temperament if she could be rendering no assistance meanwhile.

Jem and Jack were even more vexed than their mother, for they could not endure the thought of letting their father go off alone, when both natural affection and the spirit of enterprise urged them to accompany and assist him. Indeed, they so earnestly insisted upon their right to do so, and that it was

their bounden duty not to desert him in the hour of peril, that the worthy man was obliged to exercise his paternal authority, and decidedly forbid them to entertain the notion. He pointed out to them that, as far as mortal eye could see or mortal knowledge inform, their only chance of finding their lost and loved one was to follow exactly the directions which had been given from the oak. They none of them knew where Jemima was, and unless it was revealed to them they probably never would know. Then he pointed out to them, in simple but touching language, how that there were many virtues, just as there were many vices, in the world; that courage and resolution were virtues, but that patience was one also, and that their faith might be shown by the one as well as by the other. Upon the present occasion their duty was to stay by their mother, whom they must protect and comfort during their father's absence. The young men listened respectfully to all that he said, and reluctantly gave up the idea of accompanying him to Canterbury. They promised, also, that they would take great care of their mother; and after the family conversation had been concluded, the whole party retired to their respective beds, and the second day of Jemima's disappearance came to an end.

John Cheeseman was early afoot, for besides that his habits of life caused him for the most part to be out of doors betimes, he had sundry preparations to make for his departure, and orders to give as to certain farming operations which must be carried on during his absence.

It was a fine morning, and nature seemed to smile upon the good man's enterprise, so his heart felt as light and cheery as was possible under the circumstances. Having given his orders, and eaten a wholesome and hearty breakfast, he spent some little

FARMER CHEESEMAN STARTS ON HIS JOURNEY.

time in preparing for his start; but between nine and ten o'clock he wished his family good-bye, took upon his shoulders a small wallet containing a few articles which Mrs. Cheeseman insisted upon his having with him, grasped a stout staff in his hand, and proceeded upon his journey. He was not very

certain as to his nearest way to Canterbury, but knew the line of country pretty well, and did not doubt but that he should reach the cathedral city without much difficulty. So he plodded on with steady steps in the direction of Pluckley, where he had settled to ascend the hill. The roads were rather heavy, and so was the footpath through a field or two, in which the clay soil stuck to the traveller's boots in such a way as to seriously impede his progress. So Cheeseman walked but slowly, and by the time he reached the foot of the hill near Pluckley village, he began to feel that a few minutes' rest would be no unwelcome thing. So he sat down on the stone step of a stile close to the road, and as it was now several hours since he had left home, thought it as well to take from his wallet a crust of bread and cheese with which his wife's care had provided him, and to employ his resting-time in discussing the same with an appetite sharpened by the morning air and the exercise which he had taken. It was now between eleven and twelve o'clock, for Cheeseman did not need rest until he had been walking sturdily forward for some two or three good hours, and by this time he had certainly earned it. So down he sat and began to eat, looking neither to the right nor left, and occupied only with his own affairs. All of a sudden he was interrupted in a most unexpected manner. Over the stile came a buxom young country lass, with red cheeks and fresh complexion, and nearly ran over him before she seemed to see him. The stile was rather above the level of the road, and there were three rough stone steps from the former to the

latter, upon the lowest step of which the worthy farmer had seated himself. So when the girl came blundering over the stile (as we say in Kent), she could not well get into the road without interrupting him. But apparently she saw him as soon as she was over the stile and on the top step, for she pulled herself up all at once, and gave a little scream, as if frightened at a sight which she had not anticipated.

"Deary me!" she said as soon as she had done her scream; "well I do declare! Who'd ha' thought it?"

John Cheeseman was himself rather startled at the interruption, but saw at once that he was blocking up a public path, which he had no right to do, and had moreover sufficient good manners to desire to get out of the damsel's way as soon as possible. So he began to rise from the stone step, saying as he did so, as well as he could speak with a mouth half full of bread and cheese: "I asks your pardon, miss, for being in the way and startling of you. I hadn't no thought of any one coming this here road just now."

"There beant no call to ask pardon," at once replied the girl, speaking in the dialect of the district, and in a singularly pleasant voice; "I com'd along in such a mortal hurry, I did, that I never looked afore me to see where I was a-coming to."

"I hadn't ought to have been a-setting on that there stone, though," remarked John Cheeseman, slowly and gravely, as he finished his mouthful and made way for the girl to pass.

However, she made no attempt to do so, or to

move from her position upon the top stone of the three, but stood there leaning against the stile, and evidently disposed for further conversation. "I'm afraid I've upset you, master?" she said in an inquiring tone.

FARMER CHELSEMAN (SITTING) AND THE WITCH-MAIDEN.

"No, no you hav'n't," replied honest John. "I'd only set me down a bit to have my 'lowance."

"'Twas a terrible poor place, too," rejoined the other.

"Well," responded the farmer, "I don't know so

much about *that*, neither; there's worse places nor a stone agin a bank, out of the wind, and nice and low."

"So there be," said the wench, briskly. "But ain't you rather afore 'lowance time, master?"

"Sure-ly, sure-ly," returned Cheeseman, "only I've had a smartish walk this morning—come all the way from Headcorn parish."

"You don't say so!" exclaimed the damsel.

"I sartainly have," said he.

"You must be terrible tired, sure-ly," remarked the girl.

"Middling, middling," rejoined the farmer. "It beant so very far, neither, and I don't know as I should ha' pulled up so soon, only I've got a precious long way to go afore night, so 'tis no use a tiring myself out afore noon."

"Why, where be you a-going to?" asked his companion.

"I'm for Canterbury," replied John.

"You beant never a-going to walk all *that* way, be you?" inquired she.

"Yes, I be," said he, "and I must get as far as I can to-day, though I don't expect as how I shall get to my journey's end afore to-morrow. It must be nigh twenty mile from here."

"I wouldn't hurry, not if I was you," observed the girl; "'tis a wonderful fine morning. Set ye down again and rest a bit, and then come and take a turn with me through these here Pluckley woods: I'm most afraid to go alone, and I'm bound for my old uncle's at Chart."

Now John Cheeseman, though no great traveller, and, considering his age, somewhat ignorant of the locality of his own neighbourhood, knew well enough that Chart was quite out of his way to Canterbury, and that to accept the invitation of the girl would very much delay his journey. He thought it rather odd, too, that she should ask him, a stranger, to escort her through the woods; but John was not without that sort of vanity which often makes men apt to think that there is something about them which pleases the fairer portion of humanity, and he was rather flattered by the confidence which she was so ready to bestow upon him. It was not every day that a fine-looking girl, with plenty to say for herself, as was evidently the case with this one, asked the worthy farmer to take a walk with her, and had she caught him at a more leisure moment, I will not answer for what he might have replied to her request. As it was, he hesitated, but only for a moment, for the thought of his daughter came into his heart, and he remembered the object of that journey, which would be delayed by his doing that which he was asked. So he shook his head as he replied to the damsel, "No, no, my wench, I can't come along wi' you, let it be as it may; I must get on to Canterbury."

The girl pouted her lips as he spoke, as if vexed at her request being denied, and then, as quickly changing the pout into a smile, descended the steps, and suddenly put her arm across the farmer's shoulders in quite an affectionate manner. "Now don't ye say no, master," she said; "Here be I,

all alone and timersome like. You ar'n't got no call to hurry; just see me safe for a bit, won't you now?"

John Cheeseman was unused to this kind of wheedling from a strange girl, and it somewhat took him by surprise. She looked into his face, too,

FARMER CHEESEMAN AND THE WITCH-MAIDEN.

with such a coaxing look as she spoke that he hardly knew what to make of it. But something within him seemed to warn him still to be firm, and accordingly he gently disengaged himself from the maiden's arm and again declined her invitation. She was not

to be so repulsed, however, and positively took him by the arm as if determined that he should come with her according to her request. This was really too much for the good man.

"Lord bless us," he said, "what are you arter?"

The words were scarcely out of his mouth when the girl dropped his arm as if she had been shot, and staggered back towards the bank. This surprised Cheeseman still more, but it also aroused his suspicions as to the character of his strange companion. He no longer hesitated what to do. Throwing open his vest he displayed the token which hung around his neck, and pointing to it, cried aloud—"Look ye here, wench, d'ye see this here?"

It was enough, and more than enough; the effect of his words was instantaneous. The young, smiling, pleasant face of the girl turned as if by magic into the scowling and hideous features of an old hag; the graceful, well-made form became a thin and shrivelled body; rage and malice sat upon the face of the witch—for such beyond all doubt she was—and with a wild cry of baffled fury and fear commingled, she fled down the road, and presently disappeared from the sight of the astonished farmer.

He stood still for a moment, collecting his thoughts and wondering what it all meant; then suddenly he remembered the warning which he had received to "trust no mortal on the way," and although it might be questionable whether the creature who had just left him was mortal or not, he could not but feel that he had been very nearly trusting her, and that in not having done so he had escaped a great danger. He

heaved a deep sigh as he thought how nearly his journey had been thus interrupted, and how probable it was that this was only the first of many attempts which might be made upon him; for he could not help feeling that if, as appeared to be only too certain, some evil ones had got hold of his daughter, they would try by all the means in their power to prevent his reaching Canterbury, and obtaining the assistance which he hoped to find by means of his visit to St. Thomas' shrine. However, John Cheeseman had a stout heart, and was moreover fortunate enough to have a strong faith in the token which had been given him. Had he not had such a faith, it is probable that he would hardly have been prepared to face the dangers which he imagined to be before him, or to undertake a journey which to him was one of considerable magnitude and very foreign to the usual habits of his life. But Faith is a great upholder and strengthener of human nature, and, thus inspired, the worthy farmer, as soon as he had recovered from the astonishment of his late adventure, again grasped his stout staff in his hand and proceeded on his way. Slowly he ascended the Pluckley hill, and paused when he got to the top to look round at the magnificent prospect which lay before him. At his feet lay the great Weald of Kent—very different then from what it is now, when civilization has made gigantic steps of progress, and he who gazes from the hills looks down upon a vast vale full of smiling homesteads and flourishing farms, well studded indeed with trees and woods, but giving evidence of a considerable population occupying the district and tilling

the land. But in the old times this vale was one mass of wood, whence, indeed, it takes its name of Weald; and although at the period of which we speak some portion of the wood or weald had been grubbed, and the land converted into arable and pasture fields, the farms and homesteads were as yet but few and far between, and a vast body of wood occupied the greater part of the plain over which the traveller looked from the top of Pluckley hill. It was a grand view, however, and far away to the left he could just see the sparkle of the water in the rays of the sun, which told of the sea beyond.

John Cheeseman did not stand gazing for very long—and indeed it was less to gaze than to take breath that he had stopped. He turned on his heel and recommenced his walk, which ere long brought him to Pluckley church. Here he turned into the long avenue which led to the great house of Surrenden Dering, deeming it his best way to pass through the park belonging to the Dering family, and so away to Eastwell. No adventure befell him in the avenue, and leaving the mansion on the left, he struck into a pathway and made his way across the park as he had intended. He was scarcely more than half-way across it before a loud bellow startled him from his thoughts—whatever they were at the moment—and turning round he perceived an enormous white bull, with its head down, tearing up the turf with its horns, and advancing upon him in a manner which evidently meant mischief. Being well versed in the ways of bulls, the farmer was not much afraid at first, but turned round and faced the

animal, well knowing that to run away would be the most certain method of making it attack him. The bull, however, still continued to advance, lashing its sides with its tail as if to rouse itself to greater anger against the intruder upon its pastures. There was no fence near, which Cheeseman could have put between him and the enemy, and only a large chestnut-tree at a short distance. He shook his stick at the animal, and spoke to it in a loud and stern voice, which sometimes overawes a creature of this sort; but it had no effect whatever upon the bull, which still came slowly on with the evident intention of making an unprovoked and violent assault upon the farmer. The latter, perceiving that he was in some danger of having his life and journey ended together in a sudden and unexpected manner, cast a hasty glance at the chestnut-tree, and saw that one of its huge branches stretched out so near to the ground that he could easily reach it. There was evidently no time to be lost, for the bull was now barely thirty yards off, and was quickening its movements into a trot which would very soon shorten the distance more than was pleasant. The chestnut-tree was close at hand, and making up his mind in a moment, Cheeseman darted at it, seized the branch, swung himself up, and crawled out of reach just as the infuriated bull charged at him with such speed and violence that a couple more seconds would have been probably fatal to his escape. In swinging himself up of course he dropped his staff, and upon that the bull at first expended its rage, which did it but little harm, since stout oak staves do not care about being

tossed by a bull, and for aught I know rather enjoy the excitement. Then it looked up at its intended victim, and bellowed loudly, as if to invite him to come down and meet it in fair fight. This he had no intention of doing, and occupied himself in making as comfortable a seat as he could in the thickest part of the branch, so that he might rest quietly until the animal should think fit to go away. This, however, it showed no signs of doing for the present, but after pawing the ground vigorously for a moment or two, and giving a dig or so into the turf with its horns, it began to walk slowly round and round the tree, every now and then looking upwards and giving vent to a kind of sound half snort and half bellow, as if to say, "Yes, there you are, my fine fellow, and there I mean to keep you, unless you will come down and be comfortably gored to death, which is the fate I reserve for you."

John sat quietly enough for a few minutes, and then began to consider seriously what a position he was in with regard to the objects of his journey. It was some two or three hundred yards to the park fence, and this it would be impossible to reach if he started whilst his enemy was anywhere near the tree. He was most anxious to get on, but this interruption was one which he could not have either expected or avoided without going out of his way. He wished from the bottom of his heart that he had taken the latter course; but then he could not possibly have foreseen that a savage bull would be loose in Surrenden Park, and there was nothing for which he could blame himself in having taken the shortest

path. As far as he could judge, there was nothing for it but patience, and this he determined to exercise as well as he could. Ten minutes passed away, and the bull still paced slowly round the tree; twenty minutes slipped by, and it was still the same; half an hour had gone, and there was no change in the relative position of the parties. John Cheeseman was "up a tree" in every sense of the expression, and began to despair of ever being anywhere else, unless indeed he went to sleep and fell down, in which case his position would probably be very soon altered for the worse, and the horns of the bull would prove to be even more disagreeable than the horns of the dilemma in which he found himself placed. An hour had well-nigh passed; the bull had lain quietly down at the foot of the tree, and the farmer really began to indulge in the hope that he might go to sleep. He *did* shut both eyes, and the captive in the tree moved slightly after a bit, to see whether or no he was actually dozing off. Not a bit of it: the fierce blood-shot eyes were open again in an instant, and sent forth such a savage leer at Cheeseman that he felt more than ever convinced of the craft and malice of the animal which was thus lying in wait for him. But at the same moment another thought entered his head. That was a curious, a *very* curious leer to come from a bull: it had more of human malice in it than he had ever before seen in a beast such as that before him—there was something devilish, quite awful in it. The idea flashed across him that perhaps the bull might be possessed by an evil one. Was it? Could it be that the creature

had been sent by such to hinder his journey? No sooner did this occur to him than he determined to test the truth of the matter without an instant's delay.

"Holy St. Dunstan aid us!" he cried aloud, and at the same time pulled out the token from his breast and displayed it to view.

The effect upon the creature at the foot of the tree was as sudden and extraordinary as it had been in the case of the girl at the stile. In an instant the horns, bull's head, and body disappeared as if they had all been swallowed up by the earth, and instead of the terrible animal which had so lately threatened him, John Cheeseman beheld nothing but a large black tom-cat of peculiarly repulsive appearance, which shook itself violently as if to get rid of some unpleasant sensation, and after uttering a loud and by no means melodious cry, scampered away as fast as it could in the direction of the nearest wood. Most grateful indeed was the good farmer for this deliverance, but at the same time bitterly annoyed at what had occurred and at the waste of more than an hour of valuable time. He blamed himself greatly for not having suspected the true nature of the beast, and thought of his token as the sure way of bringing him through the dangers of the journey. Determined to be more careful in future, he descended at once from the chestnut-tree, picked up his trusty staff, and once more proceeded on his way. No interruption occurred again in Surrenden Park, and having crossed it safely, he came out into the road to Hothfield, and walked quietly along it until he reached a pathway which

led across the heath. Now Hothfield Heath was a place of which travellers in those days were usually somewhat shy. The Hag of Hothfield Heath was a wicked and terrible witch, who, together with her rival and dire enemy, the Crone of Charing, kept all the country between Lenham and Ashford in great affright. Many were the tricks which these two had played, and much the mischief they had done to those who chanced to have had the misfortune to offend them. Had the two been able to work together in a friendly manner, there is no bounds to the evil which they would have worked; but Heaven never permitted such a state of things to exist, which would have rendered human life unbearable in all that country. The Hag and the Crone could never agree, so that many a poor creature escaped from the one by means of the other, and the counsel of the two wicked creatures was brought to nought by their own jealousy and hatred of each other. But honest John Cheeseman knew but little of all this. Headcorn was below the hill, as we know, and Hothfield lay above it, so that in the eyes of the good people who lived in those times the two parishes seemed almost as much apart as if they had been in different counties. So the Headcorn farmer knew little or nothing about Hothfield witches, and accordingly set foot on Hothfield Heath as readily and boldly as if he had been going along upon the king's highway.

Now Hothfield Heath was a wilder place in those days than it is now—which is something to say, for within a very few years it has been tolerably wild and rough, with its fern and thorn-trees, and the tall

weird firs which rise here and there about it. In those days, however, it was in some parts an impenetrable thicket, and the path upon which Cheeseman set foot was neither very wide nor very smooth, and led right through a mass of fern and brushwood, straight towards a part of the heath where the ground rose, and upon the highest point of which stood a group of firs, beyond which the ground fell again, and the rest of the way was through rough and tangled bushes and fern again.

On marched the traveller with steady step until he approached the firs, under which the ground was of course less covered with bushes, since these could not thrive beneath the shade of the high trees. John Cheeseman had approached quite close to the latter—for indeed the path skirted them so closely that he could not avoid doing so—when he suddenly became aware of an old woman seated with her back against one of the firs, with her knees drawn up, and her chin (which was of a curved and curious appearance) resting upon them. She was apparently wrapped in deep meditation, and had her eyes fixed in a steady gaze at the firs before her, as if totally unconscious of all that might be going on around in a world from which her thoughts were entirely removed. There was something remarkable in the appearance of the old dame, as well as in the fact of her being seated in that wild place. Her cheek-bones were high, her face wrinkled, her eyes extraordinarily bright, and her thin grey hair peeped out from beneath a quaint little hood which she wore upon her venerable head. As John Cheeseman drew

near her—which he probably would not have done had he been able to leave the path without inconvenience from the roughness of the ground—he began to doubt in his own mind what sort of being she was, and whether he should do wisely to accost her, or go by as if he had not noticed her presence. The latter course was rather difficult, because the path was so close to the clump of trees that the farmer could not avoid passing within some three yards of the spot where the old woman sat. Still, after his two previous adventures it was not surprising that the good man should entertain the gravest doubts respecting everything and everybody he saw, and he resolved not to open his mouth unless the person before him should make the first advances. So he plodded steadily along upon the path, looking neither to the right nor left, until he had actually passed the old woman and gone several yards beyond her. Then, to his great surprise a harsh, grating voice proceeded from her ancient throat, and the following words fell upon his ears—

"Whither away, John Cheeseman?"

The farmer started as if he had been shot. How on earth could this old woman, miles away from Headcorn as he now was, be so well acquainted with his name? He was immediately upon his guard even more than he had been before, but still there was about him a natural feeling of politeness which prevented his hurrying on when thus accosted without taking any notice of the speaker. So he stopped, turned round, and hesitated for a moment what he should say or do.

"Whither away so fast?" again demanded the other in the same tone of voice. "Hast never a word to say when thou meetest a neighbour? Are these the manners below the hill? They do well to speak of Headcorn hogs, an' ye have no more of civil ways than this comes to!"

"Marry come up!" said John, at these words, nettled at the epithet which for the first time he heard applied to his parish people, and which he felt that they deserved no more than other folk; "these be hard words to apply to men who are to the full as civil as any in the land. I be come from Headcorn, sure enough, though how you know it I cannot tell, for thou be no neighbour of mine, missis, not as I knows on."

As he spoke, the old woman rose from her seat, displaying as she did so a tall, gaunt figure, with an expression of countenance which certainly betokened no kindly feeling towards the stranger.

"Thou hast more neighbours than thou wottest of, John Cheeseman," she said; "and haply more than thou wouldest care for, an' thou knewest all. Whither away, I say?"

Knowing of no particular reason why he should conceal the name of the place for which he was bound, Cheeseman at once replied—

"I go to Canterbury, to the shrine——"

"Hush!" said the old woman quickly, interrupting his speech, while a spasm of pain seemed to pass through her at the moment, such a visible shudder did she give. "Hush! say no more, but listen a bit, cummer John, for though I be not a neighbour accord-

ing to thy notions, nathless I may be a friend, and able to aid thee at a pinch. Is it true that thou hast lost thy daughter?"

John fairly staggered back a full yard with surprise.

"How knowest thou that?" he exclaimed.

"Never trouble thyself with hows and whys, John Cheeseman," returned the other: "there are many things known which thou knowest not, and many who know things who have ways and means of doing so of which thou hast never dreamt. Thou hast lost thy daughter. Dost thou desire to find her?"

"I do!" sturdily answered he; "and by the help of——"

"Stop!" again hastily interrupted the old hag, whilst again she shivered as if with sudden cold. "Stop!—if thou wouldest find thy daughter, perchance I can put thee in the way of doing so without that long and tedious journey upon which thou hast set out."

I dare say that some wise people who read this true story will be inclined to think that the honest farmer should at this point have displayed his token, called upon St. Dunstan, and settled the matter at once. But the truth is, that although there are thousands of people who know what they *should* have done after they have got home and think things over, or when they are told the story of something that has occurred, there are very few who do exactly the best thing at the real moment when the action is possible. It is just the same in regard to speech: thousands there are who think afterwards of precisely the right thing

to have said and the best answer to have made to something which has been addressed to them, but the number who actually do say that right thing at exactly the right moment are uncommonly few. So when the Hag of Hothfield (for such undeniably was the old woman before him) declared that she had it in her power to assist John Cheeseman in the recovery of his beloved Jemima without the necessity of his going all the way to Canterbury, I am sorry to say that for the moment he forgot his prudence and caution, and thought only of his lost darling and how anxiously he longed to clasp her once more in his arms. He took one step forward—or rather, backward — towards the old dame, and eagerly exclaimed—

"How? Can'st thou help me to find my girl? Dang it, but that's good hearing!"

This form of address seemed to please her whom he accosted better than his former words, for a grim smile stole across her withered features as she replied—

"Yes, Gaffer Cheeseman, that can I indeed, and none better, an' thou followest my counsel and dost not hearken to foolish words from those who do but deceive thee."

John paused. What could she mean? Who had deceived him? Was it possible that, after all, he had been tricked by the voice in the oak? It could not be; but yet this old woman evidently knew something of the matter, and there could be no harm in trying to find out what she really *did* know. In this idea our friend Cheeseman was undoubtedly wrong,

for there is always harm in trifling with evil, which, like a quicksand, if once you set foot upon it, will suck you in entirely unless you are happily enabled to withdraw at once. The farmer, however, was so anxious about his daughter that he could not bear to lose a chance of getting some information about her, and the idea of having been deceived was not by any means an agreeable one to be put into his mind.

"How be I deceived?" he asked, in some indignation. "My girl's been took off somewheres and somehow, that's sure and sartin!"

"Is it so, John Cheeseman?" asked the Hag. "Girls sometimes stray from home of their own will."

"That my Jemima never did, I'll swear!" cried the man, angrily.

"Swear away to thy heart's content, bully John, I love to hear thy spirit," she said, with another of her grim smiles; "but for all that girls will be girls, and one may be tempted to wander as well as another. What if thine have gone off to meet young Pearson, and be safe all the time with some of his friends?"

John stared at the woman with amazement: not only did she know his name and place of abode, not only was she aware of the fact of his having lost his daughter, but she was acquainted with the very name of the young man who was certainly the girl's favourite admirer, and for whose sake he had expected he should at some future time have to see her leave her old home. Certainly the old woman was well informed, and if she knew so much of his child's

past history, was it impossible that she should also be able to speak of her present condition?

Whilst he still doubted, she looked at him steadfastly, as if to mark the effect of her words, and presently continued as follows—

"If thy daughter has gone off, cummer John, it were a goodly joke of those who have helped in the deed to deceive thee with some old wife's tale, and get thee out of the way by means of a journey to Canterbury. Truly thou hast been easily taken in!"

Was it possible that she spoke the truth? Had a trick really been played upon him, and was he the dupe of some one who had carried or cozened Jemima away and then sent him off on a fool's errand? The thought was not one of a pleasant nature, nor in all probability would it ever have entered into John Cheeseman's head if he had not turned round and listened at first to the words of the old woman. But as soon as he did this, the ideas which she put into his mind began to operate, and doubts and suspicions began to cloud over the pure, simple faith in which he had so far proceeded on his journey.

"What sayest thou?" he asked, in a bewildered tone. "Can it be that I have left Jemima behind me after all?"

"Doubt it not, gossip John, doubt it not!" replied the Hag, in a wheedling tone: "or if thou doubtest, come with me and I will show thee proof which shall speedily dispel thy doubts."

So eager was the father to know more of his daughter's real condition, that he thought not for a moment of any possible risk to himself, but at once

retraced his steps and approached the old woman, who entered within the clump of fir-trees, beckoning him to follow. As soon as they had got within the trees, so that the latter surrounded them on all sides, the Hag turned, and drawing herself up to her full height, pronounced some words which I dare not repeat or write down, but which were of a very powerful and wonderful nature. John Cheeseman felt a shiver all over him, and, between ourselves, I have always thought it highly probable that if he had not had that token round his neck, something dreadful would have happened to him then and there. Most likely the token saved him, but it did no more, partly because it was out of sight, I suppose, and partly because he had for the moment forgotten all about it. The old witch turned round after she had uttered the words to which I have alluded, and passed her hands rapidly before the eyes of the worthy farmer, who forthwith felt a strange, dreamy, sleepy feeling steal over him, and staggered back against the nearest tree. Whilst in this position, the Hag, still muttering to herself in a low tone of voice, suddenly held up before his eyes something which he could only dimly see in the state in which he was, but with the nature of which he presently became better acquainted. For in a somewhat louder whisper his companion now said, whilst she pushed the object closer before him—

"Mortal! ere 'tis yet too late
Gaze upon the glass of Fate."

As if compelled by some mysterious power, John felt himself obliged to open his eyes, and found that

he was peering into a looking-glass, across the face of which things were passing which seemed at first all blurred and indistinct, but which presently assumed a more clearly defined shape and character. He saw, plainly enough, the inside of a room, a hearth with a pleasant fire burning upon it, and a kettle merrily boiling in the place where kettles are wont to be. Opposite the fire, or rather, towards one side of it, was an armchair, in which was seated a female figure, which, unless his eyes deceived him in a manner which they had never done before, was none other than his own darling daughter. He was quite certain of this—a father could never be mistaken at such a moment; and when he set eyes upon her, her head was turned round and she was looking away from a young man who had his back towards the gazer, but who was evidently kneeling at Jemima's feet in an attitude of devotion which could not be mistaken. Who the young man was John Cheeseman could not see for certain, and indeed he had no time to look, for hardly had the picture been presented to his eyesight, and scarcely had he recognized his daughter, before the figures and the scene became less and less distinct, and in an instant afterwards disappeared altogether and gave way to others. He saw, as plainly as if he had been there, the interior of his own house, and in the kitchen where the family usually sat he perceived his wife, whom he had left in her usual health when he started that same morning, seated by the table with her elbows thereupon, and leaning her head upon her hands as if in a state of bodily as well as

mental suffering. The position was so unnatural to the good woman, who was always bustling about, that John was sure she must have been taken ill, and the more so as he saw two of the servant-maids, with anxious faces, standing near her; but scarcely again had he set eyes upon the scene, than it, like the first, faded away, and was replaced by another of a totally different character. He saw a cottage, low and ill-built, which he seemed somehow or another to recognize, but whose and where it was he could not at the moment recall to mind. Against the door of this cottage three young men were beating and kicking with a vehemence which betokened their determination to break in, and in these persons the spectator clearly enough discerned the features of his own sons and Tom Pearson of Ashford. For an instant he saw this scene, and then it also vanished, and the glass became once more blurred and indistinct, though mystic, wavy figures still seemed to pass to and fro its surface.

John Cheeseman had, however, seen enough to assure him that things were going on at home which required his presence; and the thought came across him, naturally enough, that this seemed to establish the truth of the old woman's suggestion that he had been purposely got out of the way by some trick of which he had been the unsuspecting dupe. At the same time with the thought came the voice of his companion, who probably judged this the right moment to speak again, which she did in the same low and emphatic tones—

"Thou seest, cummer John, that I spoke the truth,

and that thou hast been deceived. Hie thee back home, an' thou wouldest save more trouble and see thy daughter again."

John raised himself from his leaning posture with an effort as he listened to these words.

"That will I, good mother," said he, and made a step towards the path from which he had come.

Perhaps if his companion had said or done nothing more, he would have gone straight back without another word, and what might have been the consequences of his doing so I cannot pretend to say. But for some reason or other this was not to be. I imagine that the Hag of Hothfield, being beyond all doubt a very powerful witch, was not content with having stopped, as she seemed to have done, the worthy farmer's journey. This she had probably undertaken in order to oblige some of the witches below the hill—for witches, like thieves, always hang together and help each other upon such occasions, except, indeed, when they are opponents and rivals in the same district. But when she had in a measure fulfilled the request of her friends, I suppose that the Hag thought she might as well do a little business on her own account, and not only stay the farmer from pursuing his way to Canterbury, but get him altogether into her own power, so as to have him for a slave for the future, or at all events ruin him, body and soul, if she could. So instead of leaving him alone to rush off, as he was inclined to do, upon his homeward track, she called to him before he had taken a second step, waving her hand to him also in a manner which caused him to stop and turn round at once.

"Leave me not thus, good John," she said, "since I have done thee a good turn, which well deserves another. I am an old and feeble creature, and the nights will soon be getting cold. Help me to gather my winter fuel before thou leavest the heath, and it will delay thee but a short time."

Thus accosted, John Cheeseman could hardly do otherwise than accede to the request so earnestly made to him, and he stepped back at once towards the old woman, who, telling him that sticks and dried fern were to be found in abundance at a short distance from where they stood, bade him follow her through the fir-trees, which he did without a word. The Hag walked slowly to the other side of the knoll on which the firs stood, and there struck into a path which led across the heath in the direction of the great chalk hills, and was therefore very little out of the line which the farmer had been pursuing in his walk towards Canterbury. She kept steadily on, leaning on her staff, which she had taken from one of the fir-trees, against which it had been placed by her when she had taken her seat upon the spot where Cheeseman had first seen her, and which she generally carried about with her wherever she went. This staff was made of holly, and was reported in the neighbourhood to be possessed of strange powers, though I suspect that it was the hand which held it and not the staff itself which was really to be feared. Anyhow, she held it in her hand now, and made use of it as she walked along the path before John, who followed her submissively, like one in a dream, and hardly knew what he was doing at the time.

The ill-assorted pair—for an honest farmer and a witch have very little in common—went on until they reached the road which runs, if a road may be said to run, from Ashford to Charing, cutting Hothfield Heath in two, the larger half of which they had just quitted. In those days, however, the heath was much more extensive than at present, and there was a large wild tract upon the side of the road to which they now crossed. Here the ground sunk into a hollow, and through this hollow flowed a stream, not a bright, sparkling, merry brook, but a stream which only just oozed out of the ground, and gurgled on so slowly and with such difficulty that it was scarcely a stream at all; and its water was not clear and bright, but dull, muddy, and dark-coloured, so that no one would either drink or wash in it for choice. After she had entered this hollow, and steered her way carefully among the bushes for a few yards, the old woman arrived at a spot which, in the midst of fern and tangled bushes around, was in itself bare and void of all vegetation as if it had been in the heart of a barren desert. Only a few tufts of black, coarse, unwholesome-looking grass were to be seen here and there for a circle of some ten or twelve yards, and a large flat stone occupied the middle of the space, which lay there with one end higher than the other, much like an old tombstone which had gradually sunk down on its back as if tired of standing upright. Just by this stone the water bubbled up in a strange kind of manner, and had a red colour which was anything but inviting. This, though John Cheeseman knew it not, was one of the favourite resorts of

witches, and as dangerous a place to mortal man as any in the county. The people around called it "The Witches Caldron," and whispered that on certain occasions the red water was made to boil, and sacrifices of a fearful character were offered to evil beings upon that stone. Be this as it may, it was no very pleasant place to look upon, and there can be little doubt that the Hag had led John Cheeseman thither as to a place wherein she would be able to exercise her charms and spells upon him with the best chance of complete success. As soon as he stepped within the barren circle of which I have spoken, the worthy John felt a strange dizziness come over him, and accordingly placed his hand upon his forehead and looked round with a puzzled expression of face.

"Where be we got to?" he said; "I don't see no sticks, Goody, not never an one."

As he spoke his voice sounded strange to his own ears, as if it was some one else who was speaking at a little distance from him. At the same moment he saw his companion turn round and stand about two yards from him, facing him as she did so.

"Thou wilt know all soon enough," she muttered, and then raising her staff over her head, began to speak in a strange tongue.

John Cheeseman ever after declared that, as she did so, her form grew larger and her figure swelled out before his eyes, whilst her features wore an expression so terrible that he had no words with which to describe it. She fixed her eyes upon the farmer, shaking her staff as she did so, and according

to his firm belief for the rest of his life, it was her deliberate determination to have then and there turned him into a pig or a cow, or other animal of an inferior grade to man, had not a sudden and unforseen accident changed the whole circumstances of the case.

The Hag of Hothfield Heath was in the very act of casting her spells over the luckless Cheeseman, when she was struck full in the face by a piece of soft turf, well soaked in the dark, red-coloured water, and flung by no unskilful hand. At the same moment another old woman, not unlike the Hag herself in appearance, only somewhat less tall and more strongly built, stepped from behind a bush on the other side of the stone, and having thrown the bit of turf in the manner which I have mentioned, stood with her arms akimbo, in a defiant manner, exactly opposite the person whom she had thus insulted.

"How dare you come over on *my* side of the road, you old thief?" she asked, in a voice which was scarcely to be called musical, and at the same time glared upon the Hag as if she were her mortal enemy.

So, indeed, she was, for the new-comer was none other than the famous, or rather infamous, Crone of Charing, and the feud between these two rivals was well known throughout the whole of the surrounding country.

The Hag was mightily taken aback by this interruption. The piece of turf which had struck her was not only wet, but muddy, and the dark mud

pain, rage, and despair, they scuttled away right and left at once, and John Cheeseman found himself suddenly left alone. As he grasped the Token in his hand, in order to return it to its resting-place, the whole truth of his position came flashing across his mind as clearly as if he had seen it written down in a book. He knew that he had been fooled by a witch, and that all she had told and shown him had been for some evil purpose of her own. Whether or no there might be truth in what he had seen in the magic glass was more than he could tell, but that it was shown him for mischief he did not for an instant doubt. If this was so, his course was clear enough, namely to follow the advice in accordance with which he had left his home that morning. No thought of turning back now lingered in his heart, and in fact he was thoroughly ashamed of having allowed himself to be so deceived. Without the loss of a moment he made his way back into the high-road, breathed a prayer of thanks for his deliverance from a great danger, once more grasped his stick firmly in his hand, and set his face in the direction of Canterbury. He was not very certain of his best and shortest way, but knew that he must somehow or other get beyond the great chalk hills and into the valley of the Stour, after which it would be easy enough to find.

All these adventures had, as may be supposed, taken some time, so that it was now nearly four o'clock, and in a couple of hours or so the evening would be coming on, and rest and shelter have to be sought. The lofty trees of Eastwell Park were

straight before him, and it was plain enough that the shortest way, as the crow flies, was to walk straight away in that direction. On the other hand, not being a crow, John Cheeseman could not fly over obstacles in the same manner as might be accomplished by a bird of that description; and besides, travelling across country by strange footpaths did not appear to him to be either desirable or safe, taking into account the unlucky quarters to which the last footpath had led him. So he trudged quietly along the road until he reached Potter's corner, meeting nobody who interfered with him, and falling in with no adventure worthy of notice. Then he took the road to the left, instead of going on to Ashford town, and thus headed away for Eastwell parish, and so bore up to the east side of the great park, skirting the foot of the chalk hills, so to speak, instead of crossing them. By this means he had come a long round, and had taken nearly two hours to accomplish a distance which he could have done in much less time had he left the road. But at all events he was so far safe and sound, and now came the question as to where he should pass the night.

There were several cottages about the place, and having made up his mind to try one of them, he marched up to the door and rapped at it with his staff. It was a neat enough cottage, with a thatched roof, and honeysuckles growing over it, and it stood at the end of a nice little garden, through the centre of which a path, paved with bits of brick, led to the door, before which was an old rustic porch, affording a pleasant shade to those who chose to sit under it

on a warm evening, and recalling recollections of enjoyable pipes which the good farmer had often smoked in a similar place not far from home.

The door was opened by an old man with silvery white hair, and a mild, kind expression of countenance which made Cheeseman feel at once that he had lighted on good quarters. He thought so still more, indeed, when he perceived the large horse-shoe which was nailed over the door, for by this he knew that the inmates of the cottage were on their guard against witches, and that here at least he should be troubled by no such evil creatures.

The old man asked him of his errand, and on being told that he was journeying to the shrine of St. Thomas of Canterbury, and had need of a night's lodging, warmly welcomed him within his dwelling, which, humble though it was, he said, was much at the service of any one bound upon so good an undertaking, and he was glad to receive him and do the best he could to make him comfortable.

The old peasant lived alone with a little granddaughter of about twelve years old, whose gentle, loving ways reminded poor Cheeseman of his own Jemima, and brought tears into his eyes as he thought of the loss he had sustained. When the little girl had gone to bed, the old man respectfully questioned his guest, and drew from him the whole history of his journey, to which he listened with deep attention, and expressed great sympathy with the bereaved father.

Then the conversation turned upon witches and witchcraft, and the old man told Cheeseman of the evil

creatures which had for so long time infested certain districts upon the side and at the foot of the great chalk range of hills. He did not know, he said, whether a chalk soil was particularly favourable to magic doings, but there had been the Witch of Brook Hollow, the Warlock of Coombe, and others of the same kidney, all close to the hill, whilst as to Wye town—well, they had better say nothing about it.

Then John Cheeseman replied with legends of Headcorn, of the witches of the Weald, and those of the great Smarden Woods; and, in short, they discussed so much upon the topic that, but for the number of horse-shoes which were nailed about the place, I really think that some witch or other must have been tempted to come and pay a visit to those whose thoughts turned so constantly towards the weird sisterhood. Nothing evil, however, came near the cottage which was so well and so wisely protected, and the two men retired to rest without any interruption.

John Cheeseman, fatigued with his long walk, was very soon buried in a profound slumber, and there is no doubt that his kind host also slept the sleep of an honest, hard-working man, which is about the best kind of sleep known to mankind.

It was a bright and pleasant morning when the farmer awoke, and was surprised to find that it was getting on for half-past six, which was a full hour later than his usual time of rising. He had evidently overslept himself, and felt rather ashamed of having done so, considering the important nature of the journey on which he was engaged. His host

was already astir, and as soon as they had partaken of a frugal repast, told him that he was about to go to his daily work in the gravel pits on Kennington Leese hard by, but would first put him in the best road for Canterbury. Accordingly he walked as far as the south-east corner of Eastwell Park, which indeed was all in his way to his own work, and bade his guest turn to the left, and follow the road which ran northward and skirted the park. He gave him particular directions that he was to turn to the right about a mile farther on, cross Boughton Green and follow the lane which led to the main road from Ashford to Canterbury; and having done this, and wished him good luck on his way, the old man parted from the traveller and left him to pursue his journey.

John Cheeseman trudged steadily on by the side of the park, much refreshed by his night's rest, and in good hope that he should reach Canterbury that same evening, inasmuch as it could not be above twelve or fourteen miles at most from where he was, and probably not so far if he knew the shortest way to walk. He met nobody and saw nothing to interrupt him until he got to Boughton Green, a pleasant place enough, with several houses scattered round it, and a few geese and a donkey enjoying themselves upon the green after the manner of such creatures.

Turning across the green according to the directions which had been given him, John saw immediately before him the lane of which the old man had spoken, and made straight for it. He had scarcely got half-way across the green before he suddenly

stopped at the sound of his own name, which somebody was certainly calling out. He turned sharply round, and then recollecting what troublesome adventures he had lately had, determined to pay no attention to anything which might have the effect of delaying his journey, and so resolutely struck his staff upon the ground and continued his way. A second time he heard his name called—so distinctly that there could be no doubt about it—then a third, and a fourth, till the morning air seemed to be full of the sound "John Cheeseman," repeated so often and in such curious tones that it fairly puzzled the honest man to account for it. All of a sudden he perceived that the sounds undoubtedly proceeded from the flock of geese which he had noticed on the green, and this astonished him more than ever. He had never known geese, or indeed any birds or animals to speak, although there had been legends of a learned pig in some distant part of the county, who had performed strange feats and spoken wonderful words of wisdom. But that geese—which, save at Michaelmas, were birds of small repute and little importance—should speak with the tongues of mortal man, and should moreover call a fellow by his name when they had certainly never even seen him before, was a circumstance so extraordinary as to call for serious notice. It was undoubtedly the fact. The birds had raised their heads from the ground, and stretching out their long necks as far as ever they could, instead of hissing after the usual manner of respectable geese who have reasons for not remaining silent, were all occupied in pronouncing aloud the

words "John Cheeseman!" as if they were determined to attract the attention of that excellent individual.

"Well," cried John in amazement, "I'm blessed if this here don't beat cock-fighting! Why, what the dickens does it mean?"

As he spoke he turned towards the geese, of whom there must have been quite twenty, and looked upon them as if expecting an explanation. Instead of this, however, no sooner did they perceive that they had succeeded in attracting his attention, than they all returned to their usual habits, and burst into such a chorus of hissing and cackling as nearly deafened the traveller. Half inclined to think that he must have been mistaken in what he fancied he had heard at first, he turned short on his heel and began to resume his walk. Directly he did so, his name again sounded upon his ears from the same quarter, and again he saw the whole flock of geese with outstretched necks calling upon him. Again he turned, and again precisely the same thing happened, and the birds turned once more to their natural sounds and cries.

By this time worthy John was well satisfied that there was witchcraft at work, and that this was another device of the evil ones to delay his journey to Canterbury. Warned by all that had previously occurred, and remembering by what action he had been more than once preserved from misfortune, he boldly threw open his vest and displayed the Token before the eyes of the geese, upon whom its powers were no less manifest than they had been upon

previous occasions. The birds all faced about directly, their cackling and hissing turned to moans expressive of pain and consternation, and, suddenly rising from the ground, they flew screaming away right and left, in every direction.

What their plan had been can never be exactly known, and whether they were witches disguised as geese, or real birds bewitched for the time by some crafty one of the neighbourhood. We may be certain, however, that they were the agents of evil, and that mischief had been intended towards our old friend, had he not defeated the wiles and wickedness of his foes by the timely display of St. Dunstan's Token. He left the green at best pace, as soon as the geese had flown off, and having come into the lane, walked along it as he had been told to do, in the direction of the main road, which was barely a mile off. It was not long, therefore, before he reached it, and stood where four roads met, as in fact they meet at the present day.

Our traveller had come, as we know, from the west—that is, from the direction of Eastwell Park. To his right was the main road back to Ashford, to his left that which led to Canterbury; whilst immediately opposite him was a road running in an easterly, and after a short distance in a north-easterly, direction, which led into the town of Wye, which indeed was within little more than half a mile from the spot on which he stood. There were several houses at this place, which in later times was made safe and holy by the presence of a turnpike-gate in its immediate vicinity—a thing which always scares

away witches and warlocks, who have an incurable dislike to paying tolls. Their example in this respect has been so contagious, that during the last few years this gate has been removed, and as it had not been put up at the time of which I write, it is useless to allude to it further. Here it was, nevertheless, that John Cheeseman stopped, and stood in the main road looking around him, and wondering whether he had better turn to the left and pursue the dusty way to Canterbury; or whether there must not certainly be a more pleasant and much shorter way by following the road opposite to him, and then striking some other lane or footpath. Had there been finger-posts in those days, I do not think he would have hesitated for a moment, because the sight of a finger pointing "To Wye" would have reminded him that he was near a town noted for being the head-quarters of the most dangerous witches in Kent, and he would have hastened to take the other road, and place himself as soon as possible at a goodly distance from a neighbourhood so likely to be hurtful to his hopes. There was, however, no finger-post to tell him anything about the matter, and whilst the main road on his left looked broad and dusty and unsheltered, that immediately before him sloped pleasantly down between sundry large trees, which threw their welcome shade over it, and seemed to tempt the traveller to follow it in preference to the other.

He might not have done so, however, had nothing else been present to influence his determination. But as he stood doubting there, a man came quickly out of a stable at the back of a house close by, and

walked out into the road. He had on a smock-frock, and wore a round hat, rather too large for him, on his head. His face was somewhat pale and sickly looking, but perhaps this was partly the effect of his light red or sandy hair, of which he had a good supply, with whiskers and beard of the same hue; the beard, indeed, being one of rather unusual length. He walked past John Cheeseman without appearing to notice him until he had done so, and then suddenly turned round and wished him "Good-morning."

Although somewhat taken aback by the abruptness of the greeting, the worthy farmer returned it civilly, and the stranger forthwith followed it up by an inquiry whither he was going, to which he replied that he was on his way to Canterbury.

The other immediately demanded of him whether he was thinking of going by the main road or by a shorter cut, and on his saying that he was doubtful as to the best way, offered at once to put him in the path which led, as he remarked, right away through Olanteigh, and so by Crundale parish away towards Chartham, and thus cut off a good corner of the journey to Canterbury, besides being altogether a more pleasant way. As the man evidently seemed to know all about it, Cheeseman supposed that he belonged to the neighbourhood, and thereupon asked him the question.

"Sure-ly I do," replied the person addressed; "every one about here knows Bob Morris of Boughton. I're just a-going down to th'old mill by the bridge, and if you'll come along with me, master, I'll put ye into the path and welcome too."

The farmer thought that he was in great luck to have met with Bob Morris at that particular moment, and judging that he would save a mile or two of his journey by following the advice so kindly given to him, readily accompanied the person who had given it. They crossed the main road, and walked down towards Wye, leaving Spring Grove, the ancient patrimony of the Bretts, on their left, and entering the town by the bridge which is now close to the railway station, but which in those days was troubled by no such neighbour, but spanned the Stour without any rushing trains and puffing engines to disturb the tranquillity of the scene.

There were not nearly so many houses in Wye at the time of which I write as is now the case, and those that there were to be seen were straggling and separated from each other by many vacant spaces, which have long since been filled up and built over. Hard by the bridge stood the mill to which Bob Morris had said he was bound, and directly opposite the mill was a public-house. It was not very unnatural that, under these circumstances, people who had come from some distance were apt to stop at this public-house to obtain the refreshment of which they stood in need, and apparently this had already been the case upon the day upon which John Cheeseman and his companion entered the town. The house of entertainment stood a little back—or rather, the road was of unusual width at that part of it immediately on the town side of the bridge, and there were two or three trees growing in front of the inn, against which were set rough benches which tempted the

passing traveller to stay his steps. Upon one of these benches sat two or three people who had apparently been thus tempted, and were enjoying themselves with bread and cheese and ale, duly set out upon a rudely-hewn wooden table which had been placed before them. The party consisted of two men and a woman, and they seemed by their dress to be labouring people. They were sitting very much at their ease, and the thought crossed Cheeseman's mind that work must be scarce in those parts, or employers very slack in looking after their men, if it was a usual thing to find folk of that class sitting down to eat and drink opposite a public-house at ten o'clock in the morning, for he judged it to be about that hour.

He had not much time for thinking over the matter, however, for scarcely had he and his companion crossed the bridge when one of the men at the table appeared to recognize Morris, and called out to him to come and join them.

"Ay, do 'e now," said the woman, "do 'e now, Master Morris, come and have a drop of ale along wi' us, and bring your mate too."

Bob Morris appeared nothing loath, but at once turned his back upon the mill and approached the party at the public-house; and John Cheeseman, hardly knowing how to refuse under the circumstances, slowly followed him, though he would much rather have pushed forward on his journey. He could hardly quit Morris, however, before the latter had shown him the path, as he had promised to do, and it would have seemed churlish to endeavour to prevent his joining his friends.

The two men approached the table at which the others were sitting, and there being plenty of room on the bench, which was a large one, they sat down upon it. The woman, who was occupying the outside seat, made room by her side for one of the two, and although John Cheeseman stood waiting for the place to be taken by his companion, the latter signified by a gesture that he should take it, and he could hardly help doing so.

As he sat down he noticed that the woman was of dark skin and swarthy complexion, unlike that of a native of England, and she had a light coloured handkerchief round her neck which seemed of foreign make. But she talked with the tongue of a Kentish peasant, and although there was a wild, roving look about her eyes, which, somehow or other, made the good farmer feel rather uneasy, there was nothing else to excite suspicion, nor indeed had he any excuse for showing any such feeling. The men began to talk upon the usual subjects of weather and crops, and the characters of the different farmers in the neighbourhood with reference to their dealings with their labourers. Then the conversation turned upon other matters, and the woman wanted to know where Cheeseman had come from, and whither he was bound. The good man thought himself very cunning in concealing from her the name of the village from which he came, but could not avoid stating that he was on his way to Canterbury. Upon this, the whole party possessed a strong desire to discover what could induce him to be taking so long a journey, and he was asked so many questions about what he

should do when he got to Canterbury, and where he should "put up" there, that he was fairly bothered out of his wits, and hardly knew what to say without disclosing his story. Meanwhile, the men had called for more ale, and Morris having offered to "stand treat," the horns were filled again, and the farmer saw no prospect of getting away, anxious as he was to start upon his journey. His neighbour now began to annoy him too, giving him an occasional shy pinch on the arm, which made him, as a respectable and well-conducted man, rather uncomfortable, since he knew not in what relationship the woman might stand to the other men, nor how they would approve of such behaviour if he seemed either to resent or encourage it. So he tried to edge away a bit, but in doing so pushed against Bob Morris just as the latter was raising his horn to his lips, thereby causing him to spill some of the precious liquor. The man sprang to his feet directly.

"What did you do that for?" he cried.

"'Twas a accident," said the farmer; but the woman broke in directly—

"It warn't no such thing, Bob! I see him jog your arm all of a purpose, I did."

The farmer turned round to Morris to protest that this was wholly a mistake on the part of the woman, but no sooner had he turned his back to her in doing this than she knocked off his hat, and gave him a sound cuff on the head with her hand. Irritated at this disgraceful behaviour, John Cheeseman turned again to remonstrate with the woman and to recover his hat, when she seized him by the breast of the

coat, and in endeavouring to shake her off, they managed between them to overturn the bench and both rolled upon the ground. In an instant the two other men were up, and began to belabour poor Cheeseman lustily, whilst Morris stood calmly by, watching the proceedings as if they concerned him not the least in the world. The farmer was too brave a man to call for help, but he found that he was in an awkward position, and it would have been even worse with him than it was, had not the noise attracted another individual to the spot. This was no less a personage than John Hancock, the parish constable, a man fully conscious of the importance of the office which he held, and who bore himself with a dignity which was not a little increased by the circumstance of his being a remarkably fat man, which of itself would have given him a certain weight even if he had not been a constable. With his red cheeks puffed out, his eyes wide open, and his mighty stomach heaving with the exertion, this excellent man positively hurried to the spot upon which the affray was taking place, and having in his hand a stick or staff, which perhaps betokened his office, at once commenced beating with strict impartiality the four persons who lay struggling upon the ground in front of the inn.

"What ho! my masters!" he shouted, as soon as he could find breath to do so, "what is all this here 'bobbery' about? And you, you baggage, what are you a-doing here a-fighting along with the men? I'll have you all before Justice Brett, as sure as my name's Hancock, if you don't leave off!"

Thus adjured, the persons addressed *did* leave off, the more readily inasmuch as Cheeseman's assailants, being three to one, and also being uppermost, got a larger share of the constable's blows than the farmer himself; whilst he, for his part, was ready to have left off long before, since he could by no means have got the best of such an unequal struggle. They all arose from the ground therefore, and stood regarding each other with angry glances, panting meanwhile from their recent exertions. Swelling with dignity, the fat constable stood before them, and struck his staff firmly upon the ground as he once more demanded in imperious tones, "What's the meaning of all this here bobbery, I say?"

Before the luckless Cheeseman could open his mouth, the woman and her companions began eagerly to accuse him of having assaulted them, and being thus the sole cause of all the disturbance. The farmer of course vehemently denied the charge, and attempted to defend himself. His appearance, however, was at this moment not such as to establish his respectability at first sight, or to induce a stranger to believe him. His coat was torn, his face bleeding from sundry scratches inflicted by the sharp nails of the woman (who had evidently scratched other people before, by the ability in the art which she displayed), and he was covered with dust from head to foot.

"What do you come here for, a-bruising and a-beating of folk like this?" asked the constable.

"I an't done nothing," replied Cheeseman; "I were a-sitting as quiet——"

But here the others all broke in at once, and prevented him from uttering another word. Still the constable hesitated for a moment, being withal an honest man, and not wishing to do injustice to any. Then, seeing Bob Morris standing quietly by, and observing from the clean condition of his dress that he had taken no part in the row, he turned and asked him what he knew of it. John Cheeseman never doubted that the testimony of his new friend would go to clear him, or at all events to show that he had not begun the fight. What, then, was his horror and indignation when the man deliberately pointed at him with his finger, and calmly observed, "He began it."

"What?" exclaimed the farmer in a loud voice; but the constable raised his staff in so impressive a manner that he said no more, whilst the officer of the law asked Morris for some further explanation.

"Well," remarked the other, "if you must know the truth, we was all a-setting quiet enow, when this here cove up with his arm and knocks my ale out of my mouth. The woman she chastised him for it, and he turns and goes on to her at onst, and then the men come to help her, and the scrimmage was on."

"What did you knock the man's ale over for?" demanded the constable of Cheeseman.

"I never had no such intention," replied the farmer; but when Morris shook his head in answer to this and said, slowly and sadly, "He's a bad 'un, I doubt," the case was all against the unlucky stranger.

The woman and her two friends appealed to the

constable not to let honest Wye people be knocked about by tramps that came from no one knew whither; and the parochial feelings of the officer being thus aroused, he declared that the matter should certainly go before the justice. Nothing that John Cheeseman could say had the smallest effect in altering this determination, and the worst of it was that, as Justice Brett would see no one on magisterial business until after one o'clock, his journey to Canterbury would be delayed for some hours, even if he escaped punishment for what had occurred. This was most unfortunate, but still the good man hoped for the best, feeling sure that the innocent would be protected, and that he should come safe out of his present difficulties as he had done out of those which he had already encountered.

As it wanted more than an hour to one o'clock, the constable took his prisoner to his own house, which was not far off, there to detain him until it should be time to start for Spring Grove, the residence of the worthy Justice. His accusers eagerly begged that he might be set in the stocks meanwhile, but this the constable told them he had no authority to do, so they were forced to be content, and were further told that they must be ready at one o'clock to give their evidence before the Justice.

John Cheeseman was much depressed as the man of the law led him away, and the look which the woman cast upon him as they parted, filled him with many and strange thoughts. Her eyes seemed so unnaturally bright, and withal so full of malignant spite, that he could hardly believe that any creature

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of mere mortal mould could look in such a manner. Where had he seen such eyes before? He shuddered as he thought of the maid in Pluckley lane, and again of the fearful beings whom he had encountered on Hothfield Heath. Was it—could it be possible that witchcraft had again been at work to bring about his present misfortune? The thought had scarcely crossed his mind when with it came the recollection of the precious Token which he wore around his neck. He felt for it hastily, fearful that during the scuffle it might have been lost. No! thank Heaven, there it was safe enough, and at once his spirits revived. He walked quietly with the constable, who never vouchsafed a word to him until they reached his own door, which he opened, and pointed to a little room upon the left hand, which was guiltless of any carpet and had no other furniture than two roughly made chairs, upon one of which Cheeseman was directed to sit, and accordingly did so. This was the room which the parish constable always used for such purposes as the present, there being no regular "lock-up" in the place, and herein had sat many a prisoner, although probably none who had deserved it less than poor John Cheeseman. The constable left him for a short time, having taken the precaution of bolting the door before he did so. This gave our worthy friend an opportunity of thinking over all that had happened, and of settling what he should say before the magistrate. It did not take him long, as an honest man, to make up his mind to tell the plain, simple truth, and indeed I do not think that he could have invented any tale to tell other than

the true one, even had he been so inclined; for I think that those who read this true, though strange history, will have already seen that worthy John Cheeseman, though an honest, was not a very clever man, and would have done ill in any case to have trusted to his powers of invention.

Presently Hancock entered, for it was his custom to question prisoners on his own account—and he considered it part of his duty to do so, instead of its being very much the reverse, as all policemen know now-a-days, and of course never do it. He marched in, sat himself down in the chair immediately opposite Cheeseman, placed his hands on his knees, leaned foward, and looked him steadily in the face for several seconds without speaking a word.

"Well," he said at length, drawing a deep breath as he spoke, "*you're* in for it, my joker, anyhow!"

Not very well knowing what to say, Cheeseman remained silent, whereupon the other presently continued—

"Where do you come from, my man?"

"Headcorn parish," replied he.

"Headcorn—Headcorn," said the constable, who had never been farther than Ashford from his own parish, and had very little knowledge of the neighbourhood. "I've heerd tell of Headcorn, surely. Where be it? Not down in the sheeres (shires), eh?"

The farmer smiled with some contempt, though, if the truth were known, he could have told but little more than the other of places no farther from his own home than was Headcorn from Wye.

"Down in the sheeres?" he said. "No, no, master; no such thing. 'Tis t'other side of Ashford—atwixt Ashford and Staplehurst, like."

"Staplehurst," repeated the constable, gravely. "I never knowed any one as come from Staplehurst, neither. Then you be a Kent man, be you?"

"Kent born and Kent bred be I," sturdily responded the farmer, "and my fathers afore me."

"How come you a-tramping over the country and kicking up a dust like this?" asked Hancock.

"I never did no such a thing as kick up a dust," replied Cheeseman; "and I never was in no trouble heretofore."

The other regarded him with perfect silence after this reply for a full minute, and then solemnly shook his head as he remarked: "The Justice will see to that. There *was* a dust, and you was in it!" a remark which was literally true, as the state of our friend's coat could prove, although he had not been responsible for any "dust" in the sense in which the constable used the word. He then left his prisoner alone again for a few minutes, after which he returned and said that it was time to start.

Spring Grove was barely half a mile from the western end of Wye, so that a very short walk brought them to its gates, where they were met by Bob Morris and the other witnesses against the luckless Cheeseman. The house stood but a short distance from the road, and was an old-fashioned building inhabited by an old-fashioned man. Squire Brett was a member of an ancient Kentish family, not over-burdened with riches, but

possessed of what is better than riches—an honest heart and kindly disposition which made him beloved by all who knew him. He sat in a huge leather-lined armchair opposite a table of antique form and make, and kept down with difficulty the jovial smile which rose naturally to his face whenever he tried to compose his features into the gravity which became a justice of the peace. Into this august presence was ushered the unfortunate prisoner, whom the constable held by the arm as he led him into the room, thereby intending to convey to the justice the impression that he had caught him in the actual commission of the crime with which he was charged, and had never left hold of him until he had brought him before the person appointed by due authority to try the matter. Close behind followed the woman, the two men, and Bob Morris, and the whole party presently stood before the worthy Justice.

"Now then," said the latter in a loud and cheerful tone, "who is this man, and what has he been doing?"

"Please, your worship," began Hancock, bowing his fat body forward as he spoke, and letting go of Cheeseman's arm in order to do so with the greater grace, "I was a-coming down Wye Street this morning, atwixt ten and eleven o'clock, when I heard a hullabuloo."

"Heard a noise, I suppose you mean," interrupted the Justice. "Well, and what then?"

"I took to running, your worship."

"Running away from a noise, Hancock?" said the Justice, laughingly.

"No, your worship," cried the constable, growing red in the face as he spoke; "running *to* the noise, for to see what it meant."

"Oh, I beg your pardon. Well, go on."

"I *did* go on, your worship, and I come up to the 'Bridge Inn,' and there I see'd a scrimmage a-going on. This here chap (pointing at Cheeseman) was down on the ground, and the woman and two of the men as well. They was a-rolling and a-fighting amongst theirselves, and if I hadn't come along I don't know what might have come of it. I never see sich a set-out not since I've been constable of Wye parish."

"Well," remarked the Justice, "this is very bad and very sad, no doubt; but what made you take one man prisoner instead of the lot of them, if they were all fighting, one as bad as the other, as I understand you to say was the case?"

"Please, your worship," answered the constable, scratching his head as if he felt some doubt upon the matter for the first time, "I took him because it seemed as how he'd begun it."

"Very well," said Justice Brett; "if that was so you were right enough; but let us hear the story before we go any further." Then he looked at Bob Morris, who was the most respectably dressed of the three men, and asked him what he knew about the matter. Without the smallest hesitation the man replied that he had accidentally met the prisoner that morning, and walked into Wye with him; that they had joined the party sitting opposite the "Bridge Inn," and had a glass of ale with them. So far his

story was correct enough; but he then went on to repeat the false tale he had told the constable, declaring that the prisoner had begun the fray by knocking his horn over, and attacking the woman when she remonstrated with him for doing so.

Then the Justice asked the woman if it was as Morris had said; and she, casting down her eyes and looking as demure as possible, confirmed his story, and protested that she had never been so served in her life. The two men were in the same story, and things looked as black as they could well be for the farmer, who had now four witnesses against him and never a friend at hand to save him. The Justice looked sternly at him, and asked him what he had to say in his defence. Then John Cheeseman took heart of grace and spoke out boldly. He often used to say afterwards that he wondered how he had the courage to do so; but he raised his hand to his breast, and feeling for the Token, pressed hard against it, and as he did so the words seemed to come into his mouth with a readiness which surprised him.

"Please, your worship," he said, returning Justice Brett's look with an unblushing face, "I bean't no lawyer like, but a plain man as has come into trouble as he didn't deserve. But afore I say anything, if I may make so bold, would your worship be so good as to swear those who have spoken against me?"

The Justice started as Cheeseman spoke, for the fact was that he perfectly well knew that if he dealt regularly with the case, the evidence must be taken on oath; but partly because things were not done so

regularly in those days as they are now, and partly because he was a good-natured man, who liked to settle quarrels amongst neighbours off-hand and without having recourse to the law, he had not gone through the form of swearing any of the witnesses. But when a direct appeal was made to him by a prisoner, though it was a most unusual thing to happen, he could not well refuse to allow it, especially when the man was charged with an offence for which he was liable to severe punishment, so he replied at once, though with an air of surprise—

"Certainly you have a right to what you ask. I always like to settle these things with as little bother as may be, but if you require that the charge against you should be established on the oath of those who make it, they shall certainly be sworn at once."

As he spoke, the Justice stretched out his hand, and from beneath some papers which had covered it drew forth an old and well-worn Bible, which he held out towards the four people who had given evidence against Cheeseman, saying at the same time, "Now, you Morris, come forward and be sworn as the law directs."

The words and action of the Justice were simple enough, but they produced an effect upon the persons whom he addressed which had hardly been expected even by John Cheeseman himself, although his recent experience might have prevented his being surprised at anything. Bob Morris stepped back instead of forward: his face grew pale, his teeth chattered, and he vainly strove to regain the confident air with which he had entered the room. The

other two men also backed towards the door, and seemed as if they wished themselves anywhere else. But the woman behaved in a manner still more extraordinary. She shook as if stricken with a sudden palsy—her eyes glared with unnatural brightness and her whole face betokened mingled pain and horror, whilst a low groan broke from her lips in spite of all her efforts to restrain it.

The Justice sat with eyes and mouth wide open with surprise at the sudden change which had come over the persons before him, and the constable stared in like amazement. But John Cheeseman knew at once what it meant, for he had not gone through his recent troubles without having learned something. Without a moment's pause he threw open his coat and waistcoat, seized the Token in his right hand, and displayed it full before the eyes of his enemies.

"Master Justice! Master Justice!" he cried at the same time, "now shalt thou see who is thief and who is true man. There is witchcraft abroad again!"

The production of the Token finished the business. A yell of dismay broke from the woman as she beheld it, and at the same time her features changed horribly, and the constable ever afterwards declared that they assumed a singular resemblance to those of old Dame Punyer, a noted Wye witch at that time. However this may be, the facts are as I relate them. The two men who had been with the woman also underwent a strange transformation, and within half a minute of the Token having been held up to view, these three creatures had rushed shrieking from the room, leaving behind them such a

strong smell of brimstone as left no doubt whatever as to who and what they were. Bob Morris, white as a sheet and trembling in every limb, remained where he was. I presume that this man was a friend and confederate of witches, and had for some reason or other been employed by those who wished to delay or prevent Farmer Cheeseman's journey. But he now found what all evil-doers are sure to discover some day, namely, that in the hour of trial their master will leave them in the lurch, and that friends who have no religion or principle are not to be relied on when put to the test. Bob Morris was left in the presence of the Justice, the constable, and Cheeseman, and must have felt about as uncomfortable as he had ever been in his life.

Justice Brett recovered from his astonishment after a few seconds, and slapped his hands heavily upon the writing-desk before him as he exclaimed—

"Well! wonders will never cease! Poor old Wye has not got rid of her witches, I fear, and this must have been a bad one indeed. Tell me, honest man, what is the truth of this matter?"

Then Cheeseman told the Justice in a few words who he was, whence he came, and what his errand, adding that his only wish now was to be forwarded on his journey as soon as might be.

"That shall be done," replied the Justice, "and God speed you on your errand. But first must we deal with this knave, who, as a companion of witches and evil creatures, deserves heavy punishment. Had he sworn a false oath, it had gone harder still with him than it shall now do; but luckily for him it

did not come to that. Who and what is he, constable?"

Hancock, who had all this time remained dumb with astonishment, his eyes starting from his head and his hair standing on end with horror, now managed to rouse himself in some degree, and answered the question of the Justice. He said he knew but little of Morris—which was true enough, inasmuch as the latter was a man who roamed about from place to place as a "jobber," and was seldom to be found at Boughton, which he called his home, whilst old Hancock rarely left Wye from one end of the year to the other. The latter therefore could only say of the former that he knew him to be a man who lived in the neighbourhood, but could vouch nothing as to his character one way or the other.

Under these circumstances the kind-hearted Justice was unwilling to deal out to the man so severe a measure of punishment as he would probably have felt bound to do if there had been anything known against him before. Still the matter was not one to be lightly passed over, and had it been made publicly known that he had been consorting with folk who were witches and something worse, it is probable that the man's life would have been in great danger. Justice Brett therefore determined that he would treat Morris as if he had been convicted of a brawl in the streets, of which he had accused the farmer, and directed him accordingly to be set in the parish stocks for three hours that same afternoon. This, though a light sentence when compared with what

it might have been, was no joke to the unhappy Morris, who was led off by Hancock sadly crest-fallen, and, no doubt, long before his three hours were over, repented him bitterly of having joined in the witches' scheming to entrap an innocent man. I cannot tell you, however, how this was, for I do not know how the business actually went off, simply because no one ever told me, and there is, as far as I am aware, no parish history of Wye which chronicles all the people who were put in the stocks in those old days, or the particular circumstances connected with the punishment of any one of them. I only know that the constable bore off Morris in triumph, being strictly charged by the Justice not to disclose the real nature of his offence, lest the people should be roused to do him an injury. As parish constables are always wise and discreet men, there can be no doubt that Hancock obeyed the orders he had received, and said nothing to anybody upon the subject. I think, however, that it is equally certain that poor Morris had no very pleasant time of it that afternoon, for the boys and idle fellows of that period were very apt to pelt with mud any luckless wight who was set in the stocks, to say nothing of the taunts and jeers with which they commonly assailed him.

Leaving my readers, then, to guess at all that happened—or might have happened—to Bob Morris, we will return to our hero, and proceed with his adventures.

As soon as the others had taken their departure, the good Justice turned to John Cheeseman, bade

him sit down, and asked him for a fuller account of all that had befallen him. The worthy farmer frankly related the whole story, and added that he was determined to get on to Canterbury and accomplish the object of his journey, but was "most tired of them there dratted witches," and should be truly glad to find himself safe at home once more.

MORRIS IN THE STOCKS.

Squire Brett listened attentively to the farmer's tale, and grieved to find that the neighbourhood was still so sadly infested by the noxious creatures who appeared to have selected John Cheeseman as their victim. Nevertheless, he bade the latter be of good heart, since the powers on his side were greater than

those who were against him, and his faith and perseverance would certainly, in the long run, meet with success. Of this our good friend had himself no doubt, but it had so far proved a very "long run," he said, and he only hoped he should have strength to go through with it. The Justice cheered him up with very kind words, and also with that which was even better than words, namely, a slice off as fine a bit of cold roast beef as the eye of hungry man could desire to see, washed down by a draught of wholesome home-brewed ale which warmed the cockles of his heart, and put new life and spirit in him at once.

Squire Brett then directed him to walk by the footpath to Wye church, and then, leaving the latter behind him, to walk by the road to the left, which led to Olantigh, and so bear away to Godmersham, at which place he would again fall into the high-road to Canterbury, which he would have done well never to have quitted. The Squire further advised the farmer to keep his hand upon the Token as he passed through Wye town, and not to converse with any one if he could help it, since the place was dangerous, and a favourite haunt of those whom he had so much reason to dread.

Cheeseman thanked him heartily for this advice, which he carefully followed, and, perhaps in consequence thereof, met with no interruption as he passed along the footpath, through the churchyard, and out of the town of Wye into the Olantigh road. He met, indeed, a couple of good-looking wenches who seemed inclined to have a chat with him, but when

he resolutely pressed his hand upon the Token a look of pain crossed their features, and they passed on; by which he well knew what they were, and felt an inward thankfulness that he was so well protected.

He had now left Wye behind him, and trudged steadily on through pleasant Olantigh, with the Stour winding through the meads on his left, and the trees casting their long shadows over the road as he passed beneath them. It was a lovely place, and so it is to this day; but John Cheeseman had neither time nor inclination to ponder over the beauties of the scenery around him. Despite their final failure to arrest his progress, the evil ones had hindered him not a little on his journey; and on this second day, when he should by rights have been well at Canterbury, he was still some nine miles off. Moreover, the business at Wye had taken up some time, and it was well-nigh three o'clock before he entered Olantigh and headed straight for Godmersham. Steadily he marched forward, looking neither to the right nor left, but only bent on reaching the place for which he was bound. After leaving Olantigh he met not a living creature until he came in sight of Godmersham church, to which he perceived several persons making their way, apparently travellers like himself. As he drew near, he discovered that these were pilgrims journeying to the shrine of the great Kentish saint, which in those days was an object of wondrous veneration, and at certain seasons of the year was sought by multitudes of persons, who visited it from various motives. Some came bare-

footed, or with peas in their shoes (which must have been remarkably uncomfortable), travelling by way of penance, and believing that they could repent better at the shrine of St. Thomas than anywhere else; some came to offer gifts at the shrine, either as tokens of gratitude for some blessings received, to remind the good saint that some blessings were still required, or from some other religious motive. Some came, perhaps, because it was the fashion to come; some out of curiosity to see the place; and some for other reasons equally good. But, by whatever motives they were impelled, the fact remains that thousands of people did year by year visit the shrine, until the mighty reformer King Henry the Eighth put an end to it all by scattering the ashes of the saint to the winds, and plundering the shrine of all the wealth belonging to it.

As, however, the pious monarch had not accomplished this work of religious zeal at the period of our history, the shrine was still what it had long been, the object of special veneration to Englishmen; and those whom John Cheeseman saw were bound, as he was, to Canterbury.

There was (and is, unless it has been lately "restored," or, in other words, demolished, which is the way in which the interiors of our churches are now-a-days subjected to "restoration") a famous spring in Godmersham churchyard, to which weary pilgrims flocked to drink on their way to Canterbury. An iron ladle hung by a chain fastened to a stone close to where the water bubbled up, and this ladle was during the year lifted to the mouth of many a thirsty

soul. One was employing it in this manner as Cheeseman entered the churchyard, and several others were seated around upon the grass waiting their turn, or resting awhile from the fatigues of their journey. The drinker was a tall, brawny man, clad in the dress of a travelling friar, who, if he had drunk nothing in his life stronger than the beverage which he was now discussing, had thriven wonderfully upon it; for when he had finished and turned round, the farmer thought he had seldom seen a more powerful man. His face was dark and tanned as if with exposure to a hotter sun than that of England, and he had a merry eye which seemed to indicate that a lively spirit abode beneath the religious garb which enveloped his muscular form. There was nothing remarkable in the three or four other individuals who were seated near the spring, but the friar's appearance struck the farmer at once, and the more so when, having cast his eyes upon him as he advanced towards the spring, he at once hailed him in a hearty and pleasant tone which by no means belied his appearance.

"What, ho! honest man," he cried, "art thou weary with walking, and dry withal? Here is the true nectar of the gods, the purest water that ever flowed from the chalk hills of Kent. Drink and be thankful, my son, for here is fitting tipple for a thirsty man."

So saying, he held out the ladle towards John Cheeseman, as far as the chain would let him, and invited the good farmer to follow his example and partake of the cooling beverage. Nothing loth, our

friend promptly accepted the invitation, and took a long draught—first, however, thanking the friar for his civility. The water was pleasant and refreshing to his throat, and after he had drank he put down the ladle, and exclaimed with some fervour—

"'Twas a good deed of him who turned this spring to account, and hung up this here ladle; there's a good many blesses him for it, I reckon, from one year's end to another."

"Surely, my son, surely 'tis so," replied the friar. "It is a most happy place, too, in the path which is trodden by so many pilgrims. Thou art doubtless bound, as we are, to the shrine of the blessed St. Thomas of Canterbury?"

Cheeseman allowed that this was the case, upon which the friar expressed his satisfaction that they should travel in company, and launched forth, as became his vocation, into praises of the great Kentish saint and the glories of his shrine. The farmer listened with attention, and rejoiced within himself that he had fallen in with so holy a man, for in such society he should surely be secure from all witches and evil creatures.

It was now past four o'clock, and as the travellers had all come some distance they agreed that they must stop short of Canterbury that night. As far as he was concerned, Cheeseman would have pushed on, but he deemed the advantage of travelling in such company so great that he agreed to stay at Chilham with the others that night, and they accordingly went no farther than that village. There they took up their quarters in a large barn which the

piety and charity of its owner permitted pilgrims to use, and wherein they made themselves comfortable for the night.

During the walk from Godmersham to Chilham John had much conversation with the friar, and learned from him many wondrous things; in return for which he imparted to him the cause of his own journey to Canterbury, and the many strange adventures which had befallen him.

The good man groaned in spirit as he heard the tale, and bewailed aloud the evil which lingered everywhere around the Christian, and beset him constantly on his journey through life. He gave it as his opinion, moreover, that every woman had more or less of the witch in her, and strongly cautioned Cheeseman to have as little to do with the sex as he could help, and never to trust a woman on any account if he could help it.

The advice came somewhat late to the good farmer, who was no longer a young man, but he received it with due respect and reverence for the holy man who gave it, and settled it in his own mind that there was doubtless a great deal of truth in what he said.

So they came to Chilham, and made, as I say, a resting-place in the barn. John Cheeseman, the friar, and three or four others who were of their company, lay down comfortably in the loose straw, and were before long sleeping the sleep of the just, and snoring for the most part as the just may or may not snore, according to their condition and circumstances.

All of a sudden John awoke. I don't know why or

wherefore: he didn't know himself. Perhaps a rat or a mouse ran across his face—perhaps a straw tickled him as he turned—perhaps a flea bit him; but anyhow the result was the same as if any of these three things had happened. He awoke, and sitting up with a start, looked around him. It was not a cold night, rather the contrary, and the moon was shining bright and clear, as moons occasionally do when they have no special reason to the contrary. The stars, too, were shining away as busily as they could, and helping to illuminate the earth below with a calm and beautiful light. You would have thought that nothing evil could have been about at such an hour, when peace and purity seemed to reign over the world, and heaven appeared to be smiling upon earth.

Nevertheless, as John Cheeseman sat up, a feeling stole over him that something was wrong, and that it behoved him to be watchful and vigilant even at a time when most men would have thought it most fit to be sound asleep. So evidently thought his companions, for both his eyes and ears told him that they were all plunged into as deep a slumber as ever fell upon mortal men.

Cheeseman was not very far from the side of the barn, which, as is not unfrequently the case with barn-sides, had a good many splits and chinks in it, through which something could be seen of the outer world. To one of these he accordingly crept, as quietly as possible, for he felt certain that he heard a sound in that direction, and in the present condition of his affairs everything made him suspicious

that some mischief might be near at hand. It was a low, muttering sound which the good man had heard, and it grew more and more distinct as he came close to the barn-side and peeped through the nearest chink. No sooner had he done so than a sight met his eyes which astonished him not a little, and at the same time proved his wisdom in having been upon the alert, and watchful against possible evil.

At a very short distance from the barn stood several haystacks; but between these stacks and the barn was an old, a very old oak pollard, which seemed as if, some time or other, it had been struck by lightning. Its huge trunk was so split that it leaned in large pieces on either side, as if trying to escape from itself; while its branches seemed blasted and withered, most of them very short, and the longer ones bearing a stunted and unhealthy appearance. It was not the tree, however, which attracted John Cheeseman's attention. There was something more curious to behold. Crouched upon the ground at the foot of the old oak were three figures of a strange and weird kind, such as at a glance could be recognized as belonging to no ordinary beings. They were women, or at least possessed the shape of women, but not such women as are commonly to be seen in the part of the world of which we are now writing. Their bent forms, wizened features, the broom-stick which each grasped in her hand, and, above all, the extraordinary keen and sharp glances which flashed from their eyes, all told John Cheeseman, without need of further evidence, that these

were witches and nothing else; and as if to put the matter still further beyond doubt, he heard them muttering to each other in a sing-song, croning manner, that which was evidently a spell of some kind or other, which was but too likely directed against the poor pilgrims in the barn, if not indeed against himself.

John Cheeseman no sooner saw and understood, as he believed, the scene before him, than he took his resolve immediately to interrupt the proceedings of the evil ones. So, without more ado, he placed his mouth to the chink through which he had been peeping, and shouted in an audible voice—"I see ye, I see ye! avaunt, ye evil witches! I hold the Token!" A faint shriek promptly showed that he had been heard, as indeed was pretty certain to be the case, since the oak-tree could not have been a dozen yards from the barn, and John shouted with tolerable vigour. Without the delay of a moment, he sprang up, rushed to the door, accidentally bestowing a hearty kick upon the prostrate form of his friend the friar as he did so, and slipping outside the barn as fast as he could, rushed straight to the oak, grasping the Token in his hand so as to be prepared for whatever might happen, and quite ready to do battle with any number of witches who might venture to face him. But, to his infinite surprise, when he reached the oak he found it entirely deserted, and no signs whatever of any living creature near it. He stared with astonishment, and stood there for a full minute scratching his head, as if to bring back his somewhat bewildered senses.

Presently there issued from the barn door the burly friar, still rubbing himself to take off the effects of the violent kick which he had received from his new friend.

"What is it?" he exclaimed. "What is the matter with thee, that thou wakest honest folks from their sleep after such a rough fashion? Beshrew me, but thou hast the kick of a donkey; and methinks must be near akin to that animal, if this be thy usual fashion."

To this address John Cheeseman could make no reply, but staring wildly at his companion, cried out in a strange tone of mingled doubt and dismay, "Where be they? Where be the witches?"

"*What* witches, man?" asked the friar, in a cross tone, somewhat different from his usual manner; for he was by no means pleased either at having his rest broken, or the manner in which it had occurred.

"Why," returned John, in the same scared tone, "the witches I saw sitting here at the foot of the oak not three minutes ago. I saw them as plainly as I see you now; gruesome creatures they were, and doubtless about to work us some ill."

"Witches!" growled the friar, evidently very much put out at what had happened; "I believe you dream of witches. There are none such here, nor likely to be. Get thee back to thy straw and sleep, instead of rousing other people with thy senseless noise."

"Nay," rejoined John, unwilling to believe that he could have been mistaken, "but there *were*

thee wake up at ill times of the night, and dream strange dreams. Cast off thy heavy thoughts when thou goest to rest, and do not be on the look-out for evil. It comes soon enough, my son, without looking for it through the chinks of a barn."

The farmer listened to the words of the holy man with the respect to which his office entitled him; but although he made no reply, he found it impossible to withstand the evidence of his own senses, and to the day of his death always declared that there had been three witches engaged in their evil practices by the haystack on that eventful night, although doubtless the good friar believed it not.

When they parted company, our old friend paused for a few seconds, somewhat in doubt as to whether he should go straight to the cathedral, or secure a lodging for the night before doing so. As it was yet early in the day, however, he deemed it best to fulfil the main purpose of his journey first and foremost; and accordingly, seeing an honest shoemaker hard at work in his shop, with the window that looked upon the street wide open, he stopped opposite thereto, and making him a respectful salutation, asked the nearest way to the cathedral.

"Art thou bound on a pilgrimage then, good man?" asked the shoemaker, who, like the vast majority of his trade, then as now, dearly loved a little conversation, and picked up news wherever he could to retail it among his gossips.

The farmer allowed that it was something of this kind which had brought him to the place.

I," rejoined the shoemaker, "thou wilt see

much that is glorious and beautiful at the shrine of St. Thomas. Hast thou been here before?"

"Never," replied Cheeseman, "and know not where I am, nor one street from another as yet."

"That thou will soon learn," laughed the other. "'Tis easy to find thy way about Canterbury. This is the parish of St. Dunstan's, and thou standest in one of the chief streets of the city."

John Cheeseman started as the man spoke; surely it was of good augury that, in his expedition for the purpose of overcoming witches, he should have chanced to enter the city of Canterbury through a parish which bore the name of the very saint who, more than any other in the calendar, had shown his personal courage in confronting the evil one, and from whom came the Token which he wore around his neck.

As a matter of fact, it would have been difficult for honest John to have entered Canterbury from that side without passing through the said parish; but this he did not know, and felt much encouraged by the sound of the name of St. Dunstan.

The shoemaker, seeing that he was evidently a respectable man, asked him to come in and rest awhile in his shop, to which he readily assented; and before long the man of leather had extracted from him the greater part of his story, in which he expressed himself deeply interested. Indeed, said he, there was no one in the city of Canterbury who had a better right to know about witches, for his own uncle's first cousin once removed had a cow bewitched once; and he had himself, when a boy,

seen an old woman ducked at Whitstable on suspicion of being connected with witchcraft.

Having thus established his claim to know something about the matter, the shoemaker, whose name was Allen, rattled on for some time, and ended by making such friends with the farmer that he persuaded the latter to sup and sleep at his house that night, after the conclusion of his business. They had made this arrangement, and were still conversing, when the sound of the cathedral bells reminded John Cheeseman that he had still to perform the all-important work for the accomplishment of which he had made his journey. So he hastily arose, gave his promise to return, and having been duly commended by his new friend to the care of St. Crispin, walked off up the street, in which the houses were not as yet all connected, but green trees stood here and there between them, and the traveller gradually changed country for town as he passed along.

John Cheeseman came down St. Margaret's Street, passing by the archway of that ancient hostelry, "The Fountain;" and, guided ever by the sound of the bells, kept on his way across the High Street, and advanced to the cathedral.

Less choked up and surrounded by buildings than it is now-a-days, the appearance of the grand old edifice struck John's soul with awe as he approached by the way of the Butter-market—as it is now called—and his heart beat with pride at the thought that his own native county was that in which the great church stood.

The "great church" in those days meant some-

thing different to the country folk than it does in these degenerate times, when the mention of the words bring up visions of deans and chapters, court rolls, fines on renewal of leases, and other worldly bargains, in which the great church shows her skill and her servants their cunning. Then it meant the embodiment of the religious spirit of the nation, right or wrong; and John Cheeseman's heart was filled with love, awe, and hope, as he gazed upon the stately edifice. He had no difficulty in entering the building, as vergers and fees were unknown, and no notice that you need not give the latter was at all necessary. There were other pilgrims of various kinds who entered at the same time, and the farmer had but to follow them in order to find his way to the shrine of St. Thomas. There it was indeed, in all its gorgeous magnificence, covered with the gifts of the faithful, conspicuously displayed. Tapers were burning, and priests were passing to and fro, whilst from a neighbouring chapel was heard the voice of one chanting some solemn service of the Church. In front of the shrine itself were a number of persons, scattered here and there, but all reverently kneeling; and amongst these John Cheeseman presently knelt, and occupied himself for a few moments in devotion. Then, with trembling hand, he drew from his breast the Token, and held it as he had been directed, earnestly fixing his eyes upon the shrine as he did so. Wonderful to relate, before a second had elapsed he felt a strange heat steal from the iron into his flesh, increasing so rapidly in intensity that in less than a quarter of a minute it seemed

to burn him so that he could hold it no longer. Was this a miracle? He could not tell, but most certainly the Token had fulfilled the part assigned to it by the mysterious being of the oak; and had afforded to John Cheeseman unmistakable evidence that the object of his journey had been accomplished. Now, then, he had only to get home again as fast as he could.

Under ordinary circumstances he would doubtless have wished to see more of the cathedral and of Canterbury; but the circumstances were anything but ordinary. As they were, the welfare of his daughter was uppermost in the father's mind, and his longing to have her safe at home again was above and before everything. So, as soon as he could manage it, he left the cathedral, and wended his way back towards the house of his friend the shoemaker. The latter received him with joy, and was delighted to hear that all had so far gone well with him. As there was the afternoon to spend, and a night's rest was necessary before starting for the homeward journey, the good man proposed to show his guest some of the lions of Canterbury; and for that purpose took him to the Dane John, and other places of interest, the legends appertaining to which he duly told him, embellishing them with such additions and exaggerations as no one but a tailor or a shoemaker could ever have invented.

And now, having brought the good farmer safely to the point at which the main object of his journey was to be gained, it is high time that we should return to those whom he had left behind him in the

rustic hamlet of Headcorn. In order to avoid confusion, let us be quite certain as to our dates. It was on a Monday that Jemima was lost; on Tuesday evening John Cheeseman received his final orders from the oak; on Wednesday morning he left home, sleeping that night in the cottage near Kennington Lease; on Thursday having his Wye adventures, and passing the night in the barn at Chilham; and entering and performing his mission in Canterbury upon the Friday.

Now when they had seen their father safely off, Jack and Jem had busied themselves for a short time about some farm work, and then, knowing that their mother would be feeling sorrowful and lonely, they had gone into the house, like dutiful sons, to sit with and comfort her. Right glad was Molly of the company of her sons, and they all three sat down together, and had a good talk over everything that had occurred.

"To think of your poor dear feyther a-taking of that there journey all by hisself," said Mrs. Cheeseman, in a mournful tone of voice; and then they began to compare notes as to their knowledge (which was small) of the way, and to tell stories they had heard about the dangers which beset innocent travellers. From this topic they naturally slid into discussing the cause for which so hazardous a journey had been undertaken by their beloved relative; and then began to speculate over and over again what could have become of Jemima.

"'Tis my belief," said Jem, after much thought, "that the good people have got her."

"More like the bad people," replied his brother; and then they fell to talking about fairies, which was a harmless, and witches, which was a dangerous subject. For having once begun to mention such beings, it was but natural to speak of those who were, or who had been, reputed to have something to do with them; and everybody knows that it is unsafe to trifle with such creatures even in conversation. Amongst other persons they named, as a matter of course, those who lived in their own neighbourhood; and presently Jack remarked—

"I a'n't seen but little of old Kezia lately. I wonder, now, whether she knows anything of our 'Mima."

Scarcely had he uttered the words when the party was startled by a loud knocking at the door, and in another moment who should enter the room but Tom Pearson. Ill news flies apace, and somehow or other the tidings of Jemima's strange disappearance had reached her favoured lover. With the usual hastiness of mankind, he had at once settled in his own mind that some rival had taken his beloved from him, and had felt inclined to quarrel immediately with every man he met, which would have been a proceeding as foolish as useless. On reflection, however, the vanity of human nature came to his assistance: it seemed to be the most unlikely thing in the world that *he* should be thrown over, or that a girl who had professed her affection for *him* should so readily transfer it to another. Moreover, they had been together so lately, had exchanged their vows for the twentieth time so earnestly, and vowed eternal

fidelity to each other so tenderly, that it was impossible for Pearson to bring himself to believe that so great a change could have come over his betrothed in so short a time. So he speedily discarded the idea as one entirely unworthy of his notice, and as quickly came to the conclusion that if Jemima had really disappeared according to the report which had reached him, she had been the victim of some plot or foul play which it was his duty to discover. So without more ado, as soon as he could get away from home, Tom Pearson hurried over to Headcorn, and arrived there, as we have seen, at the very moment when Mrs. Cheeseman and her sons were talking over the matter which troubled them fully as much as it did him. His first words on entering the room disclosed at once the reason of his coming, even if no one of the party had suspected it before.

"Where's 'Mima?" he exclaimed, in a loud and anxious tone, as if still hoping she might be in her father's house.

They told him all they knew at once, and spoke of the father's journey and the hopes they entertained therefrom.

"Gone to Canterbury!" he cried, in astonishment. "Gone to get help from St. Thomas! Why, if St. Thomas could help us at all, he would do it without losing all this time in walking to Canterbury. She may be killed or worse while the old man is going and coming back again. Let us be up and doing!"

The mother and sons, somewhat taken aback by

Pearson's vehemence, looked at each other in doubt, and for a moment made him no reply.

"What!" cried the excited young man, "will ye do nothing? Are you, her nearest relatives, glum and silent stay-at-homes, when the best and dearest maid in all Kent has been carried off under your very noses, or made away with nobody knows how? Shame upon ye, say I!"

"Softly, softly, Tom Pearson," here interposed Jack, whilst the colour rose in his face; "you beant acting just right. We be as troubled as you be, and had right to be so, seeing as how 'Mima is our own flesh and blood; but we don't know nothing where she be gone, nor what to do to find her, else surely we'd ha' been at it afore now."

"Do?" exclaimed the other, "why search, look, hunt everywhere—rout out all the old witches and bad characters hereabouts, and pull their houses about their ears if they give you cause for suspicion—there are such here, I know. Do? anything is better than sitting at home with your hands folded and doing nothing!"

Mrs. Cheeseman here interrupted him, and said that she quite agreed with him, and liked his spirit in speaking as he did, but that they really did not know what to do, and that her husband had gone off after special directions to do so. Pearson inquired what these were, and soon learned the whole story. I am sorry to say, however, that he did not treat either the oak, the Token, or the shrine at Canterbury with the same respect with which they had been regarded by Cheeseman. Perhaps his residence

in Ashford town had brought him into contact with more restless and inquiring spirits than those of the inhabitants of the country parishes around, and his belief in saints and relics was of a less simple and sturdy character. Be this as it may, he muttered the word "humbug" more than once during the narrative by Mrs. Cheeseman of the events which had recently occurred, and at the end thereof expressed himself by no means satisfied with the prospect of Jemima's recovery. He said that speaking oaks were all very well in their way, and might be useful on occasions; but when they only caused delay in a matter like the present, they were altogether the reverse. Besides, how was he or any one else to know that the voice from the oak was not that of some one who was playing them all a trick? As to the saint, there was a saying that heaven would help those who tried to help themselves; and it was not helping yourself to walk slap off to Canterbury when trouble had happened at Headcorn. In short, Tom Pearson showed an unbelieving spirit in the matter, and urged the young men to come with him at once and institute a search for their missing sister.

They withstood his persuasions at first, for Jem told him plainly that they were acting in accordance with their father's wishes and commands, who had pointed out to them that patience was a virtue as great as courage, and that they were to exercise this virtue until his return, and do their best to protect and comfort their mother. But Tom returned to the charge again and again, telling them that because their father was trying to obtain news of their sister

in one quarter, there could be no reason why they should not make the same attempt in another; and at last going so far as to upbraid them with a want of affection for Jemima, since they seemed to take matters so easily, and to be content to do nothing for her recovery.

Annoyed at this language, the brothers replied that they were ready and anxious to do anything they could, if they only knew *what;* and upon this Pearson again suggested that they should "look up" some of those who were suspected of being witches in that neighbourhood, and asked whether there were not some very near.

"Well," said Mrs. Cheeseman, "to tell you the truth, Tom, we was just a-speaking of one of them as you come in."

"Was you, though?" said he, "that's odd; but tell us who she is and all about her."

Then the good woman began to tell of old Kezia Mummery, of the strange sights that had been seen, and the dreadful noises which had been heard, at times, near her cottage, and how that she bore an evil reputation and was all but known to be a witch.

This greatly excited Tom Pearson, who declared that this old wretch must certainly have had a hand in carrying off Jemima; and protested that unless her two brothers would go with him he would set off alone then and there, force the cottage of old Kezia, and wring the truth out of her by fair means or foul.

Finding that Tom was terribly in earnest, and that he really meant what he said, Jack and Jem declared that they would stand by him in the matter. Mrs.

Cheeseman burst into tears, but she hardly knew whether to dissuade the young men or not; and after a little further conversation they left her, and all three walked off in the direction of Kezia Mummery's cottage.

These events, it will be recollected, occurred on the afternoon of the day on which John Cheeseman had started upon his journey; and in order to make our story quite clear and easy to be understood, we must now return to an individual whom we have too long neglected, namely the fair Jemima herself. We left her entrapped by Kezia Mummery, and evidently in the power of that wicked old woman, into whose cottage she had entered when the storm which has been mentioned had just begun. But I have no doubt that many of those who condescend to read this true though strange story will have already asked themselves, more than once, the question, Why did old Kezia take the trouble to entrap Jemima, and what was her object in enticing her into her cottage? This is a very natural question, and it is one which I am now going to answer. No doubt Kezia, like all other witches, viewed with envy and hatred any pure and innocent being, and would have been only too glad to have dragged such an one down to her own level, and have made her as bad and depraved as herself. But this desire would of itself have been hardly sufficient to have induced the old woman to run such a risk as that which she must have known she would incur by entrapping a maiden at so short a distance from her father's house, and a maiden, moreover, so well known and beloved

that there was certain to be a hue and cry raised over her disappearance. There was a stronger motive for the witch's action, and it is one which has had more or less to do with the carrying off of young women ever since the creation of the world.

Kezia Mummery had an only son, upon whom she perfectly doted. He was a little, squinny, wizened creature, with long ungainly arms on a body of stunted growth, unkempt and poorly clad; his hair was matted thickly upon his large head, and his features were by no means such as the generality of mankind admire. His forehead, indeed, was massive and broad, but his eyes, overhung by shaggy brows, had a strange, uncanny look about them; his nose was ill-shaped and his mouth too wide to be called beautiful, whilst his ears were of so large a size as to be quite remarkable. But though this youth might be thought ugly by others, to his mother he was the perfection of beauty. Mick, as she called him, was the apple of her eye, and she watched over him with a maternal devotion which was perhaps the only redeeming feature in her character.

Now this witch's son had from his earliest youth "cast sheep's eyes," as the saying is, at Jemima, perhaps because her beauty was in such striking contrast to his own deficiencies in that respect. As he grew older the same fancy possessed him, and although his mother, when she discovered it, tried to jeer and laugh him out of it, she soon found that Love has a power more potent than a witch's charms, and that her beloved boy was a slave to the tender passion.

To cut a long story short, the youth persuaded his mother that life would be a burden to him unless he could persuade Jemima to be his; and as she knew this to be quite impossible to be accomplished by fair means, she was brought to employ her wicked arts in the manner which I have described. She had instructed her son in her evil ways as far as she was able, and, for aught I know, it may have been the young rascal himself who first encountered Jemima under the disguise of a hedgehog. These, however, are matters into which it is better not to inquire too particularly. Suffice it to say that it was his love for Jemima which had induced his mother to do what she had done, and he hoped that when the maiden had once been induced to enter the cottage, the charms and spells which Kezia had at her command would have the effect of making her his own in spite of all the rivals which would have otherwise stood in his way.

I cannot give so particular an account as I could wish of all that occurred after the girl first entered the cottage. I was not there myself; you may depend upon it that the old witch never told me, and it is a wonder (which I cannot now explain) how I ever got to know the main facts, with which my readers must be content. What I do know is that Jemima herself could never give any very clear account of what passed during the first hours of her captivity within that mysterious dwelling. She was not made to suffer, certainly, or she would probably have remembered it; but, on the contrary, her recollections were rather pleasant than otherwise.

I fancy that the charms of the witch were exerted in order to make everything appear beautiful and fascinating to the girl, and prevent her indulging in any feelings of regret at the loss of her freedom. One of the favourite practices of witches is to make themselves and their surroundings seem lovely to mortal eyes, just as the evil one makes the ways of sin appear pleasant and delightful to human hearts; but when truth opens the eyes and enlightens the hearts, all that appertains to evil appears hideous and revolting indeed! So, as far as I can tell, the maiden was for some time under a spell which made her forget her father and mother, and the happy home which she had left, and caused her to fancy herself in a sort of palace, wherein everything was splendid and attractive to the senses. The old, mud-stained, dirty walls of the cottage seemed to her to be gaily and tastefully decorated; the scanty, rickety furniture appeared new and beautiful; and the very creaking of the windows and doors had a sweet and musical sound. Nor was this deception confined to the inanimate part of the contents of the cottage. I have already noticed the change which had come over the rheumatic and decrepid Kezia; the same improvement was to be remarked in the cat, which looked a noble animal indeed; and the glamour which was cast over everything in the place was in no person more remarkable than in him who was principally concerned in Jemima's fate.

Mick Mummery was not, as I have described him, a handsome lad—at least in anybody's eyes save those of his mother, who probably held a different opinion

about him to that entertained by the rest of the world. But a complete transformation had taken place in his figure and manner, and no one who had not the power of understanding witchcraft and seeing through its disguises would have taken him for the same person. On the Monday he did not show himself to the captive girl, and, as I have already said, she could never recollect what happened during the rest of that day, save that shadows flitted to and fro before her eyes, and that after the storm had subsided, strange, weird sounds seemed borne upon the wind, hollow whisperings filled her ears, and unearthly voices spoke in an unknown tongue without her perceiving the speakers. All this, no doubt, was connected with the working of the spell which old Kezia had to employ, and most likely it was one of unusual power, as so good a girl as Jemima was not to be caught by a common charm. All she remembered of that first night was that the mistress of the house, magnificent in form and dress as she appeared to her dazed brain and eyes, stood before her and made rapid passes with her hands before her face; immediately after which the girl fell into a deep sleep, from which she did not awake until the next morning. When she did so, nothing seemed at all strange or unnatural to her, for she was regularly bewitched. She was therefore not unhappy, but only listless and rather heavy, as if in a kind of dream. She had been carried whilst in her trance into a little room at the back of the cottage, looking out into the wood, and been put to bed there; but of this she recollected nothing, but rose and dressed herself as if nothing

unusual had occurred, and passed again into the front room which she had entered the day before. Upon the table was an old cracked plate, upon which was a crust of very coarse bread, and a mug of water stood by it. But to Jemima's eyes this food was of the rarest and most delicate kind, and she at once eagerly devoured it, to the great satisfaction of old Kezia, who had placed it there for the purpose, and well knew that by eating witch-food poor Jemima was unwittingly placing herself more and more under the power of those who had provided it.

Now, then, was the time for her plans to begin to work, and accordingly she withdrew from the room in order to afford an opportunity to her hopeful son. Mick very soon made his appearance—or rather the appearance which was by no means his own, but only borrowed for the occasion. A tall, well-shaped, handsome young man, with features decidedly prepossessing and manners unquestionably graceful, suddenly entered the apartment, and, without more ado, threw himself upon one knee before Jemima, seized one of her hands in his, and pressed it ardently to his lips.

Strange indeed is the female heart, and stranger still the wondrous power of love. All Jemima's goodness had not been able to save her from the spell cast over her by the old witch. She had been taken from her home, made to forget those who had hitherto made it so happy, and apparently yielded entirely to the magic influences to which she had been exposed. Yet no sooner did another assail the heart which had been already given to her beloved

Tom, than true love for a moment asserted its power even over magic, and there rushed into that confused and bewildered mind a feeling that something was occurring which ought not to be suffered. The girl hastily snatched her hand away, uttering a slight shriek as she did so, and placed it upon her forehead, as if trying hard to recover her full consciousness and memory.

Mick saw at once that in his hurry to win the maid he had made a mistake, and he was sharp enough to know that if Jemima could shake off his mother's spell for only a second, she might utter a prayer or say some holy word which would destroy it altogether, and ruin his plans for making her his. So he stepped hastily but quietly back to the door, retreated through the same, and summoned old Kezia, who indeed was close by—witches, like some other evil-disposed persons, having a particular fancy for peeping through keyholes and listening at doors where they think anything interesting may be heard or seen.

The old woman lost not an instant in re-entering the room, where Jemima still stood in the same position; the struggle going on within her between the memories which true love had roused, and the deadening powers of the mighty spell under which she was held. The entrance of the witch gave the triumph to the latter at once. Without an instant's delay she fixed her eyes upon the girl with the glare of a basilisk, and muttered some words of awe which I may not write down. Jemima insensibly took her hand from her brow, and suffered the old woman to

lead her to the fireside, by which she sat down, and forthwith fell into the same dreamy state from which she had been for a moment aroused. The crafty old witch suffered several hours to elapse before she again permitted her son to approach the maiden, and strictly forbid him to say a word of love to her that day. It was necessary, she said, that the girl should get accustomed to his appearance, and it would require the spell to work for four and twenty hours longer before her memory of past love-making would cease to stand in the way of anything fresh of the same kind.

Thus it was that during the whole of Tuesday Jemima was not annoyed in any way; but Kezia and her son contented themselves by strengthening the spell which bound her by every means in their power, feeding her with witch-food whenever she would take it, saying wicked words over and near her, so that she might become more familiar with evil, and putting the black cat in her lap, knowing well that she would be sure to play with it, and that it is impossible to handle evil things without being injured thereby.

So on Wednesday morning, about the time that worthy John Cheeseman was well on his journey, the spell had so overcome his beloved daughter that the witch told her son that he might safely try her again. He began therefore, in the most crafty and persuasive way, to tell her how much he admired her, and to beseech her to accept him for a husband. The memory of Tom Pearson having by this time been totally blotted out, Mick had a fair chance of

succeeding in his attempt to win the maiden's heart: for maidens like to be admired, and the sight of a handsome young man kneeling at her feet is one to which no girl really objects under ordinary circumstances. So Jemima listened, which indeed she could hardly help doing, and only turned away her head in that bashful style which rather encourages people in Mick's condition than otherwise.

I suppose that it was at one of these moments—for there were several of the sort—when the witch's son was kneeling at the girl's feet, that John Cheeseman saw in the magic glass the representation which so much affected him; but I cannot explain how it happened save by attributing the thing to that witchcraft which influences many more things in this world than our wise ones believe or imagine. Anyhow, Master Mick persevered in his suit, and was engaged therein with all his might and main when the occurrences took place which I am now about to relate.

It will be remembered that when Tom Pearson had at last succeeded in persuading Jack and Jem Cheeseman to join him in his fray against the witches, the name of Kezia Mummery had been mentioned as one of the latter, and one, too, who lived near to their abode. It was to her cottage, therefore, that the young men took their way upon this same Wednesday afternoon, although perhaps they had not any very clear or definite idea as to what they intended to do when they got there. As they went, however, the Cheeseman boys began to tell Pearson more particulars of the events of the last

two days, and amongst other things they told him of the strange sound of mocking laughter which they had heard as they stood with their father in the road. Tom inquired as to the precise spot where they had been standing at the time; and on finding that it was not far from old Kezia's cottage, felt his suspicions redoubled, and upbraided the lads for not having induced their father to go there at once. It might not be too late yet, however, he said, and full of resolute determination to search the matter out, the three young men hastened onward.

It was a dull afternoon; the sun seemed to have turned sulky and hid behind the clouds, and there was a rustling, moaning sound among the trees as if the wind was not perfectly satisfied with itself, and did not quite know whether it would do best to blow or to keep quiet. But whatever might have been the weather, the young men would not have been easily turned back from their expedition, now that they had once started upon it, and accordingly they very soon compassed the distance between Farmer Cheeseman's house and the cottage of Kezia Mummery. As they got near the latter, each of the party looked at each other, and all stopped as if moved by one common feeling. There was something weird and curious in the very look of the tumbledown old place.

I dare say that the same thought, "Just the place for a witch," crossed the minds of all three, as would have probably been the case with any other persons who cast their eyes upon it. The young men, however, did not stop long to think about the matter, but marched straight up to the door of the

dwelling, at which Tom Pearson forthwith gave a loud blow with his stick, and shouted at the same time, "Halloo!" There was no answer, and not a sound proceeded from within the cottage. Then one of the young men gave a kick against the door, which, being old and crazy, shook with the blow, and appeared little likely to withstand any serious assault. Still no one answered the summons, and the young men were hesitating as to what they should do next, when the door suddenly flew open of its own accord, and disclosed the figure of no less a person than old Kezia herself, standing upon the other side of the threshold, and glaring fiercely upon those who had ventured to intrude upon her domain. She had a crooked stick in her hand, and a tattered red cloak over her shoulders, and looked indeed the very picture of a witch; whilst at her feet sat her black cat, with its back arched, and its eyes fixed upon the young men with a savage and malicious expression beyond that of an ordinary cat. Almost unwittingly the three young men took a step backwards when they saw the mistress of the cottage and her companion, and began to doubt whether they had done wisely in coming there and facing her in her own place. She gave them but little time, however, to doubt or think, for at once she addressed them in hard and angry tones—

"What drunken knaves be ye that come knocking at a lone widow's door as if it was a pot-house? A malison light upon such people. Who be ye, and what's your will?"

"We be no knaves," answered sturdy Tom Pearson,

" but good men and true, come to seek for a stolen maiden, and to know where she be hidden."

" What know I of your stolen maiden, thou malapert youth?" returned the old woman. " Why come troubling me?"

"When the lamb is lost," answered James Cheeseman, " 'tis in the wolf's den that the shepherd must look."

Kezia scowled fearfully upon him as he spoke, and at the same moment raised her stick slowly in the air and pointed it towards the young man. Whether something in her appearance and manner struck Jem Cheeseman as curious I do not know, or whether he was excited by some other cause; but at this precise instant he uttered the sudden exclamation of " Holy St. Edward!" and no sooner were the words out of his mouth than the door of the inner room flew suddenly open, and disclosed to the eyes of all the party the figure of Jemima seated in an armchair, with a young man kneeling before her—in the same position, in fact, as that in which worthy John Cheeseman had seen them.

Now I cannot pretend to say whether it was by virtue of Jem's exclamation that the door flew open; but if so, it is probable that, had he and his companions followed it up by others of the same description, all might have been well, and the evil ones who were doubtless about the house might have been disconcerted. But no sooner did the above-mentioned sight catch the eyes of Tom Pearson than he uttered an exclamation of a totally different character, and, in fact, gave vent to his feelings in language which I

can hardly write down, for fear of giving offence to all well-disposed people. Of course it was most irritating and annoying for him to see somebody else making love to his own particular Jemima, and a little anger might have been permitted under these trying circumstances. But no good ever comes of swearing, and my own private belief is that the violent words now used by Tom Pearson quite took away the good effects of Jem Cheeseman's exclamation, and restored their power to the evil ones. Anyhow, the room door instantly shut, whilst at the same time the black cat sprang forward towards the young men, and Kezia uttered some words to which they had no time to listen, so instantly were they followed by the strange occurrences which I am going to relate.

A dark mist appeared suddenly to envelop the cottage and all about it. At the same instant buckets of water appeared to be emptied from the roof upon the three young men, who at all events experienced sensations exactly similar to those which would have followed such a proceeding. But this was not all: blows fell rapidly upon their backs, shoulders, and shins—blows given by unseen hands, but which were felt just as keenly as if those who gave them had been seen. Tom Pearson distinctly felt upon his face a scratch as from a cat's paw, and both the others received boxes on the ear which made their heads ring again. They struck out manfully right and left, but it was of no avail—there seemed to be nobody to hit but each other; and meanwhile peals of derisive laughter burst from the cottage and the wood behind.

It was too much for any mortal to endure. Defeated and routed, they knew not by whom, Tom Pearson and the two Cheeseman youths fairly turned tail and fled, the former always declaring that, as he did so, he received such a tremendous kick behind as no mortal boot could ever have dealt.

They ran they knew not whither, but presently the mist cleared away, and they found themselves standing in the road a good half-mile off from Kezia's cottage, drenched, beaten, cowed, and thoroughly crestfallen. They looked at each other with faces of blank amazement, and it was some time before either of them spoke. Then said Jack Cheeseman—

"This here comes of not following father's orders and stopping quietly at home. If we'd ha' had patience, this here wouldn't have happened."

"Wouldn't have happened!" cried Tom Pearson. "And what if it *have* happened? We know where Jemima is, anyhow; and this ain't only the beginning of it."

As Tom spoke, one would have thought, to look at him, that it might as well be nearly the end of it, for a more rueful appearance has seldom been presented by a woebegone lover. He had lost his cap, his clothes were torn, his necktie was pulled half off, water dropped from him as from a drowned rat, and the mark of the scratch upon his face by no means improved his personal beauty. But for all that the Ashford youth was fast regaining his courage; and I am glad to say that never for a moment did he believe that Jemima was willingly receiving the vows of another suitor. He felt sure from the first that

she was under the influence of witchcraft; and although he had been unable to resist giving way to the anger which seized upon him at the unexpected sight which we have mentioned, it only made him more resolute than ever to get back his betrothed.

But her two brothers took rather a different view of the case, for although very fond of their sister, and as anxious to recover her as Tom could be, they had greater faith in their father's more peaceful method of procedure, and were fearful lest their unauthorized interference with old Kezia might work mischief instead of good. So they told their friend that they would not join in another attack upon the cottage, to which he was evidently inclined; or at all events would take counsel with others before doing so. In fact, when Tom himself came to think of it, he could not but admit that there was little chance of their succeeding in a second attempt any better than they had done in the first, if they went against their enemies with only the same strength and in the same manner. So he suffered himself to fall in with the views of the two brothers, and they slowly retraced their steps towards the farmhouse. There they found that Mrs. Cheeseman had been taken ill soon after they had left her, and had been ever since suffering from headache and nervous depression, which had quite overset the whole household.

This it was which her good husband had doubtless seen in the magic glass of the Hag of Hothfield, and it caused her sons and intended son-in-law great uneasiness. The good woman was, so to speak, quite off her head, at one time fancying that she was

an armchair, and at another a wood-basket, in which latter capacity she crouched down in one corner near the fireplace, and told them to fill her with wood at once, a request with which it was impossible to comply. The most distressing thing was that she was seized with a delusion that Tom Pearson was her daughter, and kept on addressing him as "Jemima" continually—which was perplexing, to say the least of it. The young men suspected that witchcraft was at the bottom of this new misfortune, and there can be but little doubt that they were right. They knew that, if this was really the case, no human remedies would avail to remove the evil; and they therefore determined to await their father's return, and meanwhile to keep the poor sufferer as quiet as they possibly could.

So Wednesday night passed away, and Thursday morning followed, which is constantly the case in this Christian country. This, it will be recollected, was the day upon which honest John Cheeseman had his curious adventures in Wye, and which he finished at Chilham in the company of the holy friar.

It was a fine morning, and the old church at Headcorn looked grey and grand in the early sunlight. So thought Jem Cheeseman as he looked out of his window, which faced westwards, and from which he could see both the church and the great oak. The beautiful autumn tints were just beginning to appear upon the trees, and the slight wind which rustled the leaves had a mellow coolness about it which told that the heat of summer had passed away. A silvery mist rested upon the ground,

and hovered about the low stone wall of the churchyard; and through this mist the young man fancied that he saw something moving. He raised his hand to his eyes and held it above them in order to gaze more closely at the object, which he presently perceived to be the figure of a man. It was dressed in the habit of a monk, and seemed to have come from the great oak, and to have moved therefrom a few yards in the direction of the farm; but yet not so far but that it still stood beneath the shadow of the outstretching branches of the mighty tree. There the figure halted, and Jem perceived that in one of its hands it held something which appeared to be remarkably like a pair of tongs. He had no time to think or wonder, however, before the monk (if such he were) raised the tongs in his hands, and slowly waved them in the air. Then he dropped upon his knees, laid the instrument by his side, and raised his arms towards the farmhouse in the attitude of prayer. He knelt for about half a minute, and then rose, turned his face towards the direction of the Smarden road, and taking the tongs once more in his hands, opened and shut them rapidly, as if imitating the action of seizing somebody or something.

Greatly surprised at what he saw, Jem instantly called his brother and Tom Pearson, but by the time they had come to his window the figure had entirely vanished. The young men were much puzzled to know what the monk could have been about; but an old servant of the family, who had once lived with a person who knew all about such things, gave it as her firm opinion that it must have been St. Dunstan

himself who had appeared to Jem Cheeseman; and that probably the latter had enjoyed the advantage of seeing the very tongs with which that excellent and courageous saint had tweaked the nose of the evil one. Be this as it may, the incident caused some excitement in the household of the farmer; and encouraged every one to believe that, if they had dangerous foes, they were not without powerful allies.

Mrs. Cheeseman had passed a restless night, and towards morning her delusions had taken a new and annoying form; for she took it into her head that she was a cauliflower, and insisted upon being boiled immediately. As this, under the circumstances, was impossible, they had the greatest difficulty in keeping the poor woman quiet, and her condition caused them all great uneasiness. Between ten and eleven o'clock, however, when she had become somewhat more composed, Jem went up to his bedroom again, thinking that he would have another look out, in case anything else of a remarkable nature should present itself to his view. He had not long to look before he saw something which, if not in itself remarkable, was rather unusual.

With pompous step—or rather with a waddle which would have been pompous if it could, but which was but a waddle, after all—came up from the village a personage of some importance at Headcorn, but who was very seldom seen beyond his own threshold. This was none other than Billy Offen, the parish tailor, who sat, day by day, for hours together, cross-legged upon his board at the open

window of his shop; and as he snipped and cut, fashioning the rude garments of the time for his neighbours (who deemed him a first-rate artist among tailors), maintained at the same time an unchallenged reputation as the village newsmonger and gossip. He was a short, square, stout man, with a head somewhat large in proportion to his body, and a face

BILLY OFFEN ON HIS BOARD.

rather red; but so preternaturally grave and stolid in appearance, that any one to whom he spoke felt insensibly compelled to feel that what was uttered by such a man must be true. An oracle he looked, and such he was with many of the folk around; but whether oracle or not, he chattered and gossiped to every one that passed his shop, and had already made or marred more than one village reputation by

his once pronounced opinion, favourable or otherwise.

Now, as I have said, it was a most unusual circumstance to see Billy Offen off his board, and walking at least a quarter of a mile from his shop; and when Jem Cheeseman set eyes upon him, he felt sure that something out of the common way had occurred. He had not long to wait for a solution of the mystery, for the tailor came slowly on and advanced in the direction of the farmhouse, until he stood immediately beneath the window from which the young man was looking out. Here he paused, drew a long breath as if wearied by his unwonted exertion, and raising his hand, beckoned to Jem, at the same time calling to him by his name. The person thus summoned did not feel much disposed to obey, for he was not particularly fond of the talkative tailor; and, indeed, the Cheeseman family, being hard-working folk whose labour called them out of doors for the most part, were not among those who loved to lounge about the village street, and to whom the conversation at the little man's shop formed part of the daily routine of life. On the contrary, they rather shunned him, for John Cheeseman had a proverb which he was fond of quoting, "Idle talk makes idle hands," which was perhaps not strictly true when applied to the chat of a tailor or a cobbler, who talk and work at the same time, and are often good at both; but which was right enough as regarded himself, for John was not a man who could have stopped and indulged in gossip without neglecting something, as he had a habit of only trying to do one thing at a time. But

although Jem Cheeseman would have preferred that his visitor should have kept away, he was too well aware of his influence in the village, and too civil withal, to neglect his invitation to descend and speak with him, and accordingly did so.

"What's your will, Master Offen?" said he, as he came out of the door and met him face to face.

The little man's face wore a look of solemnity even more portentous than usual as he replied, with his large round eyes fixed earnestly upon the inquirer's face—

"I've come to ask questions, young man, this morning, and not for to answer them. What's all this I hear about you?"

Jem could hardly help smiling as he replied—

"There an't no bounds as to what you may have heard, master; I don't know nothing as to that."

"Why," responded the other, "they say down street as how your sister Jemima has gone off, and your father after her; and how as you boys and young Pearson of Ashford town was a-kicking up such a hullabuloo last night as hasn't been known for years."

"Who's taking my name in vain?" interposed Tom Pearson at this moment, coming out of the door; and at the sight of him the tailor, taking his presence as a corroboration of his story, immediately accosted him in turn—

"Oh, there you are, Tom, are you? They're a-saying as how you and Jem Cheeseman here and Jack was up to a pretty spree last night—battered in poor old Mother Mummery's door, beat her son, and tossed the old girl in a blanket. Did ye?"

"I'll tell you what, Master Offen," growled Pearson, who, not being a Headcorn man, naturally stood less in awe of the village gossip than those who were his brother parishioners: "if any one goes a-lying about me in that there manner, I'll kick him round the village green till his nose bleeds vinegar!"

The tailor's face grew a shade paler as this threat was uttered, but a moment's reflection having convinced him that it could have been in no manner intended to have the remotest application to a person of his own position and dignity, he returned at once to the attack.

"Blazing and blustering is all very well, young man, but there ain't no kicking round greens where there's parish constables and stocks and suchlike. I don't say nothing only what's been told me. Old Goody Maylam, she comes by with the tale just now, and she had it from Betty Bridger at the corner, and she said as how she'd been past Mother Mummery's cottage and seen the old girl herself, very nigh done; and so the story came round so strong that I thought it was but neighbourly to come and see the rights of it."

"Or the wrongs of it, maybe," here broke in Tom Pearson, with an exclamation which I forbear to repeat. "I'll tell you what, old gentleman, you're a deal too free with that tongue of yours, fetching and carrying all these old women's tales, and if Jem and Jack were of my mind, they'd put ye in the horse-pond, they would! I've half a mind to do it myself!"

As he spoke, Tom made a step forward towards

the tailor, who immediately took one backward with as much agility as he could summon to his aid. Jem Cheeseman, however, and Jack, who had just joined them, stepped in between the two, and each laid a restraining hand upon the irate Tom. Seeing that he was safe, the little man now gave way to the anger which Pearson's threat had inspired, and swelling like a turkey-cock, he began to pour forth the vials of his wrath—

"Are these your Ashford manners?" he asked, indignantly: "a town with a big church and a peal of bells, a public pump and a set of stocks, as good as any in the country! Is this an Ashford-bred man that comes and talks of putting honest folk in the horsepond in their own parish? Why it's law work to talk like that, I can tell you! You're a-putting me in fear of my life, you are! I'll have the law of you, you great hulking lout, even if poor old Mother Mummery don't, which I hope she will with all my heart!"

What Tom would have answered I do not know; but the two brothers were doing their utmost to restrain him when one of the maids rushed from the house, eagerly calling upon them to come in and keep "missus" from sitting upon the fire, which, under the firm belief that she was the tea-kettle, she was determined to do. The three young men immediately hurried in, leaving the little tailor still venting his rage in threats against the daring youth who had threatened him with the horsepond. Unfortunately, his wrath did not then and there evaporate. Had he known the whole truth of the story,

which Jem Cheeseman, if left to himself, would probably have told him, things would have turned out very differently; but, being left in ignorance thereof, mischief naturally followed. Turning from the farmhouse door—for although his curiosity to know what the maid had said to the youths was great, his indignation was at the moment greater—he marched off in the direction of Kezia Mummery's cottage, determined to learn the real facts for himself. As soon as he came in sight of the cottage, he stopped, as a wary and experienced man, to look carefully before him in order to see whether there was anything in the nature of evidence to be gathered from it with respect to the riotous conduct of which the young men had been accused. Everything, however, appeared much as usual, and Billy Offen saw nothing but the little garden full of weeds and the fence broken down in half a dozen places, as he might have seen it any and every day in the year. Nevertheless, resolved to sift the matter to the bottom, he approached the door, when it was suddenly thrown open, and Kezia Mummery herself appeared, leaning on her crutch and just about to hobble forth as if to enjoy the sunshine. Without further ado, she began to address her visitor, making a kind of curtsy as she did so—which inclined the tailor still more towards her, being an undoubted recognition of his dignity and importance in the parish.

"Good morrow, Master Offen! good morrow, kind sir!" she began. "It's glad I am to see a respectable gentleman at my poor place, instead of a lot of riff-

raff a-racketing and roaring and turning everything topsy-turvy."

This seemed a fair opening for his inquiries, so Billy forthwith set himself to make them after the best manner he was able.

"Dear me, Mrs. Mummery," he said, affecting to be surprised at her words, "I'm sorry to hear you speak of such things. I hope there ha'n't been any one a-racketing and roaring here lately?"

"Ah, sir!" rejoined Kezia, with a long-drawn sigh, "there has indeed—more's the shame. Them rampaging young Cheesemans and that scamp of a Tom Pearson, they com'd and had their tantrums here last night. I thought I should ha' died—and me a poor lone widdy, with only my boy to look arter me."

"But why did they come here, and what did they do?" asked the little tailor.

This was just what the wily old woman had wished, for when she was thus particularly asked she was able to make it appear that she was unwilling to do anybody an injury, and only suffered the truth to be drawn from her by repeated questions. In reality, she had craftily set the reports afloat against the young men, in the fear that they might have roused the neighbours against her on Jemima's account, and wishing therefore to be beforehand with them, and if possible to represent herself as having been the object of a drunken "spree" on their part.

She now took full advantage of the opportunity afforded her by Offen, and poured into his ears a

long but most untrue recital of what had occurred, representing that she had been roused from her sleep by shouts, yells, and violent knockings at her door; that, upon opening it, she had been subject to gross language and rough usage at the hands of the young men, who were evidently the worse for liquor; that her son had been beaten when he came to help her; and that she had barely escaped with her life. As to Jemima, the old hag never so much as mentioned her; and when Billy Offen asked whether those who had attacked her so cruelly had not made the loss of the girl their excuse, she affected an air of great surprise, and declared that she never knew but that Miss Cheeseman was safe at home all the time.

Little, indeed, did the credulous tailor know that at that very moment the lost maiden was within a few yards of where he stood. At the moment when, upon her brother's exclamation, the door of the room in which she sat had flown open, and Mick's courtship been thus suddenly interrupted, the spell which bound her had been in some strange manner weakened, probably by the same agency which caused the door to behave in such an unusual manner. This was still more the case when the voices of her lover and her brothers fell upon her ears, and if they had once entered the house there is no knowing what might have occurred, provided they had only used the right language and done the right things. But as they did neither, and were consequently repulsed by those who came—whence we dare not guess—at the old witch's call to defend her house, the girl

was left once more in the power of her enemies. Nevertheless, the force of the spell was no longer quite the same; Jemima was restless and unquiet, and Mick perceived with vexation and regret that she was by no means prepared to receive his tender advances. He called his mother, who told him that there was but one cure, although that was pretty certain to be successful. The maiden must be thrown into a deep trance for twenty-four hours, and if at the expiration of that time no good or holy thing came nigh her, not only would the spell be as powerful as ever, but she would in all probability be in a frame of mind more favourable to his wishes. The old woman immediately proceeded to act according to the opinion she had given, and having made several curious faces at Jemima and said some still more curious words, the poor girl went off into a sleep which seemed as sound as if she was never to awake again. In this condition they placed her upon a rickety old sofa in the back room, and there she was slumbering during the very time when the conversation was going on between Billy Offen and Kezia Mummery, in which the latter was denying all knowledge that Jemima was lost.

The little tailor was well satisfied. He had now learned from her own lips how Kezia had been treated by those audacious young men, and it would be his own fault if the whole parish did not soon know it too. He expressed much sympathy with the old woman, joined and even exceeded her in abuse of those who had committed so gross and unprovoked an outrage upon her, and assured her

that, if it depended upon him, it should not go unpunished.

Kezia was rather alarmed at this remark; for, although she wished that the feeling in the parish should be so far favourable to her as to remove any suspicion of her having been the person who had stolen Jemima from her home, yet, like other witches, she did not desire to have herself or her affairs dragged too prominently before the public. She shuddered especially when the tailor, in a somewhat grandiloquent style, declared that this was a matter which must come before the Ashford magistrates.

Now we all know that now-a-days country justices of the peace have, as a rule, the wisdom of Solomon and the learning of Daniel combined, and it was little less so in the days of which I write. Especially in the detection of witches and suchlike evil creatures were the justices wondrous clever, and Kezia knew well enough that she would have little chance of escaping the discovery of her malpractices if she were once brought face to face with the collective wisdom of the Ashford Bench. So when Master Offen mentioned this idea, she at once opposed it with much earnestness, expressing her strong desire that no such evil should be done to the young men as to bring them within the meshes of the law; and thus gaining still more sympathy from her visitor by the kind and charitable feeling which she displayed towards her persecutors.

The tailor, indeed, was not particularly anxious, on his own account, either to make the journey to

Ashford, or to place himself in the position of one who had been the means of bringing in the officers of the law to arrest a Headcorn man. Since, however, he had taken the matter up, he was quite resolved not to let it drop; and having constituted himself old Kezia's champion, he did not intend that the old woman's wrongs, as he deemed them, should go unrevenged and unredressed. So he parted from her with many kind and friendly words, inwardly delighted that through her, as he hoped, he had found means of "serving out" the insolent rascal who had dared to threaten him with the horsepond. To do this, he felt that it would be necessary to take others into his confidence so far as to announce to them his opinion regarding the attack upon Kezia; and, accordingly, when he got home he got hold of one or two of the principal gossips of the place, told his story, and bade them spread it about far and wide that an Ashford man had come into the parish and, in company with the two sons of John Cheeseman, had been beating and ill-treating Headcorn people. He well knew that this would stir up all the patriotic feeling in the parish, and he reckoned that by the next day, Friday, that feeling would be sufficiently excited to enable him to take further steps.

Meanwhile the family of Cheeseman, little knowing what was brewing against them, were by no means in a happy condition of mind. With their sister lost, their father away from home, and their mother mad or bewitched, the young men felt as if the world had been suddenly turned upside down, and were in

great distress of mind. They were glad to be able to persuade Tom Pearson to stay with them for another day, and indeed required his assistance in dealing with the insane delusions of their mother. These became more and more extraordinary and alarming. The most harmless one was that in which she declared herself to be the moon, and, clambering on to the top of a kind of clothes-press in one corner of the room, sat upon it for more than an hour under the belief that she was shining. But when she thought herself a chimney-pot, and was with difficulty restrained from climbing on to the roof to perform the duties of such, and again, when she declared herself to be a pig, and loudly demanded hog-wash, she gave the young men and her maids much trouble and anxiety. They managed, however, as well as they could, and though the work of the farm was somewhat neglected that day, they had the satisfaction of knowing that they had done their duty, and that the mother of the family had been saved from putting an end to herself in any one of the half-dozen ways to which her strange fancies would have led her.

So Thursday eve drew in, and the only noticeable thing that happened was that Mrs. Cheeseman, when it was quite dusk, suddenly sprang up, ran to the window, and loudly called out—

"There be my mates; there be my mates! I must go and join 'em."

The attendants rushed forward to bring her back, and, looking out of the window as they did so, saw, or vowed that they saw, several shadowy forms

dancing slowly around something—they could not see what—upon the ground, and ever and anon pointing to the house with gaunt and bony hands. In one of these figures Jack Cheeseman, who came close after his mother to the window, was positively certain that he recognized the form and features of Kezia Mummery, and accordingly, whilst the others held his mother, he hurried downstairs and rushed from the house to make certain. But when he had got the house-door open, there was nothing to be seen. The dancers had vanished entirely, and not a trace of them could he find anywhere, although he fancied that a low mocking laugh reached his ears as he stood listening and gazing around. The young man returned, therefore, to the house, and assisted the others in pacifying his mother; but this little incident impressed them all more firmly than ever with the belief that witchcraft was at work, and that the same power which had stolen the daughter was now engaged in persecuting the mother of the family.

So the night passed slowly away, and then dawned that Friday morning on which, as it will be recollected, John Cheeseman entered Canterbury and duly performed his errand. It was one of those mornings in which a mist overshadows the earth, and appears to struggle against the attempts of the sun to give light and warmth to the latter. In London the mist, by dint of allying itself to smoke and fog from the river, generally succeeds, and the inhabitants of that pleasant city enjoy a murky, gloomy day, only enlivened by short and transient gleams of sunshine, just enough to show them how

fine the weather intended to be if it could. But in the country the sun stands no nonsense of that kind on the part of the mist, but, scattering it away right and left by the power of his rays, makes it add to the beauty of the scene by flitting away in light and dissolving wreaths over the surface of the earth. It was one of those mellow autumn days which seem made for mankind to enjoy themselves, and which always feel to me as near perfection as a day can be. If there had been no such things as witches and the like, I dare say the good people of Headcorn would have thoroughly enjoyed that Friday; but a witch in a parish is like garlic in soup to those who don't like garlic, and makes everything wrong and disagreeable which would otherwise be quite the reverse. So in spite of the loveliness of the weather, and the softening influences of the season, darkness brooded over the hearts of the Headcorn people, and bitter feelings pervaded their breasts. The gossiping tailor had entirely succeeded in persuading the good people that the sanctity of their parish had been assailed, and injury done to its character and reputation. Nobody knew exactly the rights of the story, but the sum and substance of their belief was that the Cheeseman family had aided and abetted Tom Pearson in a wanton and mischievous attack upon old Kezia Mummery's house, and that good Master Offen, on remonstrating against the wrong that had been committed, had been scoffed at, set at nought, and even threatened with personal violence by this interloper from Ashford. The parochial feeling was gradually excited by this tale, and indignation slowly

but surely aroused against those who had been guilty of or who had connived at such evil doings.

Now in those old days people had a rough and ready way of dealing with those who had been so foolish or so unlucky as to make themselves unpopular. They generally went about the matter by means of giving the offenders a sound beating or a good ducking, in order to bring them to their senses; and it was Billy Offen's intention and desire that Tom Pearson, if not his friends the Cheeseman boys also, should have a taste of this wholesome discipline. I do not think that the little tailor had any thoughts of carrying matters farther; but when one lets water out of a pond, one cannot always stop it exactly when and where one desires; and when one begins to tamper either with witches or with public feeling, one may be led much farther than one at first intended. So it was in the present instance; and when the matter had been discussed in the parish for some hours, an opinion began to grow that people who could be guilty of oppressing the poor, and ill-treating an innocent and helpless old woman, ought to be driven out of the parish altogether.

It may seem surprising that "Old Will," who has been represented as possessing great and well-deserved influence in the place, did not put a stop to this feeling against his friends by declaring the truth, so far as he knew it, and pointing out that at all events the Cheeseman family had received a great injury in the stealing of Jemima, and were deserving of the compassion of their neighbours in that respect at least. But Old Will had unluckily been called away to Mersham,

where he had some relations living, and to which he generally made a visit once in every three or four years. He had left upon the very day which saw John Cheeseman commence his journey to Canterbury, and therefore knew nothing of the evil spirit which was gradually being excited in the parish.

When old Kezia found that Billy Offen had taken the matter in hand, her thirst for revenge on the young men who had dared to attack her cottage, added to the natural spite of a witch against the whole human race who are not as bad as herself, caused her to forget the prudence which would have taught her that she would be acting wisely by keeping in the background. She determined, on the contrary, to urge the matter forward as much as she possibly could, hoping that thereby she should not only enjoy the punishment and suffering of the Cheeseman family, but also have the satisfaction of seeing a wicked deed performed by the people which would bring them nearer to what she was herself, and moreover give her power to plague and injure them the more, without fear of being restrained by those higher Powers who would not protect from her those who did evil and ruthless deeds. So the old woman made up her mind to encourage the wickedness which was brewing in the parish, and for this purpose she called together several of her cronies who dwelt hard by; and on the Thursday night there was an awesome meeting of evil creatures beneath the roof of that crazy old cottage in which poor Jemima still lay entranced and spell-bound by its wicked owner.

Goody Maylam and Betty Bridger, the same two old women who had first set afloat the report of the wrong done to Kezia, and who both belonged to the unholy sisterhood, readily met to concert further evil with their sworn ally. Then there was that noted old beldame, Tabitha Fitch, who was afterwards hanged on Egerton hill for many grievous crimes; and a certain Madge Howland, who lived nobody knew where, in the big woods, and was supposed to have bewitched more sheep and lambs than any witch of her day, being terribly dreaded by all farmers and graziers in those parts. This grim and cruel company having gathered together beneath Kezia Mummery's roof, took counsel of all the evil things which they knew how to summon, and dreadful would it have been for mortal man to have seen or heard what went on between them. If they had possessed the power, no doubt they would then and there have inflicted some cruel injury upon Jemima, or at the very least changed her form and appearance for the worse by some of their shameful devices. But, happily for her, she had not been long enough amongst them to be subject to their arts, and they could only lengthen her trance, so that she might not awake whilst they were absent upon the errand which they now arranged among themselves. This was no other than to fan the flame which had been already kindled in the parish to such an extent that the people should be roused to go up to Cheeseman's house, sack and destroy it, and drive the inmates in disgrace from the parish. It was a bold idea, and the witches thought, moreover, that if they could

destroy the audacious Tom Pearson altogether, it would be so much the better; whilst if the Cheeseman family were driven out for good and all, they would be more likely to retain Jemima in their power for that year and a day which would make her subject to them sufficiently, as they hoped, to bring her to become one of their own number and as bad as themselves.

With this intention they sallied forth upon the Friday morning, but not by any means in their own shapes and forms—save, indeed, Kezia, who, for reasons which may be easily guessed, was obliged to retain her own miserable carcase, the sight of which was likely to heighten the sympathy of the people with her wrongs. But her four friends took the form of comely and pleasant lasses, and as such mingled among the various groups of people who, shortly after noon, collected together in Headcorn street, and began to discuss the reports by which the parish had been agitated for the past four and twenty hours. The witches mixed first with one and then with another set of people, asking questions and giving answers freely, but, in all that they said, taking good care to excite every one against the family whose ruin they sought to accomplish. Some were asked to go down and see the poor woman who had been so ill-treated; and there was old Kezia, looking more wretched than ever, propped up in a crazy chair of great antiquity, which had been brought out and set against the wall of her door, so that those who passed by might see that the poor old soul, shaken by the rough usage she had received, had

just been able to crawl out in order to enjoy a little sunshine and breathe the fresh air. Little by little the idlers began to thicken, and there was the tongue of Billy Offen wagging here and there and everywhere, and seconding the efforts of the witches with great success. Presently some one suggested that such doings as those of which they had heard ought not to be put up with, and some one else agreed; and a third asked why should not they go up and give the offenders what they deserved. Here and there and everywhere the witches buzzed about saying the same thing, and so it came to pass that just after the dinner-time had passed, instead of going back to their work, a number of people joined the others who had no work to go back to, and all went up toward the Cheesemans' house, determined to avenge the wrongs of Kezia Mummery and vindicate the character of their parish.

Now this had been an uncomfortable morning with the Cheeseman household. The poor mother, doubtless still under the spell which the arts of the wicked ones had woven for her, had been remarkably restless and troublesome ever since the dawn of day, being possessed by delusions of a similarly extraordinary character to those which I have already narrated. At one moment she vowed that she was a sofa, and pressed, nay implored, everybody to sit down upon her forthwith; then, under the firm impression that she was a tablecloth, she spread herself out upon the table in a most ridiculous fashion; and finally, announcing herself as the garden-roller, could only be restrained by main force from going out of

doors in order to roll on the lawn and gravel walk in the due performance of the ordinary duties of that machine.

The three young men therefore had their hands full at home, and had consequently no time to stir abroad in the village. They were thus totally unaware of the falsehoods which had been spread far and wide about themselves and their proceedings, or of the hostile spirit which had been kindled against them by the gossiping tailor and the witches. They were engaged in quieting Mrs. Cheeseman as well as they could, and combating her fresh delusion that she was a cow, in which character she was butting unpleasantly, when one of the servants came running in to say that there was a crowd of people coming along the road towards the farmhouse.

As the two brothers could not leave their unfortunate mother at the moment, Tom Pearson, at their request, went to the door to see what was the matter, and whether it was anything which concerned them and their belongings. But no sooner had Tom set his foot outside the door, and appeared upon the little green plat in front of the house, than a loud shout arose from the crowd of "That's he! The rascal! The ruffian! There he is! Stone him! Duck him!" with several other expressions of a similar nature, which Pearson could not consider as either friendly or complimentary to himself—if indeed it was to him they were addressed.

Upon this point he was not long left in doubt, for a stone came whizzing by disagreeably near his head, followed by several pieces of mud evidently

aimed at the same object; so that, judging discretion to be the better part of valour under the circumstances, the young man hastily retired within the house, shut to the door, and called to his companions to come at once to his assistance.

Leaving their mother, though with some reluctance, to the care of the servants, Jack and Jem Cheeseman hurried to the front, and soon perceived that the matter was likely to be serious. Fifty or sixty people—men, women, and children—were assembled in front of the house, some on the road and some on the grass plat aforesaid, which was separated from the road by a low brick wall with iron rails upon the top; and the appearance of those who were so gathered together betokened no kindly feeling towards the inhabitants of the house. They were calling out ill names against them, throwing mud, and occasionally a stone or two, at the house, and demanding that the "Ashford thief" should be brought forth to them, that they might "serve him out." The young men looked at each other with doubtful faces, seeing that the affair appeared likely to be troublesome, and being somewhat uncertain what to do. It was very evident, however, that something must be done, and that speedily, for delay might be dangerous. So Jack Cheeseman, as the eldest, stepped to a window which was immediately above the front door, and, throwing it wide open, presented himself to the crowd.

When they saw him they set up another loud shout; and old Kezia, pointing eagerly with her crutch, cried out in eager tones—

"That's one of the villains! Pitch into him!"

A volley of mud followed this exclamation, but no harm was done, and Jack stood firm until there was a lull in the storm, and then called out at the top of his voice—

"What's the matter, neighbours? Father is away, and mother terrible bad; what is it you want here?"

Then stepped forth Billy Offen, delighted to have the opportunity of showing his influence and position by assuming the air of leader of the people; and thus replied to the words of the young man—

"We are come on a lawful errand, John Cheeseman the younger, as thou wilt shortly find. We will not have our poor folk beaten and abused by roystering young blades who are a disgrace to the country. Thou and thy brother, and that graceless hound Tom Pearson, have beaten and insulted poor old Mrs. Mummery, and you must be shown that rough games are what two people can play at."

"Beaten Mrs. Mummery!" cried Jack. "Why, we never laid so much as a hand on her——"

He got no further in his speech, for Betty Bridger broke in, supported by old Tabitha Fitch, crying out at the top of their voices, "Don't hear him, good people—the blustering, lying varlet. Throw him down! pull him out! whip him! duck him!" And the people, excited by these exclamations, raised an outcry which drowned his voice, and sent a shower of missles at him which caused him to close the window forthwith.

The situation had now become serious, for it was

plain enough that the crowd was bent on mischief, and the young men's means of defence were limited. The crowd grew more and more excited each moment, stimulated by the words and artful suggestions of the witches. They left off throwing mud, and whilst some of them rushed up to the door and began to kick and beat at it as though they would batter it in, others ran round with the intention of making an assault from the farmyard side. Matters looked bad enough for the Cheeseman family and their friends, and the triumph of witchcraft appeared to be indeed secure.

The young men within the farmhouse felt that to stay there would probably only bring destruction upon their father's property, and boldly resolved to prevent this, if possible, by going forth and facing the assailants of their house and home. Opening the front door, therefore, they rushed out, each with a stick in his hand, right into the midst of those who were the attacking party in that quarter. Their appearance was greeted with a loud shout of triumph, and the witches especially raised their shrill voices and encouraged their friends and followers to fall upon them then and there. But three young and stalwart men were not to be so easily disposed of. Setting their backs against the door, they swung their sticks round with such good will as to keep their opponents at bay, and indeed drive them back at first, whilst Jem Cheeseman caught tailor Offen such a crack across the shins as caused him to skip and howl as he had never had occasion to do before. But three man could not stand long against twenty

or thirty, supported and encouraged by nearly as many of the fairer—though on this occasion hardly to be called the softer—sex. The crowd pressed in closer and closer upon the gallant defenders of the door, assailing them alike with shouts and blows, and rendering their position every moment more and more difficult.

Tom Pearson was the special object of vengeance to those who were exciting the people, for the witches had been urged by old Kezia to be sure that he was well punished for having (as she well knew to be the case) brought the brothers Cheeseman to suspect her as the kidnapper of their sister, and induced them to attack her cottage. Accordingly, Tom suffered more severely than the others: mud was thrown in his face; so many blows were aimed at him at the same time, that he could by no possibility ward them all off; and Betty Bridger, doubtless relying on his unwillingness to strike a woman, darted in and gave him a scratch which he remembered to his dying day. Not content with this, one of the witches—but I am not sure which of them it was, and therefore, as I desire only to tell what I know to be true, I will not give a name to her—one of the witches, I say, stooped down near to the ground, and then, rushing forward, made a grab at Tom's leg, with the intent to drag him down, so that his enemies might the more easily master him.

At this juncture of the affair things did indeed look bad for the house of Cheeseman; nor were they materially improved by the conduct of the poor mother, who, breaking from her attendants, rushed

to an upper window, declared that the crowd below were the Sunday-school children come for their annual treat, and, under the firm belief that she was scattering penny buns among them for a scramble, hurled down upon their heads every piece of crockery or small furniture upon which she could lay her hands. This proceeding, whilst it was extravagant as regards her husband's property, only tended to irritate the crowd still more, especially when Billy Offen was brought to the ground by the blow of a basin upon his head, which he naturally believed to have been specially aimed at his noble self. He rose, foaming with passion, and bleeding from a broken head, and, with many expressions of furious rage, hurled a stone right through the window above the doorway, and rushed forward with the intention of further damaging somebody or something if he possibly could.

The fight was at its highest, and in a few moments the young men must have been knocked down, and the door broken open, if something of an unusual character had not occurred. Unusual indeed it was, and, so far as I know, never before heard of or witnessed in all East Kent. At the very instant when the hearts of the young men began to fail them, or, rather, when they began to feel that they could resist no longer, a loud note like that of a horn rang thrilling through the air, and reverberated through every corner of the farmhouse and yard. At the same time, those who were looking from the windows towards the church distinctly saw the tall figure of a man clad in the garments of a

monk, exactly similar to him who had been seen by Jem Cheeseman. He was standing at a short distance from the great oak, with one hand to his mouth as if blowing a horn, and with the other—in which he held some instrument, they could not tell what—pointing to the farmhouse. Those who saw him, indeed, were only the maids of the house, for everybody else was engaged in the conflict below; but these all agreed in the same story as to the appearance and action of the figure which they saw.

Everybody saw and knew what happened. All of a sudden, as if impelled by some mysterious but powerful agency, a large number of pigs, which were feeding in a stubble-field hard by, watched by an attendant boy, threw up their heads in the air, uttered loud shrieks and grunts, evidently expressive of mingled rage and excitement, and without more ado charged violently against the party who were attacking the front door of the farmhouse.

It may seem extraordinary, or perchance even ludicrous, to those who read it, but if they doubt the effect which such a charge was likely to have had, let them sit down quietly and try to realize it to themselves. Fancy fifty or sixty pigs, many of them gaunt hogs of large size and strength, rushing full-tilt against you, grunting and shrieking, throwing up their snouts in the air, and snapping right and left as they rushed forward to the affray. They took the attacking party in the rear, and caused the greatest astonishment and consternation among them by their unexpected and furious attack. It was simply irresistible, and all the more so as the young men,

relieved from the fierceness of the pressure against them, felt able once more to take the offensive, and struck out fiercely against their foes.

To any one who had been in the position of an idle spectator of the scene, it must have partaken of the ludicrous to no small degree. The four-footed combatants attacked with so much fury and rapidity, and

DISCOMFITURE OF BILLY OFFEN BY THE PIG.

ran in among the legs of the men in such an unexpected manner, that several of the besiegers of the farm-house were tripped up and thrown down before they knew where they were; whilst as for poor Billy Offen himself, who seemed destined to bad luck this day, a small pig, which had attacked him from behind; was observed to be hanging from him in a

manner which, coupled with the yells which issued from his mouth, led to the conclusion that it had seized in its grip something more than his garments.

Never was a rout more sudden and complete. It might have been thought that the witches could have prevented the disaster which had overtaken their friends, but this was far from being the case. At the first sound of the horn which had summoned the pigs to the fray, the countenances of Kezia Mummery and her allies turned ghastly white, and the animals had scarcely charged before the women were scurrying away in every direction, and, in the confusion of the moment, no one noticed what became of them. In fact, every one of the attacking party thought only of saving himself, and within five minutes of the charge of the pigs, not a man, woman, or child remained within gunshot of the farmhouse, save only its defenders. At that instant the horn again sounded through the air, and the whole body of pigs immediately turned round, and without more ado trotted peacefully back to their stubble-field, interchanging many grunts of satisfaction at the conclusion of their unaccustomed work.

It was then that the three young men, gazing in the direction of the churchyard, distinctly saw the same figure which I have already described, standing beneath the great oak. It was visible, however, but for a moment, for as the last pig left the green in front of the house it faded away before their very eyes, and in another instant had disappeared altogether. The young men turned and looked at each other with an awestruck air, and none of them for an instant doubted

the supernatural character of the figure which had thus made itself visible to their astonished vision. Marvellous, indeed, was the whole affair, and one which they could by no means explain. They had other things to do, however, at that moment, than to explain marvels, for their condition was not in all respects satisfactory. Each of them was more or less plastered with mud from head to foot, their bones ached with the blows they had received and the exertions they had undergone, and their appearance was altogether hardly that of respectable and well-to-do yeomen of the county Kent.

There was evident need, therefore, of a process of thorough cleansing and washing before they could feel at all like themselves. First and foremost, however, they hurried into the house to see after Mrs. Cheeseman, whom, somewhat to their surprise, they found fast asleep. She had gone off, said the maids, the moment "that there horn sounded," and had slept quiet ever since. So the young men, relieved of their care for the good mother, lost no time in changing their garments and resuming the appearance of respectability which they had temporarily lost. Then they looked carefully round the house, and ascertained that no material damage had been done by the crowd. A few panes of glass were broken, indeed, and the grass in front of the house was a good deal trampled about, but that was pretty much the extent of the mischief. None of the attacking party had entered the house, and indeed the escape of the inmates thereof had been as complete as extraordinary, considering the small means of defence

which they had possessed. Neither Tom Pearson nor the Cheeseman youths had received serious injury, and no one else was hurt in any way. This, by the bye, could scarcely be said of their assailants, several of whom had received severe blows; whilst as to tailor Offen, although the extent of his misfortunes was never exactly discovered, it is certain that he had a cushion made within a week of this affair, and never afterwards sat upon his board without it.

When the young men had finished their inspection of the premises, they returned to the usual living-room of the farmhouse inmates, and sat down to consider gravely over what had happened, and whether there was any step which it behoved them to take in consequence of the affair.

Never, meanwhile, had the usually quiet village of Headcorn been so disturbed and excited. The news of the attack upon John Cheeseman's house soon spread far and wide, and the ignominious repulse of the attacking force by a mere drove of pigs was made the subject of much rustic "chaff" and many rude jokes. The news, however, had not got beyond the parish on Saturday morning; but in "the street," and among all those who had taken part in or had known of the attack, a strange and uneasy feeling prevailed. It was impossible to believe that the action of the pigs had been either natural or accidental. Some unknown power must have excited the animals, and what could that power be but magic or witchcraft? It was rarely, indeed, that such powers were exercised to prevent mischief or mis-

fortune to mankind; and such had doubtless been hindered, so far as the Cheeseman family were concerned, by what had taken place. But this could only have been because the family were in alliance with the powers who had magic at their command. And so it came to pass that the very persons who were the objects of the malice and hatred of the witches, and had so greatly suffered therefrom, were suspected of being the friends and abettors of that very witchcraft which they, above and beyond all other people, had reason to detest and abhor.

Those who had fled before the victorious pigs were naturally irritated at the very thought of having done so. Rightly or wrongly, men have got into the habit of thinking themselves superior to pigs in the scale of animal creation, and for a party of men to have been routed and scattered by a body of the despised race very little larger in numbers than themselves, was a degradation which would scarcely bear reflection. These Kentish peasants, like others of their class, loved pickled pork, but which of them could hereafter sit down to discuss this savoury food without having recalled to his mind the little memories connected with that day of disaster and disgrace? What man of their party could ever hereafter feed his own pig without remembering that shameful flight from the door of Farmer Cheeseman's house, and hearing in every homely grunt the insulting sneer of the victorious porkers! "Pig's trotters" would recall the speed with which the porcine army had attacked; "pig's face" would bring to the cheek of him who discussed it the dark blush of conscious

shame; and even "black puddings" could never again be eaten without a thought of the dark stain which rested upon the honour and valour of those who had fled before triumphant piggery!

These and similar thoughts greatly increased the vexation of the Headcorn people, and added not a little to their irritation against the house of Cheeseman. It was of course a different matter with the witches. *They* knew well enough how little their dark arts had had to do with the rescue of the Cheeseman family and the defeat of their opponents. With the knowledge that they possessed, they would gladly have "let well alone," for they were perfectly well aware that if either the powers of the Church or of the Law should be called in against those who were now falsely and unjustly suspected of witchcraft, such a proceeding would in all probability end in their own detection and punishment.

Such was the state of affairs when Saturday morning arrived, and the sun once more shone upon the scene of all the strange events which I have related. With one accord the people seemed to have abstained from following their usual occupations: the ploughs stood idle in the fields, the waggons in the lodges; the farm-horses remained in their stables, the sheep-dog waited in vain for his master's summons; all work was disregarded and neglected. Nor did any one appear inclined to turn his thoughts to any subject save that which was uppermost in his mind, namely, the extraordinary business of the previous day. An air of wonder and perplexity sat upon men's faces as they stood at the various

lounging-places where they were wont to gather at leisure moments to discuss their own and their neighbours' affairs. They glanced towards John Cheeseman's house as if they felt there was something strange about it, and spoke to each other in low voices as if fearful of being overheard. In short, the whole world of Headcorn was turned topsy-turvy, and the nerves of the people seemed to have been entirely shaken and disturbed. Still, there were those who felt that for the credit of the parish something must be done, for if matters were left in their present state, Headcorn would be pointed at for ever and a day as a place in which pigs carried the sway, and the public opinion of the parishioners could be successfully defied by individuals who were supported by mysterious and, doubtless, evil powers. This feeling gradually increased as the broad daylight gave greater courage to those who talked over these weighty matters. It was impossible that the thing should rest where it did. The cat must be "belled"—but the difficulty was to find out precisely what the cat was, before searching for an individual who would undertake the operation. Billy Offen had not appeared that morning, and by all accounts was not likely to do so for some days at least. Old Kezia kept in her cottage, and the other members of the fell sisterhood did not venture to show themselves among the gossiping public. Where should they find some one to direct and lead them?

The doubt and hesitation to which this question gave rise, could only be solved by beer, and accordingly between eleven and twelve o'clock some twenty

or more of the male population of Headcorn were assembled in front of the "Red Lion," discussing alike the liquor of mine host and the important business of the day.

Opinions were now interchanged with greater freedom, and of course differed considerably upon all points of the case. One said one thing and one another, and although they were all agreed that something should be done, and that speedily, what that something should be was precisely what they were unable to determine.

Whilst they were thus engaged, a sound of wheels coming down the road attracted their attention, and presently there appeared in sight a little low-built chaise, drawn by a rough pony, well known to all of them as the property of worthy Will Prebble the blacksmith. No sooner did they set eyes upon him, than several voices at once exclaimed—

"Here's Old Will! Hurrah for Old Will! *He'll* know what to do, sure-ly!"

"Hulloa, mates, what's up?" asked the cheery voice of the old blacksmith, as he pulled up opposite the inn, somewhat surprised at the sight of so large a concourse of people there at so early an hour of the day.

Then half a dozen of them began to talk all at once, until old Will begged that one might be allowed to speak at a time, as he was in that way more likely to come at the rights of the matter upon which they desired his counsel.

When this had been arranged, and Jem Turk the farrier had told the whole story from beginning to

end, Old Will's countenance gradually lost the smiling expression which it had worn on his first arrival, and darkened into a positive frown before the man had finished his tale.

"Well," he remarked at the end of it, "I never thought to ha' been so much ashamed of my neighbours as I am to-day!"

"What d'ye mean, master?" "How so, Old Will?" "What say?" added the gaping rustics around.

"Why," said the old man very slowly, but with much emphasis, "for any one to go and believe that honest John Cheeseman had ought to do with witches—the man that has such belief must be a born natural!"

"Why, we seed it ourselves," cried one.

"Sure-ly," said another, "it worn't anything just right for them pigs to come agin us, worrying and fighting like Christian men!"

"'Tis witchcraft, sure enough, let who will say nay," muttered a third.

But sturdy Old Will was not to be overwhelmed with the vehemence of the assertions which poured in upon him in support of the prevalent belief in the alliance of the house of Cheeseman with the powers of evil.

"Look ye here," said the old man, sticking a thumb into each waistcoat pocket, having previously laid his reins across his knee and his whip by his side, preparatory to an address which should convince the crowd of his friend's innocence. "Look ye here, mates all, I have known John Cheeseman ever since

we was boys together, and I'll go bail he a'n't no witch-man, nor nothing like it. Bean't you ashamed to say so, Bill Ward? Who gave you work last winter when you hadn't got nothing to do? Why, John Cheeseman, and that out of pure good-will, and no merit of yourn, for I reckon he got a bad bargain with you!"

This turned the laugh against one of the foremost upholders of the witchcraft accusation, and Old Will proceeded—

"No witch-man does things out of kindness, and where's a kinder man amongst us than John Cheeseman? Why, Jemmy Love, is that you I see agin the door? Are you a-crying out against Master Cheeseman? Why, who was it as come when your darter was down with the fever, and brought her jelly and soup, and what not, to keep her strength up, and has saved her life? Is this your gratitude to Jemima Cheeseman—to join a lot of chaps in running down her old father? And that reminds me—talk about witches! don't ye know the man's lost his daughter? Don't ye know 'Mima Cheeseman's been sperrited away? What but witches have done it? The man has gone to Canterbury for aid against the evil ones, and here be ye noodles saying that they are his friends! Why, it must ha' been the evil ones themselves that set ye against him. Who did it, who began it, I should like to know?"

Whilst Old Will was delivering this oration, which he did with much energy, the rustics around began to look at each other with faces which evidently

showed that his words were not without effect. And when he mentioned the fact of Jemima's disappearance, a visible emotion arose among the crowd, and several muttered, "We never knowed nothing about this," and similar exclamations which showed that the tide was turning.

Old Will was too dexterous a man not to see and take advantage of the opportunity.

"Look here!" he said; "it an't no use saying nothing about it; you've been took in—that's where it has been. You've been a-doing the witch's work, you have. Is it likely that a man should be friends with those who had taken off his daughter, as he thinks? Why, it's folly to think it, and what's more, 'tis a sin and a shame to turn against a good neighbour like John Cheeseman."

By this time, the majority of those present had very much come round to Will Prebble's opinion, and began to wonder how they could have been so easily induced to join in an attack upon a family which had always been respected and popular, and against whom nothing had really been proved. Moreover, the news of Jemima, which had not been generally known, produced a great effect upon them; and it was plain enough that they already repented of what they had done, and that the current of public opinion had entirely changed. Murmurs began to arise that it was "a darned shame" to have served a man so just when he had been robbed of his daughter; and those who knew or suspected the state of affairs between Jemima and Tom Pearson, found an excuse for anything which the latter

might have done in consequence of the abduction of his sweetheart.

Old Will now set on foot a diligent inquiry as to who it was who had first set afloat the reports against his friend's family, and who had suggested the attack upon the farmhouse. Little by little it came out that, whilst Billy Offen the tailor had been one of the first and greatest talkers in the matter, two or three old women, and notably Kezia Mummery herself, had been the principal instigators of the action which had resulted in the display of such unsuspected prowess on the part of the pigs. This of course greatly favoured Will Prebble's theory that the people had—as was indeed the fact—been unwittingly doing the witch's work, and he saw at a glance that now or never must there be made an effort to get rid of the evil creatures who had so long infested the parish and neighbourhood. But even whilst he was debating in his own mind what would be the best and surest means to effect this desirable object, a new turn was given to the business by the sudden appearance of no less a person than honest John Cheeseman himself.

It is unnecessary to dwell at any length upon his adventures since we left him with his friend the cobbler at Canterbury. The latter had entertained him hospitably, and, acting upon the wise and friendly precept, "*Welcome the coming, speed the parting, guest,*" had procured for him a "lift" in the cart of a worthy butcher who was going to drive into Ashford early on Saturday morning. Whether witches do not care to encounter butchers I do not

know; but either on this account, or perchance because the Token had acquired even greater virtue by its visit to the shrine of St. Thomas, no evil thing interrupted the journey which John Cheeseman and his companion made upon the morning in question; and as they started soon after six o'clock, it was but a little after nine when the good farmer, having parted with the butcher, set off upon his walk to Headcorn, and getting another "lift" for the first part of the way, reached his destination, as we have seen, between twelve and one o'clock.

The revulsion of feeling among the assembled parishioners of Headcorn had become so great that a loud shout of welcome greeted the arrival of the man who, but a short half-hour before, would have most assuredly been encountered by a storm of groans and hisses, if not by more practical evidence of public disapprobation. They rushed forward to meet him as he trudged steadily along the road, and several of those who had recently been foremost in their condemnation of the worthy man, pressed forward to shake him by the hand and express their joy at his safe return.

The farmer took it all very quietly, being possibly aware of the light and transient nature of such popularity as he appeared to enjoy. He did not, indeed, understand the reason of the display in his favour, until, catching sight of Old Will, he made the best of his way to the spot upon which his pony-chaise was drawn up, and inquired of him what it all meant. In a few words the blacksmith explained the matter to his friend, not forgetting to impress

upon him the fact that his neighbours had been sorely and sadly misled; that they sincerely repented the mistake into which they had fallen, and were most ready to aid him in any way within their power toward the recovery of his daughter and the punishment of those who had taken her from him.

John Cheeseman was both hurt and vexed at the manner in which his neighbours had behaved, and which he felt had not been justified by any conduct of his own. Being, however, a man not without some wisdom, he thought that it was of no use to "cry over spilt milk," and that if the others regretted their attack upon his house, and were ready to act the part of his friends for the future, he had better accept the position, and make no more fuss about what had passed. He spoke civilly, therefore, to all, but begged them to allow him to go quietly home then, promising that he would ask them to help him in the work he had to do if they would kindly have a little patience in the matter. Then he walked straight up to his own house, and the blacksmith promised to join him there as soon as he had driven down to the forge and put up his pony.

No sooner had John Cheeseman reached his home than his sons and Tom Pearson came rushing out to meet him, and give their version of all that had taken place since his departure. He blamed them for their disobedience to his orders, which had been that they should wait patiently until his return, and for their rashness in advancing in their own strength against the cottage of Kezia Mummery. But his

chief thought was for his wife, of whose sad condition since his departure he now heard for the first time, and to whom he immediately hurried. He entered the room in which she lay, and approached her in fear and trembling, lest some one or other of those cruel delusions, of which he had been told, should have again possessed her. But scarcely had he crossed the threshold than Molly Cheeseman awoke from the quiet sleep which she had now enjoyed for many hours, and appeared to have slept away every trace of illness or delusion.

Whether it had anything to do with the victory of the pigs I know not, or whether it was the entry into the house of the Token; but certain it is that from the moment she opened her eyes again, and saw her husband standing before her, Mrs. Cheeseman was as well and as sensible as she had ever been before, and not a sign of mental weakness was seen in her behaviour henceforth.

This of course proved, if any further proof had been necessary, that witchcraft alone had been the cause of her illness, and that the same spells which had doubtless been used against the daughter, had caused the sufferings of the mother.

When John Cheeseman had seen his wife, and had satisfied himself that no material damage had been done to his property, he did that which most Englishmen would have done under the circumstances; that is to say, he called for beef and ale, and refreshed the inner man after a substantial and comfortable manner. He was thus engaged when Will Prebble returned from the forge, and made no

difficulty in joining his friend in the useful occupation in which he found him engaged.

By this time it was two o'clock and past, and when the men had finished their meal they held a long consultation together upon the important business which was uppermost in the minds of both. There could be very little doubt as to the course to be pursued. It would doubtless have been easy enough to have aroused the parish, and turned the fury of those who had recently attacked John Cheeseman's house upon the evil ones who had instigated the deed. But the result of such a proceeding would be at least doubtful, and its failure might retard the recovery of Jemima, or possibly prevent it altogether, if indeed it were not attended with even more serious consequences. The better, and indeed the only way in which to proceed, was to follow implicitly the directions which had been given to the good farmer at the time when he first received his "marching orders" for Canterbury. He had been clearly and distinctly told to hasten back to Headcorn after his visit to the holy shrine, and the words seemed still ringing in his ears—

> "Then beneath this sacred tree
> Succour shall be sent to thee."

Nothing could be clearer or more definite, and the two friends agreed that, when evening fell, it would be the bounden duty of the farmer to repair to the great oak, Token in hand, and then and there demand the promised assistance.

The short hours of an October afternoon soon

slipped away. There was much to tell and be told on both sides, and John Cheeseman mightily astonished his family as he related to their attentive ears the history of the perils which he had encountered during his journey to Canterbury. Soon, however, the shades of evening began to steal over the village, and the hour was fast approaching when the farmer must perform the important duty which devolved upon him. Not feeling certain what might be the final result of his meetings with the strange and mysterious guardian of the tree, he bade an affectionate farewell to his wife on leaving her, and strictly enjoined her, in the event of his not returning, to remember that the pigs were always properly fed and cared for, as those deserved who had proved themselves the friends and protectors of the place. He shook hands with the others, begged Old Will to await the result in his house, and then boldly but reverently went out to fulfil his task.

It was a fine evening, though there was a little wind, and everything appeared peaceful and quiet as usual. No one was about the place, and the farmer walked without any interruption quite up within the shadow of the great tree, and there stood still for a moment. Then he drew out the Token, held it in his hand, and spoke these words—

"I've been and done as I was told, master; and burn the Token did, sure enough. Wherefore, here I be again, for to ask for that there succour as I was to have, if so be the thing burned in my hand."

He had scarcely finished speaking when the same

voice which had addressed him on the two previous occasions again spoke from the tree—

"Well done, thou faithful one, well done,
Thy faith hath now its guerdon won;
Look round! nor deem thy trial hard
Now that thou hast thy faith's reward."

RETURN OF CHEESEMAN'S DAUGHTER.

John Cheeseman raised his eyes in wonder at these words, but turning round as he did so, saw that which explained them at once. Who was this hurrying towards him from the direction of the big woods, with outstretched arms and loving haste?—who but

Jemima herself! He took two steps forward, and in another moment his daughter was laughing and sobbing alternately on his breast, closely clasped to his brave heart.

"Oh, father, father! how happy I am to be with you again;" she murmured, as she clung fondly to him; whilst he lavished upon her the tender caresses of paternal love. And then again spoke the same voice, and the pair listened with wrapt attention—

"Thanks to the Token's might divine,
To tested faith and holy sign,
Thy daughter, saved from evil scheme
And wakened from a spell-bound dream,
Re-seeks that home, of late bereft,
Spotless and pure as when she left.
Yet wouldst thou further ills escape
From fiend-like foes in human shape,
Turn every thought and set thy face
To drive the wicked from the place.
To-morrow pass in rest and prayer,
On Monday for the strife prepare;
Let each who joins th' avenging band,
Green branch grasp firmly in his hand;
And thou, upon the eventful day,
Thy Token manfully display.
Advance upon the evil crew,
Fear not, faint not, but dare to do.
Let no ill word from any tongue,
Or oath, advantage give to wrong;
But to all threats and all complaints
Use holy words and names of saints:
So shall thy party gain the day,
And evil beings pass away!"

John Cheeseman and his daughter listened to these words with all the attention that they deserved; and

when the voice had concluded, the farmer began to pour out his thanks to the spirit of the oak, and to promise that there should be nothing wanting on his part to prove his gratitude for the restoration of his beloved Jemima. As the voice made no reply to these protestations, and the girl was naturally anxious to get home to her mother, the farmer saw no reason for staying any longer beneath the shadow of the oak, and accordingly led his daughter back to the house. The joy and rapture with which she was received may be better imagined than described. She flew into her mother's arms, and embraced her with a tenderness which made Tom Pearson wish he could change places for a time with the old lady. Then there came questions upon questions as to where she had been, and what she had been doing; and the family showed a not unnatural desire that she should at once relate the whole story from the beginning.

But "Old Will" interposed; and having gathered from the farmer the last commands which had proceeded from the voice in the great oak, earnestly persuaded the family to forbear any further questioning of Jemima at present. He strongly urged them that, for that night at least, they should not even mention in their conversation those evil ones with whom Jemima had been making an unwilling stay. They should endeavour as far as possible to forget them, and keep their souls free from even a thought of evil. On the morrow they must strictly follow the injunctions of the voice, and let the day be devoted to religious exercises; and by this means

they would be better fitted for the important expedition which was to be undertaken on the following day.

The wisdom of this advice was so self-evident that it was immediately and implicitly followed. Every member of the party laid curiosity aside, and asked Jemima no more questions. What they talked about I really cannot say; but no doubt there were many domestic topics of sufficient interest to form subjects of conversation, and the evening passed quickly and quietly away without any further excitement.

The next day was also one of an uneventful character. All the family kept duly the religious observances which had been enjoined, and which indeed they would have in nowise neglected at such a time. Thankful indeed they were for the termination of their anxiety of the past week; and the fulfilment of the words spoken from the oak, or rather the happy consequences which had followed the farmer's obedience thereto, filled them with hope that continued obedience would ensure an equally successful result in the coming enterprise. So the day wore away, and night once more fell upon the ancient parish of Headcorn.

Early in the morning John Cheeseman and his sons were astir, and having previously settled with Old Will the course to be pursued, they separated, each undertaking to summon different friends to meet at the corner of the lane leading to the forge at four o'clock in the afternoon, an hour which was fixed in order to give time for all to assemble who wished to take part in the affair. The news soon

spread when set abroad in this manner, and by the appointed hour a goodly number of people appeared, anxious to advance under John Cheeseman's direction. Not a few, indeed, had been among those who had attacked the good farmer's house; and these felt an additional anxiety to atone for their error, and regain a friendship which they feared their rashness and folly had imperilled.

When they were gathered together at the spot which had been agreed upon, Cheeseman asked Old Will to explain the matter more fully to them, which he accordingly did; telling them exactly what had been the commands given by the voice, and earnestly enjoining upon each man the necessity of obeying them to the letter. To this end they all plucked green branches at once; and the blacksmith further pressed upon them the absolute necessity of avoiding the use of any bad words, and if possible, of keeping their minds free from any unholy thought, whilst engaged upon their present expedition. Thus exhorted, the party set out, headed by John Cheeseman and Old Will, the former of whom wore his Token outside his vest, so that every one could see it.

I am well aware that I am now coming to a part of my story which to many persons may seem strange, and even improbable. Such, however, must recollect that I am writing of old and strange times, when things were suffered to occur which do not occur now; or, at least, are generally believed not to occur, though it may be that even now there are things going on which escape the ken of the wise

and learned children of this generation. It is sometimes the fate of an historian not to be believed; but the honest chronicler of the past will not heed this, but continue in spite of it to record the events which have come to his knowledge from sure and trustworthy sources, never doubting them in his own mind, and leaving it to his readers to accept or reject his statements according to the strength or weakness of their own faith.

The party which John Cheeseman led against the witches took the direct line to that cottage of Kezia Mummery with which we have already been made acquainted. They were still a good hundred yards away from it when an enormous dog came rushing from the opposite direction, as if to meet the advancing band. His mouth was open, his tongue hanging out, his whole aspect savage and alarming, for he was evidently mad, and he bore down upon the party at a great pace, and evidently with bad intentions.

Now a mad dog is an unpleasant enemy to meet with at any time, being one with whom you cannot reason, and whose bite is generally fatal to those who have the misfortune to experience it. It was therefore no pleasant or reassuring thing for the Headcorn party to be thus encountered; and I doubt not that there were several of them who wished themselves a hundred miles off when they saw this ferocious animal rushing upon them. But John Cheeseman, having a vivid recollection of the bull in Surrenden Park, faltered not for an instant, but seizing the Token in his hand, held it well in front of

him as the dog approached. Marvellous to relate, the effect was sudden and complete. The animal came to a dead stop about five yards before it reached the party, set up one fearful, melancholy howl, and immediately vanished at once and altogether from their sight. The men looked one at the other in wonder and awe; if any of them had previously doubted that they were fighting against magic and the powers of darkness, he doubted no longer; whilst the confidence of all in their leader was naturally increased when they saw how the evil ones fled before him. So they waved their branches in their hands, and proceeded on their way with renewed courage.

They had advanced but a very few yards farther before all around them there suddenly arose a dense, thick darkness, although it was not yet half-past four, so that it evidently proceeded from no natural or ordinary cause. It was impossible for any man to see two yards to the right or left, and there were some who declared that with the darkness came an intolerable smell of sulphur, which positively made it hard to breathe. John Cheeseman, however, was in no ways alarmed or disconcerted by this occurrence; again he raised the Token, and almost immediately the sun burst forth again, and the darkness melted away in every direction. Fifty yards more and they would be at the spot to which they were marching with such determination. At this moment, all of a sudden, the road was rent visibly asunder before their eyes, and a huge chasm appeared immediately in their way, too wide to be crossed by

man or beast, and apparently of unfathomable depth.

"Verily," quoth Old Will, as he witnessed this occurrence, which had almost staggered even Cheeseman himself—"verily the evil one guards his own well! Courage, friend Cheeseman, for he cannot prevail against those who are on thy side."

Thus exhorted, the good farmer, who wanted but little encouragement, though somewhat taken aback at the moment, once more raised his Token, and calling upon his companions to wave their branches and follow him, stepped boldly into the chasm. Wonderful to relate, it immediately closed, as if it had never existed—as perhaps was indeed the case; for I fancy that many of the works of the evil ones are unreal, and only deceive the senses of mortal man whom they are meant to tempt or alarm, vanishing or fading away to nothing when encountered by the eye and heart of faith.

So the chasm closed, and John Cheeseman led his company forward, straight on to the very door of Kezia Mummery's cottage. Just as they approached, however, to the very great alarm and consternation of the whole party, a shower of red-hot cinders descended upon their heads, without the slightest warning, so thick and so fast that it seemed as if they must have been all immediately consumed then and there. Strange to say, the cinders no sooner touched the men than they melted into nothing, and produced not the slightest effect. Yet that they really were hot cinders was proved beyond all doubt, because one man, Tommy Padgham by name, was

severely burned in the back; and as he had not only dropped his green branch, but afterwards confessed that he had forgotten to say his prayers that morning, it is very evident that it was only their general obedience to the orders received from the guardian of the oak which prevented the party from suffering more severely.

As it was, however, no one else was hurt, and in spite of the cinders John Cheeseman advanced boldly to the cottage. Then, all at once, it seemed as if the tactics of the foe had changed. The door opened as if of itself, and seemed to invite the people to enter—about which they made no hesitation, though John Cheeseman grasped his Token firmly, and each man made the holy sign and kept tight hold of his branch as he crossed the threshold. They entered the room into which Jemima had at first been brought (though this they knew not), and for a moment stood still with astonishment at the sight which met their eyes.

Seated in a crazy old chair by her fireside was no less a person than old Kezia herself, apparently bent together by age, infirmity, and rheumatism, and striving to warm her hands over a smouldering log in the fireplace before her. On the other side of the same seat sat her hopeful son Mick, whilst her black cat was crouching between the two.

For an instant no one liked to speak, for in spite of all that had passed, and of the strict orders which they had received, there seemed something cowardly and unmanly in a number of men taking the offensive against a crippled old woman, and a son but little

removed from the same condition. From this feeling, or from some other which is less apparent, the men hesitated for an instant, as I say, and this gave old Kezia an opportunity which she had probably expected. She feebly turned her head around, displaying a countenance upon which were written misery and pain in every feature, save that her eyes never lost that unnatural brightness which surely betokens the witch. Then addressing herself at once to the leader of the party, she croaked out in pitiful tones—

"What's your will, Master Cheeseman—what's your will? Wherefore come ye to trouble a lone widow in her poverty and sorrow?"

John Cheeseman, now that it had come to the point, lacked words to answer this inquiry, and perchance the thought stole into his good-natured heart that, now he had got his daughter back safe and sound, there was no great reason for persecuting or punishing the old creature before him.

But stout-hearted Will Prebble was by his side, and was too well acquainted with the nature of those with whom they were dealing to allow any doubt or pity to enter his heart. So finding that the farmer did not immediately reply, he opened his mouth and spake out boldly—

"We be come," said he, "after business thou knowest well, dame, and to do that which thou has brought upon thyself. By St. Ursula of Egerton, disclose thyself, evil witch as thou art!"

At these words old Kezia trembled visibly all over, and a palpable tremor also seized upon her cat,

which seemed to swell out as well as to shiver as Old Will spoke.

At that instant one of the men, Harry Gurr by name, anxious to distinguish himself, or perhaps angry at the position taken by the old woman, owing to whose persuasion he had been one of the foremost in the attack upon Cheeseman's house, pushed forward and cried out—

"What, a'n't ye got nothing to say, Mother Mummery? Darned if you bean't a bad 'un, arter all!"

The words were scarcely out of his mouth, when the cat turned and, darting at the speaker like lightning, struck with her fore-paw a blow which caused his right arm to drop paralyzed by his side, whilst at the same time old Kezia half rose in her chair and made some mysterious passes with her crutch, which for an instant caused every one of her visitors to shudder and fall back as if compelled to do so by some strange and hidden power.

But by this time John Cheeseman had fully recovered both his self-possession and his determination to carry out to their completion the orders which he had received from the mysterious voice. He therefore seized and held up the Token which had already served him so well and so often, and shouting loudly, "St. Thomas of Canterbury, aid us!" stepped manfully forward.

A frightful yell broke at the same moment from both Kezia and her cat as he uttered these words, which were followed, or indeed accompanied, by Old Will's exclamation, "St. Dunstan! St. Dunstan!" as he strode on by his comrade's side.

But it was not only from the two creatures before them that the sounds of woe proceeded. From roof and rafter, from every nook and cranny and corner of the place—nay, from the very floor and fireplace, burst forth such a horrible chorus of doleful, unearthly, painful yells as completely deafened the ears of the whole party. Several, indeed, were so horrified and startled, that they incontinently dropped their green branches and clapped both hands to their ears. Wonderful to tell, every one who did so was immediately warned of his error in an unmistakable manner. One received a scratch down his leg from an invisible claw which marked him for life, inflicting a wound which upon every anniversary of that day opened and bled afresh and smarted badly for an hour at least; a second had a stroke across the upper part of his face which caused him to squint fearfully to the day of his death; whilst a third received a poke in the stomach which materially injured his digestion for ever afterwards.

Fortunately, however, most of the party held firmly to their branches, and suffered nothing from the yelling beyond the temporary annoyance to their ears and nerves. Some, indeed, observing the effect which had been produced upon the enemy by the words of their leaders, took to following their example, and loudly shouted out the names of their favourite saints; St. Edward the Confessor, St. Thomas of Canterbury, and St. Dunstan being—as was likely to be the case with Kentish peasants and men of Saxon descent—most frequently in their mouths.

Had all of them kept to such exclamations, it is probable that the rout of the evil ones would have been as speedy and complete as any one could have desired, and attended by no further ill consequences to any one. But the use of rough language—sadly prevalent even to the present day, in spite of school-boards, sanitary authorities, and the rural police—was even in those old days too much a habit among a certain class to be easily discarded, and this for the second time delayed the triumph of John Cheeseman and his associates.

In all probability, the evil ones would have left an ordinary dwelling long before. But Kezia Mummery's cottage, if we may believe the legend, had certainly been one of their favourite places of resort for many years. The Weald witches had met there again and again, and one shudders to think of the wicked plots which had doubtless been frequently concocted against mankind beneath that ill-starred though apparently unpretentious roof. So the powers of darkness clung to it with a tenacity beyond that which might have been expected, thereby affording, indeed, another instance of the difficulty of getting rid of evil when once it has been allowed to enter in and take possession.

At the first outburst of the awful yells which betokened the presence of unseen and enraged foes, both John Cheeseman and Old Will stopped short, being barely a couple of yards off Kezia Mummery's chair at that moment, and their followers naturally did the same. But the men of Kent were not long to be deterred by yells, of however terrible a descrip-

tion, and especially when the sounds were evidently those of anguish and discomfiture. In another second the leaders of the party would have taken a step forward; but before they could do so, one of their companions, by name Dick, the son of a small farmer in the neighbourhood, unluckily forestalled them. Fancying he saw something like a grin upon the countenance of old Kezia's son, and perhaps having something of a grudge against him in connection with the robbery of hen-roosts, at which Mick Mummery was commonly reported to be particularly skilful, the young man suddenly rushed upon him, seized him by the shoulder, and at the same time shouted out in a loud tone—

"Drat your howling and hullabuloo! the deuce is in it if I don't settle this chap!"

Rash and ill-omened words! Scarce had they been uttered when the yells not only redoubled, but visibly changed from the expressions of pain and despair to those of renewed hope not unmixed with triumph.

There were those, indeed, among the Headcorn men, who ever after declared that at this particular moment they saw as well as heard signs of the wicked ones, and that from divers corners of the room, dark, dusky, shadowy faces were for an instant distinctly visible, peering out from the semi-darkness, each with a grimace of fearful import, and a leer of malice such as had never been seen on human countenance.

Be this as it may, the effect of poor Dick's words was felt by no one more than by himself. For, on

the instant, the youth whom all had supposed to be little better than a deformed cripple rose from his seat, even as the hand of his assailant touched his shoulder, and seizing him by the back of the neck, twisted him round as if he had been a child, shook him violently, and with a kick so hard that it was positively heard, sent him flying into a corner of the room, where he fell like a log, and lay stunned and helpless. After a while he rose again, and when the affair was over, was found seated outside upon the bank by the roadside; but from that day forth poor Dick was never himself again, and during the course of a long life was always pointed out as one whose mental and bodily powers had been rudely shaken by his contact with witchcraft, and his attempt to overcome the same in his own strength, and whilst loose and idle words, if no worse, were in his mouth.

As soon as this event had taken place, the yells took the form of triumphant notes even more plainly than before, and some sounds differing little from wild shrieks of laughter mingled with them, as if the fiends were mightily cheerful over what had happened, and were still hopeful of a favourable result.

But, during all this scene, neither John Cheeseman nor the bold blacksmith ever lost faith or courage for one single instant. Come what might, they *knew that nothing could withstand the powers which* were ranged on their side, and that the Token which the farmer carried would in the end prevail over all the foes which could be arrayed against them. So even when their young companion met with such a

rough reception at the hands of Mick Mummery, these two good and true men quailed not for a second, but attributed it at once to that which was undoubtedly the true cause, and promptly counteracted the effect of poor Dick's unhallowed language by their own words and actions. Shouting again, persistently and loudly, the names of St. Thomas of Canterbury and St. Dunstan, they sprang forward, Cheeseman at the same time displaying the Token, which he held above his head. Again the yells sank into wild, unearthly cries of despair, and the crisis was evidently at hand. The two friends stretched out their hands at the same moment to seize the old woman, when a further marvel occurred which has now to be related.

The old woman with a hasty effort, and one that seemed almost supernatural in one of her age and infirmities, threw her crutch across to her hopeful son, muttering some words with great rapidity as she did so. Catching it in his hand, the youth struck the wall of the room nearest to which he sat, and therefrom at once proceeded a dense smoke, which quickly obscured that end of the apartment, but not before the attacking party had time to see the extraordinary behaviour of the cat at precisely the same moment. This creature, which had remained, since her attack upon Harry Gurr, silently glaring upon the party, evidently found her feelings rather too much for her when the Token approached near. She turned literally pale with fear—and those who have never seen a black cat turn pale have no idea of the extraordinary appearance which it

presents at such a moment. Her black fur seemed to grow grey all in a moment, and her face had a leaden, ashen hue which did not render its expression any the more agreeable to look upon. But the people had little opportunity of studying her general appearance, for, arching her back for one moment, and giving vent to one violent burst of spitting, just for all the world as if she had been a natural and ordinary cat, she darted directly up the chimney, scattering a lot of sparks behind her which might have possibly come from the smouldering log upon the fireplace, but which the wise ones all declared to have visibly proceeded from the creature herself.

Others of the party now seized old Kezia, who submitted unresistingly to her fate, inasmuch as she had now no power to resist, the evil ones having fled—as was shown by the entire cessation of the yells which had lately resounded so fearfully through the place.

Meanwhile, as John Cheeseman again waved the Token aloft, the smoke cleared away from the corner of the room, and disclosed a great gap in the wall, through which it may be supposed that Mick Mummery had made his escape. I say "it may be supposed," because I confess that this part of the story is still wrapped in mystery. Nothing, I hope, would induce me to hand down to posterity anything about which I was myself at all doubtful, and I have been careful, in all these chronicles of Kentish witchcraft, to be precise and accurate in every detail. Therefore when I come to matters upon which tradition is silent, or regarding which the accounts vary—as they do sometimes in a manner which makes it almost

hopeless to arrive at the truth—I always take care to make my readers acquainted with the fact that such is the case. So with respect to all that concerns Mick Mummery, I frankly and freely confess that I have never been able to exactly satisfy myself as to his real nature and character, nor as to the part he actually played in the scene which I am now relating. I should have deemed him to have been an imp or familiar spirit attached to his reputed mother, but that his desire to wed Jemima Cheeseman appears to go against such a supposition; and as Kezia Mummery's cat was evidently an evil one, it is hardly likely that, with so many witches to be supplied, one lady of that profession could have been spared two spirits.

Every one may guess for himself what position Mick really occupied, and also what became of him at the moment when he seized the old woman's crutch and struck the cottage wall. His was not the only blow struck at that particular instant, for Jack Love and Harry Hobbs, two stalwart men among the attackers of the cottage, and both armed with stout oaken cudgels, no sooner saw what had befallen their comrade Dick than they aimed desperate blows at his destroyer, fully believing him to have been killed outright. The smoke enveloped Mick in a moment, but Jack and Harry struck straight and strong, and both of them more than once; and not only did they each vow that they knew by the feeling that they had struck home on head and shoulders each time, but there was blood, upon Harry's stick especially, which went

far to bear out their belief. Moreover, being pious and thoughtful men, they had not forgotten, whilst striking, to shout out the name of St. Bridget of Pluckley, which had doubtless added much force to their arms and weight to their blows.

Be this as it may, when the smoke had cleared off, and the gap in the wall appeared before the astonished eyes of the party, there was no Mick Mummery to be seen anywhere about the place. He might have dived into the woods, or gone down below, or been carried away by some of his mother's friends—at all events he was not there, either on one side of the wall or on the other. But, immediately on the outside of the cottage, opposite the gap, lay an enormous hedgehog, panting and exhausted as if it had been severely injured and hurt. Several of the men observed this creature, and probably at another time would have killed it then and there, for Kentish peasants have a dislike to such animals, and attribute to them many mischievous propensities. But at that moment the men were all intent upon Kezia, and no one cared to stop and attend to the hedgehog. Afterwards, when some of them looked for it, it was gone, and no traces of it were anywhere to be discovered. Then putting two and two together, and remembering that the hedgehog, bloodstained and injured, lay just about where the body of Mick Mummery would have fallen if he had succumbed to the blows given him by Love and Hobbs, there were not a few who came to the conclusion that the young man and the animal were one and the same, and that the evil ones had aided Mick to assume this shape in order that he might

have the better chance of escaping from his enemies.

Some there were, indeed (for I love to give both sides), who remarked that if the powers of darkness could do this, they could probably with equal ease have carried the hedgehog farther off, out of sight and hearing of his foes, if indeed they could not have prevented the young man from being hurt altogether.

But to this it was answered, with some justice as I always thought, that most likely the evil ones had no power to prevent injury from the blows given in the presence of the Token; and that as to the rest, it is not for us weak mortals to know what are the precise limits of power assigned to those against whom we have to war. They have quite enough as it is, goodness knows; but that which they have is, happily for us, limited, and it is quite possible that, if they did change Mick Mummery into the shape of a hedgehog, that was all they were allowed to do.

It is idle, and might soon become dangerous, to speculate upon such matters, and as I have already said, each person who reads this story may form his or her own opinion. There is no doubt as to that of the neighbourhood at that time, and I believe for long afterwards, if not down to the present day. Hedgehogs are ruthlessly slaughtered, not only at Headcorn but elsewhere, by men and boys who find them, and who believe that they are doing a good work in their destruction. For they are popularly believed, if not to milk cows, at least to suck eggs and destroy young birds and small rabbits; and for some time after the events of which I am giving you

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a faithful narrative, no farmer's wife in or near Headcorn ever lost the tender brood of her hen or duck, by rats or any other mischance, without attributing the misfortune to a hedgehog, and frequently winding up her lamentations over the same with a wise shake of the head and a still wiser remark—

"Ah, 'tis that Mick Mummery again! He wor always desp'rate fond of chickens!"

But whatever may have been the son's fate, it is high time that we return to the unfortunate mother. I have said that she was helpless to resist those who had seized her; but though incapable of physical exertion, she had still her tongue, that infallible weapon of a woman, of which even a witch can only be deprived with life. This weapon Kezia Mummery employed in a continuous and violent manner, cursing and abusing every one who approached her, and using language of a nature so awful and wicked that even the roughest-tongued among the party fairly shivered with horror. It must certainly be confessed that the unhappy old woman had as much justification for anger as it is well possible to have, for she was subjected to no gentle usage. As the events which had recently occurred proved beyond doubt that she was a witch of the worst character, and in league with evil and terrible beings, there was no longer (if there had ever been) the smallest hesitation among the Headcorn party as to how Kezia Mummery should be treated, or the slightest pity in any heart towards one who, by her own abominable practices, had put herself at once and for ever beyond the pale of Christian forbearance and sympathy, which would

in ordinary cases have respected her age and infirmities. There was only one course to be pursued with such a creature, namely, to duck her forthwith in the nearest horse-pond, and see whether those who had hitherto served her—or he whom she had served—would be able and willing to save her from the hands of Christian men performing such a righteous deed. So in spite of her ill words and threats, they seized on the old woman, dragged her from her chair, hauled her through the door and across the road, and in a very short space of time deposited her in a pond of peculiarly uninviting appearance, which happened to be situate within twenty or thirty yards of the cottage on the Smarden side. It was a pond joining the great woods, between them and the road, and as it was the duty of no one in particular to clean it out, it was full of coarse weeds and mud, and no very pleasant place to bathe in at any time. Most decidedly unpleasant, then, must it have been for a rheumatic old woman to be plunged therein under the circumstances in which Kezia Mummery found herself rudely thrust into the pond and soundly ducked by her relentless persecutors. The latter, however, started back for a moment at first, for no sooner did the old woman come in contact with the usually cold and placid waters of the aforesaid pond than they began to boil and hiss, just for all the world as if hot coals instead of a human form had been thrown into them; and this put the final seal to the proof that it could be none other than a witch with whom the people were dealing. They did deal with her, and that most

effectually, for though she screamed, and struggled with greater strength than you would have thought it possible she could possess, once, twice, thrice she was held below the water, so that no portion of her head or body should escape immersion; and none of those agents of the powers of darkness who had so often been at her beck and call, made so much as the slightest effort to save her. Probably the Token was too much for them, or perhaps it was only another instance of the way in which evil and unprincipled friends fall away in the hour of need and trouble.

Whilst some of the party were thus engaged with Kezia, others proceeded to carry out what they believed to be the orders of the Voice, by wrecking her cottage, which they did as completely as possible; and finally set light to the old thatch, so that an end was speedily made of the miserable dwelling, and nothing remained but a heap of blackened ruins.

But the work at the pond went merrily on, and the men called to each other to make an end of the old hag speedily, so that they might go on and complete the good work by dealing with her cronies and accomplices.

The business was at its height when the party were interrupted by an unexpected visit. All of a sudden Jemima Cheeseman came flying rather than running down the road from her father's house, her eyes sparkling with excitement, and her whole countenance glowing with the same.

"Stay, stay!" she cried; "An ye be men—and men of Kent—hold your hands and cease tormenting

the old woman. Is this a work for strong men? Show her mercy, as ye hope to receive it!"

At this earnest entreaty from one who was not only loved and respected by all, but who, as the person injured by the witch, had the best right of any one present to decide upon her fate, the men who were ducking Kezia Mummery instinctively desisted for a moment, and stood irresolute, not quite sure what they ought to do. But John Cheeseman lifted up his voice and spoke forthwith.

"Daughter," said he, "thou bean't thyself—thou knowest not what thou sayest. Hie thee home to thy mother; 'tis no work for such as thou here."

But the girl, usually so docile and obedient, made yet another effort, in despite of the parental authority which thus opposed her errand of mercy.

"Father," she cried, "those who show mercy shall receive it! Be not cruel—the woman is old and infirm; spare her that she may have time to repent of her ill deeds! Heaven will punish her if it be His will that she be punished!"

As she spoke she came still nearer the pond, and held out her arms with an imploring gesture. But Old Will stepped forth towards her and motioned her to go back.

"Peace, wench!" he said, in a stern tone. "If Heaven punishes, think ye not it is by mortal hands; and are we not the agents of Heaven in this matter? Be off, and that quickly!" And here he added in a lower voice: "Beware how thou speakest of mercy for witches, lest folk think that thou art still under their spell, and deal with thee accordingly."

Thus admonished, and being wise enough to know that Old Will's hint was not one to be despised, Jemima, though not without tears of sorrow and disappointment, forbore to urge her wishes further, and turned sadly from the pond—though not before the drowning woman had cast upon her a look in which she fancied she read gratitude for the effort which she had so bravely, though fruitlessly, made. Slowly she retraced her steps to the house, and long before she reached it the world had ended for old Kezia Mummery.

I have made every inquiry to discover what they did with her after they had washed out her life and witchcraft together. But upon this point tradition is silent. There is no record of her spirit having been seen flying off on a broom-stick, or carried away by a winged cat with flaming eyes and erect tail; or, in fact of anything wonderful and supernatural having attended her decease, beyond those circumstances which I have related. Nor can I discover that she was buried or burned, or that any account exists of the disposal of that which was mortal of the old woman. So I must again leave everybody to judge for himself what was most likely to have happened, and one guess is quite as likely to be right as another. Kezia Mummery was, at any rate, safely put out of the way, and, this having been done, the witch-hunters had to decide upon their next step, a matter which did not occupy them for any length of time.

Most of the men had remarked that Goody Maylam and Betty Bridger had been with Kezia at the attack on Cheeseman's house, and among the foremost to

urge the people on. Both these women lived at a short distance off, and it was towards their dwellings that the zealous witch-hunters at once advanced. The first-named old lady, however, was not at home, for, having received timely intimation of their visit, she had fled to the hills, where indeed she remained, so far as I am aware, for the rest of her life, having taken refuge with old Tabitha Fitch.

The records of the mischief which these two evil ones did at Egerton and thereabouts would fill a volume, and I think that the whole backbone of Kent has hardly produced two more active and malevolent witches. The account of their trial and final execution upon Egerton Hill is not to be found in Hasted, and has been somewhat unaccountably omitted from all the standard histories of Kent. If any one, however, should come across an old-fashioned pamphlet entitled "Chronicles of the Chalk Hills," to which the name of the author is not attached, and which has, possibly on that account, not been quoted in any of the aforesaid histories, he will find this among other strange and eventful records. These two witches, however, rarely descended the hill, and never, so far as I know, revisited Headcorn after the death of Kezia Mummery. The party, who found Goody Maylam flown, served her house as they had done that of her friend Kezia, a circumstance which probably deprived her of the inducement to return, and thus contributed to her choice of another locality for her residence.

They then proceeded to visit Betty Bridger; but here they found some excuse for mercy. The woman had a husband, who, whilst he owned that he

suspected his wife of an inclination towards witchcraft, stated his determination to "whack it out of her" before long. As the husband expressed himself hopefully, and there was, moreover, no horse-pond immediately at hand, the followers of John Cheeseman resolved to show mercy, especially as there was nothing very definite proved against the woman, save her presence at and encouragement of the attack on the farm. So they contented themselves with nailing up horseshoes over all the doors of the house, and presenting the husband with a stick cut from a crab-apple tree, with which if any woman under suspicion of witchcraft is only sufficiently belaboured, she is almost certain to repent and reform. I fancy that this or some other remedy must have been tried by the man Bridger after the departure of the party, for Betty was never again heard of as consorting with witches, and, for all I know, lived and died without getting into any more scrapes of the kind.

There was little more that the Headcorn witch-seekers could accomplish that night, and they therefore shortly afterwards separated, and retired to their several homes. Indeed they had done their work pretty effectually, having killed one witch outright, banished another, and cured a third, which was very fair sport for one evening. Of Tabitha Fitch they knew nothing, and had little need to fear her after the warning she would have received from the fate of old Kezia; and as to Madge Howland, they knew it to be hopeless to pursue a person without fixed abode, and could only hope that she too would read

in what had occurred a lesson which would keep her away from Headcorn parish.

So the party separated, and most of them were glad enough to get to bed, though it was scarce half-past six when they gave up their work, which had all been accomplished in little more than two hours.

But John Cheeseman could not retire to rest without one more visit to the great oak, in order to thank the owner of the voice for the assistance which he had so effectually rendered. Leaving the young men at home, therefore, he strolled forth alone once more, and slowly approached the old tree, where, in homely words, he poured forth the gratitude of his honest heart.

For some moments there was no reply, but presently the voice spoke once more in the same tones—

"Well hast thou done; the witches' might
In Headcorn now shall pass from sight;
And spells and charms alone remain
To maids who seek fond hearts to gain.
Now guard thy Token free from rust,
To Faith and Honesty still trust,
And blessing rest on Cheeseman folk
Whilst still endures the Dunstan Oak."

Here it ceased, and John Cheeseman, having attentively listened to what had been said, kept repeating it over to himself as he walked home, and immediately told it to his family, who were duly delighted. It was good to be told that the power of the witches in Headcorn had passed away; and it was, if possible, even more satisfactory to know that, whilst the great oak endured, a blessing would rest

upon the house of Cheeseman. Tom Pearson, indeed, remarked that there was at least *one* maid in Headcorn who required no spells, and none but the charms which nature had so freely bestowed upon her to win as many hearts as she pleased, but that he trusted one would be enough for her. As he said this his arm stole gently around Jemima's waist, and ——but never mind what next.

There was a regular good family talk, and the only part of it which may possibly be of some interest to my readers was based upon the last line of the last speech of the voice from the tree, which had spoken of that noble work of creation as "the Dunstan Oak."

On being asked for more particulars with regard to her sojourn under Kezia Mummery's roof, Jemima could recollect little until the evening when she had rejoined her father.

At that time, she said, she seemed to have been (as was indeed the case) in a deep sleep or trance, when she was suddenly awakened by the touch of a hand upon her forehead. Starting from slumber she looked around, perceiving at once that she was in a room which seemed strange to her sight. Standing immediately before her was a venerable man in the brown dress of a monk, whose countenance bore an expression in which benevolence and energy were strangely blended. In one hand he held, as nearly as she could tell, a rough-shapen cross; in the other he unmistakably grasped a pair of tongs. He made signs to her to follow him, which she immediately did without fear or hesitation. She knew where she was the very instant she was outside the cottage,

and, following her guide, advanced straight upon the churchyard and the oak tree, when he suddenly vanished from her sight and she beheld her father beneath the tree.

To his eyes the monk had never been visible; but after the story of Jemima, the implement which the aforesaid monk had carried in his hand, and the last words uttered by the mysterious voice from the tree, no doubt any longer existed that St. Dunstan had rescued Jemima, and that it was by the aid and protection of that holy man that they owed the destruction and end of the power of witchcraft in Headcorn parish.

What need I say more? Of course Tom Pearson and Jemima were happily married, and equally of course they never repented it. Of course the Cheeseman family prospered, and as there are people of the name still living in East Kent, and the old oak still stands by Headcorn churchyard, who shall dare to say that the words of St. Dunstan have fallen to the ground?

I pass constantly by the old place in the railway: I look out of the window and see the old oak; I see the new Board-school between me and the village, and I know that no witchcraft can come to the place now in the teeth of such an establishment. But I leave it to others to decide whether the people are better and happier now than they were of old, and whether or no there may be other things than witches to get rid of for which the parish and neighbourhood might be glad enough to find a St. Dunstan!

RIGMAROLE; OR, THE SEARCH FOR A SOUL.

THERE was once an old Elf who lived in a vast forest, where indeed he had resided for many centuries, and was in high repute among his fellows for his knowledge of elf-lore and magic arts. The worthy old gentleman had three sons, who for some time shared his abode with him. But when the youngest of them had attained the age of one hundred years—when, as all the world

knows, elves come of age — the father began to think he should be more comfortable without so many of them at home. As far as the eldest boy was concerned it did not matter much, for he took to elf-work kindly from the first, followed the advice and example of his father as much as possible; and was so often out on works of mischief, directed against mankind and the rest of the animal world, that he gave the old fellow at home very little of his company, and no trouble at all. The second son was not so sharp as his brother, but was sufficiently evil and sprite-like to give promise of future proficiency in mischief, and his respected parent therefore apprenticed him to the wickedest old witch of his acquaintance, under whose able tuition he soon began to learn the true business of an elf, and bid fair to become as great a torment as any of his race. But the third child was at once a trouble and a mystery to his father. His name was Rigmarole, and his nature differed entirely from that of his brothers and family. From the earliest stage of his existence he shirked elf-work, and declared that he "wouldn't go elfing for anybody." Instead of teazing animals or human creatures, he always preferred to do them a good turn if he could, and steadfastly set his face against the habits of tormenting and worrying which are the recognized and legitimate laws of elfdom all over the world. This was of course a sad trial to a father who, having given to all of his children equal advantages, could not see them neglected by any one child without feeling it deeply. It was in vain that he attempted

to instil into little Rigmarole the true elfish spirit of mischief, and to lead him by wise precepts and judicious example upon the slippery paths of vice. The boy *would* be good in spite of him. He hated lying, abhorred stealing, resolutely declined to speak evil of his neighbours, and was in fact as little like a wicked elf as if he had been a good fairy.

This very much reconciled his father to the idea which he had conceived of having his house more to himself, and therefore, when his second son had gone off to the witch, he determined that the third should not stay long behind. He was still in doubt as to the precise course he should adopt, when accident hastened his decision. He had given the boy an exercise in bad language to write out and translate, and instead of rendering it as he should, the young fellow softened and modified every evil expression, and made it evident that the same sentiments could have been set forth in perfectly proper and becoming language. This much enraged the old elf, who saw in it either gross stupidity or an insult to himself, which he could not tolerate. So he told his son that his patience was now exhausted, and he neither could nor would tolerate any longer his presence at home. Forth he must go and seek his own living as best he could!

The young Rigmarole listened to this speech with respectful attention, but with a heavy heart. He felt that he had done nothing wrong; but he knew his father's disposition too well to doubt that he meant what he said, and that prayers and entreaties on his part would be worse than useless. He must

go forth a wanderer from the home where the first hundred years of his young life had been passed; and he must go, too, not with a father's blessing and good wishes for his success, but with the consciousness that his parent disapproved of him entirely, and was uncommonly glad to get rid of him. For a moment he stood still, stunned with grief and dismay, when he heard the harsh sentence of his sire. Then he looked proudly up, knowing that right was on his side, and asked his father where he desired him to go to, and what should be his career in future life.

The old elf replied that he really did not much care. His son had refused to follow the usual pursuits of his family and friends, or to profit by the example which he had endeavoured to set him. He could not therefore expect that any elf would take such an interest in him as might otherwise have been the case. Still, if he could help his son, he would not be unwilling to do so even now, if he had formed any wish towards the accomplishment of which he might be able to contribute. There were, he added, a number of elfs who befriended mankind, but they were of a different sort altogether from the race to which he and his children had the happiness to belong, and his son would receive his bitter malediction if he sought or in any way allied himself to *them*. Otherwise, he might go where he pleased, with the sole stipulation that he did not come back again.

Rigmarole heard his father to the end, and then threw himself at his feet in a suppliant attitude.

"Sir," he said—for the old elf always required that

his sons should thus address him, and scrupulously exacted from them the greatest respect—"Sir, if you banish me, your unhappy child, from your presence and from my home, I have no wish save to live and be happy somewhere else. But since I seem to be unworthy to be an elf such as you and my brothers, and you forbid me to join or seek the society of other species of elves, will you not teach me how to become a mortal? Surely there must be a place for me somewhere in the world, and the desire of my heart is to share the toil and the lot which human creatures endure."

The old elf smiled grimly as he replied to his entreating son. "Your wish," said he, "is one which it is beyond my power to grant. Mortal men have a double existence: within their frail bodies exists an immortal soul, which, when the body is worn out, or perishes by disease or accident, floats forth into regions which are unknown, and to destinies which are not yet comprehended by mortals, and of which I may not speak. But we elves are of a different nature altogether. We are not possessed of souls, and our present and future are one. We look forward to no change, no improvement in our position, and we consequently make the best of things as they are. I never wanted a soul myself, believing it to be a dangerous possession, which, if not properly treated, may lead its possessor into uncomfortable circumstances after it quits the body. This, however, is a matter of opinion, and if you desire, and can manage to get, a soul, by all means do so. Do not let *me* stand in your way on any account.

RIGMAROLE AND HIS FATHER.

How you should proceed, however, is another question altogether. There, I fear, I am unable to help you. All I can do is to give you this ring, which, you will observe, has a single stone set in it, which may appear to you at first sight to be of no great value. It is, however, a ruby of a peculiar kind, and is endowed with a marvellous property. You must always wear it upon the fourth finger of your left hand; and when you are in conversation with any one, press the thumb or first finger of your right hand upon it, and you will immediately be able to see and know what is passing in that person's mind, and consequently whether he or she is telling you the truth or attempting to mislead and deceive you. Perhaps among your favourite mortals there may be no such thing as mischief, malice, and treachery, about which you find such fault with your own people, you shameless elf. *That* you will be able to discover for yourself. For my part I do not believe in your mortals. A fig for them and their souls, too, say I! Give me soul-less elf-land with its fun and its frolics, its teasing and tormenting, its mischief and roguery—these are quite enough for me; and to think of a chit of a child like you, who is not yet a hundred and one, despising the ways of his own kith and kin as you do! Ugh! it's positively sickening. Here, take your ring and go along with you, do!"

With these words the old elf thrust his gift into the hands of the weeping Rigmarole, who had no need to test its wonderful powers in order to be acquainted with the melancholy fact that his own father's real thoughts and feelings about him were

those of mingled contempt and disgust. He thanked his parent, however, in appropriate terms, and would fain have prolonged their conversation for a time, especially since it would be the last opportunity, probably for several centuries at least, that they might have of conversing together. But the old elf had already said all he intended to say, and moreover he was anxious to be off egg-stealing, which was his favourite amusement, next to that of teasing a rabbit or other animal when it had been caught in a trap, which is always a delight beyond all others to the more wicked class of elves. So he turned rudely away from poor Rigmarole and told him not to make a fool of himself any more, but to go about his business without delay. The poor youth heaved a deep sigh at this additional mark of the total want of affection on the part of his unnatural parent, and stood watching the retreating form of the latter as he disappeared in the high fern into which he had stepped. Soon he was out of sight, and as the banished child knew that he must not be found there when his father returned, he put his ring upon his finger, took a good stout oaken stick in his hand, cast one longing, lingering look upon the home which had been the shelter of his youth, and set bravely off upon his travels.

The forest in which the elves dwelt, and through which young Rigmarole now took his way, was one of exceeding beauty. Oaks of enormous size threw out their branches, rich with magnificent foliage, above his head; whilst their mighty trunks, large enough, when age should have sufficiently hollowed

them, to be the home of a whole nation of elves, reared themselves on every side. Dense thickets of brakes and brambles afforded a refuge to wild animals of every description, whilst here and there the traveller came upon open spaces in the very heart of the forest, in which no trees grew, no thickets occupied the ground, and the reason for the existence of which no one knew, unless indeed the elves and fairies of former times had kept them for playgrounds, and had danced there so long and so vigorously as to prevent any trees or bushes from growing up as they had done everywhere else. It was indeed a beautiful forest, and so thought the elf as he made his way through it, without having formed in his own mind any exact idea of the route he should take. On he walked, quietly but steadily, admiring the beautics of nature as he went, but feeling at his heart a dull, heavy kind of sensation which diminished the pleasure he would otherwise have felt in their contemplation. For if a man or an elf has a secret sorrow, or anything which weighs upon his spirits, it greatly lessens his capacity for enjoyment, just as a boy or girl cannot find any pleasure in the most amusing playthings if he or she happens to have a regular bad fit of toothache in that particularly troublesome hollow tooth! Well, his father's unkindness was the elf's toothache, and he could not get over it, although he tried to console himself by thinking that it was undeserved. However, undeserved or not, there it was, and he was now feeling its results. He walked on for some distance until he suddenly found himself upon the outskirts of the forest

in the direction nearest the sea. Here the scenery changed. For some time past the oaks had been fewer, and now their places were taken by large pine-trees, rearing their tall, straight forms up to heaven with a stiffness and stateliness peculiarly their own. Presently they became fewer and fewer, until there were only straggling trees here and there, and the elf began to see huge rocks, upon which the vegetation was scanty, and the whole face of nature appeared to be changed, for the aspect of the country was bleak and barren, and such trees and shrubs as there were had a withered, unhealthy look about them very different from those which grew in the grand old forest which he had left behind. Coming round the corner of a large rock, the little elf suddenly perceived the form of an old woman, who was occupied in gathering sticks, and, as she did so, was muttering to herself in a peevish and discontented tone.

"Good morrow, mother!" said the elf, cheerfully, thinking he should startle the old lady, whose back was towards him, if he came close upon her without speaking.

The hag immediately turned herself round, and disclosed the ugliest set of features you can possibly imagine, for there was not a good one among them, and age and evil passions had so wrinkled and distorted her face that, had her features been originally good, their beauty must have long perished.

"What do you call me mother for, you imp of darkness?" she replied to his civil salutation. "I am no mother of yours, thank the fiends; and if I

were you would be learning your lessons at home, instead of gadding about the country, you idle young scamp!"

Rigmarole was rather nettled at this most uncivil reply to his polite words, and felt that the old woman was hardly behaving in a proper manner towards a stranger. Being, however, of a gentle and courteous disposition, he withheld the angry retort that rose to his lips, and made his best bow as he replied—

"Madam, I am not wandering about by choice, but from necessity, and I am sorry to have given you any offence."

By this time the old crone had left off gathering sticks, and was looking stedfastly at him with her grey, stony eyes.

"Fine words, fine words!" she said; "but for all you speak thus, I warrant you are as much of a vagabond as the rest of your tribe. I know you well, all of ye, for have I not got one of ye here as an apprentice?—and a regular bad 'un he is, that little Tiddletip!"

At these words Rigmarole started, for he found that he had unwittingly stumbled upon the very old witch to whom his brother had been apprenticed.

"Madam," he said, with another bow, "although I was not aware of the fact, it seems that you are the lady with whom my brother resides, for such is he whom you have just mentioned."

"Your brother!" cried the old woman. "Then there's a pretty pair of ye, that's all I can say. A mischievous young varmint he is, if there ever was one, and I'll be bound you are just the same or worse."

The little elf felt somewhat hurt at this hasty and severe condemnation, and was anxious to justify himself in the eyes of his brother's employer.

"Indeed, madam," he rejoined, "it is not as you suppose. I am anxious to earn my bread honestly, but my father has turned me out of doors, and I am now in want of employment."

As he spoke, a change came over the face of the old woman, as she continued to regard him stedfastly with her cold eyes.

"Well," she rejoined, "it may be as you say, and one ought not to judge others harshly. Perhaps I might find something for you to do if you chose to come and live with me. Would you like to do so?"

"Oh yes, very much!" quickly answered the elf, thinking how kind the speaker was, and how pleasant it would be to find himself again under the same roof with his brother.

"Then," continued the hag, "if you consent to do so, you have only got to come to my cave and sign the agreement, and you can come and dwell with your brother and me."

"All right," cried Rigmarole, and was about to follow her to the place she named, when suddenly he felt a nut strike him sharply on the tip of his nose, and looking about to see whence it came, perceived his affectionate brother Tiddletip hiding behind a bush close by, and roaring with laughter at the success of his shot. Seeing that he was discovered, he darted from his place of concealment, rushed up to his brother, and after an ineffectual attempt to

trip him up, shook him warmly by the hand, and said he was very glad to see him.

"Where are you going, Rig?" he asked.

His brother pointed to the old woman and explained what had passed between them, at the same time telling him how he had been turned adrift by his father.

As he told his story, he could not but observe the extraordinary grimaces in which Tiddletip indulged, ending in another violent fit of laughter.

"Going with Granny, are you?" he said, as soon as he had sufficiently recovered to speak; and lightly tripping round in front of the old woman, "Here I am, deary!" he cried, and placing another nut between his finger and thumb, aimed a second successful shot, and hit her exactly in the same place as he had struck his brother.

Upon this the witch flew into a fearful passion and called him every bad name under the sun; which he did not appear to mind in the least, but skipped gaily around her, making the most impertinent remarks upon her conduct and appearance. When her wrath had somewhat subsided, she pointed to Rigmarole—who stood at a short distance off, not a little embarrassed at the scene—and muttered some words to her apprentice which caused him to skip more violently than ever, and to rub his hands with glee.

"All right!" he cried. "All right! What a lark! Come on, Rig!"

And the three advanced towards the witch's cave hard by. When they were close to it the crone turned, and addressing Rigmarole in a kindly tone,

bade him enter first. He was just about to do so, when the thought suddenly came into his head that he might just as well know what were the real intentions of the old woman towards him, as her kind offers were hardly such as he should have expected from the character which he had heard of her, and the last words of his brother had a somewhat suspicious sound about them. So he stopped short, put his right hand over his left, and with the thumb of the former pressed hard upon the ruby in his ring. Instantly the thoughts which occupied the breast of the old woman were disclosed to his knowledge. Bound by the laws, which she could not break, to keep the elf she had received from his father under certain conditions, and to dismiss him at the end of his term, she found that she had rather a hard bargain with Master Tiddletip. But, if she could get any elf or mortal child willingly to enter the cave before her, she could compel him to sign an agreement which she had drawn up herself, by which he would become her slave for many years, if not for ever. It was into this bargain she had intended to trick poor Rigmarole, and his own brother had been quite ready to enter into the plan, inasmuch as he would have not only gained more liberty for himself by having another to help do the work, but being a lawful apprentice and not a slave, would have been able to tease, bully, and domineer over Rigmarole to his heart's content. The little elf started back aghast as his ring told him the secret of the witch's apparent kindness, and in that instant his brother perceived that it was discovered. He

immediately set up another of his wild laughs, and skipping again before the witch, snapped his fingers jeeringly in her face, whilst he shrieked out in shrill tones—

"He knows it, he knows it; the ring has told him! Granny's sold! Granny's sold! Ha, ha, ha!"

RIGMAROLE REFUSES TO ENTER THE CAVE.

The old woman's face grew distorted with rage.

"A'n't you going in?" she asked Rigmarole in a quivering voice.

"I think not, thank you, madam," replied the latter, calmly.

"Well," rejoined she, "I don't suppose you will,

you little tadpole, you miserable atom. Drat that ring, whatever it may be! *I'd* have taught you how to earn your living, you varmint! *I'd* have shown you what work is!"

"So she would, so she would!" cried Tiddletip, as he still danced round her, shrieking with laughter, until she darted furiously at him with intent to box his ears soundly, if no worse; upon which, still laughing, he darted into the bushes and escaped, without so much as saying a word of regret or apology to the brother in the plot against whom he had so readily and wickedly joined.

Now that he knew the vile intentions of the witch, Rigmarole had no reason for showing her any more civility, or indeed for remaining in her neighbourhood. He therefore informed her, in concise but telling language, what he thought of her conduct; and being, as a free-born elf, safe from her magic arts unless he voluntarily placed himself within her power, he had no difficulty in leaving her, which he did, without regarding the bad language with which she followed him until he was out of sight. The poor little fellow sighed deeply as he walked along, thinking that if the adventure through which he had just passed was a specimen of those which would attend his journey through life, he should have but a rough time of it, and find some little difficulty in getting on. He reflected, however, that everybody was not a witch, and that there must be good as well as bad people in the world if he could only manage to find them. He might be worse off, too, inasmuch as he had the inestimable advantage of being able to

discover the real thoughts and intentions of those in whose company he might be thrown, instead of being left to guess at them.

Comforted by this reflection, he plucked up courage and proceeded on his journey, leaving behind him the witch's cave and its surrounding scenery, and gradually making his way down to the seashore. Here, instead of the shingle which generally lines the edge of the water, there was a beautiful bed of sand extending some distance on either side. When the tide came in this grew soft and unsafe, and the water, soaking gradually underneath it, claimed it as part of the ocean kingdom, and for the most part covered it entirely after a while. But at low water it became hard and firm, and you could walk a long way upon its surface, when the fine particles of sand glittered here and there in the sunlight like diamonds, and numerous small thin shells remained embedded where they had been brought up and left by the waves.

There was a little fishing-village not far off, and from this the children used to come out when the tide permitted and gather these shells, which, when whole and unbroken, were used as ornaments in various ways, according to the ingenuity of those who so employed them, and who then sold them in the nearest towns, and thus obtained a small profit which repaid the labour of collecting them. Upon this sand came the little elf, and thence had his first view of the great ocean. He thought it very lovely, unlike anything that he had ever seen in his short hundred-year life, and he forgot his home, his father,

and all his troubles, as he gazed upon it with wondering eyes. Presently his attention was attracted to some children, who came slowly walking across

RIGMAROLE AT THE SEASHORE.

the sands, looking for shells as they did so. Little Rigmarole advanced to meet them, and as he drew

near one of them saw him and set up a shout of laughter.

"See what a droll little chap!" he cried; which the elf thought an uncivil method of addressing a stranger, but knowing that the children were even younger than himself he said nothing, but timidly approached them.

"What's your name, and what do you want?" immediately demanded a sturdy urchin of ten who stood in front of the rest; and as he spoke our little friend pressed his ring, and found, alas! that no kindly feeling moved within the breast of even so small a child as the speaker. His thought was—

"Here is another fellow come to gather shells; we won't have him here. We do not find enough shells to satisfy our fathers and mothers as it is. We don't want any strangers to come and interfere with us."

A sadness stole over the little elf's heart; but as the child did not say but only thought these things, he took no notice of them, but merely replied—

"My name is Rigmarole; I want something to do, and I want a soul."

"A sole!" shouted the child in a shrill voice. "You won't get so much as a shrimp here, I can tell you." And then turning to his companions, he said: "What a queer name! The little chap's a fisher too, you see. It ain't no use his coming here, is it?"

The others all joined in a cry of "No, no!" and the elf saw that he should meet with neither sympathy nor aid here if they considered him as a possible rival in their shell-seeking pursuit. So he hastened to undeceive them.

"I don't mean a fish," he said, gravely. "I am not a fisherman, and do not want fish or shells. I want a living soul such as dwells within you mortal children, and I do not know where to get one."

The children hardly understood what the elf meant, but his words seemed strange; and after looking at him carefully again, they all turned round as if struck by a sudden impulse, and scurried over the sand towards the main-land. Here, on the side of a boat, sat an old sailor-man, smoking a short clay pipe and contemplating the weather. They ran up to him hastily, and exclaimed—several speaking at once—

"Master Marlowe, Master Marlowe, here be a chap that ain't got no soul—he says he wants a soul!"

"Punch his head," calmly replied the old man, without altering his position or evincing the smallest surprise. He did not look a very promising person to apply to upon the subject so near the elf's heart, and so thought the little fellow as he slowly and sadly approached him. Nevertheless, the matter was too important to be neglected, and he knew no better way of obtaining a soul than by asking every human being whom he might chance to encounter. So he marched right up to the old sailor and looked him straight in the face. It was a curious face to look into: wrinkled, brown, and hard as leather with exposure to the sun and winds, and with not a particle of expression to be observed upon it from which the existence of a soul within could be detected. It might as well have been a wooden face for any look of intellect upon it, and little Rigmarole doubted for

a moment whether there really could be a soul within that strange-looking being before him.

"Sir," he said, timidly, after waiting for a little while, and then paused, doubtful how to proceed.

The sailor took not the slightest notice of him, but smoked steadily on, looking straight before him over the sea, as if gazing with immense steadiness at an imaginary vessel, and thinking a real ship would be created if he only did so long enough.

"Sir," again said Rigmarole, in a little louder voice.

Then the old man slowly lifted his right hand and took his pipe from his mouth; after which he turned his head round and emitted a volume of smoke which nearly blinded the elf; after which he remarked in a deep, gruff voice—

"What's up, my hearty?"

The words were not unfriendly, and though Rigmarole pressed his ring in the proper manner he could not discover that the sailor had any thoughts at all about him, which was probably the case. So he plucked up courage, and said to him more boldly—

"Sir, can you tell me how to set about getting a soul?"

The sailor opened his eyes very wide indeed at this question, and looked the questioner over from head to foot with an air of utter and undisguised astonishment. Then, as if the intellectual exertion required of him by this process was altogether too much for his powers, he heaved a tremendously deep sigh, and replied in the same tone as before, "Go to blazes!" after which he calmly placed his pipe once

more in his mouth, and resumed his interesting occupation of gazing at nothing over the sea.

This reception greatly disconcerted and discouraged the poor little elf, who could not understand why it was that he found such difficulty in obtaining the information he desired. Being, however, of a tenacious and persevering nature, he resolved not to be daunted by his failures hitherto, but to push forward to new fields of exertion in the hope of meeting kinder and more intelligent people among mortal men.

He left the shore, therefore, and followed the road which led to the fishing-village hard by, whence had come the children whom he had already met. He proceeded slowly and sadly on his way, and presently came to a blacksmith's forge. The smith was a strongly-built man, with a jovial face and a merry twinkle in his eye, and he stood inside his shop hammering away with a mighty good will, and making the sparks fly off by hundreds at a time from the hot iron at every blow. Rigmarole stood and watched him at his work—for there is something in a smithy which always fascinates children, and elves are only children, after all, in many of their habits, and have many childish ways and feelings with them. As each spark flew off, bright and red for a moment and then dark and gone for ever, the little elf wondered if that was what he would be if his life ever came to an end, and if the soul of man which he coveted so much was like one of those sparks, only that it kept for ever bright instead of fading away into nothing as his being would do if it ended. He

fancied to himself that perhaps this was so if the man who had the soul was wise and good, and did his duty upon earth; and if not, perhaps his soul went out too, like the sparks. He wondered if this was so or not, and as he stood wondering and thinking, the smith came to an end of his hammering, and strode to the door of his forge to gaze out at the day. He stretched his brawny arms, and then put them akimbo on his hips, and sang the stave of a merry old song as he stood there, evidently on good terms with himself and all mankind, and in a pleasant, good-humoured frame of mind. Presently his eye lighted upon the little elf who was standing near him, and at once he had a kindly word for him.

"Well, my mite!" he exclaimed, "and what may *your* business be? You are but a tiny customer when all is said and done."

Rigmarole was delighted with the friendly tone in which these words were uttered.

"Sir," he answered, looking up at the stalwart frame whose owner had thus addressed him; "I come from Elfdom, and I want work and a soul."

"Jumping Moses!" shouted the honest smith, using a favourite and peculiar expression of his own, as he started back in astonishment at the speech of the small being before him. "Come from Elfdom, do you? Burst my bellows if this don't beat cock-fighting! Want work and a soul, do you, little mate? Well—there's work enough to be had in the world, of one sort and another; but as to a soul, that's a different matter altogether. Those who have got one very often don't seem to know what to do with

it; but as to a chap without one—well, *I* can't help you to one, anyhow!"

Poor Rigmarole sighed as the smith spoke, but as the man seemed well disposed towards him, he thought he would not hurry on to those who might be less so.

"Sir," he said, in a timid voice, "could you put me in the way of getting some honest work, even if you cannot help me in the other matter?"

The smith looked thoughtfully at him, and apparently mused deeply over his request.

"Well," he said at last, "I don't know but what I might. I was thinking this morning that I oftentimes want a boy to help with the bellows, and run errands and do a many things about the forge; and if you and I was to come to terms, I'd as lieve have you as another, for you've an honest look of your own. But then, a chap without a soul!—that's a rummy go. I never *did* have a chap without a soul about my premises—leastways not that I knowed on, and I don't rightly know what might come of it."

"Oh, sir," eagerly interposed little Rigmarole, "do, pray do take me into the forge as you say. I will be both honest and industrious, and I am sure you will find that I do my duty as well as if I had half a dozen souls, if you will only try me."

"I dare say you might," responded the other; "although, for the matter of that, a chap with half a dozen souls would be a queer kind of customer, and no mistake. But, anyhow, I'll try you, for you seem an active young fellow and likely to suit."

So the smith proceeded to discuss terms with the

little elf, who said that he wanted no wages, but only food and lodging in return for his services. The smith, however, being an honest man, and knowing, moreover, that services when paid for are generally better performed than when given for nothing, insisted upon paying his new servant the wages which it was customary to pay in those parts, and forthwith the young elf entered into his first situation. He found it by no means disagreeable. The smith was so cheery and good-natured, the work was so easy to the elf, and the sound of the hammer and sight of the merry sparks so enlivening, that, could he but have forgotten his one great want, he would have been supremely happy. But if you have set your whole heart upon one thing, nothing else makes you quite satisfied. If I happen to want a currant-and-raspberry tart, it is not of the smallest use to give me all the toys in the world, to stop a "Punch" for me, or to offer to take me to see the whale in the Aquarium. My tart I must have, or I remain unhappy.

So it was with our poor Rigmarole. The tart he wanted was a soul, and how to get one he could not imagine. The smith very rarely alluded to the subject—it was not a natural one to him, and he was not quite sure whether, as a good Christian, he had done exactly the right thing in taking a servant without a soul, though he thought in his own mind that it was much better than taking one without a character. In this instance the worthy man had done both, but a blessing had seemed to follow it, as blessings often *do* follow the performance of a

kind and charitable act. All went well with John Knapp the blacksmith whilst the elf was under his roof, and as long as that was the case he felt that there could not be much amiss in what he had done.

Rigmarole's only annoyance was quite unconnected with his master and his work. The children whom he had met upon the sands had told their village companions of their first meeting with the blacksmith's new boy, and they having passed the information on to others, it soon got abroad in the village that John Knapp had a demon servant. For some time this was confined to the children, and even they did not at once take any action upon it, not having very clear notions as to what a demon might be, and seeing nothing strange or unnatural about the elf. He was not much away from the forge, either, and so did not meet many of them. But as time went on the children told their mothers, and when Rigmarole passed along they would stand at their doors and point after him, calling out—

"There goes the boy without a soul!"

This was not in itself an agreeable mode of salutation to the little elf, and still less so since it reminded him of the principal misfortune of his life. So one day, when a fat old woman in a blue striped calico gown, and a mob cap on her head and broom in her hand, turned up her nose at him as he passed her, and remarked in a gruff and unfeminine voice, "Eh! you a'n't got no soul, haven't you?" the words grated so much upon Rigmarole's ears that he quickly replied—

"I can't help it, ma'am; I wish I could!"

Instantly the jade set up a cry, "He owns it! He owns it! Ugh! the little demon," and threw her broom at him without a moment's hesitation.

Her neighbours took up the cry as soon as they understood the matter, for although if a fellow had come among them with a long purse they would have cared nothing whether he had one soul or a hundred, yet as this was not the case with our elf, they thought his condition was one which could not be tolerated. So they jeered at him, and called him "demon," and made him so very uncomfortable that he fled to his master's house as fast as he could.

Unfortunately, however, the forge was the common resort of many villagers who loved a gossip with honest John Knapp, who was therefore not only very quickly informed of what had happened, but received several messages from the wives of his neighbours to the effect that he had better look out for himself, since his new apprentice was undoubtedly a demon of some sort or other. Now Knapp was a sensible man, but he knew that ignorance and prejudice are the two hardest things in the world to fight against, and he feared that if the tide had once set in against Rigmarole he should lose his popularity and probably damage his trade if he stood up for him. So he called the elf and fairly told him that he had no fault whatever to find with him, and was very glad to have taken him in, but that under the circumstances he was afraid they must part.

This news naturally caused the poor little fellow great distress, for he had been very happy with the honest blacksmith in spite of all the drawbacks of the position. However, he saw the force of the good man's argument, and would have been very sorry to have brought misfortune upon one who had been his friend in the hour of need. Accordingly, he sorrowfully wished him good-bye, and resumed his journey with depressed spirits and a heavy heart.

He soon left the village far behind, and advanced inland, farther and farther from the sea. The road ran for some distance through a flat country intersected by ditches which formed the boundaries and fences of the fields, which were mostly pasture, and flocks of sheep were feeding on every side of the elf as he walked along. They looked so peaceful and contented that the little fellow thought, as he stood at a gate and looked upon them while he rested himself for a bit, that it must be a happy thing to be a sheep, with no care save for grass and one's lambs. But then came the weaning of the lambs, the dry summers when pasturage is scanty, exposure to the pitiless blasts of winter; and, finally, the butcher's knife destined at no distant time to end that peaceful existence.

No; at all events he was better off than a sheep, which, besides all this, had not a soul any more than he had. So he plucked up his spirit and marched on. Presently the ditches became fewer and the hedges more numerous, as he came nearer the country beyond the tract of marsh land which he had been passing through. Before him rose a hill,

towards which he had often looked during his walk, as it rose in the distance. Woods hung upon the side of this hill, and pleasant green fields and hedges between them; and from the road which wound upwards the little elf could cast his eyes back over the flat country which he had left behind, and see the bright sunlight upon the sea shining in the long distance.

It was a beautiful view, and as he looked upon it far away, the thought crossed his mind that perhaps, if he could look forward over his own life, an equally lovely light might be there which he could not now see, but which might nevertheless brighten his existence at the end if he could only persevere until he came to it. It was a strange thought—but elves are strange beings—and it mightily cheered him as he strode onward to the very top of the hill. Now he came into a fertile country, pleasant pastures and fat cornfields, narrow lanes with high hedges, and now and then comfortable farmhouses with orchards adjoining, where apple and cherry trees abounded, and an air of well-to-do prosperity was apparent throughout the whole place.

"Surely," thought the elf, "I shall be able to find employment here: they must want people to gather their apples and cherries, and to do a hundred other jobs continually in such a country as this." So he boldly accosted a farmer whom he saw standing at the corner of his straw-yard contemplating with great satisfaction some bullocks, whose only business and occupation was to get fat, and who were evidently doing so as fast as they reasonably could.

"Please, sir," asked the elf, in a gentle voice, "could you give me any work?"

The farmer turned sharply round, and started when he saw the weird little figure which addressed him.

"Work!" he replied; "and what do the likes of you want with work? I'll warrant me you'd make but a poor hand in the hayfield, or anywhere else for the matter of that. No, my lad, I've no work for you, and sha'n't have for any one soon, with wheat down at forty shillings, and foreign hops swamping the market as they do now. It's no go here, my lad, I can tell you."

The man did not speak unkindly, but in a tone which left poor Rigmarole no hope, so he heaved a sigh and continued his journey. He had gone for another mile or so when he met a gentleman and a young lady walking, with more than one dog jumping and barking around them. The little elf, determined to lose no opportunity which came in his way, humbly accosted the pair with the same request which he had made to the farmer.

The gentleman was about to return him a somewhat similar answer, when the young lady interposed.

"Poor little fellow!" she whispered to her father, "he seems dreadfully tired; and see, papa, what a sad look there is upon his face. Cannot we help him somehow? You see he does not beg, either, but asks for work. We want a new hall boy; why not try him?"

"My darling," answered the gentleman, with a smile, "you wish to be kind, I know, but in

days it does not do to take servants without characters; but to please you I will ask the lad a few questions."

Then he asked Rigmarole where he came from, and to what work he had been accustomed, and whether he had anybody who would recommend him.

To these inquiries the little elf answered, truly enough, that he was a homeless outcast, and told of his sojourn with John Knapp the blacksmith, and how that he had left for no fault, and had been allowed to refer to that worthy man. Grown wise by experience, however, he left the soul question out altogether, having resolved to wait for a favourable opportunity before he broached it again, or allowed it to be known that he was wanting in that particular possession.

His weird, wan look appeared to have touched the heart of the young lady, and despite the doubts of her more cautious father, he suffered himself to be persuaded into giving the elf a trial, and told him he might go up to the house and get some refreshment, and that if he liked to come on trial for the place of hall boy that honourable situation should be his.

Gratified by the generous kindness shown him, Rigmarole poured out his thanks, and took advantage of the offer without delay. He forthwith sought the mansion to which he had been directed, refreshed his weary body with the food which was given him, and entered upon the duties of his new office with cheerful alacrity. These duties occupied much of his time, for in those days servants were always glad to get anybody else to do their work for them, and the

hall boy, being among the lowest in the social scale of domestic servants, was "put upon" by everybody, and scolded all round when anything was neglected. Rigmarole, however, being active and clever, as well as willing, did more work of all kinds than any hall boy that had filled the post before, and consequently got on pretty well with the other members of the household. He cleaned shoes and brushed clothes quicker than any ordinary mortal could have done, was always ready to run errands when required, and, in short, spared no effort to make himself generally useful. Still, in his heart he kept constantly dwelling on that which he deemed the great misfortune of his life, and vainly racked his brains to discover how he might obtain the possession which he coveted so much. There was no visible difference between himself and the mortals with whom he was now associated, save that he was smaller than the generality of them, and more agile in his movements. But yet there existed that great and vital difference which clouded his whole existence, and the cause of which he sought in vain to discover. How did mortals get their souls? They did not seem to be ignorant of the value of the possession, although their way of treating it was very various. The little elf sometimes heard men abuse each other's soul in language which shocked him; but far more frequently he heard them speak and saw them act in a manner which, had he not known it to be otherwise, would have positively led him to believe that they had no souls at all, but lived only for the indulgence and gratification of that body which was in reality only the casket which

contained the precious gem. Whenever the elf *did* hear a mortal mention his or her soul, he could with difficulty repress a sigh, so forcibly was he reminded of what he considered his own inferiority of position.

Now the old housekeeper of the establishment, who had lived there many years and grown fat in the service, had a habit of making constant reference to her soul in a very emphatic manner. Never was she pleased, surprised, angered, or excited in any way but she immediately gave vent to the expression, "Bless my soul!" in a tone which plainly denoted her frame of mind at the moment. She was a worthy old woman, and much respected by all the servants, nor do I suppose that her soul stood either more or less in need of blessing than the soul of everybody else. This, however, was her habit, and although Rigmarole had no very frequent occasion to encounter her, he never did so without a forcible reminder of the one great subject of his thoughts.

It happened one morning that the little elf was busily engaged in doing some work or other which properly belonged to the under-housemaid, when good Mrs. Lancaster—for so the worthy housekeeper was called—came bustling along the passage towards "The Room," for such was the title by which the apartment appropriated to the use of the upper servants was always designated in that and every other well-regulated mansion, there being, of course, no other chamber so worthy to be distinguished by the special prefix of "the" as that which those who really ruled over the establishment were good enough to occupy. As the good woman came along she

turned the corner sharply, and nearly tumbled over the little elf as he was kneeling and scrubbing in the middle of the passage. She was a stout—some might have said a fat—woman, and people of a certain size do not like stumbling and tumbling about, and perhaps feel the effects of such motion more than those who have a less amount of flesh to carry about them. At any rate, worthy Mrs. Lancaster was so startled at the occurrence that her favourite exclamation rose at once to her lips.

"Bless my soul!" she cried out aloud; "whatever are you a-doing of here, boy? You've nearly thrown me down with your kneeling right in the middle of the place where no one would ever have thought to look for you!"

Little Rigmarole (being, as we must recollect, only just over a hundred years old, and therefore still shy and nervous) made the most respectful bow he could manage, and replied in his meekest tone that he had been cleaning the passage, and hoped he hadn't been the cause of any harm, and begged pardon for having got in the housekeeper's way.

By this time Mrs. Lancaster had recovered her composure, and began to look with pity upon the little fellow before her. She gazed down upon him through her gold-rimmed spectacles, and said, with a benevolent look beaming upon her venerable countenance—

"Why, what a mite of a chap you are, to be sure! You're the new hall boy, I see. Bless your little soul, no, you've done no harm, so never mind!"

The little elf was touched by the kindness of her

manner as well as by her words, and as soon as they had been uttered he clasped his hands together, and, with a pitiful expression upon his face, looked up at her and said in a mournful voice—

"Thank you kindly, ma'am. But it is of no use blessing *my* soul. I haven't got any."

"Bless the child!" exclaimed the old housekeeper, starting back as these strange words were uttered; and then added, "What nonsense you're talking, boy! Not got a soul! Why, we've all of us got souls, and precious little care we take of them, for the most part. I won't have such rubbish talked here!"

"Indeed it isn't rubbish, ma'am," continued poor Rigmarole, sadly; "I have got no soul—none of my people have, and I would give anything to get one, if I only knew how. I thought perhaps you might tell me, ma'am."

This form of address both surprised and agitated the worthy dame not a little, as she stood there with her large bunch of house-keys swinging in her hand, looking with a curious sensation upon the little elf before her.

"Lord ha' mercy upon us!" she said; "the child must be mad to talk like this! Why, you poor little misery of an atom, who told you that you hadn't got a soul?"

"I know it, ma'am," replied Rigmarole; "my father has none, nor any of my brothers. No elf has a soul, you know."

Mrs. Lancaster gave a quick scream. "Elf!" she cried; "what d'ye mean, you queer little creature?"

Then it flashed across Rigmarole's mind that he had broken one of the laws of Elf-land, which forbade any elf to disclose his nature and origin in conversation with human beings, and he felt at once that he had done wrong. So he stuttered and stammered a bit, and finally became silent, whilst the old housekeeper gave him what she called a "good talking to" for trying to impose upon her with such nonsense. But even as she spoke to him she could not help feeling a queer sensation, and as she saw the strange, weird look which sat upon his countenance, the exceeding smallness of his figure and tiny proportions of his limbs, she could not keep herself from thinking in her inmost thoughts that there was certainly something unusual about the lad. So she watched him during the rest of the day, and her idea was strengthened by his marvellous agility, and the quickness with which he got through all the work which he undertook. Then she thought that she had better mention it to old Mr. Bottleneck the butler, who was a tallish man with a great protuberance in front, and consequently of an appearance so dignified as to give every one the idea that he possessed consummate wisdom. In reality he was about as great an ass as had ever lived fourteen years in a gentleman's family, and being himself as little like an elf as it is possible to conceive, was most unlikely to have either knowledge of or sympathy with any creature of the kind. On being consulted by Mrs. Lancaster, however, he assumed an air of importance such as became a man of his high position and dignity, and remarked at the same

time that *he* was not responsible for the lad, whom the master had engaged himself, instead of leaving it to the butler in the proper and ordinary manner. "And," he added, sententiously, "if gentlemen *will* do such things, they must hexpect to get helves, himps, and hall kinds of creatures has his no good to hanybody."

Mr. Bottleneck, however, had no particular fault to find with Rigmarole, and, not being either unjust or unkind by nature, would not have interfered with him in any way, had not Mrs. Lancaster suggested that the boy's statement regarding his soul, or rather regarding the absence from his being of that usual accompaniment of mortality, was of a character too serious to be passed over without further inquiry. So the very next day, immediately after the servants'-hall dinner, Rigmarole was summoned to "The Room," where the upper servants were all assembled in solemn conclave over their cheese and ale. Besides Mr. Bottleneck and Mrs. Lancaster, who occupied respectively each end of the table upon which the repast was spread, there was Mrs. Finnikin the lady's-maid, Mr. Parsnips the head-gardener, and a couple more who had done certain visitors to the house the honour of accompanying them there in the capacity of valet and maid. On being ushered into the presence of this dread assembly, the little elf had no sort of idea what they required of him, and accordingly came lightly tripping in, willing to render any service which he could perform, and by no means anticipating the ordeal through which he was about to pass. Hardly, however, had he entered the room,

before the appearance of those who were seated therein warned him that something serious was in the minds of all of them. Had he wanted further confirmation of the fact, he would have found it in the magisterial air assumed by old Bottleneck, who

"ROBERT, HOW'S YOUR SOUL?"

sat there visibly swelling and puffing with even more than his usual dignity, and after clearing his throat with a preparatory "Hem," at once proceeded to accost the little elf in a deep and solemn tone.

"Robert!" said he—for they had called the hall boys in that house "Robert" for many years, with-

out reference to the particular name which any of them might have received at his baptism—"Robert, how's your soul?"

Astonished at this strange form of address, the little elf remained perfectly silent.

"Now, Robert," continued the butler after a moment's pause, "don't let hus have any nonsense. What's this you've been talking to Mrs. Lancaster habout not having hany soul, boy? His it hignorance, hor his hit himperence?"

Rigmarole hung down his head at these words, which made him feel very uncomfortable; and pressing his ring at the same moment, he discovered in his questioner's breast a mixture of indifference and contempt which did not encourage him to open his heart before the company present. As, however, it would have been considered highly disrespectful to the exalted presence in which he stood, to remain any longer without giving a reply, he said in trembling accents and with a humble manner—

"Please, sir, I didn't mean any harm, sir. I was took by surprise, sir, or I wouldn't have said anything about it."

"Never mind that, Robert," gravely replied the butler; "the question his, what have you been a saying hof as regards a soul?"

"Ay," put in Mr. Parsnips, who set up for being somewhat of a literary character; "soul or no soul —that is the question."

"You know, child," remarked the housekeeper, "you told me you hadn't got any soul, and the gentlemen want to know what you mean by it."

Rigmarole looked round, first at one and then at another of the party: he saw no great evidence of soul in the face of any of them, and thought at that moment their cheese and ale were objects of far greater attraction to all of them than their souls. How could he explain his true position? What hope was there for him of sympathy or aid from such a quarter? Still, was it not better to tell the truth at once and get the matter over? Or should he pretend to have been only joking all the time? The spirit of truth ultimately prevailed, and the little fellow looked old Bottleneck full in the face as he replied—

"It is quite true, sir, and I'm very sorry for it, but I can't help it."

The servants stared at each other in blank astonishment, and for a moment none of them found voice or words to make any answer to this strange confession of soul-lessness. Then the great Bottleneck found utterance, and with his cheeks puffed out to their fullest extent, his face as red as a continuous course of good living and plenty thereof could make it, and a voice which was intended to be awful in its effect upon the boy who had dared to avow a state of things so terrible as that conveyed by Rigmarole's words, he thus gave vent to the honest sentiments of his bosom.

"You dreadful little ragamuffin, you!—you hare heither mad, hor somethink worse. To steal hinto a gentleman's family without a soul. Why, such a thing has never been heard hof! What's the meaning hof hit, you young willin?"

Rigmarole could make no reply, and for a moment

doubted what he had better do ; but in the midst of all his misery he could not help noticing the extraordinary look of wonder, not unmixed with awe, which had gradually stolen over the faces of all the company, who had never before held conversation with any one who openly declared that he had no soul, and were in consequence becoming more and more alarmed. This feeling increased as they looked upon Rigmarole, and its expression in their faces became so intensely ludicrous, that the natural fun of an elf was aroused within him, and he suddenly forgot his troubles and burst out into such a peal of wild, weird laughter as had never before been heard within the sacred precincts of "The Room."

This, however, had the effect of increasing rather than of diminishing the terror of the party, who became thoroughly convinced that their master must have unwittingly received a demon imp into his service, and that all kinds of mischief would presently befall them. Bottleneck started from his chair with as much alacrity as his excessive corpulence would allow; Mrs. Lancaster shrieked, Mrs. Finnikin fainted; Mr. Parsnips loudly ejaculated, "Good Lord, deliver us!" which he believed to be an undoubtedly efficacious incantation against all evil spirits; and if the two strangers did nothing remarkable, it was only because, not belonging to the family, they felt that the matter did not affect them so immediately as the others.

The conduct and gestures of the inmates of "The Room," speedily convinced our elf that his days in that establishment were numbered, and that no

atonement on his part would ever excuse the discomfiture into which he had thrown the potentates before whom he had so boldly avowed his own unfortunate condition. To reason with them would have been deemed an impertinence of an aggravated character, nor were they indeed at the moment in a condition to listen to reason, by whomsoever advanced. There was nothing for it but to beat a retreat as soon as possible, and this he accordingly did. But a retreat from the room was not sufficient; the poor little fellow knew well enough that he must leave the house and his place altogether, and he had neither the wish nor the courage to face his kind master and tell him the reason of his departure. He heaved a deep sigh as he passed out into the open air, and walked off into the shrubberies which surrounded that pleasant home. It seemed to him that the Fates were all against him, and that, do what he could, there was no prospect either of getting the soul which he so much coveted, or of living an honest life among mortals whilst he was pursuing his search after the best way of obtaining his desire. He passed through the shrubberies and came out into the road which led to the nearest town, which was about four miles off. The road was pretty, and for some little way wound through the park, on the outskirts of which was a wood of very old trees. Upon the outstretched root of one of these the little elf sat down, not so much to rest as to think over his sad fate, and to call to mind all that had happened to him since his father had sent him out into the world. He thought deeply, and the more he thought

the more he wondered why he should have been born an elf at all, and, why, being an elf, he should wish so much to be something else, and should feel so differently from other elves. At last he could not keep his thoughts any longer within his breast, and, almost without knowing that he did so, he spoke

RIGMAROLE IN DESPAIR.

aloud to himself, and said, in an audible voice, "I wonder why!"

Scarcely had he uttered these words than to his amazement they were repeated from the tree above his head: "I wonder why!"

He started up immediately, and looked anxiously in the direction from which the voice had come, but could see nobody, and hear nothing but the gentle

summer breeze that whispered among the leaves, and with tender touch caused them to tremble and quiver.

"Who speaks?" cried the little elf; and again in accents like his own came the sound from above—"Who speaks?" and again there was silence.

"It is the echo," said he. "Echo," repeated the voice, and a soft, silvery laugh followed which convinced the little fellow that he had been mistaken.

More surprised than ever, he was doubting whether to quit the spot or make further search for the speaker, when the same voice pronounced his own name in low but clear tones.

"Rigmarole! that is my name," he cried aloud, in answer. "I am Rigmarole; who is that calls me?"

Then spoke the voice again, and these were the words it uttered—

"I am the spirit of the oak," it said, "of this oak which has flourished for several hundred years in the old wood, and has seen generation after generation of mankind spring up, live, and perish. Still my tree lives on, and still you elves live on; but man only lives a little while before he passes away."

"Yes!" exclaimed the elf, eagerly, "but only from this earth; there is another world to which his soul goes, whilst we stay always here. And they say that in that world souls live for ever too, and they have happiness greater than this world can hold. Oh, it *must* be best to have a soul!"

"If you really think so," replied the voice again, "you might obtain your wish; but to do so you must die."

"Die?" repeated Rigmarole, in a tone of inquiry. "What is that, and how can I do it?"

"It is hard for an elf," replied the voice, "although exceeding easy for a mortal; but there are ways by which even you may manage it, if you go the right way to work."

THE ELF LISTENING TO THE VOICE FROM THE TREE.

"Oh, tell me how!" imploringly asked the little elf. "Tell me how to die, and I will be ever grateful to you."

As he spoke he pressed his ring according to the directions which he had received from his father, and although he could not discover all that was in the

mind of the spirit of the oak—who very possibly had no mind at all—he somehow felt assured by the feeling of the ring that he might entirely trust and believe what was said. The spirit continued to speak in the same clear, low tone, like the distant sound of beautiful music on a still summer's eve.

"Turn from the road into the wood," it said, "and walk on for some way under the shadow of our old trees. After a while you will come to a spring, from which the water bubbles up between two large stones which are bedded down deep in the earth. These stones, centuries ago, belonged to an old chapel which stood hard by, but which the ruthless hand of the spoiler destroyed in days when such buildings were a prey to those who had no reverence for holy things. But the spring has been a very holy place, as mortals say, ever since, and its waters have a strange virtue. If you drink of them once, as the first ray of the sun shines upon earth at early morn, keeping your right hand upon your heart and holding the cup in your left, you are changed into the shape of some animal which frequents this wood. At the first sight of the moon on that same night, drink again, and you will undergo another change. Then return the next night and wait until the midnight hour sounds. Drink again, and, if you are deemed worthy, you will gain what you want."

Little Rigmarole listened with the most earnest attention to these words, and, as soon as the voice ceased, he quickly replied with thanks again and again repeated for the information which had been given to him by the spirit of the oak.

"Is the spring far distant?" he asked; but there was no reply.

"How shall I find it?" he again inquired; but all was silent.

The spirit spoke no more, and the little elf was obliged to be contented with what he had heard. It was somewhat vague, indeed, and he did not feel very certain as to the result. He might be changed, he thought, into some very unpleasant animal, whose tastes might lead him away from the spring at which it was necessary that he should drink a second and a third time. There might be more things to do, which the spirit had not told him, and other ways of proceeding which might be much less difficult. He longed to ask a great many more questions, and to be more particularly informed what he was to say and do on approaching the holy spring. But it was no use to long for what he could not obtain. The spirit of the oak had clearly said all that he intended to say that afternoon, and it was useless to bother him any more. In fact it was very kind of him to have spoken at all, as Rigmarole owned to himself, and felt very grateful to him for what he had said.

Having had rest enough by this time—for indeed he had not walked far enough to tire him—and feeling a vast deal happier than he had felt for a long time past, the little elf rose from his seat beneath the oak tree, and, passing under its spreading branches, left the road as he had been directed, and plunged into the wood. The ground was soft and springy beneath his feet, the dense foliage above afforded him pleasant shade, a hundred birds were singing their

sweetest melodies in his ears, and the lovely flowers and ferns vied with the green leaves in delighting his eyes as he moved along with light step and happy heart in full confidence that ere long the object of his life's desire would be accomplished. The little elf positively revelled in the beautiful scene before him, for his heart was so much lighter and his whole feelings so much happier than of late, that everything about him seemed, if possible, more beautiful than it really was. Down he went into the wood, looking and listening, but never forgetting to keep a sharp look-out for the spring. For some time he saw no signs whatever of any such thing, but he had somehow or other unbounded faith in the mysterious being who had so recently addressed him, and he never doubted for a moment that he should find what he sought.

At last his faith and patience were crowned with success. He saw the bright sunlight peeping beneath the dense foliage of the trees, and knew that he must be near the edge of the wood. Still he went on, and presently saw that the large trees grew fewer and fewer, and that beyond them was an open space of broken, rocky, rugged ground, beyond which again began a wood of smaller trees, although many of these were of goodly dimensions, with noble branches reaching up towards the heavens. A short distance from the wood in which he had been walking, and towards the middle of the open space, stood one gigantic oak, worn by age and partially hollow, but still grand in its slowly approaching decay, and doubtless destined to stand there yet for

many years to come, a very monarch among trees. Rigmarole stopped when his eyes first fell upon this tree, and, as he gazed upon it, could distinctly hear the low trickling sound of running water. Was this the place of which he was in search? It must be so: the ground sloped downwards from the great tree, and he felt certain that here must be the holy spring, and that from it came the water the sound of which he heard. He did not hesitate for a moment, but walked with firm though timid steps in the direction of the great oak, and in another moment stood beneath its branches. One glance was sufficient to tell him that he had found what he sought. At the foot of the oak, on the side opposite the wood which he had left, two huge stones were embedded in the earth, precisely as the spirit of the oak had described. They formed a kind of small square into which the gazer peered from above, and saw within it the water, clear as a diamond, sparkling and pure: it seemed several feet in depth, and at the bottom he could see clear, fine, hard sand. The water was quite still, save when it bubbled up below, but over the corner of the lower side of the square it flowed out from the spring and took its way down a little channel which it had made for itself in the rocky ground, winding off towards the other wood, and being then lost in a fringe of fern and rushes which concealed its further progress from the sight of any one standing at its source. This was certainly the holy spring: there could be no doubt about it, and all the more so as there was an ancient iron cup fastened by a chain to a link in the stone, on a ledge close to the

oak. The elf stood for some moments gazing upon the water; then he looked up into the tree; then back at the wood he had left. Should he follow the directions of the spirit of the oak or not? He had no doubt that, if he did so, all would occur that had been foretold him. Was he so certain that, if it did so occur, he would be any better off? Was it *very* wretched to be an elf? There might be worse conditions of existence after all. These thoughts passed rapidly through his mind, but they were speedily followed by the old intense desire for a soul and the deep sense of inferiority to those who possessed one. Should he pause and doubt now, after all his labour and anxiety, when the goal was so nearly reached? Never. He would persevere to the end, come what would of his endeavours.

However, he had still some time for reflection, since the oracle of the tree had distinctly told him that the first draught of spring water was to be taken when the first rays of the sun lighted up the earth at early dawn. It was now late in the afternoon, so that he must wait for several hours before the right time would have arrived, and would have ample leisure to consider well the step which he was about to take and its probable consequences. He sat down at the foot of the oak, at a little distance from the spring, and pondered deeply. The shades of night were fast falling around him; the birds had well-nigh ceased their singing, the wood-pigeon had faintly murmured her last soft coo of good-night to her mate, the robin had long since carolled his evening hymn and sought his roosting-place, and the last rook had winged his

high flight over the wood towards the rookery in the big elms on the other side of the park. Already the bats had begun to come forth from their hiding-places in the hollow trees, and flit to and fro with silent flapping of the wings, round the old oak and over the open space in which it stood; the owl was preparing herself to sally forth for her nightly journey round the outskirts of the wood, and other timid creatures, which hid themselves from the glaring light of day, began to peep out and welcome the coming darkness which enabled them to leave their hiding-places and enjoy unmolested the quiet safety of the wood.

All was still; even the drowsy humming of the insects had ended, and Nature was about to take her rest. Even the little elf, in spite of all he had to think about of the past, the present, and the future, could not resist the mystic influence of the hour. As he sat, his thoughts grew more and more confused and indistinct, a soft languor stole gradually over him and lulled his senses to forgetfulness, his head moved gently back against the oak, his arms fell by his side, his eyes closed, half-opened and then closed again, until sleep entirely overpowered them and him, and he passed away from all consciousness of the world and its doings. Rigmarole slept, and slept soundly, whilst the shadows gathered around him and enshrouded the whole earth in darkness. No harm came near him: I do not suppose that harm could have come near any one at that holy spring, for doubtless it was guarded by high and pure beings into whose presence evil dare not come. At any rate nothing evil came near the little elf whilst he slept,

and for some hours he lay there in a peaceful and quiet slumber.

Then he suddenly awoke with a start. Had he been a mortal he might have felt cold, being unused to sleep in the open air, but that did not matter to one of elfin race. He started, however, forgetting for a moment where he was, and then suddenly remembering, and wondering how near he was to the hour when he might make his first attempt upon the waters of the spring. He could not tell the exact time, but knew that much of the night had passed away, and that it could want but two or three hours of sunrise. It would never do to go to sleep again, or he should certainly fail to awake in time. So he got up and shook himself, which with elves, just as with animals, and indeed with human animals as well as others, is a very good way of arousing one's sleepy senses, and causing one to feel very much awake. Then he sat down and waited patiently for some time. It seemed as if the morning would never come! Surely that must be, thought Rigmarole, the longest night that ever was invented. What *was* the sun about? They must have forgotten to call him! He had overslept himself. Was he not going to rise at all? These and similarly ridiculous thoughts flitted through the brain of the little elf, until at last, far away to the east, a low, murky streak of light seemed to make its appearance, though in such a vague, uncertain, indistinct manner, that he could hardly declare positively whether it was really light, or only a fancy of his brain or eyesight.

Presently, however, it showed itself somewhat more

distinctly; a real glimmer of light; another followed, then another, and the edge of the horizon began to emerge altogether from the darkness in which it had previously been obscured. Then the first low note of the robin in the adjoining wood told that he was a witness of what was going on in the far east, and the little elf knew that he might fairly say that the first rays of the sun were shining upon the earth. The time, then, had arrived for action, and he must at once act, or probably lose for ever his chance of obtaining that which had become the main object of his existence. His mind was fully made up, and he stepped boldly down to the edge of the holy spring. There he stopped, took the iron cup in his hand, filled it with water, and held it for an instant, as if still doubtful of his course. The light of the sun, still feeble, was waxing stronger every minute, and by its growing strength the elf could see the great oak behind which he stood, looming still larger in the imperfect light, and the shadow of the old trees in the wood hard by, becoming gradually more and more distinct in the increasing light.

One second only did Rigmarole pause, for the robin struck up a second and louder note, which warned him that the hour for action was rapidly passing away. Then he lifted the cup to his lips in his left hand, and swallowed the water which it contained to the last drop, pressing his right hand at the same time firmly to his heart as he had been directed by the spirit of the oak. Down fell the cup to the ground as he unwittingly relaxed his grasp upon it. Horror of horrors! what is this? Fur is growing

upon him; his skin is changing; his legs are becoming shorter, so are his arms; his head is shrinking, his ears growing up in a new way, his whole body is being transformed. Where is he? What is happening? What *has* happened? There is no Rigmarole; there is no active little elf in shape of mortal man, but only an innocent, large-eyed hare trembling and shivering at the foot of the

RIGMAROLE CHANGED INTO A HARE.

great oak, and gazing down into the clear water of the holy spring.

He was changed, and with a vengeance. Strange to say, his first thought was of the housekeeper's room in the house which he had lately left, and how that, if the butler and his companions could see him now, far from being alarmed at his soulless condition, and desiring him to go, they would eagerly desire his

company, and whether roast, jugged, or hashed, would consider him a most welcome addition to their table. The thought was a queer one to occur just at that moment, but queer thoughts *do* come at unexpected moments, and this one soon passed away. In fact the little elf, being no longer an elf but a hare, could not think quite so well as he could before, and had a curious mixture of elfish wisdom in his head, together with reflections of a more hare-brained character. He knew, first and foremost, that he must be at that same place when the moon rose that night. *That* was the knowledge of an undoubted elf, which no hare which was *not* an elf could have known. He knew also, though somewhat vaguely, that he had left one state of existence, had passed into another, and had, if all went well, further changes before him. But here his knowledge stopped. His powers of meditation and reflection had not wholly left him, but were entirely changed. He had all the feelings and instincts of a hare. He shuddered at the thought of a dog; he started at any noise for which he could not account, and kept listening attentively as one who knew himself to be surrounded by many enemies, against whose hostility an active and constant watch was absolutely necessary.

Having eaten nothing since his elf body had left the great house the day before, it is not to be wondered at that the hare felt uncommonly hungry, and as soon as he was comfortably settled in his skin, and could feel that he had the use of his limbs, he lifted up his head and looked for food. Not far

from the spring, out in the open space, was a patch of young grass, fresh with early dew, and to this the hare at once made its way, and commenced a hearty meal. After this, the little animal crept down to the running water, and slaked his thirst in the cool stream which flowed from the spring above. Instinct then prompted the hare to seek for a snug hiding-place, where he might pass the day in security. There was a patch of fern not far off, in the younger wood, and to this he made his way, and after a little while found a place very suitable for the purpose. He set to work to make a "form" as naturally as if he had never been anything but a hare all his life, and, having soon finished the work, curled himself round and round until he had made himself comfortable, and sat there quietly musing upon such matters as usually occupy the thoughts of hares.

For several hours all remained quiet, and nothing came near the place save the rabbits and squirrels, except the birds, which were always there. Then, when the sun was high in the heavens, and the world was all abroad and stirring, other sounds were to be heard. A horse neighed in a neighbouring paddock, the distant mooing of the cows was wafted across the park, and the grunt of the deer sounded in the ears of the hare as he sat quietly in his form, and dreamed the moments peacefully away.

Suddenly a new sound caused his heart to beat fast within him ; it was the short, sharp bark of a dog in chase of some animal. The hare pricked up his ears and listened: in another moment a rabbit

darted by, and, peeping out, he saw a black-and-tan terrier dog with his head down, following on the scent at a little distance, and coming right down towards the form.

In old days the elf would not have cared for a dog any more than for a rabbit, but all was changed now. Instinct told him what to do, and, jumping hastily from his form, he ran off at the top of his speed. The dog saw him, and, immediately leaving his pursuit of the rabbit, darted at the larger game, and followed him at full speed and with eager yelps of joy at seeing a possible victim so near. A kind of indignation, some remnant of his old elfish nature, possessed the hare, but fear was the more powerful feeling, and he fled before the dog with a full knowledge of his danger. As a hare can always outrun a terrier, his escape was pretty sure, but his pursuer was so persevering that he had a scamper for several minutes, which quite put him out of breath, and showed him how hard a time of it hares and other animals of the chase must have on such occasions.

After a while the dog, finding that he could not catch his intended prey, went off in search of a rabbit or hedgehog, and left the elf-hare to himself. Hot and uncomfortable after his race, he sauntered beneath the shade of the trees, and endeavoured to get cool as best he could. There was a thicket not far off, towards which he was making his way, when he saw a rabbit sitting just in front of it, close to a hole. As he approached, a low moan of anguish proceeded from the animal, and, although hares and rabbits are often scarcely upon speaking terms, and

are never really friendly with each other, the natural tenderness of his heart induced the elf-hare to ask what was the matter. This was soon explained: the unhappy rabbit had been caught by the foot in a steel trap set either by a keeper or poacher, and was held where he was in agony of pain until the trapper should come and put an end to his sufferings by knocking him on the head.

The hare shuddered as he thought how easily this might have been his fate instead of the rabbit's, if he had happened to set his foot upon the trap in entering the thicket before him. He could not help the poor wretch, so left him where he was; but, as he went on, his timid nature trembled again at the thoughts of all the dangers by which a hare was surrounded. He presently found a corner in some rough grass, and stayed there during the rest of the day without further interruption.

Then evening came on again, and in the midst of his hare instincts he clearly remembered that when the moon rose he must revisit the holy spring. Still he dozed on, quietly and dreamily, until night fell, and in less than half an hour the moon would rise. He rose and stretched himself, when his attention was attracted by a little noise, and, looking round, he perceived a stoat within half a dozen yards of him, stealing down upon him with intentions but too plainly of a murderous character. In his elf days he would have made short work of this nasty little animal, but the conditions of their meeting were now altogether changed. His blood curdled in his veins; a cold chill flew at once to his heart, and it

was only by a mighty effort of will that he could bound forward and take to flight.

"Stop, dear little hare!" cried the stoat, in sarcastic accents; "do not fly thus from your best friend! I desire a more intimate acquaintance with you, and I mean to have it too, in spite of your coyness and shy ways, pretty dear!"

The voice of the wretch penetrated to the very heart of the poor hare, who knew but too well the meaning of its words and the peril in which he stood. The cruel monster would indeed make "intimate acquaintance" with him if he could, and it would be by jumping on his back, grasping his fur closely with its claws, and fixing its sharp teeth in his neck as it rode, until it had sucked the warm life-blood from his veins, and left him to perish miserably. There was no safety from such a foe but flight, immediate and hasty flight, and to that the hare had recourse at once.

But oh! how terrible is the position of a hare or rabbit at such a moment! Although in the presence of a dog or fox these animals are able to run at full speed from their enemy, and have all their wits about them to dodge or outrun him, it is entirely different when they are attacked by a stoat. By some mysterious dispensation of Providence the sight of a stoat paralyzes his intended victims. They seem unable to run for more than a short distance; they stop, sit still, tremble, squeak, and constantly yield themselves over a prey to a small creature from whom, to all appearance, they could escape with the greatest ease, since both hares and rabbits are far fleeter of foot than a stoat, and could easily outrun him.

So it is, however, and in the present instance the nature of the hare was too strong for that of the elf in the body of our little hero. He ran for about twenty yards only, and then stopped; then he repeated the same process; then he ran to the right and then to the left, and the only difference which his elf nature made was that he certainly dodged rather more than an ordinary hare might have done, and kept always going in the direction of the spring. At one of his halts, however, he heard the voice of the stoat again at a very little distance.

"Now, little hare, are you nearly tired of this pretty game?" it said. "You know quite well that you cannot escape me; 'tis no use trying, my dear. I'm coming, I'm coming, the nice old stoat, who is so fond of tender harelings. How soft your fur is, gentle hare! I know *that* as well as if I had hold of it in my paws, as I soon shall. How I long to kiss you, pet, and make my teeth meet in that sweet little neck! Oh, you darling, stop for me, please, won't you?"

These words were perfectly awful to the hare, who felt as if he must go mad with fright, and almost gave himself up for lost as a glance round showed him the stoat within three yards of him, and already gathering itself for the final spring. But the same glance showed that there was another spring of better omen hard by, and at the same moment one soft but clear ray of the rising moon flitted across the darkened face of the heavens above. One more effort, and life might yet be saved! The elf-hare made a bound forward just as the stoat sprang,

jumped within the shadow of the great oak, and fell fainting forwards upon the very edge of the spring, actually almost touching the cup. As he raised the latter almost instinctively to his lips, placing his right paw on his heart at the same time, he heard a squeak of baffled rage from his late pursuer, who slunk away in the darkness, unable to approach nearer to the holy spring. The poor hare hastily drank the water, doubly grateful to him as it trickled down his throat, parched with terror and excitement. Oh! what a marvellous change! He felt the fur falling from him, his ears disappeared, his legs were totally changed, his head altogether transformed, and in the space of three seconds he found himself standing upon the roots of the great tree, a veritable pigeon in shape, size, and feathers, all complete!

Although this change was surprising, it was by no means unpleasant, especially as our little friend had suffered such agonies of fear in his hare shape that he would have been glad to have got rid of it upon almost any conditions. He sat for a moment upon the edge of the spring, looking down upon the clear, pure water in which his own image was reflected in the increasing moonlight, and wondering at his changed appearance. Then his new pigeon nature asserted itself, and he flew across into one of the trees in the opposite wood, chose a good leafy bough, and established himself thereon as naturally as if he had been a bird all his life. He nestled his head down against his wing, gave one gentle little flutter to compose and arrange his feathers in their proper places, and then settled himself down and slept the

sleep of pigeons as comfortably as his best friends could have wished. The night was still and calm, the moon rose high above the woods, and rendered them still more beautiful by her pale yet strong light, and peace reigned over the whole world for the next few hours. Then the moonlight passed away like the happy dream of a sleeping child, and after a brief period in which light and darkness seemed struggling together to decide which of them should possess the world, the sun began to send out his powerful rays once more, driving the shadows of night gradually but certainly from the field, and lighting up the woods and dales and the whole face of the earth. Then creation began to awake from slumber; the little birds began to twitter; the deer rose from his couch and shook the morning dewdrops from his graceful limbs as he stretched himself in the morning light; the rabbit peeped out of his hole to nibble at the young grass before the dew was off; the squirrel came out of his dray to eat his early nut, and every living creature began to bestir himself and to revel in the new day.

Amongst the rest, our pigeon opened his eyes, fluttered his wings, and cooed gently to the sunrise. Not many minutes passed before an answering coo came from another tree, and a pigeon of his own size, shape, and plumage flew out and joined him. This bird appeared by no means surprised to see a stranger, for, as he told Rigmarole, the visitors to those parts were numerous, partly on account of the famous spring which the inhabitants of the wood possessed, and partly because of the shade and

beauty of the woods themselves. The pigeon-elf was glad to have met with a companion of his own so soon, and especially one who seemed so friendly and polite. The two birds chatted away together for some time upon such subjects as are common among pigeons. They talked of peas and wheat and other grain, which was a most interesting topic at all times; they spoke of turnip fields, to be visited in the late summer and autumn, and which still held pigeon food even when the sheep were folded upon them in the beginning of winter; then the conversation turned upon nests, and they both agreed that the few simple sticks, laid across each other, of which a pigeon formed her nest, was much more neat and proper for the purpose than the nests which were built by other birds, such as blackbirds and thrushes, which took so much more time and trouble in their construction, whilst the magpies and jays were worse still, since they always built nests about four times as large as was necessary for their wants, and stole not only wood, but bits of cloth and rag to line them, thus being wicked as well as extravagant. Then the two birds discoursed of many other things, until they both began to feel that it was nearly breakfast time, and the real pigeon informed his new friend that he knew of a field of peas within a mile of the wood which he would be very happy to show him.

Rigmarole thanked him, and they set out together, flying quietly over the wood, and enjoying the woodland sights and sounds as they went upon their way

When they reached the field they found several of their race already there, who received them with coos of ready welcome, for there is a kindness and unselfishness among pigeons which is very beautiful, and which mortals would do well to imitate.

There was quite a little flock of these birds in the pea-field, and as the peas were ripe, and the pods open, they had no difficulty in making a very good meal. As they did so, they discoursed upon the weather and the crops, for all the world as if they had been farmers, and congratulated themselves upon the quantity and quality of the peas, in taking which they thought they were doing no harm, it being part of a pigeon's creed that the fruits of the earth which the good God makes to grow are for the food and support of all His creatures, and that the men who plant the seed are only His agents, by means of whom He supplies the world with food, and who ought only to expect a fair share of that which grows.

Unfortunately for the pigeons, however, this doctrine was not shared in by the men who called themselves the owners of the land, and the farmer who possessed this particular field held views which were entirely different. So whilst the pigeons were feasting away right merrily, suddenly there stepped through a gap in the hedge a man with a gun in his hand, evidently bent upon mischief. The innocent creatures rose as one bird, and endeavoured to make their escape in every direction.

But the farmer (for he it was who had intruded upon their repast) had taken his measures well, being determined to revenge himself upon

spoilers of his pea-field, and having, moreover, a keen relish for pigeon pie. He had therefore approached so stealthily that, when he strode through the gap, he was within easy gunshot of the birds, and fired upon them as they rose with deadly aim. The flash of the gun and the loud, stunning report frightened the elf-pigeon out of his wits; but greater still was his consternation when he perceived his friend of the morning throw up his head, vainly attempt to fly on with the rest, and flutter downwards to the ground, his white breast stained with the blood which welled up from the cruel shot-wounds which had taken his innocent life. One sad, mute, appealing glance he cast upward as he fell, and then yielded up his gentle spirit and fell dead upon the earth.

The shot had whistled about the elf so closely that it was marvellous how he escaped, and he had scarcely time to witness the fate of his companion, so necessary did he find it to fly at best pace from the scene of danger. He did so, however, in safety, but in a state of great agitation and alarm, which indeed was the condition of the whole party. They flew off to the woods, and scattered here and there, Rigmarole himself flying up into the branches of a large cedar just outside the wood, whence he looked back at the field wherein had occurred that which he regarded as a most cruel and wicked murder.

The farmer, I may remark, considered it in a very different light, and believed that he had done a wise and praiseworthy act in driving off the robbers

of his pea-field, and congratulated himself upon having made so successful a shot.

From his lofty perch Rigmarole saw him pick up the body of the slaughtered bird, together with that of another who had fallen at the same time, and march calmly off with them, evidently well pleased with his morning's work. The elf-bird stayed where he was for some time, musing over many things, and bewailing the wickedness of man. Even the innocent life of a pigeon, he found, was not safe from his cruelty, and must be sacrificed if in any way it interfered with his wishes or interests. Strange it seemed that such gentle, quiet creatures, who harmed no one and wished well to all, should be exposed to such misfortunes as that which had befallen his friend of the morning. He sat and thought as only pigeons can think until the sun was high in the heavens, and his rays struck down warmly upon the cedar. Then he flew into the thicker parts of the wood, and sought shade and shelter in the dense foliage of the large trees; and here he found other pigeons, and through the long hours of the summer day they cooed pleasantly to each other from their cool, quiet perches, and now and then flitted heavily and lazily from tree to tree by way of a little amusement.

The day wore on, and the shadows began to fall which betoken the approach of evening. Then the pigeons began to mention food, and to coo to each other information as to the different places in which it was to be found. One of them told the new bird that there was a good cornfield about a couple of

miles off, and advised him to go there for his supper. After the morning's experience he was rather shy in the matter, but as hunger pressed, and food must be had, he at last agreed to go, and flew off with several companions. Before approaching the field they posted a careful watch in a high tree near, so that they might have full and early notice of the approach of any enemy. None such appeared, and the birds supped well upon the ripe grain, and commenced their homeward flight without any disaster.

Rigmarole, however, had yet to discover that farmers with guns were not the only foes of the race to which he had been so lately joined. Half-way between the cornfield and the wood an enormous hawk swooped down upon them with such fearful speed that it was a marvel that they managed to escape his clutches. He missed his swoop, though, which gave the frightened birds a start, of which they instantly took advantage. The hawk, furious at having been foiled, pursued in hot haste, and singled out our hero for his victim. As soon as he found this to be the case, the poor bird exerted himself to the utmost to avoid his terrible enemy. He dodged right and left, as his pigeon nature taught him to do; now he mounted up in the air as the hawk struck, so that the latter darted under him; then he dropped suddenly downwards, that he might pass over him, and, in a word, he did all that pigeon could do to save his life.

I do not think, however, that he could possibly have escaped if it had not happened that a small fir plantation was at hand, not far from the main wood,

and into this he managed to dart just as the hawk had risen for a final swoop. I suppose the bird of prey could have followed him there if he had chosen, but hawks rarely do this unless they have actually struck their prey so that they know it to be wounded. Their habit is to strike down their victim in the open, and if they have failed to do so, they rarely enter a wood or plantation in pursuit, knowing that such places often conceal those who are enemies to the noble race of hawks, and that there is danger of an ambushed foe in the shape of a keeper or such-like terrible creature. So the hawk turned round and flew pigeonless away, whilst our poor bird cowered under the fir branches in mortal fright for some time, and only ventured to fly back to the wood when the shadows of evening had settled down upon the earth.

Night came, and all again was still. The bird sat in the same oak up to which he had flown after he had first taken his feathered shape, and sufficient of his elf nature came back to him to make him feel and know that ere long the hour would arrive at which another change had to be undergone. Had he been wholly himself as he was of old, he would have been much perplexed and filled with wonder and doubt as to what would be the next transformation of his body. Had he been wholly a pigeon, he would have known and thought nothing about it. As it was, he knew that it was to come, but he had not the power to think of it, so that he passed the earlier hours of night in the dreamy, quiet fashion of pigeons, and without any particular

PIGEON AND HAWK.

As midnight drew near, he flew slowly across to the great oak, and sat in its branches until the appointed hour. Slowly the minutes passed away, but still nearer and nearer drew the time, until at last, from the old church tower of the town far away across the vale rang out the first chime of the midnight hour. Then, true to the very moment, down flew the pigeon to the holy spring. He grasped the iron cup in his claw, and lifted it with a power that probably no pigeon had ever before possessed; he fluttered up as he did so, in order to obey the directions of the spirit of the oak by placing his other claw upon his breast; and so, dipping his beak into the cup, he drank deeply of the pure spring water. Then the cup fell back to the ground; through every vein in his body the blood tingled and smarted with an extraordinary sensation, the feathers vanished, and he was no more a bird.

What was he? Where was he? What were these new sensations? Whence came this strange, this wonderful alteration in all his feelings? Who was it that felt as he felt, but as he had never felt before? He was again an elf, yet not an elf. He had apparently—nay, certainly—his old elfin body and his own elfin face, for he saw them reflected plainly enough in the spring water below. But there was something marvellously different within him of which he was at once perfectly conscious, and yet for which he could not account. A new being was he; a new spirit seemed to possess him; a strange, unknown, fluttering something which agitated his whole existence in a manner wholly

different to anything he had ever known before. He tried to rise from his seat by the holy spring, but sank backwards fainting upon the bank, and knew at the same moment that his strength of body had gone out as that strange new sensation had entered his frame.

Lost in wonder, and still ignorant of what it was that had actually happened, the little elf was about to make another effort to rise, when a voice fell upon his ears which caused him immediately to desist from the attempt.

"Rigmarole!" it said—in tones low indeed, but so clear that he could hear every syllable, and so sweet and touching that they sent a thrill of pleasure through his faintly beating heart. "Rigmarole! the desire of your life is accomplished—and you have a soul."

Here the voice paused, and the little elf would fain have risen again, but was powerless to do so. Was this, then, having a soul—these strange emotions, this failing of strength—what did it all mean? Thus he thought, but spoke not, for his heart was too full of awe and wonder, and his whole being oppressed with a new weight of mingled joy and fear. Then the voice spoke again, and there was a faint tinge of melancholy in the tones in which it again addressed the elf.

"Rigmarole!" it said, "when mortal men have obtained anything which they have long anxiously
it generally in some degree disappoints
, and turns out very differently from that which they had expected. It is not otherwise with elves.

You have been granted that for which you wished so earnestly and so long, but *all may not be as you* imagine. You are about to die."

As the voice pronounced these words the little elf felt his heart grow cold within him: was it, then, the approach of death which he felt? But the voice continued—

"He, by whose will and at whose pleasure creation exists, has given different natures to His various creatures. This may not be explained now, and vain are the efforts of the wisest brains to understand it. But to those who possess the treasure of an immortal soul is allotted a lesser span of earthly life than those to whom the boon has not been given, and who have but this earth on which to dwell. It may be that some of these endure for ages, but they cannot attain to the perfection of happiness which may be reached by the soul. So when one of them is permitted to possess a soul, his body must follow the common lot of mortal man. Already have you lived far beyond the ordinary age of mortals; your soul, though it has scarcely entered your body, is ready to take flight, and happy is it for you that you have been spared the trials and temptations to which a longer existence would have subjected your new treasure."

The little elf listened to these words as attentively as his failing strength would permit, and he knew them to be true by his own feelings. He looked up at the beautiful foliage above him, and then into the clear spring below; he gazed round upon the beauties of nature on every side of him, though his eyes

grew dim, and he could but imperfectly see them. A low sigh broke from him as he thought how he was about to leave all, and to enter upon a new state of existence of which he knew nothing; but there came into his heart a feeling that the Being who had power to give him a soul must also have power to help him wherever he was, and would not desert him now that he had this new possession to value and keep. Doubt gave way before hope, and simple faith strengthened the little elf in his last moments. Faintly he raised his head and looked with fast darkening eyes towards the spot from whence the voice had come.

"Who are you?" he murmured, in weak and faltering accents—"who are you that speaks such kind words to me?"

"It matters not to say who I am," replied the voice, tenderly. "Let it be enough for you to know that there are beings of whom neither mortals nor elves have real knowledge, but who exist, nevertheless, and do service to Him who permits their existence whenever that service is required. Farewell, Rigmarole, farewell. The blessing of the holy spring is yours. Farewell, farewell."

And whilst the sweet tones of the spirit voice sounded still in his ears, the little elf sank gently back upon the bank and breathed no more. Quiet and painless was his end, and happy thoughts were his to the very last. Through all the evil of elfdom he had passed unscathed; the rude buffets of the world he had patiently borne; the insults of mankind he had endured; the changes of fortune, the banishment

from home, the want of sympathy (so trying to a feeling heart), had all failed to tempt him from the love of right, or to make him for one instant forget the object of his life's desire.

He had found it now, and if you had looked upon his face as he lay dead by the holy spring you would have seen a placid joy, a quiet contentment upon his countenance, which gave a sure sign that he had also found at last the peace and rest, the love and sympathy, which had been denied to him upon earth.

Let us leave him there, at the foot of the great oak tree, close by the holy spring. I cannot tell you any more. Perhaps the robin redbreasts came to him, as in the old story of the babes in the wood, and covered him with leaves: perhaps the spirits carried him away to some safe resting-place—I know not; but I am sure that He who gave him the soul did not leave him unaided, and that whatever became of the little elfin form after the soul had left it, the brighter and immortal part soared off to the regions of eternal bliss, where love and truth, faith and purity, reign supreme, and those who have loved them upon earth find a fulness of joy for ever.

THE END.

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