

MRS. BOTHERBY'S STORY: THE LEECH OF FOLKESTONE

Reader, were you ever bewitched? — I do not mean by a “white wench’s black eye,” or by love potions imbibed from a ruby lip;— but, were you ever really and *bonâ fide* bewitched, in the true Matthew Hopkins sense of the word? Did you ever, for instance, find yourself from head to heel one vast complication of cramps? — Or burst out into sudorific exudation like a cold thaw, with the thermometer at zero? — Were your eyes ever turned upside down, exhibiting nothing but their whites? — Did you ever vomit a paper of crooked pins? Or expectorate Whitechapel needles? — These are genuine and undoubted marks of possession; and if you never experienced any of them, — why, “happy man be his dole!”

Yet such things have been: yea, we are assured, and that on no mean authority, still are.

The World, according to the best geographers, is divided into Europe, Asia, Africa, America, and Romney Marsh. In this last named, and fifth, quarter of the globe, a Witch may still be occasionally discovered in favourable, *i.e.* stormy, seasons, weathering Dungeness Point in an egg-shell, or careering on her broomstick over Dymchurch wall. A cow may yet be sometimes seen galloping like mad, with tail erect, and an old pair of breeches on her horns, an unerring guide to the door of the crone whose magic arts have drained her udder — I do not, however, remember to have heard that any Conjuror has of late been detected in the district.

Not many miles removed from the verge of this recondite region, stands a collection of houses, which its maligners call a fishing town, and its well-wishers a watering place. A limb of one of the Cinque Ports, it has (or lately had) a corporation of its own, and has been thought considerable enough to give a second title to a noble family. Rome stood on seven hills; Folkestone seems to have been built upon seventy. Its streets, lanes, and alleys — fanciful distinctions without much real difference — are agreeable enough to persons who do not mind running up and down stairs; and the only inconvenience, at all felt by such of its inhabitants as are not asthmatic, is when some heedless urchin tumbles down a chimney, or an impertinent pedestrian peeps into a garret window.

At the eastern extremity of the town, on the sea beach, and scarcely above high water mark, stood, in the good old times, a row of houses then denominated “Frog Hole.” Modern refinement subsequently euphonized the name into “East Street;” but “what’s in a name?” — the encroachments of Ocean have long since levelled all in one common ruin.

Here, in the early part of the seventeenth century, flourished in somewhat doubtful reputation, but comparative opulence, a compounder of medicines,

one Master Erasmus Buckthorne; the effluvia of whose drugs from within, mingling agreeably with the “ancient and fish-like smells” from without, wafted a delicious perfume throughout the neighbourhood.

At seven of the clock, on the morning when Mrs. Botherby’s narrative commences, a stout Suffolk “punch,” about thirteen hands and a half in height, was slowly led up and down before the door of the pharmacoplist by a lean and withered lad, whose appearance warranted an opinion, pretty generally expressed, that his master found him as useful in experimentalizing as in household drudgery; and that, for every pound avoirdupois of solid meat, he swallowed, at the least, two pounds troy weight of chemicals and galenicals. As the town clock struck the quarter, Master Buckthorne emerged from his laboratory, and, putting the key carefully into his pocket, mounted the surefooted cob aforesaid, and proceeded up and down the acclivities and declivities of the town with the gravity due to his station and profession. When he reached the open country, his pace was increased to a sedate canter, which, in somewhat more than half an hour, brought “the horse and his rider” in front of a handsome and substantial mansion, the numerous gable-ends and bayed windows of which bespoke the owner a man of worship, and one well to do in the world.

“How now, Hodge Gardener?” quoth the Leech, scarcely drawing bit; for Punch seemed to be aware that he had reached his destination, and paused of his own accord; “How now, man? How fares thine employer, worthy Master Marsh? How hath he done? How hath he slept? — My potion hath done its office? Ha!”

“Alack! ill at ease, worthy sir — ill at ease,” returned the hind; “his honour is up and stirring; but he hath rested none, and complaineth that the same gnawing pain devoureth, as it were, his very vitals: in sooth he is ill at ease.”

“Morrow, doctor!” interrupted a voice from a casement opening on the lawn. “Good morrow! I have looked for, longed for, thy coming this hour and more; enter at once; the pasty and tankard are impatient for thine attack!”

“Marry, Heaven forbid that I should baulk their fancy!” quoth the Leech *sotto voce*, as, abandoning the bridle to honest Hodge, he dismounted, and followed a buxom looking handmaiden into the breakfast parlour.

There, at the head of his well-furnished board, sat Master Thomas Marsh, of Marston Hall, a Yeoman well respected in his degree: one of that sturdy and sterling class which, taking rank immediately below the Esquire (a title in its origin purely military), occupied, in the wealthier counties, the position in society now filled by the Country Gentleman. He was one of those of whom the proverb ran:

“A Knight of Cales,  
A Gentleman of Wales,  
And a Laird of the North Countree;

A Yeoman of Kent,  
With his yearly rent,  
Will buy them out all three!"

A cold sirloin, big enough to frighten a Frenchman, filled the place of honour, counter checked by a game pie of no stinted dimensions; while a silver flagon of "humming-bub," — *viz.* ale strong enough to blow a man's beaver off — smiled opposite in treacherous amenity. The sideboard groaned beneath sundry massive cups and waiters of the purest silver; while the huge skull of a fallow deer, with its branching horns, frowned majestically above. All spoke of affluence, of comfort — all save the master, whose restless eye and feverish look hinted but too plainly the severest mental or bodily disorder. By the side of the proprietor of the mansion sat his consort, a lady now past the bloom of youth, yet still retaining many of its charms. The clear olive of her complexion, and "the darkness of her Andalusian eye," at once betrayed her foreign origin; in fact, her "lord and master," as husbands were even then, by a legal fiction, denominated, had taken her to his bosom in a foreign country. The cadet of his family, Master Thomas Marsh, had early in life been engaged in commerce. In the pursuit of his vocation he had visited Antwerp, Hamburg, and most of the Hanse Towns; and had already formed a tender connexion with the orphan offspring of one of old Alva's officers, when the unexpected deaths of one immediate, and two presumptive, heirs placed him next in succession to the family acres. He married, and brought home his bride: who, by the decease of the venerable possessor, heartbroken at the loss of his elder children, became eventually lady of Marston Hall. It has been said that she was beautiful, yet was her beauty of a character that operates on the fancy more than the affections; she was one to be admired rather than loved. The proud curl of her lip, the firmness of her tread, her arched brow and stately carriage, showed the decision, not to say haughtiness, of her soul; while her glances, whether lightening with anger, or melting in extreme softness, betrayed the existence of passions as intense in kind as opposite in quality. She rose as Erasmus entered the parlour, and, bestowing on him a look fraught with meaning, quitted the room, leaving him in unrestrained communication with his patient.

"Fore George, Master Buckthorne!" exclaimed the latter, as the Leech drew near, "I will no more of your pharmacy; — burn, burn — gnaw, gnaw — I had as lief the foul fiend were in my gizzard as one of your drugs. Tell me in the devil's name, what is the matter with me!"

Thus conjured, the practitioner paused, and even turned somewhat pale. There was a perceptible faltering in his voice, as, evading the question, he asked, "What say your other physicians?"

"Doctor Phiz says it is wind — Doctor Fuz says it is water — and Doctor Buz says it is something between wind and water."

"They are all of them wrong," said Erasmus Buckthorne.

“Truly, I think so,” returned the patient. “They are manifest asses; but you, good Leech, you are a horse of another colour. The world talks loudly of your learning, your skill, and cunning in arts the most abstruse; nay, sooth to say, some look coldly on you therefore, and stickle not to aver that you are cater cousin with Beelzebub himself.”

“It is ever the fate of science,” murmured the professor, “to be maligned by the ignorant and superstitious. But a truce with such folly; let me examine your palate.”

Master Marsh thrust out a tongue long, clear, and red as beetroot. “There is nothing wrong there,” said the Leech. “Your wrist:— no;— the pulse is firm and regular, the skin cool and temperate. Sir, there is nothing the matter with you!”

“Nothing the matter with me, Sir ‘Potecary? — But I tell you there is the matter with me — much the matter with me. Why is it that something seems ever gnawing at my heart-strings? — Whence this pain in the region of the liver? — Why is it that I sleep not o’ nights — rest not o’ days? Why?”

“You are fidgety, Master Marsh,” said the doctor.

Master Marsh’s brow grew dark; he half rose from his seat, supported himself by both hands on the arms of his elbow-chair, and in accents of mingled anger and astonishment repeated the word “Fidgety!”

“Ay, fidgety,” returned the doctor calmly. “Tut, man, there is nought ails thee save thine own overweening fancies. Take less of food, more air, put aside thy flagon, call for thy horse; be boot and saddle the word! Why — hast thou not youth? — ”

“I have,” said the patient.

“Wealth and a fair domain?”

“Granted,” quoth Marsh cheerily.

“And a fair wife?”

“Yea,” was the response, but in a tone something less satisfied.

“Then arouse thee, man, shake off this fantasy, betake thyself to thy lawful occasions — use thy good hap — follow thy pleasures, and think no more of these fancied ailments.”

“But I tell you, master mine, these ailments are not fancied. I lose my rest, I loathe my food, my doublet sits loosely on me — these racking pains. My wife, too — when I meet her gaze, the cold sweat stands on my forehead, and I could almost think — ” Marsh paused abruptly, mused awhile, then added, looking

steadily at his visitor, "These things are not right; they pass the common, Master Erasmus Buckthorne."

A slight shade crossed the brow of the Leech, but its passage was momentary; his features softened to a smile, in which pity seemed slightly blended with contempt. "Have done with such follies, Master Marsh. You are well, an you would but think so. Ride, I say, hunt, shoot, do anything — disperse these melancholic humours, and become yourself again."

"Well, I will do your bidding," said Marsh, thoughtfully. "It may be so; and yet — but I will do your bidding. Master Cobbe of Brenzet writes me that he hath a score or two of fat ewes to be sold a pennyworth; I had thought to have sent Ralph Looker, but I will essay to go myself. Ho, there! — Saddle me the brown mare, and bid Ralph be ready to attend me on the gelding."

An expression of pain contracted the features of Master Marsh as he rose and slowly quitted the apartment to prepare for his journey; while the Leech, having bidden him farewell, vanished through an opposite door, and betook himself to the private boudoir of the fair Mrs. Marston, muttering as he went a quotation from a then newly-published play,

"Not poppy, nor mandragora,  
Nor all the drowsy syrups of the world,  
Shall ever medicine thee to that sweet sleep  
Which thou own'dst yesterday."

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Of what passed at this interview between the Folkestone doctor and the fair Spaniard, Mrs. Botherby declares she could never obtain any satisfactory elucidation. Not that tradition is silent on the subject — quite the contrary; it is the abundance, not paucity, of the materials she supplies, and the consequent embarrassment of selection, that makes the difficulty. Some have averred that the Leech, whose character, as has been before hinted, was more than threadbare, employed his time in teaching her the mode of administering certain noxious compounds, the unconscious partaker whereof would pine and die so slowly and gradually as to defy suspicion. Others there were who affirmed that Lucifer himself was then and there raised *in propria personâ*, with all his terrible attributes of horn and hoof. In support of this assertion, they adduce the testimony of the aforesaid buxom housemaid, who protested that the hall smelt that evening like a manufactory of matches. All, however, seemed to agree that the confabulation, whether human or infernal, was conducted with profound secrecy, and protracted to a considerable length; that its object, as far as could be divined, meant anything but good to the head of the family: that the lady, moreover, was heartily tired of her husband; and that, in the event of his removal by disease or casualty, Master Erasmus Buckthorne, albeit a great philosopher, would have no violent objection to "throw physic to the dogs," and exchange his laboratory for the estate of Marston, its live stock included. Some, too, have inferred that to him did Madame Isabel seriously incline; while others

have thought, induced perhaps by subsequent events, that she was merely using him for her purposes; that one José, a tall, bright-eyed, hook-nosed stripling from her native land, was a personage not unlikely to put a spoke in the doctor's wheel; and that, should such a chance arise, the Sage, wise as he was, would, after all, run no slight risk of being "bamboozled."

Master José was a youth well-favoured, and comely to look upon. His office was that of page to the dame; an office which, after long remaining in abeyance, has been of late years revived, as may well be seen in the persons of sundry smart hobbledehoys, now constantly to be met with on staircases and in boudoirs, clad, for the most part, in garments fitted tightly to the shape, the lower moiety adorned with a broad strip of crimson or silver lace, and the upper with what the first Wit of our times has described as "a favourable eruption of buttons." The precise duties of this employment have never, as far as we have heard, been accurately defined. The perfuming a handkerchief, the combing a lapdog, and the occasional presentation of a sippet-shaped *billet doux*, are, and always have been, among them; but these a young gentleman standing five foot ten, and aged nineteen "last grass," might well be supposed to have outgrown. José, however, kept his place, perhaps because he was not fit for any other. To the conference between his mistress and the physician he had not been admitted; his post was to keep watch and ward in the anteroom; and, when the interview was concluded, he attended the lady and her visitor as far as the court-yard, where he held, with all due respect, the stirrup for the latter, as he once more resumed his position on the back of Punch.

Who is it that says "little pitchers have large ears?" Some deep metaphysician of the potteries, who might have added that they have also quick eyes, and sometimes silent tongues. There was a little metaphorical piece of crockery of this class, who, screened by a huge elbow chair, had sat a quiet and unobserved spectator of the whole proceedings between her mamma and Master Erasmus Buckthorne. This was Miss Marian Marsh, a rosy cheeked laughter loving imp of some six years old; but one who could be mute as a mouse when the fit was on her. A handsome and highly polished cabinet of the darkest ebony occupied a recess at one end of the apartment; this had long been a great subject of speculation to little Miss. Her curiosity, however, had always been repelled; nor had all her coaxing ever won her an inspection of the thousand and one pretty things which its recesses no doubt contained. On this occasion it was unlocked, and Marian was about to rush forward in eager anticipation of a peep at its interior, when, child as she was, the reflection struck her that she would stand a better chance of carrying her point by remaining *perdue*. Fortune for once favoured her: she crouched closer than before, and saw her mother take something from one of the drawers, which she handed over to the Leech. Strange mutterings followed, and words whose sound was foreign to her youthful ears. Had she been older, their import, perhaps, might have been equally unknown. — After a while there was a pause; and then the lady, as in answer to a requisition from the gentleman, placed in his hand a something which she took from her toilet. The transaction, whatever its nature, seemed now to be complete, and the article was carefully replaced in the drawer from which it had been taken. A long, and apparently interesting, conversation then

took place between the parties, carried on in a low tone. At its termination, Mistress Marsh and Master Erasmus Buckthorne quitted the boudoir together. But the cabinet! —Ay, that was left unfastened; the folding doors still remained invitingly expanded, the bunch of keys dangling from the lock. In an instant the spoiled child was in a chair; the drawer, so recently closed, yielded at once to her hand, and her hurried researches were rewarded by the prettiest little waxen doll imaginable. It was a first rate prize, and Miss lost no time in appropriating it to herself. Long before Madame Marsh had returned to her *Sanctum*, Marian was seated under a laurestinus in the garden, nursing her new baby with the most affectionate solicitude.

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“Susan, look here; see what a nasty scratch I have got upon my hand,” said the young lady, when routed out at length from her hiding-place to her noontide meal.

“Yes, Miss, this is always the way with you! mend, mend, mend — nothing but mend! Scrambling about among the bushes, and tearing your clothes to rags. What with you, and with madam’s farthingales and kirtles, a poor bower-maiden has a fine time of it!”

“But I have not torn my clothes, Susan, and it was not the bushes; it was the doll: only see what a great ugly pin I have pulled out of it! and look, here is another!” As she spoke, Marian drew forth one of those extended pieces of black pointed wire, with which, in the days of toupees and pompoons, our foremothers were wont to secure their fly caps and head gear from the impertinent assaults of “Zephyrus and the Little Breezes.”

“And pray, Miss, where did you get this pretty doll, as you call it!” asked Susan, turning over the puppet, and viewing it with a scrutinizing eye.

“Mamma gave it me,” said the child. — This was a fib!

“Indeed!” quoth the girl thoughtfully; and then, in half soliloquy, and a lower key, “Well! I wish I may die if it doesn’t look like master! — But come to your dinner, Miss! Hark! the *bell is striking One!*”

Meanwhile Master Thomas Marsh, and his man Ralph, were threading the devious paths, then, as now, most pseudonymously dignified with the name of roads, that wound between Marston Hall and the frontier of Romney Marsh. Their progress was comparatively slow; for though the brown mare was as good a roadster as man might back, and the gelding no mean nag of his hands, yet the tracts, rarely traversed save by the rude wains of the day, miry in the “bottoms,” and covered with loose and rolling stones on the higher grounds, rendered barely passable the perpetual alternation of hill and valley.

The master rode on in pain, and the man in listlessness; although the intercourse between two individuals so situated was much less restrained in

those days than might suit the refinement of a later age, little passed approximating to conversation beyond an occasional and half-stifled groan from the one, or a vacant whistle from the other. An hour's riding had brought them among the woods of Acryse; and they were about to descend one of those green and leafy lanes, rendered by matted and overarching branches alike impervious to shower or sunbeam, when a sudden and violent spasm seized on Master Marsh, and nearly caused him to fall from his horse. With some difficulty he succeeded in dismounting, and seating himself by the road side. Here he remained for a full half-hour in great apparent agony; the cold sweat rolled in large round drops adown his clammy forehead, a universal shivering palsied every limb, his eyeballs appeared to be starting from their sockets, and to his attached, though dull and heavy serving man, he seemed as one struggling in the pangs of impending dissolution. His groans rose thick and frequent; and the alarmed Ralph was hesitating between his disinclination to leave him, and his desire to procure such assistance as one of the few cottages, rarely sprinkled in that wild country, might afford, when, after a long-drawn sigh, his master's features as suddenly relaxed; he declared himself better, the pang had passed away, and, to use his own expression, he "felt as if a knife had been drawn from out his very heart." With Ralph's assistance, after a while, he again reached his saddle; and though still ill at ease, from a deep-seated and gnawing pain, which ceased not, as he averred, to torment him, the violence of the paroxysm was spent, and it returned no more.

Master and man pursued their way with increased speed, as, emerging from the wooded defiles, they at length neared the coast; then, leaving the romantic castle of Saltwood, with its neighbouring town of Hithe, a little on their left, they proceeded along the ancient paved causeway, and, crossing the old Roman road, or Watling, plunged again into the woods that stretched between Lympe and Ostenhanger.

The sun rose high in the heavens, and its meridian blaze was powerfully felt by man and horse, when, again quitting their leafy covert, the travellers debouched on the open plain of Aldington Frith, a wide tract of unenclosed country stretching down to the very borders of "the Marsh" itself.

Here it was, in the neighbouring chapelry, the site of which may yet be traced by the curious antiquary, that Elizabeth Barton, the "Holy Maid of Kent," had, something less than a hundred years previous to the period of our narrative, commenced that series of supernatural pranks which eventually procured for her head an unenvied elevation upon London Bridge; and though the parish had since enjoyed the benefit of the incumbency of Master Erasmus's illustrious and enlightened Namesake, still, truth to tell, some of the old leaven was even yet supposed to be at work. The place had, in fact, an ill name; and, though Popish miracles had ceased to electrify its denizens, spells and charms, operating by a no less wondrous agency, were said to have taken their place. Warlocks, and other unholy subjects of Satan, were reported to make its wild recesses their favourite rendezvous, and that to an extent which eventually attracted the notice of no less a personage than the sagacious Matthew Hopkins himself, Witchfinder-General to the British government.

A great portion of the Frith, or Fright, as the name was then, and is still pronounced, had formerly been a Chase, with rights of free warren, etc., appertaining to the Archbishops of the Province. Since the Reformation, however, it had been disparked; and when Master Thomas Marsh, and his man Ralph, entered upon its confines, the open greensward exhibited a lively scene, sufficiently explanatory of certain sounds that had already reached their ears while yet within the sylvan screen which concealed their origin.

It was Fair Day: booths, stalls, and all the rude *paraphernalia* of an assembly that then met as much for the purposes of traffic as festivity, were scattered irregularly over the turf; pedlars, with their packs, horse coupers, pig merchants, itinerant vendors of crockery and cutlery, wandered promiscuously among the mingled groups, exposing their several wares and commodities, and soliciting custom. On one side was the gaudy riband, making its mute appeal to rustic gallantry; on the other, the delicious brandy ball and alluring lollipop, compounded after the most approved receipt in the "True Gentlewoman's Garland," and "raising the waters" in the mouth of many an expectant urchin.

Nor were rural sports wanting to those whom pleasure, rather than business, had drawn from their humble homes. Here was the tall and slippery pole, glittering in its grease, and crowned with the ample cheese, that mocked the hopes of the discomfited climber. There the fugitive pippin, swimming in water not of the purest, and bobbing from the expanded lips of the juvenile Tantalus. In this quarter the ear was pierced by squeaks from some beleaguered porker, whisking his well-soaped tail from the grasp of one already in fancy his captor. In that, the eye rested, with undisguised delight, upon the grimaces of grinning candidates for the honours of the horse-collar. All was fun, frolic, courtship, junketing, and jollity.

Maid Marian, indeed, with her lieges, Robin Hood, Scarlet, and Little John, was wanting; Friar Tuck was absent; even the Hobby Horse had disappeared: but the agile Morris dancers yet were there, and jingled their bells merrily among stalls well stored with gingerbread, tops, whips, whistles, and all those noisy instruments of domestic torture in which scenes like these are even now so fertile. — Had I a foe whom I held at deadliest feud, I would entice his favourite child to a Fair, and buy him a whistle and a penny trumpet.

In one corner of the green, a little apart from the thickest of the throng, stood a small square stage, nearly level with the chins of the spectators, whose repeated bursts of laughter seemed to intimate the presence of something more than usually amusing. The platform was divided into two unequal portions; the smaller of which, surrounded by curtains of a coarse canvas, veiled from the eyes of the profane the *penetralia* of this moveable temple of Esculapius, for such it was. Within its interior, and secure from vulgar curiosity, the Quacksalver had hitherto kept himself ensconced; occupied, no doubt, in the preparation and arrangement of that wonderful *panacea* which was hereafter to shed the blessings of health among the admiring crowd. Meanwhile his attendant Jack Pudding was busily employed on the *proscenium*, doing his best

to attract attention by a practical facetiousness which took wonderfully with the spectators, interspersing it with the melodious notes of a huge cow's horn. The fellow's costume varied but little in character from that in which the late (alas! That we should have to write the word — late!) Mr. Joseph Grimaldi was accustomed to present himself before "a generous and enlightened public:" the principal difference consisted in this, that the upper garment was a long white tunic of a coarse linen, surmounted by a caricature of the ruff then fast falling into disuse, and was secured from the throat downwards by a single row of broad white metal buttons; and his legs were cased in loose wide trousers of the same material; while his sleeves, prolonged to a most disproportionate extent, descended far below the fingers, and acted as flappers in the somersets and caracoles, with which he diversified and enlivened his antics. Consummate impudence, not altogether unmixed with a certain sly humour, sparkled in his eye through the chalk and ochre with which his features were plentifully bedaubed; and especially displayed itself in a succession of jokes, the coarseness of which did not seem to detract from their merit in the eyes of his applauding audience.

He was in the midst of a long and animated harangue explanatory of his master's high pretensions; he had informed his gaping auditors that the latter was the seventh son of a seventh son, and of course, as they very well knew, an Unborn Doctor; that to this happy accident of birth he added the advantage of most extensive travel; that in his search after science he had not only perambulated the whole of this world, but had trespassed on the boundaries of the next: that the depths of the Ocean and the bowels of the Earth were alike familiar to him; that besides salves and cataplasms of sovereign virtue, by combining sundry mosses, gathered many thousand fathoms below the surface of the sea, with certain unknown drugs found in an undiscovered island, and boiling the whole in the lava of Vesuvius, he had succeeded in producing his celebrated balsam of Crackapanoko, the never failing remedy for all human disorders, and which, a proper trial allowed, would go near to reanimate the dead. "Draw near!" continued the worthy, "draw near, my masters! and you, my good mistresses, draw near, every one of you. Fear not high and haughty carriage: though greater than King or Kaiser, yet is the mighty Aldrovando milder than mother's milk; flint to the proud, to the humble he is as melting wax; he asks not your disorders, he sees them himself at a glance — nay, without a glance; he tells your ailments with his eyes shut! — Draw near! draw near! the more incurable the better! List to the illustrious Doctor Aldrovando, first physician to Prester John, Leech to the Grand Llama, and Hakim in Ordinary to Mustapha Muley Bey!"

"Hath your master ever a charm for the toothache, an't please you?" asked an elderly countryman, whose swollen cheek bespoke his interest in the question.

"A charm!—a thousand, and every one of them infallible. Toothache, quotha! I had hoped you had come with every bone in your body fractured or out of joint. A toothache! — Propound a tester, master o' mine — we ask not more for

such trifles: do my bidding, and thy jaws, even with the word, shall cease to trouble thee!”

The clown, fumbling a while in a deep leathern purse, at length produced a sixpence, which he tendered to the jester. “Now to thy master, and bring me the charm forthwith.”

“Nay, honest man; to disturb the mighty Aldrovando on such slight occasion were pity of my life: areed my counsel aright, and I will warrant thee for the nonce. Hie thee home, friend; infuse this powder in cold spring water, fill thy mouth with the mixture, and sit upon thy fire till it boils!”

“Out on thee for a pestilent knave!” cried the cozened countryman; but the roar of merriment around bespoke the bystanders well pleased with the jape put upon him. He retired, venting his spleen in audible murmurs; and the mountebank, finding the feelings of the mob enlisted on his side, waxed more impudent every instant, filling up the intervals between his fooleries with sundry capers and contortions, and discordant notes from the cow’s horn.

“Draw near, draw near, my masters! Here have ye a remedy for every evil under the sun, moral, physical, natural, and supernatural! Hath any man a termagant wife? — here is that will tame her presently! Hath any one a smoky chimney? — here is an incontinent cure!”

To the first infliction no man ventured to plead guilty, though there were those standing by who thought their neighbours might have profited withal. For the last-named recipe started forth at least a dozen candidates. With the greatest gravity imaginable, Pierrot, having pocketed their groats, delivered to each a small packet curiously folded and closely sealed, containing, as he averred, directions which, if truly observed, would preclude any chimney from smoking for a whole year. They whose curiosity led them to dive into the mystery, found that a sprig of mountain ash culled by moonlight was the charm recommended, coupled, however, with the proviso that no fire should be lighted on the hearth during its exercise.

The frequent bursts of merriment proceeding from this quarter at length attracted the attention of Master Marsh, whose line of road necessarily brought him near this end of the fair; he drew bit in front of the stage just as its noisy occupant, having laid aside his formidable horn, was drawing still more largely on the amazement of “the public” by a feat of especial wonder — he was eating fire! Curiosity mingled with astonishment was at its height; and feelings not unallied to alarm were beginning to manifest themselves, among the softer sex especially, as they gazed on the flames that issued from the mouth of the living volcano. All eyes, indeed, were fixed upon the fire-eater with an intentness that left no room for observing another worthy who had now emerged upon the scene. This was, however, no less a personage than the *Deus ex machinâ* — the illustrious Aldrovando himself.

Short in stature and spare in form, the sage had somewhat increased the former by a steeple-crowned hat adorned with a cock's feather; while the thick shoulder padding of a quilted doublet, surmounted by a falling band, added a little to his personal importance in point of breadth. His habit was composed throughout of black serge, relieved with scarlet slashes in the sleeves and trunks; red was the feather in his hat, red were the roses in his shoes, which rejoiced moreover in a pair of red heels. The lining of a short cloak of faded velvet, that hung transversely over his left shoulder, was also red. Indeed, from all that we could ever see or hear, this agreeable alternation of red and black appears to be the mixture of colours most approved at the court of Beelzebub, and the one most generally adopted by his friends and favourites. His features were sharp and shrewd, and a fire sparkled in his keen grey eye, much at variance with the wrinkles that ran their irregular furrows above his prominent and bushy brows. He had advanced slowly from behind the screen while the attention of the multitude was absorbed by the pyrotechnics of Mr. Merryman, and, stationing himself at the extreme corner of the stage, stood quietly leaning on a crutch-handle walking staff of blackest ebony, his glance steadily fixed on the face of Marsh, from whose countenance the amusement he had insensibly begun to derive had not succeeded in removing all traces of bodily pain.

For a while the latter was unobservant of the inquisitorial survey with which he was regarded; the eyes of the parties, however, at length met. The brown mare had a fine shoulder; she stood pretty nearly sixteen hands. Marsh himself, though slightly bowed by ill health and the "coming autumn" of life, was full six feet in height. His elevation giving him an unobstructed view over the heads of the pedestrians, he had naturally fallen into the rear of the assembly, which brought him close to the diminutive Doctor, with whose face, despite the red heels, his own was about upon a level.

"And what makes Master Marsh here? — what sees he in the mummeries of a miserable buffoon to divert him when his life is in jeopardy?" said a shrill cracked voice that sounded as in his very ear. It was the Doctor who spoke.

"Knowest thou me, friend?" said Marsh, scanning with awakened interest the figure of his questioner: "I call thee not to mind; and yet — stay, where have we met?"

"It skills not to declare," was the answer; "suffice it we *have* met — in other climes perchance — and now meet happily again — happily at least for thee."

"Why truly the trick of thy countenance reminds me of somewhat I have seen before; where or when I know not: but what wouldst thou with me?"

"Nay, rather what wouldst thou here, Thomas Marsh? What wouldst thou on the Frith of Aldington? — is it a score or two of paltry sheep? Or is it something *nearer to thy heart?*"

Marsh started as the last words were pronounced with more than common significance: a pang shot through him at the moment, and the vinegar aspect of the charlatan seemed to relax into a smile half compassionate, half sardonic.

“Grammercy,” quoth Marsh, after a long-drawn breath, “what knowest thou of me, fellow, or of my concerns? What knowest thou —”

“This know I, Master Thomas Marsh,” said the stranger gravely, “that thy life is even now perilled, evil practices are against thee; but no matter, thou art quit for the nonce — other hands than mine have saved thee! Thy pains are over. Hark! *the clock strikes One!*” As he spoke a single toll from the bell tower of Bilsington came, wafted by the western breeze, over the thick set and lofty oaks which intervened between the Frith and what had been once a priory. Doctor Aldrovando turned as the sound came floating on the wind, and was moving, as if half in anger, towards the other side of the stage, where the mountebank, his fires extinct, was now disgorging to the admiring crowd yard after yard of gaudy coloured riband.

“Stay! Nay, prithee stay!” cried Marsh eagerly, “I was wrong; in faith I was. A change, and that a sudden and most marvellous, hath indeed come over me; I am free; I breathe again; I feel as though a load of years had been removed; and — is it possible? — Hast thou done this?”

“Thomas Marsh!” said the doctor, pausing, and turning for the moment on his heel, “I have not: I repeat that other and more innocent hands than mine have done this deed. Nevertheless, heed my counsel well! Thou art parlously encompassed; I, and I only, have the means of relieving thee. Follow thy courses; pursue thy journey; but as thou valuest life and more than life, be at the foot of yonder woody knoll what time the rising moon throws her first beam upon the bare and blighted summit that towers above its trees.”

He crossed abruptly to the opposite quarter of the scaffolding, and was in an instant deeply engaged in listening to those whom the cow’s horn had attracted, and in prescribing for their real or fancied ailments. Vain were all Marsh’s efforts again to attract his notice; it was evident that he studiously avoided him; and when, after an hour or more spent in useless endeavour, he saw the object of his anxiety seclude himself once more within his canvass screen, he rode slowly and thoughtfully off the field.

What should he do? Was the man a mere quack? an impostor? — His name thus obtained? — That might be easily done. But then, his secret griefs; the doctor’s knowledge of them; their cure; for he felt that his pains were gone, his healthful feelings restored!

True, Aldrovando, if that were his name, had disclaimed all cooperation in his recovery; but he knew, or he at least announced it. Nay, more, he had hinted that he was yet in jeopardy; that practices — and the chord sounded strangely in unison with one that had before vibrated within him — that practices were in operation against his life! It was enough! He would keep tryst with the

Conjuror, if conjuror he were; and, at least, ascertain who and what he was, and how he had become acquainted with his own person and secret afflictions.

When the late Mr. Pitt was determined to keep out Bonaparte, and prevent his gaining a settlement in the county of Kent, among other ingenious devices adopted for that purpose, he caused to be constructed what was then, and has ever since been conventionally termed a "Military Canal." This is a not very practicable ditch, some thirty feet wide, and nearly nine feet deep — in the middle — extending from the town and port of Hithe to within a mile of the town and port of Rye, a distance of about twenty miles, and forming, as it were, the cord of a bow, the arc of which constitutes that remote fifth quarter of the globe spoken of by travellers. Trivial objections to the plan were made at the time by cavillers; and an old gentleman of the neighbourhood, who proposed as a cheap substitute, to put down his own cocked-hat upon a pole, was deservedly pooh-pooh'd down; in fact, the job, though rather an expensive one, was found to answer remarkably well. The French managed indeed to scramble over the Rhine and the Rhone, and other insignificant currents, but they never did, or could, pass Mr. Pitt's "Military Canal." At no great distance from the centre of this cord rises abruptly a sort of woody promontory, in shape almost conical; its sides covered with thick underwood, above which is seen a bare and brown summit rising like an Alp in miniature. The "defence of the nation" not being then in existence, Master Marsh met with no obstruction in reaching this place of appointment long before the time prescribed.

So much, indeed, was his mind occupied by his adventure and extraordinary cure, that his original design had been abandoned, and Master Cobbe remained unvisited. A rude hostel in the neighbourhood furnished entertainment for man and horse; and here, a full hour before the rising of the moon, he left Ralph and the other beasts, proceeding to his rendezvous on foot and alone.

"You are punctual, Master Marsh," squeaked the shrill voice of the Doctor, issuing from the thicket as the first silvery gleam trembled on the aspens above. "'Tis well: now follow me and in silence."

The first part of the command Marsh hesitated not to obey, the second was more difficult of observance.

"Who and what are you? Whither are you leading me?" burst not unnaturally from his lips; but all question was at once cut short by the peremptory tones of his guide.

"Hush! I say; your finger on your lip, there be hawks abroad: follow me, and that silently and quickly." The little man turned as he spoke, and led the way through a scarcely perceptible path or track, which wound among the underwood. The lapse of a few minutes brought them to the door of a low building, so hidden by the surrounding trees that few would have suspected its existence. It was a cottage of rather extraordinary dimensions, but consisting of only one floor. No smoke rose from its solitary chimney; no cheering ray streamed from its single window, which was, however, secured by a shutter of

such thickness as to preclude the possibility of any stray beam issuing from within. The exact size of the building it was, in that uncertain light, difficult to distinguish, a portion of it seeming buried in the wood behind. The door gave way on the application of a key, and Marsh followed his conductor resolutely but cautiously along a narrow passage, feebly lighted by a small taper that winked and twinkled at its farther extremity. The Doctor, as he approached, raised it from the ground, and, opening an adjoining door, ushered his guest into the room beyond.

It was a large and oddly furnished apartment, insufficiently lighted by an iron lamp that hung from the roof, and scarcely illuminated the walls and angles, which seemed to be composed of some dark coloured wood. On one side, however, Master Marsh could discover an article bearing strong resemblance to a coffin; on the other was a large oval mirror in an ebony frame, and in the midst of the floor was described in red chalk a double circle about six feet in diameter, its inner verge inscribed with sundry hieroglyphics, agreeably relieved at intervals with an alternation of skulls and cross bones. In the very centre was deposited one skull of such surpassing size and thickness as would have filled the soul of a Spurzheim or De Ville with wonderment. A large book, a naked sword, an hour glass, a chafing dish, and a black cat, completed the list of moveables; with the exception of a couple of tapers which stood on each side of the mirror, and which the strange gentleman now proceeded to light from the one in his hand. As they flared up with what Marsh thought a most unnatural brilliancy, he perceived reflected in the glass behind a dial suspended over the coffin-like article already mentioned: the hand was fast verging towards the hour of nine. The eyes of the little Doctor seemed riveted on the horologe.

“Now strip thee, Master Marsh, and that quickly: untruss, I say! discard thy boots, doff doublet and hose, and place thyself incontinent in yonder bath.”

The visitor cast his eyes again upon the formidable-looking article, and perceived that it was nearly filled with water. A cold bath, at such an hour and under such auspices, was anything but inviting: he hesitated, and turned his eyes alternately on the Doctor and the Black Cat.

“Trifle not the time, man, an you be wise,” said the former: “Passion of my heart! let but yon minute hand reach the hour, and thou not immersed, thy life were not worth a pin’s fee!”

The Black Cat gave vent to a single Mew — a most unnatural sound for a Mouser — it seemed as it were mewed through a cow’s horn.

“Quick, Master Marsh! uncase, or you perish!” repeated his strange host, throwing as he spoke a handful of some dingy looking powders into the brazier. “Behold the attack is begun!” A thick cloud rose from the embers; a cold shivering shook the astonished Yeoman; sharp pricking pains penetrated his ankles and the palms of his hands, and, as the smoke cleared away, he distinctly saw and recognised in the mirror the boudoir of Marston Hall.

The doors of the well-known ebony cabinet were closed; but fixed against them, and standing out in strong relief from the contrast afforded by the sable background, was a waxen image—of himself! It appeared to be secured, and sustained in an upright posture, by large black pins driven through the feet and palms, the latter of which were extended in a cruciform position. To the right and left stood his wife and José; in the middle, with his back towards him, was a figure which he had no difficulty in recognising as that of the Leech of Folkestone. The latter had just succeeded in fastening the dexter hand of the image, and was now in the act of drawing a broad and keen edged sabre from its sheath. The Black Cat mewed again. “Haste or you die!” said the Doctor — Marsh looked at the dial; it wanted but four minutes of nine: he felt that the crisis of his fate was come. Off went his heavy boots; doublet to the right, galligaskins to the left; never was man more swiftly disrobed: in two minutes, to use an Indian expression, “he was all face!” in another he was on his back, and up to his chin, in a bath which smelt strongly as of brimstone and garlic.

“Heed well the clock!” cried the Conjuror: “with the first stroke of Nine plunge thy head beneath the water, suffer not a hair above the surface: plunge deeply, or thou art lost!”

The little man had seated himself in the centre of the circle upon the large skull, elevating his legs at an angle of forty five degrees. In this position he spun round with a velocity to be equalled only by that of a tee-totum, the red roses on his insteps seeming to describe a circle of fire. The best buckskins that ever mounted at Melton had soon yielded to such rotatory friction — but he spun on — the Cat mewed, bats and obscene birds fluttered over-head; Erasmus was seen to raise his weapon, the clock struck! — and Marsh, who had “ducked” at the instant, popped up his head again, spitting and sputtering, half-choked with the infernal solution, which had insinuated itself into his mouth, and ears, and nose. All disgust at his nauseous dip, was, however, at once removed, when, casting his eyes on the glass, he saw the consternation of the party whose persons it exhibited. Erasmus had evidently made his blow and failed; the figure was unmutilated; the hilt remained in the hand of the striker, while the shivered blade lay in shining fragments on the floor.

The Conjuror ceased his spinning, and brought himself to an anchor; the Black Cat purred — its purring seemed strangely mixed with the self-satisfied chuckle of a human being. — Where had Marsh heard something like it before?

He was rising from his unsavoury couch, when a motion from the little man checked him. “Rest where you are, Thomas Marsh; so far all goes well, but the danger is not yet over!” He looked again, and perceived that the shadowy triumvirate were in deep and eager consultation; the fragments of the shattered weapon appeared to undergo a close scrutiny. The result was clearly unsatisfactory; the lips of the parties moved rapidly, and much gesticulation might be observed, but no sound fell upon the ear. The hand of the dial had nearly reached the quarter: at once the parties separated: and Buckthorne stood again before the figure, his hand armed with a long and sharp-pointed *misericorde*, a dagger little in use of late, but such as, a century before, often

performed the part of a modern oyster knife, in tickling the osteology of a dismounted cavalier through the shelly defences of his plate armour. Again he raised his arm. "Duck!" roared the Doctor, spinning away upon his cephalic pivot:— the Black Cat cocked his tail, and seemed to mew the word "Duck!" Down went Master Marsh's head; — one of his hands had unluckily been resting on the edge of the bath: he drew it hastily in, but not altogether scatheless; the stump of a rusty nail, projecting from the margin of the bath, had caught and slightly grazed it. The pain was more acute than is usually produced by such trivial accidents; and Marsh, on once more raising his head, beheld the dagger of the Leech sticking in the little finger of the wax figure, which it had seemingly nailed to the cabinet door.

"By my truly, a scape o' the narrowest!" quoth the Conjuror: "the next course, dive you not the readier, there is no more life in you than in a pickled herring. — What! courage, Master Marsh; but be heedful; an they miss again, let them bide the issue!"

He drew his hand athwart his brow as he spoke, and dashed off the perspiration, which the violence of his exercise had drawn from every pore. Black Tom sprang upon the edge of the bath, and stared full in the face of the bather: his sea green eyes were lambent with unholy fire, but their marvellous obliquity of vision was not to be mistaken; — the very countenance, too! — Could it be? — the features were feline, but their expression was that of the Jack Pudding! Was the Mountebank a Cat? — or the Cat a Mountebank? — it was all a mystery; — and Heaven knows how long Marsh might have continued staring at Grimalkin, had not his attention been again called by Aldrovando to the magic mirror.

Great dissatisfaction, not to say dismay, seemed now to pervade the conspirators; Dame Isabel was closely inspecting the figure's wounded hand, while José was aiding the pharmacoplist to charge a huge petronel with powder and bullets. The load was a heavy one; but Erasmus seemed determined this time to make sure of his object. Somewhat of trepidation might be observed in his manner as he rammed down the balls, and his withered cheek appeared to have acquired an increase of paleness; but amazement rather than fear was the prevailing symptom, and his countenance betrayed no jot of irresolution. As the clock was about to chime half past nine, he planted himself with a firm foot in front of the image, waved his unoccupied hand with a cautionary gesture to his companions, and, as they hastily retired on either side, brought the muzzle of his weapon within half a foot of his mark. As the shadowy form was about to draw the trigger, Marsh again plunged his head beneath the surface; and the sound of an explosion, as of firearms, mingled with the rush of water that poured into his ears. His immersion was but momentary, yet did he feel as though half suffocated: he sprang from the bath, and, as his eye fell on the mirror, he saw — or thought he saw — the Leech of Folkestone lying dead on the floor of his wife's boudoir, his head shattered to pieces, and his hand still grasping the stock of a bursten petronel.

He saw no more; his head swam; his senses reeled, the whole room was turning round, and, as he fell to the ground, the last impressions to which he was conscious were the chucklings of a hoarse laughter, and the mewings of a Tom Cat!

Master Marsh was found the next morning by his bewildered serving-man, stretched before the door of the humble hostel at which he sojourned. His clothes were somewhat torn and much bemired! and deeply did honest Ralph marvel that one so staid and grave as Master Marsh of Marston should thus have played the roisterer, missing, perchance, a profitable bargain for the drunken orgies of midnight wassail, or the endearments of some rustic light o'love. Tenfold was his astonishment increased when, after retracing in silence their journey of the preceding day, the Hall, on their arrival about noon, was found in a state of uttermost confusion. — No wife stood there to greet with the smile of bland affection her returning spouse; no page to hold his stirrup, or receive his gloves, his hat, and riding-rod. — The doors were open, the rooms in most admired disorder; men and maidens peeping, hurrying hither and thither, and popping in and out, like rabbits in a warren. — The lady of the mansion was nowhere to be found.

José, too, had disappeared; the latter had been last seen riding furiously towards Folkestone early in the preceding afternoon; to a question from Hodge Gardener he had hastily answered, that he bore a missive of moment from his mistress. The lean apprentice of Erasmus Buckthorne declared that the page had summoned his master, in haste, about six of the clock, and that they had rode forth together, as he verily believed, on their way back to the Hall, where he had supposed Master Buckthorne's services to be suddenly required on some pressing emergency. Since that time he had seen nought of either of them: the grey cob, however, had returned late at night, masterless, with his girths loose, and the saddle turned upside down.

Nor was Master Erasmus Buckthorne ever seen again. Strict search was made through the neighbourhood, but without success; and it was at length presumed that he must, for reasons which nobody could divine, have absconded, together with José and his faithless mistress. The latter had carried off with her the strong box, divers articles of valuable plate, and jewels of price. Her boudoir appeared to have been completely ransacked; the cabinet and drawers stood open and empty; the very carpet, a luxury then newly introduced into England, was gone. Marsh, however, could trace no vestige of the visionary scene which he affirmed to have been last night presented to his eyes.

Much did the neighbours marvel at his story:— some thought him mad; others, that he was merely indulging in that privilege to which, as a traveller, he had a right indefeasible. Trusty Ralph said nothing, but shrugged his shoulders; and, falling into the rear, imitated the action of raising a wine cup to his lips. An opinion, indeed, soon prevailed, that Master Thomas Marsh had gotten, in common parlance, exceedingly drunk on the preceding evening, and had dreamt all that he so circumstantially related. This belief acquired additional credit when they, whom curiosity induced to visit the woody knoll of

Aldington Mount, declared that they could find no building such as that described, nor any cottage near; save one, indeed, a low roofed hovel, once a house of public entertainment, but now half in ruins. The "Old Cat and Fiddle" — so was the tenement called — had been long uninhabited; yet still exhibited the remains of a broken sign, on which the keen observer might decipher something like a rude portrait of the animal from which it derived its name. It was also supposed still to afford an occasional asylum to the smugglers of the coast, but no trace of any visit from sage or mountebank could be detected; nor was the wise Aldrovando, whom many remembered to have seen at the fair, ever found again on all that countryside.

Of the runaways nothing was ever certainly known. A boat, the property of an old fisherman who plied his trade on the outskirts of the town, had been seen to quit the bay that night; and there were those who declared that she had more hands on board than Carden and his son, her usual complement; but, as the gale came on, and the frail bark was eventually found keel upwards on the Goodwin Sands, it was presumed that she had struck on that fatal quicksand in the dark, and that all on board had perished.

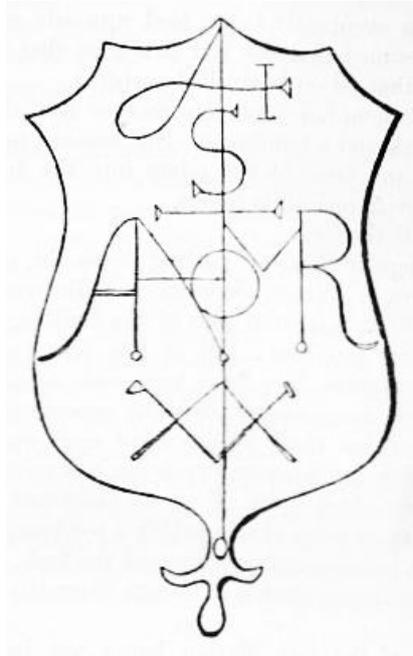
Little Marian, whom her profligate mother had abandoned, grew up to be a fine girl, and a handsome. She became, moreover, heiress to Marston Hall, and brought the estate into the Ingoldsby family by her marriage with one of its scions.

Thus far Mrs. Botherby.

It is a little singular that, on pulling down the old Hall in my grandfather's time, a human skeleton was discovered among the rubbish; under what particular part of the building I could never with any accuracy ascertain; but it was found enveloped in a tattered cloth, that seemed to have been once a carpet, and which fell to pieces almost immediately on being exposed to the air. The bones were perfect, but those of one hand were wanting; and the skull, perhaps from the labourer's pick-axe, had received considerable injury; the worm eaten stock of an old-fashioned pistol lay near, together with a rusty piece of iron which a workman, more sagacious than his fellows, pronounced a portion of the lock, but nothing was found which the utmost stretch of human ingenuity could twist into a barrel.

The portrait of the fair Marian hangs yet in the Gallery of Tappington; and near it is another, of a young man in the prime of life, whom Mrs. Botherby affirms to be that of her father. It exhibits a mild and rather melancholy countenance, with a high forehead, and the peaked beard and moustaches of the seventeenth century. The signet finger of the left hand is gone, and appears, on close inspection, to have been painted out by some later artist; possibly in compliment to the tradition, which, *teste Botherby*, records that of Mr. Marsh to have gangrened, and to have undergone amputation at the knuckle joint. If really the resemblance of the gentleman alluded to, it must have been taken at some period antecedent to his marriage. There is neither date nor painter's name; but, a little above the head, on the dexter side of the picture, is an

escutcheon, bearing “Quarterly, Gules and Argent, in the first quarter a horse’s head of the second;” beneath it are the words “*Ætatis suæ 26.*” On the opposite side is the following mark, which Mr. Simpkinson declares to be that of a Merchant of the Staple, and pretends to discover, in the monogram comprised in it, all the characters which compose the name of THOMAS MARSH, of MARSTON.



THE NURSE'S STORY: THE HAND OF GLORY

“Malefica quædam auguriatrix in Angliâ fuit, quam demones horribiliter extraxerunt, et imponentes super equum terribilem, per aera rapuerunt; Clamoresque terribiles (ut ferunt) per quatuor fermè miliaria audiebantur.”

— *Nuremb. Chron.*

On the lone bleak moor,  
At the midnight hour,  
Beneath the Gallows Tree,  
Hand in hand  
The Murderers stand  
By one, by two, by three!  
And the Moon that night  
With a grey, cold light  
Each baleful object tips;  
Each baleful object tips;  
One half of her form  
Is seen through the storm,  
The other half's hid in Eclipse!  
And the cold Wind howls,  
And the Thunder growls,  
And the Lightning is broad and bright;  
And altogether  
It's very bad weather,  
And an unpleasant sort of a night!  
“Now mount who list,  
And close by the wrist  
Sever me quickly the Dead Man's fist!—  
Now climb who dare Where he swings in air,  
And pluck me five locks of the Dead Man's hair!”

\* \* \* \* \*

There's an old woman dwells upon Tappington Moor,  
She hath years on her back at the least fourscore,  
And some people fancy a great many more;  
Her nose it is hook'd,  
Her back it is crook'd,  
Her eyes blear and red:  
On the top of her head  
Is a mutch, and on that  
A shocking bad hat,  
Extinguisher-shaped, the brim narrow and flat!  
Then, — My Gracious! — her beard! — it would sadly perplex  
A spectator at first to distinguish her sex;  
Nor, I'll venture to say, without scrutiny could he  
Pronounce her, off-handed, a Punch or a Judy.

Did you see her, in short, that mud-hovel within,  
With her knees to her nose, and her nose to her chin,  
Leering up with that queer indescribable grin,  
You'd lift up your hands in amazement and cry,  
"—Well!—I never \_did\_ see such a regular Guy!"  
And now before That old Woman's door,  
Where nought that's good may be,  
Hand in hand  
The Murderers stand  
By one, by two, by three!  
Oh! 'tis a horrible sight to view,  
In that horrible hovel, that horrible crew,  
By the pale blue glare of that flickering flame,  
Doing the deed that hath never a name!  
'Tis awful to hear Those words of fear!  
The pray'r mutter'd backwards, and said with a sneer!  
(Matthew Hopkins himself has assured us that when  
A witch says her pray'rs, she begins with "Amen.") —  
—'Tis awful to see On that Old Woman's knee  
The dead, shrivell'd hand, as she clasps it with glee! —  
And now, with care, The five locks of hair  
From the skull of the Gentleman dangling up there,  
With the grease and the fat Of a black Tom Cat  
She hastens to mix, And to twist into wicks,  
And one on the thumb, and each finger to fix. —  
(For another receipt the same charm to prepare,  
Consult Mr. Ainsworth and *Petit Albert*.)

"Now open lock To the Dead Man's knock!  
Fly bolt, and bar, and band! —  
Nor move, nor swerve  
Joint, muscle, or nerve,  
At the spell of the Dead Man's hand!  
Sleep all who sleep! — Wake all who wake!—  
But be as the Dead for the Dead Man's sake!!"

\* \* \* \* \*

All is silent! all is still,  
Save the ceaseless moan of the bubbling rill  
As it wells from the bosom of Tappington Hill;  
And in Tappington Hall  
Great and Small,  
Gentle and Simple, Squire and Groom,  
Each one hath sought his separate room,  
And sleep her dark mantle hath o'er them cast,  
For the midnight hour hath long been past!

All is darksome in earth and sky,

Save, from yon casement, narrow and high,  
A quivering beam  
On the tiny stream  
Plays, like some taper's fitful gleam  
By one that is watching wearily.

Within that casement, narrow and high,  
In his secret lair, where none may spy,  
Sits one whose brow is wrinkled with care,  
And the thin grey locks of his failing hair  
Have left his little bald pate all bare;  
For his full-bottom'd wig  
Hangs, bushy and big,  
On the top of his old-fashion'd, high-back'd chair.  
Unbraced are his clothes,  
Ungarter'd his hose,  
His gown is bedizened with tulip and rose,  
Flowers of remarkable size and hue,  
Flowers such as Eden never knew;  
— And there, by many a sparkling heap  
Of the good red gold, The tale is told  
What powerful spell avails to keep  
That care-worn man from his needful sleep!

Haply, he deems no eye can see  
As he gloats on his treasure greedily,—  
The shining store  
Of glittering ore,  
The fair Rose-Noble, the bright Moidore,  
And the broad Double-Joe from ayont the sea, —  
But there's one that watches as well as he;  
For, wakeful and sly,  
In a closet hard by,  
On his truckle-bed lieth a little Foot-page,  
A boy who's uncommonly sharp of his age,  
Like young Master Horner,  
Who erst in a corner  
Sat eating a Christmas pie:  
And, while that Old Gentleman's counting his hoards,  
Little Hugh peeps through a crack in the boards!

\* \* \* \* \*

There's a voice in the air,  
There's a step on the stair,  
The old man starts in his cane-back'd chair;  
At the first faint sound  
He gazes around,  
And holds up his dip of sixteen to the pound.

Then half arose  
From beside his toes  
His little pug-dog with his little pug nose,  
But, ere he can vent one inquisitive sniff,  
That little pug-dog stands stark and stiff,  
For low, yet clear,  
Now fall on the ear,  
— Where once pronounced for ever they dwell, —  
The unholy words of the Dead Man's spell!  
“Open lock To the Dead Man's knock!  
Fly bolt, and bar, and band!  
Nor move, nor swerve  
Joint, muscle, or nerve,  
At the spell of the Dead Man's hand!  
Sleep all who sleep! — Wake all who wake! —  
But be as the Dead for the Dead Man's sake!”

Now lock, nor bolt, nor bar avails,  
Nor stout oak panel thick-studded with nails.  
Heavy and harsh the hinges creak,  
Though they had been oil'd in the course of the week;  
The door opens wide as wide may be,  
And there they stand, That murderous band,  
Lit by the light of the GLORIOUS HAND,  
By one! — by two! — by three!

They have pass'd through the porch, they have pass'd through the hall,  
Where the Porter sat snoring against the wall;  
The very snore froze  
In his very snub nose,  
You'd have verily deem'd he had snored his last  
When the GLORIOUS HAND by the side of him past!  
E'en the little wee mouse, as it ran o'er the mat  
At the top of its speed to escape from the cat,  
Though half dead with affright,  
Paused in its flight;  
And the cat that was chasing that little wee thing  
Lay crouch'd as a statue in act to spring!  
And now they are there,  
On the head of the stair,  
And the long crooked whittle is gleaming and bare!  
— I really don't think any money would bribe  
Me the horrible scene that ensued to describe,  
Or the wild, wild glare  
Of that old man's eye,  
His dumb despair,  
And deep agony.

The kid from the pen, and the lamb from the fold,

Unmoved may the blade of the butcher behold;  
They dream not — ah, happier they! — that the knife,  
Though uplifted, can menace their innocent life;  
It falls;— the frail thread of their being is riven,  
They dread not, suspect not, the blow till 'tis given. —  
But, oh! what a thing 'tis to see and to know  
That the bare knife is raised in the hand of the foe,  
Without hope to repel, or to ward off the blow! —  
— Enough! — let's pass over as fast as we can  
The fate of that grey, that unhappy old man!

But fancy poor Hugh, Aghast at the view,  
Powerless alike to speak or to do!  
In vain doth he try  
To open the eye  
That is shut, or close that which is clapt to the chink,  
Though he'd give all the world to be able to wink! —  
No! — for all that this world can give or refuse,  
I would not be now in that little boy's shoes,  
Or indeed any garment at all that is Hugh's!  
— 'Tis lucky for him that the chink in the wall  
He has peep'd through so long, is so narrow and small!  
Wailing voices, sounds of woe  
Such as follow departing friends,  
That fatal night round Tappington go,  
Its long-drawn roofs and its gable ends:  
Ethereal Spirits, gentle and good,  
Aye weep and lament o'er a deed of blood.

\* \* \* \* \*

'Tis early dawn — the morn is grey,  
And the clouds and the tempest have pass'd away,  
And all things betoken a very fine day;  
But, while the lark her carol is singing,  
Shrieks and screams are through Tappington ringing!  
Upstarting all  
Great and small,  
Each one who's found within Tappington Hall,  
Gentle and Simple, Squire or Groom,  
All seek at once that old Gentleman's room;  
And there, on the floor,  
Drench'd in its gore,  
A ghastly corpse lies exposed to the view,  
Carotid and jugular both cut through!  
And there, by its side,  
'Mid the crimson tide,  
Kneels a little Foot-page of tenderest years;  
Adown his pale cheek the fast-falling tears

Are coursing each other round and big,  
And he's staunching the blood with a full-bottom'd wig!  
Alas! and alack for his staunching! — 'tis plain,  
As anatomists tell us, that never again  
Shall life revisit the foully slain,  
When once they've been cut through the jugular vein.

\* \* \* \* \*

There's a hue and a cry through the County of Kent,  
And in chase of the cut-throats a Constable's sent,  
But no one can tell the man which way they went,  
There's a little Foot-page with that Constable goes,  
And a little pug-dog with a little pug nose.

\* \* \* \* \*

In Rochester town,  
At the sign of the Crown,  
Three shabby-genteel men are just sitting down  
To a fat stubble-goose, with potatoes done brown;  
When a little Foot-page  
Rushes in, in a rage,  
Upsetting the apple-sauce, onions, and sage.  
That little Foot-page takes the first by the throat,  
And a little pug-dog takes the next by the coat,  
And a Constable seizes the one more remote;  
And fair rose-nobles and broad moidores,  
The Waiter pulls out of their pockets by scores,  
And the Boots and the Chambermaids run in and stare;  
And the Constable says, with a dignified air,  
"You're *wanted*, Gen'lemen, one and all,  
For that 'ere precious lark at Tappington Hall!"

There's a black gibbet frowns upon Tappington Moor,  
Where a former black gibbet has frown'd before:  
It is as black as black may be,  
And murderers there  
Are dangling in air,  
By one! — by two! — by three!

There's a horrid old hag in a steeple-crown'd hat,  
Round her neck they have tied to a hempen cravat  
A Dead Man's hand, and a dead Tom Cat!  
They have tied up her thumbs, they have tied up her toes,  
They have tied up her eyes, they have tied up her limbs!  
Into Tappington mill-dam souse she goes,  
With a whoop and a halloo! — "She swims! — She swims!"  
They have dragg'd her to land,

And every one's hand,  
Is grasping a faggot, a billet, or brand,  
When a queer-looking horseman, drest all in black,  
Snatches up that old harridan just like a sack  
To the crupper behind him, puts spurs to his hack,  
Makes a dash through the crowd, and is off in a crack! —  
No one can tell,  
Though they guess pretty well,  
Which way that grim rider and old woman go,  
For all see he's a sort of infernal Ducrow;  
And she scream'd so, and cried,  
We may fairly decide  
That the old woman did not much relish her ride!

MORAL

This truest of stories confirms beyond doubt  
That truest of adages — “Murder will out!”  
In vain may the blood-spiller “double” and fly,  
In vain even witchcraft and sorcery try:  
Although for a time he may 'scape, by-and-by  
He'll be sure to be caught by a Hugh and a Cry!

\* \* \* \* \*

One marvel follows another as naturally as one “shoulder of mutton” is said “to drive another down.” A little Welsh girl, who sometimes makes her way from the kitchen into the nursery, after listening with intense interest to this tale, immediately started off at score with the sum and substance of what, in due reverence for such authority, I shall call —

PATTY MORGAN THE MILKMAID’S STORY: “LOOK AT THE CLOCK!”

“Look at the Clock!” quoth Winifred Pryce,  
As she open’d the door to her husband’s knock,  
Then paus’d to give him a piece of advice,  
“You nasty Warmint, look at the Clock!  
Is this the way, you Wretch, every day you  
Treat her who vow’d to love and obey you? —  
Out all night!  
Me in a fright;  
Staggering home as it’s just getting light!  
You intoxicated brute! — you insensible block! —  
Look at the Clock! — Do! — Look at the Clock!”

Winifred Pryce was tidy and clean,  
Her gown was a flower’d one, her petticoat green,  
Her buckles were bright as her milking cans,  
And her hat was a beaver, and made like a man’s;  
Her little red eyes were deep set in their socket-holes,  
Her gown-tail was turn’d up, and tuck’d through the pocket-holes;  
A face like a ferret  
Betoken’d her spirit:  
To conclude, Mrs. Pryce was not over young,  
Had very short legs, and a very long tongue.

Now David Pryce  
Had one darling vice;  
Remarkably partial to anything nice,  
Nought that was good to him came amiss,  
Whether to eat, or to drink, or to kiss!  
Especially ale —  
If it was not too stale  
I really believe he’d have emptied a pail;  
Not that in Wales  
They talk of their Ales;  
To pronounce the word they make use of might trouble you,  
Being spelt with a C, two Rs, and a W.

That particular day,  
As I’ve heard people say,  
Mr. David Pryce had been soaking his clay,

And amusing himself with his pipe and cheroots,  
The whole afternoon, at the Goat-in-Boots,  
With a couple more soakers,  
Thoroughbred smokers,  
Both, like himself, prime singers and jokers  
And, long after day had drawn to a close,  
And the rest of the world was wrapp'd in repose,  
They were roaring out "Shenkin!" and "Ar hydd y nos;"  
While David himself, to a Sassenach tune,  
Sang, "We've drunk down the Sun, boys! let's drink down the Moon!  
What have we with day to do?  
Mrs. Winifred Pryce, 'twas made for you!" —  
At length, when they couldn't well drink any more,  
Old "Goat-in-Boots" showed them the door:  
And then came that knock,  
And the sensible shock  
David felt when his wife cried, "Look at the Clock!"  
For the hands stood as crooked as crooked might be,  
The long at the Twelve, and the short at the Three!

That self-same clock had long been a bone  
Of contention between this Darby and Joan;  
And often among their pother and rout,  
When this otherwise amiable couple fell out,  
Pryce would drop a cool hint,  
With an ominous squint  
At its case, of an "Uncle" of his, who'd a "Spout."  
That horrid word "Spout"  
No sooner came out  
Than Winifred Pryce would turn her about,  
And with scorn on her lip,  
And a hand on each hip,  
"Spout" herself till her nose grew red at the tip,  
"You thundering Willin,  
I know you'd be killing  
Your wife, — ay, a dozen of wives, — for a shilling!  
You may do what you please,  
You may sell my chemise,  
(Mrs. P. was too well-bred to mention her stock),  
But I never will part with my Grandmother's Clock!"

Mrs. Pryce's tongue ran long and ran fast;  
But patience is apt to wear out at last,  
And David Pryce in temper was quick,  
So he stretch'd out his hand, and caught hold of a stick;  
Perhaps in its use he might mean to be lenient,  
But walking just then wasn't very convenient,  
So he threw it, instead,  
Direct at her head;

It knock'd off her hat;  
Down she fell flat;  
Her case, perhaps, was not much mended by that:  
But whatever it was, — whether rage and pain  
Produced apoplexy, or burst a vein,  
Or her tumble induced a concussion of brain,  
I can't say for certain, — but *this* I can,  
When, sober'd by fright, to assist her he ran,  
Mrs. Winifred Pryce was as dead as Queen Anne!

The fearful catastrophe  
Named in my last strophe  
As adding to grim Death's exploits such a vast trophy,  
Made a great noise; and the shocking fatality,  
Ran over, like wild-fire, the whole Principality.  
And then came Mr. Ap Thomas, the Coroner,  
With his jury to sit, some dozen or more, on her.  
Mr. Pryce to commence His "ingenious defence,"  
Made a "powerful appeal" to the jury's "good sense:"

"The world he must defy Ever to justify  
Any presumption of 'Malice Prepense;"—  
The unlucky lick  
From the end of his stick  
He "deplored," — he was "apt to be rather too quick;" —  
But, really, her prating  
Was so aggravating:  
Some trifling correction was just what he meant; — all  
The rest, he assured them, was "quite accidental!"

Then he calls Mr. Jones, Who depones to her tones,  
And her gestures, and hints about "breaking his bones."  
While Mr. Ap Morgan, and Mr. Ap Rhys  
Declared the Deceased  
Had styled him "a Beast,"  
And swear they had witness'd, with grief and surprise,  
The allusion she made to his limbs and his eyes.

The jury, in fine, having sat on the body  
The whole day, discussing the case, and gin toddy,  
Return'd about half-past eleven at night  
The following verdict, "We find, \_Sarve her right!\_"

Mr. Pryce, Mrs. Winifred Pryce being dead,  
Felt lonely, and moped; and one evening he said  
He would marry Miss Davis at once in her stead.

Not far from his dwelling,  
From the vale proudly swelling,

Rose a mountain; it's name you'll excuse me from telling,  
For the vowels made use of in Welsh are so few  
That the A and the E, the I, O, and the U,  
Have really but little or nothing to do;  
And the duty, of course, falls the heavier by far,  
On the L, and the H, and the N, and the R.  
Its first syllable "PEN,"  
Is pronounceable; — then  
Come two L Ls, and two H Hs, two F Fs, and an N  
About half a score Rs, and some Ws follow,  
Beating all my best efforts at euphony hollow:  
But we shan't have to mention it often, so when  
We do, with your leave, we'll curtail it to "PEN."

Well — the moon shone bright  
Upon "PEN" that night,  
When Pryce, being quit of his fuss and his fright,  
Was scaling its side  
With that sort of stride  
A man puts out when walking in search of a bride.  
Mounting higher and higher,  
He began to perspire,  
Till, finding his legs were beginning to tire,  
And feeling opprest  
By a pain in his chest,  
He paus'd, and turn'd round to take breath, and to rest;  
A walk all up hill is apt, we know,  
To make one, however robust, puff and blow,  
So he stopp'd and look'd down on the valley below.

O'er fell, and o'er fen,  
Over mountain and glen,  
All bright in the moonshine, his eye roved, and then  
All the Patriot rose in his soul, and he thought  
Upon Wales, and her glories, and all he'd been taught  
Of her Heroes of old,  
So brave and so bold, —  
Of her Bards with long beards, and harps mounted in gold;  
Of King Edward the First,  
Of memory accurst;  
And the scandalous manner in which he behaved,  
Killing Poets by dozens,  
With their uncles and cousins,  
Of whom not one in fifty had ever been shaved —  
Of the Court Ball, at which by a lucky mishap,  
Owen Tudor fell into Queen Katherine's lap;  
And how Mr. Tudor Successfully woo'd her,  
Till the Dowager put on a new wedding ring,  
And so made him Father-in-law to the King.

He thought upon Arthur, and Merlin of yore,  
On Gryffith ap Conan, and Owen Glendour;  
On Pendragon, and Heaven knows how many more.  
He thought of all this, as he gazed, in a trice,  
And on all things, in short, but the late Mrs. Pryce;  
When a lumbering noise from behind made him start,  
And sent the blood back in full tide to his heart,  
Which went pit-a-pat  
As he cried out "What's that?"—  
That very queer sound? —  
Does it come from the ground?  
Or the air, — from above, — or below, — or around? —  
It is not like Talking,  
It is not like Walking,  
It's not like the clattering of pot or of pan,  
Or the tramp of a horse, — or the tread of a man, —  
Or the hum of a crowd, — or the shouting of boys, —  
It's really a deuced odd sort of a noise!  
Not unlike a cart's, — but that can't be; for when  
Could "all the King's horses, and all the King's men,"  
With Old Nick for a waggoner, drive one up "PEN?"

Pryce, usually brimful of valour when drunk,  
Now experienced what schoolboys denominate "funk."  
In vain he look'd back  
On the whole of the track  
He had traversed; a thick cloud, uncommonly black,  
At this moment obscured the broad disc of the moon,  
And did not seem likely to pass away soon;  
While clearer and clearer,  
'Twas plain to the hearer,  
Be the noise what it might, it drew nearer and nearer,  
And sounded, as Pryce to this moment declares,  
Very much "like a Coffin a-walking up stairs."

Mr. Pryce had begun To "make up" for a run,  
As in such a companion he saw no great fun,  
When a single bright ray Shone out on the way  
He had passed, and he saw, with no little dismay,  
Coming after him, bounding o'er crag and o'er rock,  
The deceased Mrs. Winifred's "Grandmother's Clock!!"  
'Twas so! — it had certainly moved from its place,  
And come, lumbering on thus, to hold him in chase;  
'Twas the very same Head, and the very same Case,  
And nothing was altered at all — but the Face!  
In that he perceived, with no little surprise,  
The two little winder-holes turned into eyes  
Blazing with ire,

Like two coals of fire;  
And the "Name of the Maker" was changed to a Lip,  
And the Hands to a Nose with a very red tip.  
No! — he could not mistake it, — 'twas SHE to the life!  
The identical face of his poor defunct Wife!

One glance was enough  
Completely "*Quant. suff.*"  
As the doctors write down when they send you their "stuff," —  
Like a Weather-cock whirled by a vehement puff,  
David turned himself round;  
Ten feet of ground  
He clear'd, in his start, at the very first bound!

I've seen people run at West-End Fair for cheeses —  
I've seen Ladies run at Bow Fair for chemises —  
At Greenwich Fair twenty men run for a hat,  
And one from a Bailiff much faster than that —  
At foot-ball I've seen lads run after the bladder —  
I've seen Irish Bricklayers run up a ladder —  
I've seen little boys run away from a cane—  
And I've seen (that is, *read of*) good running in Spain;  
But I never did read  
Of, or witness, such speed  
As David exerted that evening. — Indeed  
All I have ever heard of boys, women, or men,  
Falls far short of Pryce, as he ran over "PEN!"

He reaches it's brow, —  
He has past it,—and now  
Having once gained the summit, and managed to cross it, he  
Rolls down the side with uncommon velocity;  
But, run as he will,  
Or roll down the hill,  
That bugbear behind him is after him still!  
And close at his heels, not at all to his liking,  
The terrible clock keeps on ticking and striking,  
Till, exhausted and sore,  
He can't run any more,  
But falls as he reaches Miss Davis's door,  
And screams when they rush out, alarm'd at his knock,  
"Oh! Look at the Clock! — Do! — Look at the Clock!!

Miss Davis look'd up, Miss Davis look'd down,  
She saw nothing there to alarm her; — a frown  
Came o'er her white forehead,  
She said, "It was horrid  
A man should come knocking at that time of night,  
And give her Mamma and herself such a fright; —

To squall and to bawl  
About nothing at all!"  
She begg'd "he'd not think of repeating his call:  
His late wife's disaster  
By no means had past her,"  
She'd "have him to know she was meat for his Master!"  
Then regardless alike of his love and his woes,  
She turn'd on her heel and she turn'd up her nose.

Poor David in vain  
Implored to remain,  
He "dared not," he said, "cross the mountain again."  
Why the fair was obdurate  
None knows, — to be sure, it  
Was said she was setting her cap at the Curate;—  
Be that as it may, it is certain the sole hole  
Pryce found to creep into that night was the Coal-hole!  
In that shady retreat  
With nothing to eat,  
And with very bruised limbs, and with very sore feet,  
All night close he kept;  
I can't say he slept;  
But he sigh'd, and he sobb'd, and he groan'd, and he wept;  
Lamenting his sins,  
And his two broken shins,  
Bewailing his fate with contortions and grins,  
And her he once thought a complete *Rara Avis*,  
Consigning to Satan, — viz., cruel Miss Davis!

Mr. David has since had a "serious call,"  
He never drinks ale, wine, or spirits, at all,  
And they say he is going to Exeter Hall  
To make a grand speech,  
And to preach, and to teach  
People that "they can't brew their malt liquor too small!"  
That an ancient Welsh Poet, one PYNDAR AP TUDOR,  
Was right in proclaiming "ARISTON MEN UDOR!"  
Which means "The pure Element  
Is for Man's belly meant!"  
And that *Gin's* but a *Snare* of Old Nick the deluder!

And "still on each evening when pleasure fills up,"  
At the old Goat-in-Boots, with Metheglin, each cup,  
Mr. Pryce, if he's there,  
Will get into "The Chair,"  
And make all his *quondam* associates stare  
By calling aloud to the Landlady's daughter,  
"Patty, bring a cigar, and a glass of Spring Water!"  
The dial he constantly watches; and when

The Ingoldsby Legends

The long hand's at the "XII.," and the short at the "X.,"  
He gets on his legs,  
Drains his glass to the dregs,  
Takes his hat and great-coat off their several pegs,  
With his President's hammer bestows his last knock,  
And says solemnly — "Gentlemen! LOOK AT THE CLOCK!!!"

\* \* \* \* \*