

GHOSTS, WIZARDS, AND WITCHES.

UNDER this heading we gave in our last issue several interesting extracts from an article which appeared in a late number of the "Dublin University Magazine." We proceed to continue these extracts, premising that we have now to deal more with "Credulity" than with Wizards or Witches:

One of the most renowned of the wizards of the middle ages was Michael Scott, of Balwearie, commemorated in glowing verse by his namesake in the "Lay of the Last Minstrel."

Amongst the numerous and well attested legends connected with Sir Michael Scott, we find it stated that when sent on an embassy to obtain from the King of France satisfaction for certain piracies committed by his subjects upon those of the King of Scotland, instead of preparing a suitable equipage and train of attendants, he retired to his study, opened his book, and called up a fiend in the shape of a huge black horse, mounted upon his back, and forced him to fly through the air towards France. As they crossed the sea, the demon courser insidiously asked him what it was that the old women of Scotland muttered at bed-time? A less experienced wizard might have answered that it was the Pater Noster, which would have licensed immediate precipitation from his back. But Michael, quite on his guard, sternly replied, "What is that to thee? Mount, Diabolus, and fly!" When they reached Paris, he tied his horse to the gate of the palace, entered without announcement, and boldly declared his errand. An ambassador, unattended by the pomp and circumstance befitting his position, was received with slight respect, and the King was about to return a contemptuous refusal to his demand, when Michael gently suggested that his majesty would do well to pause until he had seen his horse stamp three times. The first stamp shook every steeple in Paris, and set all the bells ringing; the second threw down three of the towers of the palace; and the imperial steed had raised his hoof for the third stamp, when the King dismissed the ambassador with the most ample concessions rather than risk the probable consequences.

Michael was once much embarrassed by a spirit or familiar, for whom he was under the necessity of finding constant employment. He commanded him to build a dam-head across the Tweed at Kelso; it was accomplished in one night, and, as Sir Walter Scott says, still does honour to the infernal architect. The seer next ordered that Eildon hill, then a uniform cone, should be divided into three. Another night was sufficient to part its summit into the three picturesque peaks which it now bears.

At length the enchanter conquered this indefatigable demon by employing him in the hopeless and endless task of making ropes out of sea-sand.

On another occasion, Michael, hearing of a famous sorceress called the witch of Falsehope, who lived on the opposite side of the Tweed, went to put her skill to the test; but she, feeling intuitively that she was in the presence of a superior, stoutly denied all knowledge of the necromatic art. In his discourse with her, he laid his wand inadvertently on the table, which the hag desecrating, suddenly snatched it up and struck him with it. Feeling the force of the charm, he rushed out of the house, but as it had given him the external semblance of a hare, his servant, who waited without, halloo'd upon the discomfited wizard his own grey-hounds, who pursued him so closely that in order to obtain a moment's breathing to reverse the charm, Michael, after a very fatiguing course, was fain to take refuge in his own jaw-hole—*Anglice*, common sewer.

To revenge himself on the witch of Falsehope, Michael, in harvest time, went to the hill above the house with his dogs, and sent his servant down to ask a bit of bread for them from the gudewife, with instructions what to do if he met with a denial. The witch refused the request contemptuously, whereupon the servant placed

over the door a paper which his master had given him, containing the since often quoted and applied rhyme—

"Master Michael Scott's man
Sought meat and got name."

Immediately the old woman ceased baking bread for the reapers, her common occupation, and began to dance round the fire. Her husband sent his men to the house, one after the other, to enquire why their provision did not arrive. Each as he entered fell under the charm, and joined the fandango and chorus. 'At last the gudeman himself came, but remembering his wife's trick upon Sir Michael, peeped in first at the window, and saw the reapers dancing and shouting, and dragging his exhausted helpmate round and through the fire, which was, as usual, in the middle of the room. Upon this he took a horse and rode up to Michael's abode on the hill, in the spirit of submission, and implored a cessation of the spell. The warlock was too well gifted to be spiteful, and told him to go home, enter the house backwards, and take the spell down with his left hand. He did so, and this brought the bewildering dance to an end.

But the great wizard had, like Merlin and Samson, a weak point. He fell under female seduction. In an unguarded hour his wife, or paramour, filched from him his grand secret, that his life was secure from any danger except the poisonous qualities of broth, made of the flesh of a *breme* sow.* She gave him such a mess on some quarrel, and killed him. But he had still time to slay his treacherous companion.

In many ages and countries there have been noted impostors and enthusiasts, claiming supernatural power and connexion, apart from witchcraft or necromancy; religious fanaticism being the fertile source from whence they spring and the ground in which they were fostered.

In England, in Henry the Third's reign, 1221, two men were crucified, both pretending to be the Messiah; and two women were put to death for assuming the characters of the Virgin Mary and Mary Magdalene. In the twenty-fourth year of the reign of Henry the Eighth, Elizabeth Barton, styled the Holy Maid of Kent, was spirited up to hinder the Reformation, by feigning inspirations from heaven, foretelling that the King would have an early and violent death if he divorced Catherine of Spain and married Anne Boleyn. She and her confederates were hanged at Tyburn in 1534. They were rank impostors, and deserved their fate as much as the noble-minded Joan of Arc ought to have been exempted from hers. We cannot degrade that bright heroine to a vulgar impostor; we believe, on the contrary, that she was a pure enthusiast, firmly convinced that she was inspired to say and do what she said and did—whether by dreams, visions, or revelation in any other specific form we do not pretend to decide. We mourn over the horror and national disgrace of her barbarous execution as a witch, and throw down the gauntlet in defence of her truth and patriotism.

In the first year of Queen Mary's reign, after her marriage with Philip of Spain, Elizabeth Croft, a girl of eighteen years of age, was secreted in a wall, and with a whistle, made for the purpose, uttered many seditious speeches against the Queen and her consort, and also against the mass and confession. Considering the state of the times, and the parties implicated, she escaped with wonderful lenity. Her sentence, on full detection, was to stand upon a scaffold at St. Paul's cross during the sermon, and make public confession of her imposture. She was called the Spirit of the Wall. In 1591, under Queen Elizabeth, William Hackett, a fanatic, personated our Saviour, and was executed for blasphemy. During the Protectorate of Oliver Cromwell, James Naylor, a native of Yorkshire, who had served eight years in the parliamentary army, became converted to Quakerism by the preaching of George Fox, and obtained great credit with the leaders of that recently established sect. He soon, however, offended them by his extravagant notions, and they were compelled to disown him. Misled by imaginary inspiration, or influenced by

* Savage or raging. The term, long obsolete, may be found in this sense in Spenser's pastorals.

an innate love of deception, he gathered together a host of followers, and went on from one extravagance to another, until, in 1656, he made acquaintance with the interior of Exeter goal. After a term he was liberated; but excited rather than tamed by the practical check, he now took upon himself to personate Christ, and was attended into the city of Bristol by a crowd of his deluded proselytes of both sexes, singing Hosanna before him, strewing his way with herbs and flowers, using the same expressions, and paying him the same honour as the Jews did to our Saviour when he rode into Jerusalem. This was too much for Oliver to tolerate. He summoned him before the parliament then sitting at Westminster. There was no specific law to meet the case, but they made one in a twinkling, such as the Americans are doing now, in less glaring emergencies. Naylor was sentenced to be whipped at the cart's tail, to stand in the pillory before the Royal Exchange, there to be burnt through the tongue, and branded with a hot iron on the head, with the letter B, signifying blasphemer. All this was carried out to the letter. He proved to be a man of nerve, repenting neither of the sin nor groaning under the punishment. That being completed, one Rich, a shopkeeper, mounted on the pillory, embraced the impostor, and kissed his forehead. From thence, Naylor was sent to Bristol, where he underwent flogging through the streets, and was finally committed as a prisoner to the castle at Guernsey for life. There he found himself in company with General Lambert, under whom he had served as a soldier in the late rebellion. When the delirium of fanaticism was finally subdued by such sharp treatment, he humbly acknowledged and repented the delusion by which he had been seduced, and died in captivity.

Erasmus was of a nature which mingled the *seriu cum jocos* more liberally than grave philosophers are wont to practice. His "Colloquies" abound in humorous anecdotes. Here are two of ingenious swindlers on a small scale:—

1. Maccus, a famous cheat, came into the shop of a shoemaker at Leyden, and saluted him, at the same time casting his eye upon a pair of boots that were hanging up. The shoemaker asked if he would buy them; the other seemed willing, upon which they were taken down, drawn on, and proved as good a fit as if made to order. "I think," said Maccus, "a pair of double-soled shoes would do well over these boots!" They, too, were found and fitted. "Now," said the rogue, "tell me, friend, did it never so fall out that such as you have thus fitted for a race, ran away without paying?" "Never," replied the other. "But if it should be so, what would you do?" "I would follow him," said the shoemaker. "Well," added Maccus, "here goes for a trial," and immediately set off. The shoemaker quickly pursued, shouting, "Stop thief, stop thief!" At which the citizens ran to their doors to see what was going on. But Maccus, laughing, cried out, "Let no man hinder our race, we run for a cup of ale." Whereupon none interfered, and all quietly looked on at the sport, until Maccus ran clean out of sight, and the poor shoemaker returned, panting and perspiring, and explained the trick that had been played on him.

2. At Antwerp there was a priest who had collected a pretty round sum in silver, which he put in a great purse, suspended from his girdle. A certain cheat observed it, who came and accosted him civilly, saying he was appointed by the parish where he lived to buy a new surplice for their own priest, and humbly prayed his reverence to go with him to the place where they were sold, and allow the surplice to be tried on him, as he was the same height and size with his clerical brother for whom it was intended. The priest complied, and together they proceeded to the shop. A surplice was brought out and put on him. "It fits exactly," said the seller. The cheat, when he had surveyed the priest, now before, and then behind, observed, "It is too short in front." "That is not the fault of the surplice," said the shop-keeper; "it is occasioned by the distention of the purse." The accommodating priest took the purse from his girdle and laid it down, that they might take another