

"As she advanced into womanhood, her surpassing loveliness became the theme of speculation among the young men in our village; but all overtures towards gaining her regard seemed fruitless. She held no converse with any one, and shunned communion with young and old.

"There was a wildness in the flash of her dark eye, and a pride in her step and look, that made the villagers shrink back with awe. She was among them, but not of them.

"For two whole years did Margaret labour, by the work of her own hands, to support herself and contribute something towards the comfort of the wretched being that she called mother; but much, I fear, they suffered both from hunger and cold during the inclement winter, for the rude hovel had been suffered to fall into a deplorable state of dilapidation; the clay had fallen from the walls, and left bare the laths, and the wind had stripped the roof of its thatch, so that the rain and snow found entrance on all sides.

"When remonstrance was made by some less flinty hearted persons on the state of the widow's cabin, Maurice swore with an oath he wished it might fall and bury the old witch and her fiendish daughter beneath its ruins.

"Secretly he instigated the ignorant and superstitious people of the country round about to try the wretched woman as a witch, by one of those laws which the strong put in force against the weak and defenceless, and which, till even a later date than the time I speak of, were winked at by the magistrates of these eastern counties.

"It was no uncommon thing, even within the last thirty years, to have any poor, aged, friendless woman, on whom the imputation of witchcraft had been cast, dragged from her cottage hearth, and either weighed against the church bible or plunged into the nearest pond or river. In the former case, if she proved lighter than the ponderous tome, she was declared guilty, and underwent a series of personal indignities that were alone sufficient to have driven her mad; in the latter case, if she floated, she was then ducked till she confessed her crime, or died under the infliction, and little account was taken of such a termination to the life of a witch.*

"It was to undergo such a test as the latter on an inclement day in March, that the unhappy Widow Drew was hurried away to a neighbouring piece of water by a crowd of exulting spectators. Langton's eager thirst for the death of the widow, was soon gratified. She lingered only a few days after this disgraceful scene had taken place. When the parish officers came to remove the body for interment, a piteous sight presented itself. They

found Margaret seated on the cold ground, supporting the corpse upon her knees, whereon it had rested for many many hours.

"Her long loosened black hair hung over her ghastly pale but tearless face, on which the wild and fearful expression of madness was legibly impressed.

"'Away, away!' she exclaimed, fiercely. 'You will waken her; she is not dead, she only sleeps; she told me she was going to her rest—her long, long rest, she said—and she had need of it, for she was weary of this bad world.'

"Then suddenly raising her face, and flinging back, with a gesture of impatience, her streaming locks, she looked upward, and her white lips moved as if she were holding silent converse with some unseen being near her—as, again becoming conscious of the presence of those about her, she waived them to depart. 'Let us alone,' she said; 'we have many things to say to each other.'

"'Oh!' she continued, in a tone of passionate entreaty, 'do not take her from me! Let me hold her yet a little longer, just as she held my own poor dying mother on her knees, and then I will go whithersoever you will have me.'

"'Let her alone, or you will drive her frantic,' said one compassionate voice among the crowd, 'and in a short space we will come again.' And they did so, for he that gave this advice was the son of one who was looked up to among the parishioners, and Margaret was once more left with the dead.'

"She was found that evening lying across a rude grave in the ruined Minster, which she had helped to hollow for her only friend and foster parent—but reason had fled for ever from its seat, and Margaret remained a harmless but cureless maniac.

"In this state she was not suffered to want for any bodily comforts, but they came too late; her insanity evinced itself in a restless desire to roam abroad in solitary and unfrequented places.

"Often have I met her in her wanderings among the fields and woods, braiding garlands of wild flowers, with which she was wont to bind her long black hair. She seldom raised her head; her large dark eyes were always bent mournfully upon the ground, and sometimes she muttered to herself, and sometimes she sang.

"When seen in the twilight and moonlight, beneath the Minster's oak, or gliding with stately tread among the copsewood that skirts the brook in front of the old ruin, you might well have fancied her a visitant from some other world, so wild and spiritual was her look.

"At her approach children forsook their sports, and the elders trembled at encountering the wild glance of the poor crazed maiden; but chiefly was she an object of terror to Maurice Langton. 'Tis

* The county of Suffolk has always been celebrated for the number of criminals burned, or otherwise put to death, for witchcraft.