

This story, and scores of others resembling it—stories of witches and the dread deeds of wizardry—are very common in Lanacashire; traditions of the terrible crusade against witchcraft which was there so vigorously carried on in the seventeenth century.

LOVE WITHOUT SIGHT.

THERE was no more slamming of doors, and the rumbling of the carriage wheels had quite died away. But in a large drawing-room, round whose walls numberless wax candles were fast burning down to their sockets, two people were still sitting on either side of a fireplace, in which, however, the last embers had long since been extinguished. They were a lady who could hardly have been thirty years old, and a young man considerably her junior.

"Well, it is no use grumbling any more, I suppose," said the lady, smiling, "but I can't help thinking they have not treated me well."

"You don't include me in this sweeping condemnation, I hope, sister mine. I am sure I was ready to entertain your visitors till daybreak."

"No, Arthur, I am not disposed to find fault with you; but what am I to say to a set of people who sweep out of one's room before the clock has struck ten? Directly the example is once set, all seem to follow one another, like so many sheep. For pity's sake, tell me what is to be done now! I can't think of going to bed at this hour. Have you got nothing to tell me, Arthur? I have not seen you for years, you know. Or would you prefer to criticise all the people who were here a quarter of an hour ago, and finally give me your candid opinion as to whose conversation you thought the 'most fascinating'?"

"No, thank you; that would not quite suit me. I have changed wonderfully, and am not the impressionable fellow you remember me to have been in the old days."

"Well, that is news, indeed! An Arthur, without his sentiment, seems almost a contradiction in terms. Are you really in love, downright in earnest, this time?"

"Yes, my dear sister, and with a woman I have never seen."

"A woman you have never seen! Well, that is extraordinary!"

"Not quite so strange as you imagine. I have at last begun to appreciate a woman not for her physical but for her mental qualities; at least, not quite that, but rather for the general and astonishing effect she has made upon me. I have fancied myself in love a great many times, but no woman before has ever made me feel what I feel now."

"Not even that pretty girl in light blue that I particularly begged you to take down to dinner this evening?"

"What, your friend that you talked to me about in such rapturous terms this afternoon—the trusting creature who made you her confidante?"

"The very one."

"Let me confess, then, that I have not so much as seen your paragon. Your husband spoilt all the plans I had made for fulfilling your injunctions, and she was whisked away before my very eyes. After dinner they hedged her into that corner by the piano, and she was lost to me. Your friend Mrs. Gray is a great talker, and she kept me a prisoner."

"Never mind, you shall see her yet. Meanwhile, I am anxiously waiting to hear this romantic story about the woman who is loved for the effect she has made on you."

"Very well. I shall make no apologies for that youthful sentiment about which your recollection is lively, but plunge at once in *medias res*—no translation offered or given."

"You know I was several months at a small watering-place on the Bristol Channel called Clevedon. Its situation is perfect. Grass cliffs, cosy nooks, romantic spots, and general effect it certainly possesses, and only requires rather more real sea, which would free it from the stigma of being only a half-and-half watering-place after all. People may say what they like, but I have seen great big waves, white horses, and quite a miniature storm at poor little Clevedon, as you

shall hear presently. I was tutor at the time I am speaking of to two sons of a wealthy Bristol merchant, who had a large house at Clevedon. The daytime I used to devote to my pupils, and to our walks round the neighbourhood, which is excessively pretty. In the evening chess with my patron, and books by myself, pleasantly whiled the time away.

"One evening, I remember it so well, I felt unusually restless. The weather was very sultry, and I knew I should never sleep. So when they had all gone to bed—and I am bound to say that, unlike a certain sister of mine, they were very early folks—I strolled out into the garden. It was such a night—clear, soft moonlight, sobbing waves, and perfect quiet. What poet could conjure up a happier hour? You will say just one thing was wanted to complete the picture—but listen. As I was enjoying to the utmost this heavenly night, I heard, to my astonishment, the clear notes of a woman's voice, singing a soft, solemn melody.

"For a long time I was puzzled to find out where the voice came from. It seemed—and its sweetness certainly added to the illusion—to come, if not from the clouds, at least, from the thick dark trees planted round the wall at the end of the garden. At last, through the trees, I saw a light, and, looking still closer, perceived a window nearly hidden by the leaves. It was evidently one of the windows of the adjoining house, which I had not previously noticed was so close to us. Then I remembered that I had heard that this house was occupied by two ladies who were seldom seen about—a mother and daughter, as they told me. Soon the voice ceased, and out went the light.

"One day, as I was sitting with my pupils reading Horace, just by the old church, I noticed a little fellow passing with a basket on his arm, and recognised him as a youngster who sometimes brought ripe green figs for sale to the house. I called him, and failing figs, got into conversation as to where he had come from.

"I have been all the way to Wrexall," said he, "and my journey was no good after all. Miss Willoughby was particularly anxious to get some roses we grow in a garden there, against her mother's birthday. I've been to-day, and find the wind has blown them all to pieces, and may be we shan't have any more out for a fortnight."

"And who, then, is Miss Willoughby?"

"Why, your neighbour, to be sure, sir; and a nice lady, isn't she? She taught me to read and write, and is going to try to put me to a situation. I wish I could get her the roses, but I don't know where to go."

"The boy's talk had, of course, a strange interest for me; but I had to be very cautious in my questioning. That afternoon I wended my way to a garden I knew in the valley just under Walton Castle, and here were roses in full luxuriance.

"That night I watched long after the light was put out, and, after some time, climbed into one of the trees. Happily, I could reach the window from one of the branches. With great difficulty I tied my bouquet of roses to the bars, and then slid back into the garden again.

The next morning I saw that they were no longer hanging to the bar.

"I soon got great friends with the little fig-seller, and took every opportunity of talking to him about my unknown neighbours. During his spare hours I taught him arithmetic. A few weeks afterwards he said to me—

"Miss Willoughby is very pleased I am getting on so well with my sums, and she says I ought to be very grateful indeed to you for taking so much trouble with me."

"From this I knew that she had been talking of me, and I began to be quite hopeful about the chance of our soon meeting.

"One evening the sun sank in the midst of a band of red, ugly clouds. The wind blew up fresh from the south-west, and the sea looked angry. In a very short time a fierce storm sprang up, and we could see the white sails standing out clear against the ink-black clouds. Tiny vessels were struggling hard to get to land.

"I was obliged to leave the shore, as I knew it was the time when my signal lamp always ap-

peared. The light was there, and the window wide open. I heard a weak voice saying—

"Carry, darling, to-morrow morning, when you wake, come and tell me if any misfortune happened to those poor little vessels. The storm frightens me!" Soon I heard two voices: mother and daughter were praying for all poor men at sea.

"I hurried back to the sea-shore. A great many people were collected there, watching the efforts of the sailors to keep their little vessels afloat. The storm was fiercer now, and I was told that one of the boats contained a pleasure-party, and that women and children were in it. We could do nothing but hope and pray, and we watched on anxiously. And then came a loud, piercing cry from the women on the shore, and we saw that one of the vessels had capsized. All was noise and confusion now. Wave after wave brought half-dead and dripping creatures to the beach; and then there was a shout that all were saved but one little child that had been wrested from its mother's arms not fifty yards from shore. I plunged madly towards the spot to which all were pointing, and by the merest accident in the world saved the little one. I restored it to its mother's arms, but she had swooned away.

"The next morning, as I was walking with my pupils in the garden, it was invaded by a clamorous crowd. The poor mother had come to thank me for saving her child, and there was an attempt at an ovation, which I could not allow. I was naturally intensely happy at having been the means of earning the poor woman's thanks, but there was something else which gave me greater joy. Somebody was peeping behind the blind at the little window, and I knew that she has been a witness of this little scene.

"And so day after day passed, and I kept hoping against hope, but still never saw this Miss Willoughby. I could not conceive what kept her so studiously in-doors, and there was no one to help me in unravelling the mystery.

"I have one more scene to describe. One evening the light did not appear as usual at the window, and I heard next morning that Mrs. Willoughby was seriously ill, and that the nearest doctor had been hastily sent for.

"The mother was a long time ill, and her life was almost despaired of. I used to waylay the doctor, and he always gave the same answer, that there was just hope, but that Miss Willoughby's health was giving way with anxiety and watching.

"One day, as I was having my usual talk with the doctor, a gentleman came out of our house, and saw me speaking to him. He waited for me, and after the doctor had gone, said, 'Where did you pick up that fellow? I hope you were not consulting him. He is the veriest quack in the world, and knows nothing about his profession. I would not trust a dog to his care.'

"Are you sure of this?" said I.

"Sure of it, my dear sir? Ask any one in the neighbourhood; he would never be recommended by any sensible person!"

"That night I wrote on a slip of paper the following words:—

"If you want to save your mother's life, try further advice. The doctor you have consulted is ignorant, and is not to be trusted."

"This I tied to the bar.

"For three days I neither saw nor heard anything to relieve my anxiety. On the fourth I thought I saw a scrap of paper still tied to the bar. Was it my note still there? When evening came, I climbed up again, and great was my joy to find, not my note, but another, in which was written—

'God bless you, whoever you are! you have saved my mother's life.'

"The next day it was arranged that I was to go away on a walking expedition in Devonshire, which kept me from Clevedon for about a fortnight. I was glad enough to return; but think of my sorrow when I heard that our neighbours had suddenly left Clevedon, and no one knew where they had gone. My young friend Charlie told me, with tears in his eyes, that the kind ladies were never coming back! So ended my romance and though it may appear foolish, I have never thoroughly got over it."