

ning the sky from horizon to horizon, and holding an invariable situation among the stars. On the other hand, in the regions beneath the dark side, a solar eclipse of fifteen years in duration, under their shadow, must afford (to our ideas) an inhospitable asylum to animated beings ill compensated by the faint light of the satellites. But we should do no wrong to judge of the fitness or unfitness of their condition from what we see around us, when, perhaps, the very combinations which convey to our minds only images of horror, may be in reality theatres of the most striking and glorious displays of beneficent contrivance.

MR. BUNCH.

CHAPTER I.

There dwelt some century ago in the village of Storflot, in the county of Derbyshire a singular personage yclept Zachariah Bunch. A lovely and delightful spot was Storflot, situated on a gentle slope at one end of an extensive valley, which seemed the only cultured spot amid scenes of wildness and desolation. About it frowned many a towering peak on which ruin seemed to sit enthroned, and for miles round no habitation, save the solitary hut of a miner, gave evidence of the vicinity of man. Intercourse even with populous places was then a matter of tardiness and difficulty; and to the secluded valley the news of what was passing in the great world came but seldom.—sometimes a solitary pedlar opened his pack in the long straggling street of cottages, and disposed of his wares and his budget of wonders at one and the same time.

It may appear strange to an Englishman of the present day, when intelligence of every kind ramifies so rapidly through every pulse of society, to hear of such utter seclusion existing in this isle only a century ago; but true it is, that the inhabitants of Storflot and its vale regarded the surrounding mountains as a barrier which it would require more than common enterprise to pass. Contented with the produce of their farms and fields, which were bought off the land by the more speculative inhabitants of the plains beyond the dusky summits which seemed to set limits to their enterprise, they "pursued the noiseless tenor of their way" remote from those busy scenes of inter-communication, which, though it fills up the cup of life with more bubbling excitement, seems to produce less solid and substantial happiness. As is usual in isolated communities, where education and business do not prompt to thoughts of seriousness, the minds of the peasantry were strongly tainted with superstition. This was not a little strengthened by the wild tales of the miners of the neighbouring district,—men whose very calling leads them to indulge in tales of wonder. With these rifiers of the earth's treasure intercourse was frequent, for the highly cultivated vale of Storflot supplied them with many little articles of luxury which could not be procured elsewhere for miles round.

One of the most important personages in the village of Storflot was Mr Bunch. His ostensible occupation was that of barber and hair-cutter, though to this humble call-

ing he added those of "Chirurgion, Dentist, and Phlebotomist," as duly set forth on the sign which surmounted the door of his dwelling. To all these occupations he had been duly brought up by his father. Ignatius Bunch who had learned them from his father Zaridisha, who also remembered his grandfather to have followed the same professions, so that the successor might well be called the hereditary barber, chirurgion, dentist, and phlebotomist of the village.—In truth, the family had scraped all the rough beards, mended the broken shins, drawn the unsound teeth, and let forth at befitting periods all the bad blood of the gaffers and dames of the valley for generations past. His shop displayed the garniture befitting his business. From the door protruded an immense pole, while the window was decorated with a blowsy-faced, figure-head of a female decked with a profusion of glossy-curl'd hair, which was the admiration of half the nymphs of the village. At the back were arranged on a black board a portentous array of yellow teeth, some of which, from their size, might have impressed a spectator of the present day with the opinion, that half the jackasses of the neighbourhood had suffered from the tooth-ach. A few horn combs, a large pewter shaving-dish, and a globe of coloured water, completed this portion of the adornment. The inside was no less heterogenous in the nature of its furniture. Over the chimney "grinned horribly a ghastly smile" a smoked-dried skull, the terror of every little urchin who dared to peep within the door, and no small annoyance to the leading rustics, who came to have their chins cleared of the weekly stubble. Many were the remonstrances which Mr Bunch met with on the subject of this awful-looking relic, but, as his honoured father and grandfather had bequeathed it as a sort of heirloom, he would by no means suffer it to be disturbed. The rest of his stock seemed to consist of pill-boxes, three or four jars, a goodly number of gallipots, a few razors, and sissors neatly arrayed on each side the chimney, and the usual indispensables of sud-basins and towels.

Mr Bunch was a little decrepit old man, with a hunchback, no body, and very long legs, so that his appearance was not a little grotesque, insomuch that the children, as he stalked slowly and with solemn and important visage through the streets, used to peep at him from a corner at an awful distance, and vociferate the nickname which they had bestowed upon him of "Old Daddy Bunch," when, fearful of the consequences of offending so terrible a personage, whom they regarded as nearly akin to the author of evil, they all scampered off as fast as their little legs could carry them. Among the superstitious inhabitants of Storflot, there was no more devout worshipper of the marvellous than Mr Bunch. Perhaps there is no sort of ghost or fairy lore more popular, for obvious reasons, than that which makes these imaginary beings the agents for bringing to light hidden treasure. The stories of their influence universally take this turn in all districts where metallic substances are known or supposed to exist beneath the surface of the land. From his very infancy the imagination of Zachariah had been warmed by

bars of gold, and lumps of silver ore, and other precious commodities, which some kind fairy or goblin had made known to a poor, unfortunate wight like himself, who had since shone in court with lords and ladies gallant and mighty. The conviction, that he should grow suddenly rich by some means which were still, old as he was, more undefined than an incubus in his brain, had become by long cherishing a thing of as absolute certainty to him as death itself; the thought of the latter, however, seldom obtruded itself, while the former was almost the sole occupant of his waking and sleeping fancy. His dreams, and he was a great observer of dreams,—he used even to lie upon his back to cause him to dream,—his dreams were carefully noted, and pondered upon by every known system of interpretation. The slightest occurrence of an unusual nature served for a foundation upon which to build a series of omens which conjured up thousands of aerial fabrics, alas! less substantial than the subtle element, but, even when they had vanished, the poor architect would scarcely believe in their invisibility.

Mr Bunch had never entered into the holy state of matrimony; nevertheless, he was not quite alone in his mansion. His dwelling was graced by the presence of a creature so fair that she was

"The wonder of the neighbouring swains."

She was the orphan child of an only sister, who, having been taken as attendant by the lady of the domain, had won the heart of a poor scholar, who died soon after. The girl returned to her native village, where she died in giving birth to a female infant, which she bequeathed to the care of her brother. Zachariah had reared her with the most tender solicitude, and he was never so proud as when he heard he, beauty the theme of admiration. He was proud of calling her his niece Bessy, and of prophesying she would one day be a lady, and ride in a gilded coach and six. She was, in truth, a lovely, sweet-tempered and highly intelligent creature. It was marvellous to know with what facility she culled out such scraps of information as could be obtained from her uncle's scanty store. The latter, as his niece grew in years and beauty, was particularly jealous of the young swains of the neighbourhood, who looked upon her with eyes of admiration. Cherishing, as he did, such fantastic and golden dreams of wealth to flow from some supernatural source, he looked upon their devoirs as a species of presumption. Many, indeed, were the offers which she had from the most wealthy of the farmer's sons both through her uncle and, more slyly, to herself; but she saved her eccentric relative any trouble on the subject, by at once rejecting every overture. To be sure, scandal, for there was scandal in the secluded village of Storflot, did whisper that Bessy was not so wholly indifferent to every body. There was a sort of rumour, vague and without detail, that she had been seen at twilight talking with a tall stranger on the hill side, and that she had once been observed from a distance as she parted with a handsomely-dressed male creature at the fountain where the nymphs of the village were accustomed