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MONICA; OR, WITCHCRAFT.

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CHAPTER I.

In the year of our Lord 1559, just after the accession of Queen Elizabeth to the throne of England, there stood a fine old baronial residence, surrounded by a park full of stately trees, and separated from the high road which led to the town of Leicester by a stone wall, terminating in an old-fashioned gateway of the same material.

A lofty avenue of oaks and elms conducted the traveller to Conway Place, a substantial residence of the olden times, which had stood the brunt of the civil wars between the rival roses, and still seemed to bid defiance to decay. About a hundred yards from the stone steps which led into the interior of the mansion, stood the Gothic village church, with its low-arched door, embowered with ivy, and over-canopied with the green drapery formed by the thick foliage of two large chestnut trees, which seemed coeval with the edifice, and beneath whose ample shade more vows had been pledged, and more hearts lost, than the altar within had ever seen united. A fair piece of water, in which a fleet of swans delighted to see reflected their own images, and on which a little white skiff occasionally expanded its snowy sail, spread out in front of the house. This reservoir was fed by a narrow stream, which after gurgling melodiously through wood and field, lost its identity in the fairy lake below. It was a beautiful, quiet spot, such as childhood loves, rich in trees and flowers, sparkling waters and green grass. The highly-cultivated gardens were surrounded on three sides by a moat, which had been of great use during the troubled times before mentioned; and the old draw-bridge, with its clanking chains and pulleys, was still regarded with a sort of awe, by the *infantry* of the family, although at present, it only served the peaceful purpose of a bridge to connect the gar-

dens with the park and pleasure grounds, through which a well-worn foot-path led to the town.

Sir Luke Conway, the present possessor of this fair domain, was a Knight of the Shire, and a person of considerable consequence in that neighborhood. His character for political honor and consistency, did not, however, keep pace with his wealth. It had been proved by all, that whoever sank in those unsettled and distracted times, Sir Luke would swim. That if by changing his creed he could save an acre of his fine property from confiscation, he would have turned Turk. In the early part of the Eighth Henry's reign, he had been a zealous Catholic, kept a private confessor in his house, and regularly attended mass. When that wicked tyrant, to gratify his insatiate lust, raised his sacrilegious hand against the church, because it refused to sanction his abhorrent crimes, Sir Luke Conway was still a staunch adherent and supporter of the reigning monarch, and had lent his aid in the work of rapine and spoliation. During the short reign of the weak, uncle-ridden, boy-king, he continued a zealous Protestant and Reformer; and as readily returned to the mass and the confession, in the reign of the much-injured and calumniated Mary. But Mary had sunk broken-hearted to her grave; and her sister had just ascended the throne—had abjured the Catholic religion, and established upon its ruins the national church, thus proving an instrument, in the hands of an over-ruling Providence, for bringing about much good. But harsh and cruel were the means employed by the she despot, for bringing her people to agree to the forms of the new religion, which, as a great political state machine, she endeavoured with all the energies of her masculine mind, to establish.

Then began that reign of persecution against the hapless Catholics, who still dared, in defiance of royal edicts and unjust executions, the loss of property and the constant dread of imprison-