

FOR THE HARP.

## THE PRIEST HUNTER.

A TALE.

THE laws of England are proverbially merciful, its code of jurisprudence and protection of the rights of the subject form a strong contrast to the political slavery in which many nations of the continent are even still held. In these countries the freedom of the inhabitants is strongly secured, the least innovation is immediately noticed and protested against, no measure tending to deprive the people of the least of the privileges of the constitution, can come under consideration without their being fully warned of its nature. For a free press, the most faithful guardian of a nation's rights is on the watch to secure to them those rights and privileges which have been endeared to them by ages. But yet, formed as the constitution of England is in its threefold capacity of King, Lords and Commons, each dependent on the other, and strange and difficult as it would seem that these estates of a free people should unite in promulgating laws subversive of the first principles of liberty, the freedom of thought and action. Strange and contradictory as this would appear, it has unfortunately been the case. We need go no farther than our own island for a forcible proof of it. The hand of religious intolerance wielded the mighty engine, and the Draconian severity of the laws attest the malignancy which actuates their framers in the persecution of a well-minded but despised people. Though years have floated by on the stream of time—since the reign of terror caused by the administration of these severe statutes was at its height—and though a brighter era has, thank God, dawned upon us, the remembrance of the bigotted and bloody indignities which the unfortunate professors of the Roman Catholic religion suffered is not, nor will ages be sufficient to do it, effaced. And can it be wondered at? No, no, the searing iron of unmerited persecutions entered too deeply into the souls of those who have gone before us, for a few short years entirely to erase its effects from us—of the present day to whom its blighting

influence has partially descended—it will take years of unremitted attention to the rights of an injured people before it can be said that the dark waters of Lethe have received within their bosom the recollections of the cold-blooded atrocity which distinguished the execution of this arbitrary code.

It is needless to refer to these laws in detail; they are, alas! but too well known. It will suffice for us to adduce one of them in order to exemplify the tale with which these few remarks are concluded. The one to which we allude is the sanguinary statute enacted against the professors of the Roman Catholic religion, but more particularly against its Ministers, a law so bloodthirsty and inhuman in its nature that as long as England's name shall bear a prominent part on the page of history, so long shall this be a disgrace and reproach to her.

So pure is the doctrine of Christianity which they possessed, and which inculcates the returning of good for evil, the sacred ministers of a persecuted religion after the example of their Divine Founder, bore in silence and with patience the various crosses and trials with which it pleased the Almighty Providence to afflict them. The barren heaths, and the wild and almost inaccessible summits of the mountains, were often the only shelter they could obtain to rest their wearied limbs, while the caves and dens which abound in our native island, the haunts of the wolf and the fox many times afforded them that refuge—it were dangerous for them to seek amid the haunts of men. Even the unheard of cruelties exercised against them were not sufficient to wean them from their attachment to that religion which was cemented by the blood of martyrs, and which has arisen pure and unsullied from—if it could be possible—more deadly persecutions than even this.

The golden bait was unsuccessfully tried. The men who had proved themselves capable of ending the privations they had suffered—for the sake of Him whose minis-