

"It may not be," said Eustace hastily—"let the bell be tolled—cause the brethren to get torches—alarm the village—hurry down to the river—I myself will be the foremost."

The real Abbot stood astonished and agape, when at once he beheld his office filled, and saw all which he ought to have ordered, going forward at the dictates of the youngest Monk in the convent. But ere the orders of Eustace, which nobody dreamed of disputing, were carried into execution, the necessity was prevented by the sudden apparition of the Sacristan, whose supposed danger excited all the alarm.

CHAPTER VII.

Erase the written troubles of the brain,
Cleanse the foul bosom of the perilous stuff
That weighs upon the heart.

Micbeth.

WHAT betwixt cold and fright the afflicted Sacristan stood before his Superior, propped on the friendly arm of the convent miller, drenched with water, and scarce able to utter a syllable.

After various attempts to speak, the first words he uttered were,

"Swim we merrily—the moon shines bright."

"Swim we merrily!" retorted the Abbot indignantly, "a merry night have ye chosen for swimming, and a becoming salutation to your Superior!"

"Our brother is bewildered," said Eustace; "speak, Father Philip, how is it with you?"

"Good luck to your fishing,"

continued the Sacristan, making a most dolorous attempt at the tune of his strange companion.

"Good luck to your fishing!" repeated the Abbot, still more surprised and displeased; "by my halidome he is drunken with wine, and comes to our presence with his jolly catches in his throat! If bread and water can cure this folly"——

"With your pardon, venerable father," said the Sub-Prior, "of water our brother has had enough; and methinks the confusion of his eye is rather that of terror, than of aught unbecoming his profession. Where did you find him, Hob Miller?"

"An it please your reverence, I did but go to shut the sluice of the mill—and as I was going to shut the sluice, I heard something groan near to me; but judging it was one of Giles Fletcher's hogs—for so please you, he never shuts his gate—I caught up my lever, and was about—Saint Mary forgive me!—to strike where I heard the sound, when, as the saints would have it, I heard the second groan just like that of a living man. So I called up my knaves, and found the Father Sacristan lying wet and senseless under the wall of our kiln. So soon as we brought him to himself a bit, he prayed to be brought to your reverence, but I doubt me, his wits have gone a bell-wavering by the road. It was but now that he spoke in somewhat better form."

"Well!" said Brother Eustace, "thou hast done well, Hob Miller; only begone now, and remember a second time, to pause, ere you strike in the dark."

"Please your reverence, it shall be a lesson to me," said the Miller, "not to mistake a holy man for a hog again, so long as I live." And making a bow with profound humility, the Miller withdrew.

"And now that this churl is gone, Father Philip," said Eustace, "wilt thou tell our venerable Superior what ails thee? art thou *vino gravatus*, man? if so, we will have thee to thy cell?"

"Water! water! not wine," muttered the exhausted Sacristan.

"Nay," said the Monk, "if that be thy complaint, wine may perhaps cure thee;" and he reached him a cup, which the patient drank off to his great benefit.

"And now," said the Abbot, "let his garments be changed, or rather let him be carried to the infirmary; for it will prejudice our health, should we hear his narrative while he stands there, steaming like a rising hoarfrost."

"I will hear his adventure," said Eustace, "and report it to your reverence. And, accordingly, he attended the Sacristan to his cell. In about half an hour he returned to the Abbot.

"How is it with Father Philip?" said the Abbot; "and through what came he into such a state?"

"He comes from Glendearg, reverend sir," said Eustace; "and for the rest he telleth such a legend, as hath not been heard in this Monastery for many a long day." He then gave the Abbot the outlines of the Sacristan's adventures in the homeward journey, and added, that for some time he was inclined to think his brain was infirm, seeing he had sung, laughed, and wept, all in the same breath.

"A wonderful thing it is to us," said the Abbot; "that Satan has been permitted to put forth his hand thus far on one of our sacred brethren!"

"True," said Father Eustace; "but for every text there is a paraphrase; and I have my suspicions, that if the drenching of Father Philip cometh of the Evil One, yet it may not have been altogether without his own personal fault."

"How!" said the Father Abbot; "I will not believe that thou makest doubt that Satan, in former days, hath been permitted to afflict saints and holy men, even as he afflicted the pious Job?"

"God forbid I should make question of it," said the Monk, crossing himself; "yet, where there is an exposition of the Sacristan's tale, which is less than miracu-

lous, I hold it safe to consider it at least, if not to abide by it. Now, this Hob the Miller bath a buxom daughter. Suppose, I say only suppose, that our Sacristan met her at the ford on her return from her uncle's on the other side, for there she hath this evening been—suppose, that, in courtesy, and to save her stripping hose and shoon, the Sacristan brought her across behind him—suppose he carried his familiarities farther than the maiden was willing to admit; and we may easily suppose, farther, that this wetting was the result of it."

"And this legend invented to deceive us!" said the Superior, reddening with wrath; "but most strictly shall it be sifted and inquired into; it is not upon us that Father Philip must hope to pass the result of his own evil practices for doings of Satan. To-morrow cite the wench to appear before us—we will examine, and we will punish."

"Under your Reverence's favour," said Eustace, "that were but poor policy. As things now stand with us, the heretics catch hold of each flying report which tends to the scandal of our clergy. We must abate the evil, not only by strengthening discipline, but also by suppressing and stifling the voice of scandal. If my conjectures are true, the Miller's daughter will be silent for her own sake; and your Reverence's authority may also impose silence on her father, and on the Sacristan. If he is again found to afford room for throwing dishonour on his order, he can be punished with severity, but at the same time with secrecy. For what say the Decretals? *Facinora ostendi dum punientur, flagitia autem abscondi debent.*"

A sentence of Latin, as Eustace had before observed, had often much influence on the Abbot, because he understood it not fluently, and was ashamed to acknowledge his ignorance. On these terms they parted for the night.

The next day, Abbot Boniface strictly interrogated Philip on the real cause of his disaster of the previous night. But the Sacristan stood firm to his story; nor was he found to vary from any point of it, although the

answers he returned were in some degree incoherent, owing to his intermingling with them ever and anon snatches of the strange damsel's song, which had made such deep impression on his imagination, that he could not prevent himself from imitating it repeatedly in the course of his examination. The Abbot had compassion with the Sacristan's involuntary frailty, to which something supernatural seemed annexed, and finally became of opinion, that Father Eustace's more natural explanation was rather plausible than just. And indeed, although we have recorded the adventure as we find it written down, we cannot forbear to add that there was a schism on the subject in the convent, and that several of the brethren pretended to have good reason for thinking that the Miller's black-eyed daughter was at the bottom of the affair after all. Whichever way it might be interpreted, all agreed that it had too ludicrous a sound to be permitted to get abroad, and therefore the Sacristan was charged on his vow of obedience to say no more of his ducking; an injunction which, having once eased his mind by telling his story, it may be well conjectured that he joyfully obeyed.

The attention of Father Eustace was much less forcibly arrested by the marvellous tale of the Sacristan's danger, and his escape, than by the mention of the volume which he had brought with him from the Tower of Glendearg. A copy of the Scriptures, translated into the vulgar tongue, had found its way even into the proper territory of the church, and had been discovered in one of the most hidden and sequestered recesses of the Hallidome of Saint Mary's.

He anxiously requested to see the volume. In this the Sacristan was unable to gratify him, for he had lost it as far as he had recollected, when the supernatural being, as he conceived her to be, took her departure from him. Father Eustace went down to the spot in person, and searched all around it, in hopes of recovering the volume in question; but his labour was in vain. He returned to the Abbot, and reported that it must have

fallen into the river or the mill-stream; "for I will hardly believe," he said, "that Father Philip's musical friend would fly off with a copy of the Holy Scriptures."

"Being," said the Abbot, "as it is, an heretical translation, it may be thought that Satan may have power over it."

"Ay!" said Father Eustace, "it is indeed his chiefest magazine of artillery, when he inspireth presumptuous and daring men to set forth their own opinions and expositions of Holy Writ. But though thus abused, the Scriptures are the source of our salvation, and are no more to be reckoned unholy, because of these rash men's proceedings, than a powerful medicine is to be contemned, or held poisonous, because bold and evil leeches have employed it to the prejudice of their patients. With the permission of your reverence, I would that this matter were looked into more closely. I will myself visit the Tower of Glendearg ere I am many hours older, and we shall see if any spectre or white woman of the wild will venture to interrupt my journey or return. Have I your reverend permission and your blessing?" he added, but in a tone that appeared to set no great store by either.

"Thou hast both, my brother," said the Abbot; but no sooner had Eustace left the apartment, than Boniface could not help breaking on the willing ear of the Sacristan his sincere wish, that any spirit, black, white, or grey, would read the adviser such a lesson, as to cure him of his presumption in esteeming himself wiser than the whole community.

"I wish him no worse lesson," said the Sacristan, "than to go swimming merrily down the river with a ghost behind, and Kelpie's night-crows, and mud-eels all waiting to have a snatch at him.

Merrily swim we, the moon shines bright!
Good luck to your fishing, whom watch you to-night!"

"Brother Philip," said the Abbot, "we exhort thee to say thy prayers, compose thyself, and banish that

foolish chant from thy mind ;—it is but a deception of the devil's."

"I will essay, reverend father," said the Sacristan, "but the tune hangs by my memory like a burr in a beggar's rags ; it mingles with the psalter—the very bells of the convent seem to repeat the words, and jingle to the tune ; and were you to put me to death at this very moment, it is my belief I should die singing it—'Now swim we merrily'—it is as it were a spell upon me."

He then again began to warble

Good luck to your fishing.

And checking himself in the strain with difficulty, he exclaimed, "It is too certain—I am but a lost priest ! Swim me merrily—I shall sing it at the very mass—Woe is me ! I shall sing all the remainder of my life, and yet never be able to change the tune !"

The honest Abbot replied, "he knew many a good fellow in the same condition ;" and concluded the remark with "ho ! ho ! ho !" for his reverence, as the reader may partly have observed, was one of those dull folks who love a quiet joke.

The Sacristan, well acquainted with his Superior's humour, endeavoured to join in the laugh, but his unfortunate canticle came again across his imagination, and interrupted the hilarity of his customary echo.

"By the rood, Brother Philip," said the Abbot much moved, "you become altogether intolerable ! and I am convinced that such a spell could not subsist over a person of religion, and in a religious house, unless he were under mortal sin. Wherefore, say the seven penitentiary psalms—make diligent use of thy scourge and hair-cloth—refrain for three days from all food, save bread and water—I myself will shrive thee, and we will see if this singing devil may be driven out of thee ; at least I think Father Eustace himself could devise no better exorcism."

The Sacristan sighed deeply, but knew remonstrance was vain. He retired therefore to his cell, to try how

far psalmody might be able to drive off the sounds of the syren tune which haunted his memory.

Meanwhile, Father Eustace proceeded to the draw-bridge in his way to the lonely valley of Glendearg. In a brief conversation with the churlish warder, he had the address to render him more tractable in the controversy betwixt him and the convent. He reminded him that his father had been a vassal under the community ; that his brother was childless ; and that their possessions would revert to the church on his death ; and might be either granted to himself the warder, or to some greater favourite of the Abbot, as matters chanced to stand betwixt them at the time. The Sub-Prior suggested to him also, the necessary connection of interests betwixt the Monastery and the office which this man enjoyed. He listened with temper to his rude and churlish answers ; and by keeping his own interest firm pitched in his view, he had the satisfaction to find that Peter gradually softened his tone, and consented to let every pilgrim who travelled on foot pass free of exaction until Pentecost next ; they who travelled on horseback or otherwise, consenting to pay the ordinary custom. Having thus accommodated a matter in which the weal of the convent was so deeply interested, Father Eustace proceeded on his journey.

CHAPTER VIII.

Nay, dally not with time, the wise man's treasure,
Though fools are lavish on't—the fatal Fisher
Hooks souls, while we waste moments.

Old Play.

A NOVEMBER mist overspread the little valley, up which slowly but steadily rode the Monk Eustace. He was not insensible to the feeling of melancholy inspired by the scene and by the season. The stream seemed