

LYNCHING A WITCH AT GREAT PAXTON.

The following circumstances are related by the Rev. Isaac Nicholson, of Great Paxton, under date, July 25th, 1808 :-

"In the afternoon of Wednesday, the 17th of February last [1808], Alice Brown, a young woman of Great Paxton, imprudently ventured to cross the ice, which then covered the surface of the Ouse. A thaw of some hours had rendered the ice unsafe, and she had not walked many yards upon it before it gave way, and let her into the river. From this perilous situation she providentially extricated herself and reached the opposite bank, where her friend, Fanny Amey, scarcely less terrified than herself at what had happened, stood anxiously waiting for her. Shivering and frightened she hastened to her father's house, about a quarter of a mile from the river, and almost as soon as she entered it, was seized with a strong epileptic fit. Fanny Amey had been subject to epilepsy for some months previous to this period, and therefore it is not at all surprising that she should be sympathetically affected, and fall into similar convulsions.

" Alice Brown did not speedily get over the effects of her fright : her distressing fits returned at short intervals and disqualified her for every kind of work; indeed she was so much reduced by them that her friends began to despair of her recovery. Inquiring after the state of her health on the 6th of April, I was astonished and grieved to hear from her mother that her fits, weakness, and dejection were ascribed to the effect of witchcraft. * She is under an ill-tongue,' said the youth. * As sure as you are alive, sir,' continued a man who stood by, ' she is bewitched, and so are two other girls that live near her. There is a man in the town I came from in Bedfordshire, who was exactly like Alice Brown - he could do no work, lost all his strength, and was wasting away very fast, when a person told him what was the matter with him and how he might be cured. He filled a bottle with a particular kind of fluid, stuffed the cork both top and bottom with pins, set it carefully in an oven of a moderate heat, and then observed a profound silence. In a few minutes the charm succeeded ; for, he saw a variety of forms flitting before his eyes, and amongst the rest the perfect resemblance of an old woman who lived in the same parish. This was what he wanted - he was now satisfied who it was that had injured him, and that her reign would soon be over. The woman whose figure he saw died in a few days, and the man immediately recovered. Thomas Brown tried this charm last night for his daughter, and though a strange noise was distinctly heard twice by his wife, who was in bed with the poor girl, it did not succeed according to our wishes ; so they have not at present found out, who it is that does all the mischief.'

"If I was shocked at this man's absurdity and superstition, I was infinitely more so to understand it was the general opinion of the people, that Alice Brown, Fanny Amey, and Mary Fox were certainly bewitched by some person, who had purchased a familiar, or an evil spirit of the Devil, at the expense of his own soul ; and that a variety of charms and experiments had been tried to discover who it was.

"When the public service was over, I called on Fanny Amey and Alice Brown. It was not in my power to judge from the countenance of the former, that anything was the matter with her ; she was perfectly collected and looked the picture of health. Alice Brown was asleep in bed, and therefore I did not see her. At both houses I endeavoured to explain to the relatives and friends of the young women, that it was an utter impossibility for one human creature to injure the health of another by any invisible and preternatural process, - entreated them to discountenance notions so wild and irrational, and begged them to try other means than senseless charms to recover their children.

"A few minutes before I went into Church on the following Sunday, Ann Izzard, a

poor woman of Great Paxton, requested leave to speak with me. In tears and greatly agitated she told me her neighbours pretended they had discovered by means of certain charms that she was a witch, and blamed her for the fits and illness of Alice Brown, Fanny Amey, and Mary Fox : she said, they threatened to punish her, abused her children, and frightened her so much that she frequently dropped on the ground in fainting fits ; and concluded with asserting her innocence in these words : — * I am not a witch, and am willing to prove it by being weighed against the church bible.'

"Ann Izzard is a little woman, about sixty years of age, and by no means ill looking : she has had eight children ; five are now living.

"After the sermon I addressed the congregation upon the subject, pointed out the folly of their opinions, that fatal consequences might result from brooding over them and tried to persuade them, that, although they might be weak enough to suppose there was no harm in laying violent hands on a woman, they madly called a witch, yet the laws of their country would view their conduct in a very different light.

"But argument, explanation, and remonstrance, were in vain ; the mania had taken full possession of them, and was only to be cured, or restrained by the powerful arm of the law.

"On Thursday, 5th of May, Ann Izzard was at St. Neots market ; and it so happened that her son, about sixteen years old, was sent the same day to St. Neots by his master, a respectable farmer, John Bidwell, of Great Paxton, for a load of corn. When he returned his mother and another woman accompanied him. Contrary to the better advice of her neighbour, the latter insisted upon putting a basket of grocery upon the top of the sacks of corn. One of the horses which drew the cart was young and unmanageable, and on going down the hill which leads into the village of Paxton, by his plunging and restiveness, overturned it. By this unfortunate accident, the shopkeeper's grocery was materially damaged ; and, because Ann Izzard had repeatedly advised her not to put the basket upon the sacks, she charged her with overturning the cart by means of her infernal art, on purpose to spoil her goods. It will scarcely be credited that in an hour after, the whole parish was in an uproar : *She has just overturned a loaded cart, with as much ease as if it had been a spinning wheel,' was echoed from one end of it to the other. Men, women, and children, raised their voices, and exclaimed, ' we have now proof positive of her guilt — this last act in open day speaks for itself — she is the person that does all the mischief, and if something is not done to put a stop to her baseness, there will be no living in the place.' Nor did this extraordinary fit of frenzy terminate till they had made two attacks upon her, which, atrocious as they appear to me, are considered by themselves as not only justifiable, but highly meritorious. The dark and uninstructed Caffrarian would look upon such actions as a perpetual scandal to himself and an everlasting disgrace to his country.

"A considerable number of people assembled together as it grew dark on Sunday evening, the 8th of May, and taking with them the young women ridiculously supposed to be bewitched, about ten o'clock proceeded to the cottage of Wright Izzard, which stands alone, at some distance from the body of the village. When they arrived at this solitary spot, so favourable for the execution of their villainous designs, they broke into the poor man's house, dragged his wife out of bed, and threw her naked into the yard ; where her arms were torn with pins, her head was dashed against the large stones of the causeway — and her face, stomach, and breast, were severely bruised with a thick stick that served as a bar to the door. Having thus satiated themselves the mob dispersed. The woman then crawled into the house, put her clothes on, and went to the constable, who said, 'he could not protect her, because he was not sworn.' The humanity, protection, and assistance which she could not find at the constable's, very happily for herself, she found under the roof of a poor widow. The compassionate and honest Alice Russel unlocked her door at the first call, wrapped up her neighbour's bleeding arms with the nicest linen rags she had, affectionately sympathised with and comforted her, and gave her a bed. But with the deepest grief I relate it, the

compassion and kindness of this poor woman, were the means of shortening her days. 'The protectors of a witch are just as bad as the witch and deserve the same treatment,' cried the infatuated populace the next morning. The envenomed shaft flew direct to its mark, and, the widow Russel, neither eat nor slept again : she died a martyr to fear and apprehension on Friday, the 20th of May.

" In the evening of Monday, the 9th of May, Ann Izzard was a second time dragged out of her house, and a second time were her arms torn with pins till they streamed afresh with blood. Alive the next morning, and apparently likely to survive this attack also, her enemies resolved to have her ducked, as soon as the labour of the day was over. On hearing this she hastily quitted her home, and took refuge in a neighbouring village, where their inhumanity and malevolence could not reach her."

Two years later, in 1810, Mr. Nicholson published : *' An abstract of the proceedings laid against Joseph Harper, James Slaughton, Thomas Biaybrook, Mary Amey, Fanny Amey, Alice Brown, Edward Briers, Mary Hook, and Mary Fox, for assaulting Ann Izzard, of Great Paxton, in the county of Huntingdon, on the 8th and 9th of May, 1808, under the pretence of her being a witch." There were two indictments, the prisoners being first tried at the Huntingdon assizes, and afterwards at the court of King's Bench, at Westminster, on November 23rd, 1809. On the latter occasion, Mr. Justice Grose, in passing sentence upon the prisoners, said : " You are each of you to receive the sentence of this court, convicted of an outrageous and alarming misdemeanour, in riotously assembling and breaking into the dwelling house, — breaking open the doors, and in truth, bursting into the house of Wright Izzard, for the purpose of seizing and possessing, by force and violence, and afterwards assaulting, Ann his wife, in which force and violence you dragged her from her bed — pierced her hands, arms, and other parts of her person, with pins and other sharp instruments, and wounding her in a most painful manner, and creating a great disturbance in the neighbourhood, and behaving in a most outrageous manner It appears that some of you held the husband, Wright Izzard, while others of you assaulted the wife, and with pins and other instruments, you pricked, goaded, and wounded her arms, and injured other parts of her person, and that so cruelly, that, to use the language of a witness, ' her arms were all over in a gore of blood.' ... At the trial this ill-used woman, the prosecutrix, demeaned herself most properly ; and from her conduct then, I should have imagined her to be a sober, discreet, and intelligent woman. Her evidence was given with propriety and temper, and it appeared that her only wish was, to get protection against force and violence, a protection which it is the right of every subject in this country to have. Your crimes call for the sentence of the law, nor can the justice of the country be satisfied without marking this breach of the peace as a great outrage upon an inoffending individual, and it is impossible to pass this offence unpunished. Therefore to protect the prosecutrix against future violence, and to preserve the public peace, and also to fix in your minds, proper principles of humanity and a ready obedience to the law, as well as to protect the character of the prosecutrix, and to enforce that which the law and justice of the country demand, the court, having taken into consideration all the circumstances of the case, doth order and adjudge, that for this your offence, you and each of you, be imprisoned in the common jail of Huntingdon, for one calendar month ; and that you, Edward Briers, Mary Hook, and Mary Fox, convicted of a similar offence on the 7th day of May, you and each of you, be imprisoned in the common jail, of Huntingdon, for one calendar month — and that you, James Staughton (convicted in a second indictment) be imprisoned in the same jail for another calendar month, to commence at the expiration of the first imprisonment."

In addition to this, they were each ordered to find security for their good behaviour for two years, or be further imprisoned until such security should be given. But all this did not quite put a stop to the evil, for on the 16th of October, 1809, Ann Izzard appeared before Henry Pointer Standley, Esq., J.P., of Little Paxton, and lodged a complaint against a mother and her daughter named Day, for assaulting her. In default of finding bail for their good behaviour, they were sent to Huntingdon jail.