

WILLIAM HARRISON AINSWORTH



GUY FAWKES

HISTORICAL NOVEL

William Harrison Ainsworth

Guy Fawkes (Historical Novel)

**A Tale of the Destruction of the Parliament -
Gunpowder Plot of 1605**

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**TO MRS. HUGHES,
KINGSTON LISLE, BERKS.**

My dear Mrs. Hughes,

You are aware that this Romance was brought to a close during my last brief visit at Kingston Lisle, when the time necessary to be devoted to it deprived me of the full enjoyment of your society, and, limiting my range—no very irksome restriction,—to your own charming garden and grounds, prevented me from accompanying you in your walks to your favourite and beautiful downs. This circumstance, which will suffice to give it some interest in your eyes by associating it with your residence, furnishes me with a plea, of which I gladly avail myself, of inscribing it with your name, and of recording, at the same time, the high sense I entertain of your goodness and worth, the value I set upon your friendship,—a friendship shared in common with some of the most illustrious writers of our time,—and the gratitude I shall never cease to feel for attentions and kindnesses, little less than maternal, which I have experienced at your hands.

In the hope that you may long continue to diffuse happiness round your own circle, and contribute to the instruction and delight of the many attached friends with whom you maintain so active and so interesting a correspondence; and that you may live to see your grandsons fulfil their present promise, and tread in the footsteps of their high-minded and excellent-hearted father,—and of *his* father! I remain

Your affectionate and obliged friend,
W. Harrison Ainsworth.

Kensal Manor House, Harrow Road,
July 26, 1841.

PREFACE.

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The tyrannical measures adopted against the Roman Catholics in the early part of the reign of James the First, when the severe penal enactments against recusants were revived, and with additional rigour, and which led to the remarkable conspiracy about to be related, have been so forcibly and faithfully described by Doctor Lingard,¹ that the following extract from his history will form a fitting introduction to the present work.

“The oppressive and sanguinary code framed in the reign of Elizabeth, was re-enacted to its full extent, and even improved with additional severities. Every individual who had studied or resided, or should afterwards study or reside in any college or seminary beyond the sea, was rendered incapable of inheriting, or purchasing, or enjoying lands, annuities, chattels, debts, or sums of money, within the realm; and as missionaries sometimes eluded detection under the disguise of tutors, it was provided that no man should teach even the rudiments of grammar in public or in private, without the previous approbation of the diocesan.

“The execution of the penal laws enabled the king, by an ingenious comment, to derive considerable profit from his past forbearance. It was pretended that he had never forgiven the penalties of recusancy; he had merely forbidden them to be exacted for a time, in the hope that this indulgence would lead to conformity; but his expectations had been deceived; the obstinacy of the Catholics had grown with the lenity of the sovereign; and, as they were unworthy of further favour, they should now be left to the severity of the law. To their dismay, the legal fine of twenty pounds per lunar month was again demanded, and not only for the time to come, but for the whole period

of the suspension; a demand which, by crowding thirteen payments into one, reduced many families of moderate incomes to a state of absolute beggary. Nor was this all. James was surrounded by numbers of his indigent countrymen. Their habits were expensive, their wants many, and their importunities incessant. To satisfy the more clamorous, a new expedient was devised. The king transferred to them his claims on some of the more opulent recusants, against whom they were at liberty to proceed by law, in his name, unless the sufferers should submit to compound, by the grant of an annuity for life, or the immediate payment of a considerable sum. This was at a time when the jealousies between the two nations had reached a height, of which, at the present day, we have but little conception. Had the money been carried to the royal coffers, the recusants would have had sufficient reason to complain; but that Englishmen should be placed by their king at the mercy of foreigners, that they should be stripped of their property to support the extravagance of his Scottish minions, this added indignity to injustice, exacerbated their already wounded feelings, and goaded the most moderate almost to desperation." From this deplorable state of things, which is by no means over-coloured in the above description, sprang the Gunpowder Plot.

The county of Lancaster has always abounded in Catholic families, and at no period were the proceedings of the ecclesiastical commissioners more rigorous against them than at that under consideration. Manchester, "the Goshen of this Egypt" as it is termed by the fiery zealot, Warden Heyrick, being the place where all the recusants were imprisoned, the scene of the early part of this history has been laid in that town and its immediate neighbourhood. For the introduction of the munificent founder of the Blue Coat Hospital into a tale of this description I ought, perhaps, to apologize; but if I should succeed by it in arousing my fellow-townsmen to a more lively appreciation of the great

benefits they have derived from him, I shall not regret what I have written.

In Viviana Radcliffe I have sought to portray the loyal and devout Catholic, such as I conceive the character to have existed at the period. In Catesby, the unscrupulous and ambitious plotter, masking his designs under the cloak of religion. In Garnet, the subtle, and yet sincere Jesuit. And in Fawkes the gloomy and superstitious enthusiast. One doctrine I have endeavoured to enforce throughout,—Toleration.

From those who have wilfully misinterpreted one of my former productions, and have attributed to it a purpose and an aim utterly foreign to my own intentions, I can scarcely expect fairer treatment for the present work. But to that wider and more discriminating class of readers from whom I have experienced so much favour and support, I confidently commit this volume, certain of meeting with leniency and impartiality.

* * * * *

1. Vide *History of England*, vol. ix. New Edition.

BOOK THE FIRST. THE PLOT.

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Their searches are many and severe. They come either in the night or early in the morning, and ever seek their opportunity, when the Catholics are or would be best occupied, or are likely to be worse provided or look for nothing. They willingly come when few are at home to resist them, that they may rifle coffers, and do what they list. They lock up the servants, and the mistress of the house, and the whole family, in a room by themselves, while they, like young princes, go rifling the house at their will.

Letter to Vers'egan, ap. Stonyhurst MSS.

What a thing is it for a Catholic gentleman to have his house suddenly beset on all sides with a number of men in arms, both horse and foot! and not only his house and gardens, and such enclosed places all beset, but all highways laid, for some miles near unto him, that none shall pass, but they shall be examined! Then are these searchers oft-times so rude and barbarous, that, if the doors be not opened in the instant they would enter, they break open the doors with all violence, as if they were to sack a town of enemies won by the sword.

Father Gerard's MS.

CHAPTER I. AN EXECUTION IN MANCHESTER, AT THE BEGINNING OF THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY.

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More than two hundred and thirty-five years ago, or, to speak with greater precision, in 1605, at the latter end of June, it was rumoured one morning in Manchester that two seminary priests, condemned at the late assizes under the severe penal enactments then in force against the Papists, were about to suffer death on that day. Attracted by the report, large crowds flocked towards the place of execution, which, in order to give greater solemnity to the spectacle, had been fixed at the southern gate of the old Collegiate Church, where a scaffold was erected. Near it was a large blood-stained block, the use of which will be readily divined, and adjoining the block, upon a heap of blazing coals, smoked a caldron filled with boiling pitch, intended to receive the quarters of the miserable sufferers.

The place was guarded by a small band of soldiers, fully accoutred in corslets and morions, and armed with swords, half-pikes, and calivers. Upon the steps of the scaffold stood the executioner,—a square-built, ill-favoured personage, busied in arranging a bundle of straw upon the boards. He was dressed in a buff jerkin, and had a long-bladed, two-edged knife thrust into his girdle. Besides these persons, there was a pursuivant,—an officer appointed by the Privy Council to make search throughout the provinces for recusants, Popish priests, and other religious offenders. He was occupied at this moment in reading over a list of suspected persons.

Neither the executioner nor his companions appeared in the slightest degree impressed by the butcherly business about to be enacted; for the former whistled carelessly as he pursued his task, while the latter laughed and chatted with the crowd, or jestingly pointed their matchlocks at the jackdaws wheeling above them in the sunny air, or perching upon the pinnacles and tower of the neighbouring fane. Not so the majority of the assemblage. Most of the older and wealthier families in Lancashire still continuing to adhere to the ancient faith of their fathers, it will not be wondered that many of their dependents should follow their example. And, even of those who were adverse to the creed of Rome, there were few who did not murmur at the rigorous system of persecution adopted towards its professors.

At nine o'clock, the hollow rolling of a muffled drum was heard at a distance. The deep bell of the church began to toll, and presently afterwards the mournful procession was seen advancing from the market-place. It consisted of a troop of mounted soldiers, equipped in all respects like those stationed at the scaffold, with their captain at their head, and followed by two of their number with hurdles attached to their steeds, on which were tied the unfortunate victims. Both were young men—both apparently prepared to meet their fate with firmness and resignation. They had been brought from Radcliffe Hall—an old moated and fortified mansion belonging to a wealthy family of that name, situated where the close, called Pool Fold, now stands, and then recently converted into a place of security for recusants; the two other prisons in Manchester—namely, the New Fleet on Hunt's Bank, and the gaol on Salford Bridge,—not being found adequate to the accommodation of the numerous religious offenders.

By this time, the cavalcade had reached the place of execution. The soldiers drove back the throng with their pikes, and cleared a space in front of the scaffold; when, just as the cords that bound the limbs of the priests were

unfastened, a woman in a tattered woollen robe, with a hood partially drawn over her face,—the features of which, so far as they could be discerned, were sharp and attenuated,—a rope girded round her waist, bare feet, and having altogether the appearance of a sister of Charity, sprang forward, and flung herself on her knees beside them.

Clasping the hem of the garment of the nearest priest, she pressed it to her lips, and gazed earnestly at him, as if imploring a blessing.

"You have your wish, daughter," said the priest, extending his arms over her."Heaven and our lady bless you!"

The woman then turned towards the other victim, who was audibly reciting the *Miserere*.

"Back, spawn of Antichrist!" interposed a soldier, rudely thrusting her aside."Don't you see you disturb the father's devotions? He has enough to do to take care of his own soul, without minding yours."

"Take this, daughter," cried the priest who had been first addressed, offering her a small volume, which he took from his vest,"and fail not to remember in your prayers the sinful soul of Robert Woodroffe, a brother of the order of Jesus."

The woman put out her hand to take the book; but before it could be delivered to her, it was seized by the soldier.

"Your priests have seldom anything to leave behind them," he shouted, with a brutal laugh,"except some worthless and superstitious relic of a saint or martyr. What's this? Ah! a breviary—a mass-book. I've too much regard for your spiritual welfare to allow you to receive it," he added, about to place it in his doublet.

"Give it her," exclaimed a young man, snatching it from him, and handing it to the woman, who disappeared as soon as she had obtained possession of it.

The soldier eyed the new-comer as if disposed to resent the interference, but a glance at his apparel, which, though plain, and of a sober hue, was rather above the middle

class, as well as a murmur from the crowd, who were evidently disposed to take part with the young man, induced him to stay his hand. He, therefore, contented himself with crying, "A recusant! a Papist!"

"I am neither recusant nor Papist, knave!" replied the other, sternly; "and I counsel you to mend your manners, and show more humanity, or you shall find I have interest enough to procure your dismissal from a service which you disgrace."

This reply elicited a shout of applause from the mob.

"Who is that bold speaker?" demanded the pursuivant from one of his attendants.

"Humphrey Chetham of Crumpsall," answered the man: "son to one of the wealthiest merchants of the town, and a zealous upholder of the true faith."

"He has a strange way of showing his zeal," rejoined the pursuivant, entering the answer in his note-book. "And who is the woman he befriended?"

"A half-crazed being called Elizabeth Orton," replied the attendant. "She was scourged and tortured during Queen Elizabeth's reign for pretending to the gift of prophecy, and was compelled to utter her recantation within yonder church. Since then she has never opened her lips."

"Indeed," exclaimed the pursuivant: "I will engage to make her speak, and to some purpose. Where does she live?"

"In a cave on the banks of the Irwell, near Ordsall Hall," replied the attendant. "She subsists on the chance contributions of the charitable; but she solicits nothing,—and, indeed, is seldom seen."

"Her cave must be searched," observed the pursuivant; "it may be the hiding-place of a priest. Father Campion was concealed in such another spot at Stonor Park, near Henley-on-Thames, where he composed his '*Decem Rationes*;' and, for a long time, eluded the vigilance of the commissioners."

We shall pass it in our way to Ordsall Hall to-night, shall we not?"

The attendant nodded in the affirmative.

"If we surprise Father Oldcorne," continued the pursuivant, "and can prove that Sir William Radcliffe and his daughter, both of whom are denounced in my list, are harbourers and shelterers of recusants, we shall have done a good night's work."

At this moment, an officer advanced, and commanded the priests to ascend the scaffold.

As Father Woodroffe, who was the last to mount, reached the uppermost step, he turned round and cried in a loud voice, "Good people, I take you all to witness that I die in the true Catholic religion, and that I rejoice and thank God with all my soul, that he hath made me worthy to testify my faith therein by shedding my blood in this manner." He then advanced towards the executioner, who was busied in adjusting the cord round his companion's throat, and said, "God forgive thee—do thine office quickly;" adding in a lower tone, "*Asperge me, Domine; Domine, miserere mei!*"

And, amid the deep silence that ensued, the executioner performed his horrible task.

The execution over, the crowd began to separate slowly, and various opinions were expressed respecting the revolting and sanguinary spectacle just witnessed. Many, who condemned—and the majority did so—the extreme severity of the laws by which the unfortunate priests had just suffered, uttered their sentiments with extreme caution; but there were some whose feelings had been too much excited for prudence, and who inveighed loudly and bitterly against the spirit of religious persecution then prevailing; while a few others of an entirely opposite persuasion looked upon the rigorous proceedings adopted against the Papists, and the punishment now inflicted upon their priesthood, as a just retribution for their own severities during the reign of Mary. In general, the common people entertained a strong

prejudice against the Catholic party,—for, as it has been shrewdly observed, “they must have some object to hate; heretofore it was the Welsh, the Scots, or the Spaniards, but now in these latter times only the Papists;” but in Manchester, near which, as has been already stated, so many old and important families, professing that religion, resided, the case was widely different; and the mass of the inhabitants were favourably inclined towards them. It was the knowledge of this feeling that induced the commissioners, appointed to superintend the execution of the enactments against recusants, to proceed with unusual rigour in this neighbourhood.

The state of the Roman Catholic party at the period of this history was indeed most grievous. The hopes they had indulged of greater toleration on the accession of James the First, had been entirely destroyed. The persecutions, suspended during the first year of the reign of the new monarch, were now renewed with greater severity than ever; and though their present condition was deplorable enough, it was feared that worse remained in store for them. “They bethought themselves,” writes Bishop Goodman, “that now their case was far worse than in the time of Queen Elizabeth; for they did live in some hope that after the old woman's life, they might have some mitigation, and even those who did then persecute them were a little more moderate, as being doubtful what times might succeed, and fearing their own case. But, now that they saw the times settled, having no hope of better days, but expecting that the uttermost rigour of the law should be executed, they became desperate: finding that by the laws of the kingdom their own lives were not secured, and for the carrying over of a priest into England it was no less than high treason. A gentlewoman was hanged only for relieving and harbouring a priest; a citizen was hanged only for being reconciled to the Church of Rome; besides, the penal laws were such, and so executed, that they could not subsist.

What was usually sold in shops and usually bought, this the pursuivant would take away from them as being Popish and superstitious. One knight did affirm that in one term he gave twenty nobles in rewards to the door-keeper of the Attorney-General; another did affirm, that his third part which remained unto him of his estate did hardly serve for his expense in law to defend him from other oppressions; besides their children to be taken from home, to be brought up in another religion. So they did every way conclude that their estate was desperate; they could die but once, and their religion was more precious unto them than their lives. They did further consider their misery; how they were debarred in any course of life to help themselves. They could not practise law,—they could not be citizens,—they could have no office; they could not breed up their sons—none did desire to match with them; they had neither fit marriages for their daughters, nor nunneries to put them into; for those few which are beyond seas are not considerable in respect of the number of recusants, and none can be admitted into them without great sums of money, which they, being exhausted, could not supply. The Spiritual Court did not cease to molest them, to excommunicate them, then to imprison them; and thereby they were utterly disenabled to sue for their own.” Such is a faithful picture of the state of the Catholic party at the commencement of the reign of James the First.

Pressed down by these intolerable grievances, is it to be wondered at that the Papists should repine,—or that some among their number, when all other means failed, should seek redress by darker measures? By a statute of Elizabeth, all who refused to conform to the established religion were subjected to a fine of twenty pounds a lunar month; and this heavy penalty, remitted, or rather suspended, on the accession of the new sovereign, was again exacted, and all arrears claimed. Added to this, James, whose court was thronged by a host of needy Scottish retainers, assigned to

them a certain number of wealthy recusants, and empowered them to levy the fines—a privilege of which they were not slow to avail themselves. There were other pains and penalties provided for by the same statute, which were rigorously inflicted. To withdraw, or seek to withdraw another from the established religion was accounted high treason, and punished accordingly; to hear mass involved a penalty of one hundred marks and a year's imprisonment; and to harbour a priest, under the denomination of a tutor, rendered the latter liable to a year's imprisonment, and his employer to a fine of ten pounds a-month. Impressed with the belief that, in consequence of the unremitting persecutions which the Catholics underwent in Elizabeth's time, the religion would be wholly extirpated, Doctor Allen, a Lancashire divine, who afterwards received a cardinal's hat, founded a college at Douay, for the reception and education of those intending to take orders. From this university a number of missionary priests, or seminarists, as they were termed, were annually sent over to England; and it was against these persons, who submitted to every hardship and privation, to danger, and death itself, for the welfare of their religion, and in the hope of propagating its doctrines, that the utmost rigour of the penal enactments was directed. Among the number of seminarists despatched from Douay, and capitally convicted under the statute above-mentioned, were the two priests whose execution has just been narrated.

As a portion of the crowd passed over the old bridge across the Irwell connecting Manchester with Salford, on which stood an ancient chapel erected by Thomas de Booth, in the reign of Edward the Third, and recently converted into a prison for recusants, they perceived the prophetess, Elizabeth Orton, seated upon the stone steps of the desecrated structure, earnestly perusing the missal given her by Father Woodroffe. A mob speedily collected round her; but, unconscious seemingly of their presence, the poor

woman turned over leaf after leaf, and pursued her studies. Her hood was thrown back, and discovered her bare and withered neck, over which her dishevelled hair streamed in long sable elf-locks. Irritated by her indifference, several of the by-standers, who had questioned her as to the nature of her studies, began to mock and jeer her, and endeavoured, by plucking her robe, and casting little pebbles at her, to attract her attention. Roused at length by these annoyances, she arose; and fixing her large black eyes menacingly upon them, was about to stalk away, when they surrounded and detained her.

"Speak to us, Bess," cried several voices. "Prophecy—prophecy."

"I *will* speak to you," replied the poor woman, shaking her hand at them, "I *will* prophecy to you. And mark me, though ye believe not, my words shall not fall to the ground."

"A miracle! a miracle!" shouted the by-standers. "Bess Orton, who has been silent for twenty years, has found her tongue at last."

"I have seen a vision, and dreamed a dream," continued the prophetess. "As I lay in my cell last night, meditating upon the forlorn state of our religion, and of its professors, methought nineteen shadowy figures stood before me—ay, nineteen—for I counted them thrice—and when I questioned them as to their coming,—for my tongue at first clove to the roof of my mouth, and my lips refused their office,—one of them answered, in a voice which yet rings in my ears, 'We are the chosen deliverers of our fallen and persecuted church. To us is intrusted the rebuilding of her temples,—to our hands is committed the destruction of our enemies. The work will be done in darkness and in secret,—with toil and travail,—but it will at length be made manifest; and when the hour is arrived, our vengeance will be terrible and exterminating.' With these words, they vanished from my sight. Ah!" she exclaimed, suddenly starting, and passing

her hand across her brow, as if to clear her sight, "it was no dream—no vision. I see one of them now."

"Where? where?" cried several voices.

The prophetess answered by extending her skinny arm towards some object immediately before her.

All eyes were instantly turned in the same direction, when they beheld a Spanish soldier—for such his garb proclaimed him—standing at a few paces' distance from them. He was wrapped in an ample cloak, with a broad-leaved steeple-crowned hat, decorated with a single green feather, pulled over his brows, and wore a polished-steel brigandine, trunk hose, and buff boots drawn up to the knees. His arms consisted of a brace of petronels thrust into his belt, whence a long rapier depended. His features were dark as bronze, and well-formed, though strongly marked, and had an expression of settled sternness. His eyes were grey and penetrating, and shaded by thick beetle-brows; and his physiognomy was completed by a black peaked beard. His person was tall and erect, and his deportment soldier-like and commanding. Perceiving he had become an object of notice, the stranger cast a compassionate look at the prophetess, who still remained gazing fixedly at him, and throwing her a few pieces of money, strode away.

Watching his retreating figure till it disappeared from view, the crazed woman tossed her arms wildly in the air, and cried, in a voice of exultation, "Did I not speak the truth?—did I not tell you I had seen him? He is the deliverer of our church, and is come to avenge the righteous blood which hath been this day shed."

"Peace, woman, and fly while there is yet time," cried the young man who had been designated as Humphrey Chetham. "The pursuivant and his myrmidons are in search of you."

"Then they need not go far to find me," replied the prophetess. "I will tell them what I told these people, that the day of bloody retribution is at hand,—that the avenger is

arrived. I have seen him twice,—once in my cave, and once again here,—even where you stand.”

“If you do not keep silence and fly, my poor creature,” rejoined Humphrey Chetham, “you will have to endure what you suffered years ago,—stripes, and perhaps torture. Be warned by me—ah! it is too late. He is approaching.”

“Let him come,” replied Elizabeth Orton, “I am ready for him.”

“Can none of you force her away?” cried Humphrey Chetham, appealing to the crowd; “I will reward you.”

“I will not stir from this spot,” rejoined the prophetess, obstinately; “I will testify to the truth.”

The kind-hearted young merchant, finding any further attempt to preserve her fruitless, drew aside.

By this time, the pursuivant and his attendants had come up. “Seize her!” cried the former, “and let her be placed within this prison till I have reported her to the commissioners. If you will confess to me, woman,” he added in a whisper to her, “that you have harboured a priest, and will guide us to his hiding-place, you shall be set free.”

“I know of no priests but those you have murdered,” returned the prophetess, in a loud voice, “but I will tell you something that you wot not of. The avenger of blood is at hand. I have seen him. All here have seen him. And you shall see him—but not now—not now.”

“What is the meaning of this raving?” demanded the pursuivant.

“Pay no heed to her talk,” interposed Humphrey Chetham; “she is a poor crazed being, who knows not what she says. I will be surety for her inoffensive conduct.”

“You must give me surety for yourself, sir,” replied the pursuivant. “I have just learnt that you were last night at Ordsall Hall, the seat of that ‘dangerous temporiser,’—for so he is designated in my warrant,—Sir William Radcliffe. And if report speaks truly, you are not altogether insensible to the charms of his fair daughter, Viviana.”

"What is this to thee, thou malapert knave?" cried Humphrey Chetham, reddening, partly from anger, partly, it might be, from another emotion.

"Much, as you shall presently find, good Master Wolf-in-sheep's-clothing," retorted the pursuivant; "if you prove not a rank Papist at heart, then do I not know a true man from a false."

This angry conference was cut short by a piercing scream from the prophetess. Breaking from the grasp of her captors, who were about to force her into the prison, she sprang with a single bound upon the parapet of the bridge; and utterly regardless of her dangerous position, turned, and faced the soldiers, who were struck mute with astonishment.

"Tremble!" she cried, in a loud voice,— "tremble, ye evil-doers! Ye who have despoiled the house of God,—have broken his altars,—scattered his incense,—slain his priests. Tremble, I say. The avenger is arrived. The bolt is in his hand. It shall strike king, lords, commons,—all! These are my last words,—take them to heart."

"Drag her off!" roared the pursuivant, furiously.

"Use care—use gentleness, if ye are men!" cried Humphrey Chetham.

"Think not you can detain me!" cried the prophetess. "Avaunt, and tremble!"

So saying she flung herself from the parapet.

The height from which she fell was about fifty feet. Dashed into the air like jets from a fountain by the weight and force of the descending body, the water instantly closed over her. But she rose to the surface of the stream, about twenty yards below the bridge.

"She may yet be saved," cried Humphrey Chetham, who with the by-standers had hurried to the side of the bridge.

"You will only preserve her for the gallows," observed the pursuivant.

“Your malice shall not prevent my making the attempt,” replied the young merchant. “Ha! assistance is at hand.”

The exclamation was occasioned by the sudden appearance of the soldier in the Spanish dress, who rushed towards the left bank of the river, which was here, as elsewhere, formed of red sandstone rock, and following the course of the current, awaited the next appearance of the drowning woman. It did not occur till she had been carried a considerable distance down the stream, when the soldier, swiftly divesting himself of his cloak, plunged into the water, and dragged her ashore.

“Follow me,” cried the pursuivant to his attendants. “I will not lose my prey.”

But before he gained the bank of the river, the soldier and his charge had disappeared, nor could he detect any traces of them.

CHAPTER II. ORDSALL CAVE.

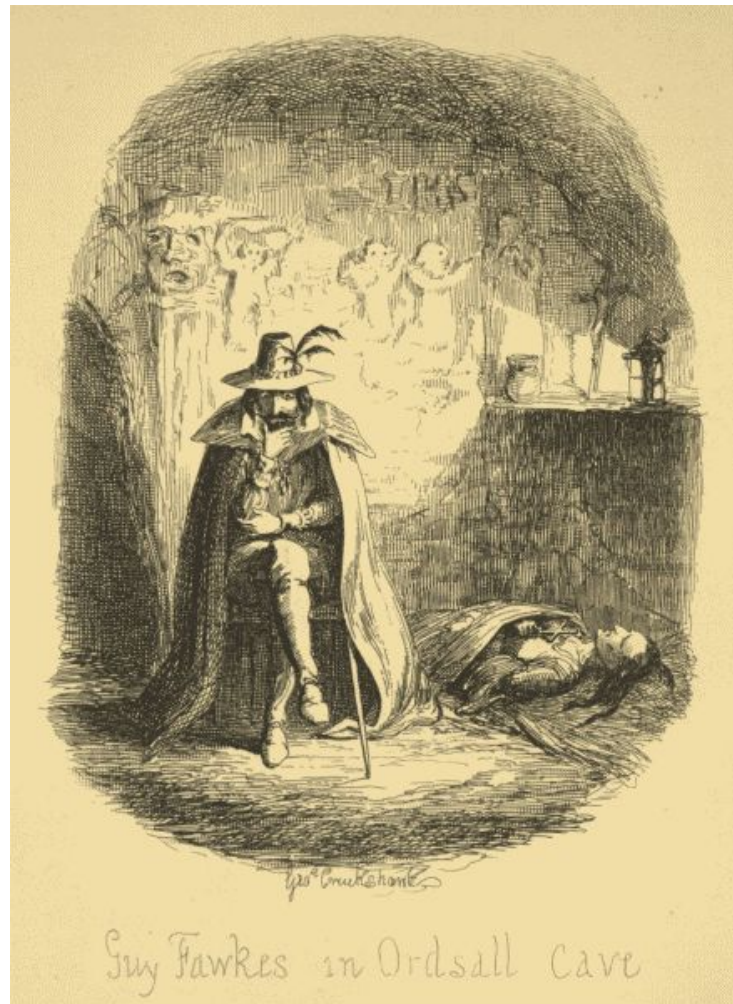
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After rescuing the unfortunate prophetess from a watery grave in the manner just related, the soldier snatched up his cloak, and, taking his dripping burthen in his arms, hurried swiftly along the bank of the river, until he came to a large cleft in the rock, into which he crept, taking the prophetess with him, and thus eluded observation. In this retreat he continued upwards of two hours, during which time the poor creature, to whom he paid every attention that circumstances would admit, had so far recovered as to be able to speak. But it was evident that the shock had been too much for her, and that she was sinking fast. She was so faint that she could scarcely move; but she expressed a strong desire to reach her cell before she breathed her last. Having described its situation as accurately as she could to the soldier—who before he ventured forth peeped out to reconnoitre—he again raised her in his arms, and by her direction struck into a narrow lane skirting the bank of the river.

Pursuing this road for about half a mile, he arrived at the foot of a small knoll, covered by a clump of magnificent beech-trees, and still acting under the guidance of the dying woman, whose voice grew more feeble each instant, he mounted it, and from its summit took a rapid survey of the surrounding country. On the opposite bank of the river stood an old hall, while further on, at some distance, he could perceive through the trees the gables and chimneys of another ancient mansion.

“Raise me up,” said Elizabeth Orton, as he lingered on this spot for a moment. “In that old house, which you see

yonder, Hulme Hall, I was born. I would willingly take one look at it before I die."



Guy Fawkes in Ordsall Cave

"And the other hall, which I discern through the trees, is Ordsall, is it not?" inquired the soldier.

"It is," replied the prophetess. "And now let us make what haste we can. We have not far to go; and I feel I shall not last long."

Descending the eminence, and again entering the lane, which here made a turn, the soldier approached a grassy space, walled in on either side by steep sandstone rocks. At the further extremity of the enclosure, after a moment's search, by the direction of his companion, he found, artfully

concealed by overhanging brushwood, the mouth of a small cave. He crept into the excavation, and found it about six feet high, and of considerable depth. The roof was ornamented with Runic characters and other grotesque and half-effaced inscriptions, while the sides were embellished with Gothic tracery, amid which the letters I.H.S., carved in ancient church text, could be easily distinguished. Tradition assigned the cell to the priests of Odin, but it was evident that worshippers at other and holier altars had more recently made it their retreat. Its present occupant had furnished it with a straw pallet, and a small wooden crucifix fixed in a recess in the wall. Gently depositing her upon the pallet, the soldier took a seat beside her on a stone slab at the foot of the bed. He next, at her request, as the cave was rendered almost wholly dark by the overhanging trees, struck a light, and set fire to a candle placed within a lantern.

After a few moments passed in prayer, the recluse begged him to give her the crucifix that she might clasp it to her breast. This done, she became more composed, and prepared to meet her end. Suddenly, as if something had again disturbed her, she opened wide her glazing eyes, and starting up with a dying effort, stretched out her hands.

"I see him before them!" she cried. "They examine him—they adjudge him! Ah! he is now in a dungeon! See, the torturers advance! He is placed on the rack—once—twice—thrice—they turn the levers! His joints snap in their sockets—his sinews crack! Mercy! he confesses! He is led to execution. I see him ascend the scaffold!"

"Whom do you behold?" inquired the soldier, listening to her in astonishment.

"His face is hidden from me," replied the prophetess; "but his figure is not unlike your own. Ha! I hear the executioner pronounce his name. How are you called?"

"Guy Fawkes," replied the soldier.

"It is the name I heard," rejoined Elizabeth Orton.

And, sinking backward, she expired.

Guy Fawkes gazed at her for some time, till he felt assured that the last spark of life had fled. He then turned away, and placing his hand upon his chin, became lost in deep reflection.

CHAPTER III. ORDSALL HALL

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Soon after sunset, on the evening of the events previously related, the inmates of Ordsall Hall were disturbed and alarmed (for in those times of trouble any casual disturbance at night was sufficient to occasion alarm to a Catholic family) by a loud clamour for admittance from some one stationed at the farther side of the moat, then, as now, surrounding that ancient manorial residence. The drawbridge being raised, no apprehension was entertained of an attempt at forcible entrance on the part of the intruder, who, so far as he could be discerned in the deepening twilight, rendered yet more obscure by the shade of the trees under which he stood, appeared to be a solitary horseman. Still, for fear of a surprise, it was judged prudent by those inside the hall to turn a deaf ear to the summons; nor was it until it had been more than once repeated in a peremptory tone, that any attention was paid to it. The outer gate was then cautiously opened by an old steward, and a couple of serving-men, armed with pikes and swords, who demanded the stranger's business, and were answered that he desired to speak with Sir William Radcliffe. The steward rejoined that his master was not at home, having set out the day before for Chester: but that even if he were, he would take upon himself to affirm that no audience would be given, on any pretence whatever, to a stranger at such an unseasonable hour. To this the other replied, in a haughty and commanding voice, that he was neither a stranger to Sir William Radcliffe, nor ignorant of the necessity of caution, though in this instance it was altogether superfluous; and as, notwithstanding the steward's

assertion to the contrary, he was fully persuaded his master *was* at home, he insisted upon being conducted to him without further parley, as his business would not brook delay. In vain the steward declared he had spoken the truth. The stranger evidently disbelieved him; but, as he could obtain no more satisfactory answer to his interrogations, he suddenly shifted his ground, and inquired whether Sir William's daughter, Mistress Viviana, was likewise absent from home.

"Before I reply to the question, I must know by whom and wherefore it is put?" returned the steward, evasively.

"Trouble not yourself further, friend, but deliver this letter to her," rejoined the horseman, flinging a packet across the moat. "It is addressed to her father, but there is no reason why she should not be acquainted with its contents."

"Take it up, Olin Birtwissel," cried the steward, eyeing the packet which had fallen at his feet suspiciously; "take it up, I say, and hold it to the light, that I may consider it well before I carry it to our young mistress. I have heard of strange treacheries practised by such means, and care not to meddle with it."

"Neither do I, good Master Heydocke," replied Birtwissel. "I would not touch it for a twelvemonth's wages. It may burst, and spoil my good looks, and so ruin my fortunes with the damsels. But here is Jeff Gellibronde, who, having no beauty to lose, and being, moreover, afraid of nothing, will pick it up for you."

"Speak for yourself, Olin," rejoined Gellibronde, in a surly tone. "I have no more fancy for a shattered limb, or a scorched face, than my neighbours."

"Dolts!" cried the stranger, who had listened to these observations with angry impatience, "if you will not convey my packet, which has nothing more dangerous about it than an ordinary letter, to your mistress, at least acquaint her that Mr. Robert Catesby, of Ashby St. Legers, is without, and craves an instant speech with her."

"Mr. Catesby!" exclaimed the steward, in astonishment. "If it be indeed your worship, why did you not declare yourself at once?"

"I may have as good reason for caution as yourself, Master Heydocke," returned Catesby, laughing.

"True," rejoined the steward; "but, methinks it is somewhat strange to find your worship here, when I am aware that my master expected to meet you, and certain other honourable gentlemen that you wot of, at a place in a clean opposite direction, Holywell, in Flintshire."

"The cause of my presence, since you desire to be certified of the matter, is simply this," replied Catesby, urging his steed towards the edge of the moat, while the steward advanced to meet him on the opposite bank, so that a few yards only lay between them; "I came round by Manchester," he continued, in a lower tone, "to see if any assistance could be rendered to the unfortunate fathers Woodroffe and Forshawe; but found on my arrival this morning that I was too late, as they had just been executed."

"Heaven have mercy on their souls!" ejaculated Heydocke, shuddering, and crossing himself. "Yours was a pious mission, Mr. Catesby. Would it had been availing!"

"I would so, too, with all my soul!" rejoined the other, fervently; "but fate ordained it otherwise. While I was in the town, I accidentally learnt from one, who informed me he had just parted with him, that your master was at home; and, fearing he might not be able to attend the meeting at Holywell, I resolved to proceed hither at nightfall, when my visit was not likely to be observed; having motives, which you may readily conjecture, for preserving the strictest secrecy on the occasion. The letter was prepared in case I should fail in meeting with him. And now that I have satisfied your scruples, good master steward, if Sir William be really within, I pray you lead me to him forthwith. If not,