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**New Monthly Magazine, Volume 101**

**Ainsworth William Harrison**

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**Author: Ainsworth William Harrison**

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# NEW MONTHLY MAGAZINE.

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## THE FLITCH OF BACON:

OR,

THE CUSTOM OF DUNMOW.

A TALE OF ENGLISH HOME.\*

BY THE EDITOR.

PART THE SIXTH.

The Procession of the Flitch.

I.

THE LAST NIGHT IN THE HAUNTED ROOM.

SIR WALTER, we have said, took no part in the festivities at Monk-bury Place.

His spirits were not equal to so great a demand upon them as participation in such rejoicings would have occasioned; and feeling he should only check the general hilarity by his presence, he announced his intention, early in the day, of returning to Dummow. The Squire would fain have detained him, but he was not to be turned from his purpose. He had made up his mind, he said, to re-visit the old Priory Church, and to pass another night in the Haunted Room.

Finding opposition useless, the Squire was obliged to yield. "Well, if you must go, you must," he said. "But I rely on your coming back to-morrow. I shall then have a communication of importance to make to you—unless I am forestalled in the interim, as may possibly be the case. I am not at liberty to mention the matter now. I need not tell you to consider this house as your own. Use it as you please. Rooms shall be prepared for you, where you will be perfectly undisturbed—quite left to yourself, if you prefer solitude. Bring any one you choose with you—I mean, supposing you should unexpectedly meet with a friend."

"Little likelihood of that," Sir Walter replied, with a faint smile.

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\*  NOTICE.—The Author of this Work reserves the right of translating it.  
May—VOL. CI. NO. CCCCI.

"My friends were never very numerous, and I am well-nigh forgotten by the few who remain."

"But it may so happen," the Squire remarked. "We frequently meet with people we least expect—sometimes, with those we fancy wholly lost to us."

This was said with a certain significance, which did not escape Fitzwalter at the time, though he afterwards more fully comprehended his friend's meaning.

Equally deaf was the old baronet to the entreaties of Alured and Rose to stay with them, and while he was bidding them farewell, a hasty conversation respecting his movements took place in private between the Squire and Roper; the result of which was the immediate departure of the indefatigable steward on some errand of importance.

Mounted on one of the best hunters in the stables, Roper was soon out of the park, and on the way to Dunmow, where he arrived before Sir Walter had quitted Monkbury Place. Owing to the delay of the postilion, who was making merry in the servants'-hall, and did not like to leave his comfortable quarters—and it may be, also, owing to a hint from the Squire to Mosscrop, the old baronet's post-chaise was not brought round for an hour or more. So the steward got a good start, if he wished to be beforehand with him.

At last, Sir Walter drove off, and pursuing the same road as Roper, in due time reached Little Dunmow. Alighting at the sexton's dwelling, he obtained from him the keys of the Priory Church, and proceeded thither alone.

Once more he stood among the tombs of his ancestors.

His emotions were deep and solemn, but less painful than those he had experienced on a former occasion. Remorse had ceased to goad him. Calmness had succeeded agitation. He could meditate with composure upon death, and life hereafter. His earthly pilgrimage he thought drew towards an end, and he might hope, ere long, to meet again his departed wife.

Some time was passed in such contemplations, and he then entered the arched recess, and knelt before the saintly relics enshrined in the cist within it.

As he concluded a prayer, and bowed his head upon his breast, he heard a slight sound behind him. A footstep! Yet how could that be? He had taken the same precaution as on his former visit to the sacred edifice, and locked the door. No one ought to be within the church. A chill came over him, and he hesitated to look round.

Why should he fear? The church was not illumined by ghostly moon-beams now, but full of garish light; and the sun shone upon the marble tombs and upon the gravestones on the floor.

Were those gravestones yawning to give up their dead? Did his eyes deceive him, or was yon ponderous slab closing slowly like a trap-door? Delusion!—mere delusion!

One thing was palpable enough—a letter. It was lying on the ground, close to the monument of the founder of his line. Not many minutes ago he stood on that precise spot. It must have been placed there since. But how?—by whom?

Hastening to pick it up, he glanced at the superscription. It was

*The Fitch of Bacon: or, the Custom of Dunmow.* §

addressed to himself. He could not be mistaken as to these well-known characters. The handwriting was his wife's! The ink fresh as if just used. Merciful Heaven! if such a thing could be!

His limbs almost failed him, and his senses seemed fleeing from excess of emotion. He had not strength to open the letter on which his hopes rested.

At last the effort was made, and doubt gave way to wildest exultation.

These were the words he read:

*"Be of good cheer, Sir Walter. The worst is past. Return to the Old Inn. Seek the Haunted Room. At midnight all shall be revealed."*

"She lives! she lives!" he cried. "The tale I heard of her death was an invention. I shall behold her again—shall clasp her to my heart once more. Kind Heaven support me!—or this flood of delight will overwhelm me, and I shall die before the appointed hour."

He leaned against the tomb, and strove to control his tumultuous feelings.

At first, some misgivings would intrude upon his joy, but, by-and-by, they wholly disappeared, and his confidence in a speedy meeting with his lost wife became firm.

He had entered that little church a sad man, with his thoughts upon the grave, anxious only to rejoin one gone thither before him. He quitted it, hopeful, joyful, clinging to the world, which he found she still tenanted.

On arriving at the Old Inn at Dunmow, he was received by pretty Peggy, the chambermaid, who told him her master and mistress were gone to Monkbury Place, in consequence of what they had heard from Mr. Roper of the great rejoicings occurring there; but she would do her best to make him comfortable in their absence. Sir Walter was surprised to find that Roper, whom he fancied he had left at the Hall, should have been at the Fitch, and he could not help connecting the steward's hurried visit with the mysterious circumstance which had just taken place at the Priory Church. No matter. If Roper gave him back his wife, he should be for ever indebted to him.

The old baronet at once proceeded to the Haunted Room, where some refreshments were set before him by Peggy, who cared little for ghosts in the daytime, and could dispense with Carrot Dick's company. However, she was punished for her temerity. Something she saw, on quitting the room, at the end of the dark corridor, made her set up a shriek, and caused the destruction of a plate she held in her hand.

Sir Walter came forth to see what was the matter, and found that the chambermaid's terror had been occasioned by a woman in tattered apparel, and of haggard looks, who was now slowly advancing towards them. Sir Walter recognised her at once. It was Alice Aggs—the mischief-maker—the cause of such dire calamity to himself, and to his wife. He motioned the woman to keep aloof, but she would not be forbidden, and creeping on, threw herself at his feet, imploring his forgiveness. Peggy pretended to hurry away—though her curiosity prompted her to remain within earshot.

"I do forgive you, woman, for the injuries you have done me," Sir Walter said, "and may Heaven forgive you likewise!"

"Then you knew my lady was innocent," Alice Aggs replied. "If