

THE WITCHES AT THE SABBAT.*

ONCE upon a time, like many others in the world, there was a young lad. He was one day in a lime-kiln, and the witches came at night. They used to dance there, and one pretended to be the mistress of a house, who was very ill; and one day, as she was going out of the church, she let the holy wafer fall on the ground, and a toad had picked it up; and this toad is still near the door, under a stone, with the bread in his mouth.† And again, this same witch said that, until they took away this bread out of the toad's mouth, this lady will not be cured. This young lad had heard it all. When they had danced their rounds, the witches go away home, and our lad comes out of the lime-kiln, and goes to the house of this lady who is ill, and says to her,

"I know what must be done to cure you," and he told her all that he had heard from the witch.

The sick lady did what they told her, and the same day she was cured, and the young man was well paid.

And that very evening there came to him a hunch-backed girl, and said to him,

"I have heard that you know where the witches hold their Sabbat."

He says, "Yes."

"To-morrow I think I should like to hear what the witches say."

And he points out to her the hole of the lime-kiln. And at midnight all the witches came, some from one quarter, some from another—some laughing, and others cutting capers. The witches said one to another,

"We must look in the lime-kiln, to see what may be there."

They go to look, and they find the hunchback girl, and they send her off—

* "Akhelarre," literally "goat pasture." This was the name in the 16th century.

† This belief in a toad sitting at the church door to swallow the Host is found in De Lancre.

"Go, go—through hedges and hedges, through thorns and thorns, through furze-bushes and furze-bushes, scratches and pricks."

And in no way could our poor hunchback find her way home. All torn to pieces and exhausted, at last, in the morning, she arrived at her house.

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The second part of this story is evidently a blundered version, transferred from fairies to witches, of Croker's "Legend of Knochgraston" ("Fairy Legends of South of Ireland," p. 10); and M. Cerquand, Part II., p. 17, has a Basque version, "Les Deux Bossus," almost identical with this Irish legend. The tale, as given in Croker, is found in the Bearnais Gascon, in Spanish, Italian, and German. It is evident, we think, that the Basque land is not its home, but that it has travelled there. We have also another Basque variation of the first part, in which two lads hear the witches at the Sabbath say that a king's daughter can only be cured by eating an ox's heart. The opening of this story is so different, that we here give it:—

THE WITCHES AND THE IDIOTS.

ONCE upon a time there were two brothers, the one an idiot, and the other a fool. They had an old mother, old, old, very old. One morning early the elder arranges to go with his sheep to the mountain, and he leaves the fool at home with his old, old, mother, and said to him:

"I will give my mother some chocolate now, and you will give her a hot bath (afterwards), quite, quite, hot."

He goes to the mountain with his sheep. The second son put the water on to boil, and said to his mother:

"My mother, the water is hot, what bath would you like?"*

* That is, one with bran, or herbs, wood-ashes, &c., or plain water.