CHAPTER II.

STORY OF THE LADY ALICE KYTELER.

It was late in the twelfth century when the Anglo-Normans first set their feet in Ireland as conquerors, and before the end of the thirteenth the portion of that island which has since received the name of the English Pale, was already covered with flourishing towns and cities, which bore witness to the rapid increase of commerce in the hands of the enterprising and industrious settlers from the shores of Great Britain. The county of Kilkenny, attractive by its beauty and by its various resources, was one of the districts first occupied by the invaders, and at the time of which we are speaking its chief town, named also Kilkenny, was a strong city with a commanding castle, and was inhabited by wealthy merchants, one of whom was a rich banker and money-lender named William Outlawe.

This William Outlawe married a lady of property named Alice Kyteler, or Le Kyteler, who was, perhaps, the sister, or a near relative of a William Kyteler, incidentally mentioned as holding the office
of sheriff of the liberty of Kilkenny. William Outlawe died some time before 1302; and his widow became the wife of Adam le Blond, of Callan, of a family which, by its English name of White, held considerable estates in Kilkenny and Tipperary in later times. This second husband was dead before 1311; for in that year the lady Alice appears as the wife of Richard de Valle, and at the time of the events narrated in the following pages, she was the spouse of a fourth husband, Sir John le Poer. By her first husband she had a son, named also William Outlawe, who appears to have been the heir to his father’s property, and succeeded him as a banker. He was his mother’s favourite child, and seems to have inherited also a good portion of the wealth of the lady Alice’s second and third husbands.

The few incidents relating to this family previous to the year 1324, which can be gathered from the entries on the Irish records, seem to show that it was not altogether free from the turbulent spirit which was so prevalent among the Anglo-Irish in former ages. It appears that in 1302, Adam le Blond and Alice his wife intrusted to the keeping of William Outlawe the younger the sum of three thousand pounds in money, which William Outlawe, for the better security, buried in the earth within his house, a method of concealing treasure which accounts for many of our antiquarian discoveries. This was soon noised abroad; and one night William le Kyteler, the sheriff above-mentioned, with others, by precept of the seneschal of the liberty of Kilkenny, broke into the house vi et armis, as the record has it, dug up the money, and carried it off.
along with a hundred pounds belonging to William Outlawe himself, which they found in the house. Such an outrage as this could not pass in silence; but the perpetrators attempted to shelter themselves under the excuse that being dug up from the ground it was treasure-trove, and as such belonged to the king; and, when Adam le Blond and his wife Alice attempted to make good their claims, the sheriff trumped up a charge against them that they had committed homicide and other crimes, and that they had concealed Roesia Outlawe (perhaps the sister of William Outlawe the younger), accused of theft, from the agents of justice, under which pretences he threw into prison all three, Adam, Alice, and Roesia. They were, however, soon afterwards liberated, but we do not learn if they recovered their money. William Outlawe's riches, and his mother's partiality for him, appear to have drawn upon them both the jealousy and hatred of many of their neighbours, and even of some of their kindred, but they were too powerful and too highly connected to be reached in any ordinary way.

At this time Richard de Ledrede, a turbulent intriguing prelate, held the see of Ossory, to which he had been consecrated in 1318 by mandate from pope John XXII, the same pontiff to whom we owe the first bull against sorcery (contra magos magicaque superstitiones), which was the ground-work of the inquisitorial persecutions of the following ages. In 1324, bishop Richard made a visitation of his diocese, and "found," as the chronicler of these events informs us, "by an inquest in which were five knights and other noblemen in great mul-
titude, that in the city of Kilkenny there had long
been, and still were, many sorcerers using divers
kinds of witchcraft, to the investigation of which
the bishop proceeding, as he was obliged by duty of
his office, found a certain rich lady, called the lady
Alice Kyteler, the mother of William Outlawe, with
many of her accomplices, involved in various such
heresies." Here, then, was a fair occasion for dis-
playing the zeal of a follower of the sorcery-hating
pope John, and also perhaps for indulging some
other passions.

The persons accused as lady Alice's accomplices
were her son the banker William Outlawe, a clerk
named Robert de Bristol, John Galrussyn, William
Payn of Boly, Petronilla de Meath, Petronilla's
daughter Sarah, Alice the wife of Henry the Smith,
Annota Lange, Helena Galrussyn, Sysok Galrus-
syn, and Eva de Brounstoun. The charges brought
against them were distributed under seven formid-
able heads. First, it was asserted that, in order to
give effect to their sorcery, they were in the habit
of denying totally the faith of Christ and of the
church for a year or month, according as the object
to be attained was greater or less, so that during
the stipulated period they believed in nothing that
the church believed, and abstained from worship-
ing the body of Christ, from entering a church,
from hearing mass, and from participating in the
sacrament Second, that they propitiated the de-
mons with sacrifices of living animals, which they di-
vided member from member, and offered, by scat-
tering them in cross-roads, to a certain demon who
caused himself to be called Robin Artisson ('filius
Artis), who was "one of the poorer class of hell." Third, that by their sorceries they sought counsel and answers from demons. Fourth, that they used the ceremonies of the church in their nightly conventicles, pronouncing, with lighted candles of wax, sentence of excommunication, even against the persons of their own husbands, naming expressly every member, from the sole of the foot to the top of the head, and at length extinguishing the candles with the exclamation "Fi! fi! fi! Amen." Fifth, that with the intestines and other inner parts of cocks sacrificed to the demons, with "certain horrible worms," various herbs, the nails of dead men, the hair, brains, and clothes of children which had died unbaptized, and other things equally disgusting, boiled in the skull of a certain robber who had been beheaded, on a fire made of oak-sticks, they had made powders and ointments, and also candles of fat boiled in the said skull, with certain charms, which things were to be instrumental in exciting love or hatred, and in killing and otherwise afflicting the bodies of faithful Christians, and in effecting various other purposes. Sixth, that the sons and daughters of the four husbands of the lady Alice Kyteler had made their complaint to the bishop, that she, by such sorcery, had procured the death of her husbands, and had so infatuated and charmed them, that they had given all their property to her and her son, to the perpetual impoverishment of their own sons and heirs; insomuch, that her present husband, Sir John le Poer, was reduced to a most miserable state of body by her powders, ointments, and other magical operations;
but being warned by her maid-servant, he had forcibly taken from his wife the keys of her boxes, in which he found a bag filled with the “detestable” articles above enumerated, which he had sent to the bishop. Seventh, that there was an unholy connexion between the said lady Alice and the demon called Robin Artisson, who sometimes appeared to her in the form of a cat, sometimes in that of a black shaggy dog, and at others in the form of a black man, with two tall and equally-swarthy companions, each carrying an iron rod in his hand. It is added by some of the old chroniclers, that her offering to the demon was nine red cocks, and nine peacocks’ eyes, at a certain stone bridge at a crossroad; that she had a certain ointment with which she rubbed a beam of wood “called a cowltre,” upon which she and her accomplices were carried to any part of the world they wished, without hurt or stoppage; that “she swept the stretes of Kilkennie betweene compleine and twilight, raking all the filth towards the dooress of hir sonne William Outlawe, murmuring secretlie with hir selfe these words:

‘To the house of William my sonne,
Hie all the wealth of Kilkennie town;’”

and that in her house was seized a wafer of consecrated bread, on which the name of the devil was written.

The bishop of Ossory resolved at once to enforce in its utmost rigour the recent papal bull against offenders of this class; but he had to contend with greater difficulties than he expected. The mode of proceeding was new, for hitherto in England sorcery
was looked upon as a crime of which the secular law had cognisance, and not as belonging to the ecclesiastical court; and this is said to have been the first trial of the kind in Ireland that had attracted any public attention. Moreover, the lady Alice, who was the person chiefly attacked, had rich and powerful supporters. The first step taken by the bishop was to require the chancellor to issue a writ for the arrest of the persons accused. But it happened that the lord chancellor of Ireland at this time was Roger Outlawe, prior of the order of St. John of Jerusalem, and a kinsman of William Outlawe. This dignitary, in conjunction with Arnold le Poer, seneschal of Kilkenny, expostulated with the bishop, and tried to persuade him to drop the suit. When, however, the latter refused to listen to them, and persisted in demanding the writ, the chancellor informed him that it was not customary to issue a writ of this kind, until the parties had been regularly proceeded against according to law. The bishop indignantly replied that the service of the church was above the forms of the law of the land; but the chancellor now turned a deaf ear, and the bishop sent two apparitors with a formal attendance of priests to the house of William Outlawe, where lady Alice was residing, to cite her in person before his court. The lady refused to acknowledge the jurisdiction of the ecclesiastical court in this case; and, on the day she was to appear, the chancellor, Roger Outlawe, sent advocates, who publicly pleaded her right to defend herself by her counsel, and not to appear in person. The bishop, regardless of this plea, pronounced against her the
sentence of excommunication, and cited her son William Outlawe to appear on a certain day, and answer to the charge of harbouring and concealing his mother in defiance of the authority of the church.

On learning this, the seneschal of Kilkenny, Arnald le Poer, repaired to the priory of Kells, where the bishop was lodged, and made a long and touching appeal to him to mitigate his anger, until at length, wearied and provoked by his obstinacy, he left his presence with threats of vengeance. The next morning, as the bishop was departing from the priory to continue his visitation in other parts of the diocese, he was stopped at the entrance to the town of Kells by one of the seneschal's officers, Stephen le Poer, with a body of armed men, who conducted him as a prisoner to the castle of Kilkenny, where he was kept in custody until the day was past on which William Outlawe had been cited to appear in his court. The bishop, after many protests on the indignity offered in his person to the church, and on the protection given to sorcerers and heretics, was obliged to submit. It was a mode of evading the form of law, characteristic of an age in which the latter was subservient to force, and the bishop's friends believed that the king's officers were bribed by William Outlawe's wealth. They even reported afterwards, to throw more discredit on the authors of this act of violence, that one of the guards was heard to say to another, as they led him to prison, "That fair steed which William Outlawe presented to our lord Sir Arnald last night draws well, for it has drawn the bishop to prison"
This summary mode of proceeding against an ecclesiastic appears to have caused astonishment even in Ireland, and during the first day multitudes of people of all classes visited the bishop in his confinement, to feed and comfort him, the general ferment increasing with the discourses he pronounced to his visitors. To hinder this, the seneschal ordered him to be more strictly confined, and forbade the admission of any visitors, except a few of the bishop's especial friends and servants. The bishop at once placed the whole diocese under an interdict. It was necessary to prepare immediately some excuse for these proceedings, and the seneschal issued a proclamation calling upon all who had any complaints to make against the bishop of Ossory to come forward; and at an inquest held before the justices itinerant, many grievous crimes of the bishop were rehearsed, but none would venture personally to charge him with them. All these circumstances, however, show that the bishop was not faultless; and that his conduct would not bear a very close examination is evident from the fact, that on more than one occasion in subsequent times, he was obliged to shelter himself under the protection of the king's pardon for all past offences. William Outlawe now went to the archives of Kilkenny, and there found a former deed of accusation against the bishop of Ossory for having defrauded a widow of the inheritance of her husband. The bishop's party said that it was a cancelled document, the case having been taken out of the secular court; and that William had had a new copy made of it to conceal the evidence of this fact, and had then rubbed the fresh
parchment with his shoes in order to give his copy the appearance of an old document. However, it was delivered to the seneschal, who now offered to release his prisoner on condition of his giving sufficient bail to appear and answer in the secular court the charge thus brought against him. This the bishop refused to do, and after he had remained eighteen days in confinement, he was unconditionally set free.

The bishop marched from his prison in triumph, full-dressed in his pontifical robes, and immediately cited William Outlawe to appear before him in his court on another day; but before that day arrived, he received a royal writ, ordering him to appear before the lord justice of Ireland without any delay, on penalty of a fine of a thousand pounds, to answer to the king for having placed his diocese under interdict, and also to make his defence against the accusations of Arnald le Poer. He received a similar summons from the dean of St. Patrick’s, to appear before him as the vicarial representative of the archbishop of Dublin. The bishop of Ossory made answer that it was not safe for him to undertake the journey, because his way lay through the lands and lordship of his enemy, Sir Arnald, but this excuse was not admitted, and the diocese was relieved from the interdict.

Other trials were reserved for the mortified prelate. On the Monday after the Octaves of Easter the seneschal, Arnald le Poer, held his court of justice in the judical hall of the city of Kilkenny, and there the bishop of Ossory resolved to present himself and invoke publicly the aid of the secular
arm to his assistance in seizing the persons accused of sorcery. The seneschal forbade him to enter the court on his peril; but the bishop persevered, and "robed in his pontificals, carrying in his hands the body of Christ (the consecrated host) in a vessel of gold," and attended by a numerous body of friars and clergy, he entered the hall and forced his way to the tribunal. The seneschal received him with reproaches and insults, and caused him to be ignominiously turned out of court. At the repeated protest, however, of the offended prelate, and the intercession of some influential persons there present, he was allowed to return, and the seneschal ordered him to take his place at the bar allotted for criminals, upon which the bishop cried out that Christ had never been treated so before since he stood at the bar before Pontius Pilate. He then called upon the seneschal to cause the persons accused of sorcery to be seized upon and delivered into his hands, and, upon his refusal to do this, he held open the book of the decretals and said, "You, Sir Arnald, are a knight, and instructed in letters, and that you may not have the plea of ignorance in this place, we are prepared here to show in these decretals that you and your officials are bound to obey my order in this respect under heavy penalties."

"Go to the church with your decretals," replied the seneschal, "and preach here, for here you will not find an attentive audience."

The bishop then read aloud the names of the offenders, and the crimes imputed to them, summoned the seneschal to deliver them up to the jurisdiction of the church, and retreated from the court.
Sir Arnald le Poer and his friends had not been idle on their part, and the bishop was next cited to defend himself against various charges in the parliament to be held at Dublin, while the lady Alice indicted him in a secular court for defamation. The bishop is represented as having narrowly escaped the snares which were laid for him on his way to Dublin; he there found the Irish prelates not much inclined to advocate his cause, because they looked upon him as a foreigner and an interloper, and he was spoken of as a truant monk from England, who came thither to represent the "Island of Saints" as a nest of heretics, and to plague them with papal bulls of which they never heard before. It was, however, thought expedient to preserve the credit of the church, and some of the more influential of the Irish ecclesiastics interfered to effect at least an outward reconciliation between the seneschal and the bishop of Ossory. After encountering an infinity of new obstacles and disappointments, the latter at length obtained the necessary power to bring the alleged offenders to a trial, and most of them were imprisoned, but the chief object of the bishop's proceedings, the lady Alice, had been conveyed secretly away, and she is said to have passed the rest of her life in England. When her son, William Outlawe, was cited to appear before the bishop in his court in the church of St. Mary at Kilkenny, he went "armed to the teeth" with all sorts of armour, and attended with a very formidable company, and demanded a copy of the charges objected against him, which extended through thirty-four chapters. He for the present was allowed to go at large,
because nobody dared to arrest him, and when the officers of the crown arrived they showed so openly their favour towards him as to take up their lodgings at his house. At length, however, having been convicted in the bishop's court at least of harbouring those accused of sorcery, he consented to go into prison, trusting probably to the secret protection of the great barons of the land.

The only person mentioned by name as punished for the extreme crime of sorcery was Petronilla de Meath, who was, perhaps, less provided with worldly interests to protect her, and who appears to have been made an expiatory sacrifice for her superiors. She was, by order of the bishop, six times flogged, and then, probably to escape a further repetition of this cruel and degrading punishment, she made a public confession, accusing not only herself but all the others against whom the bishop had proceeded. She said that in all England, "perhaps in the whole world," there was not a person more deeply skilled in the practices of sorcery than the lady Alice Kyteler, who had been their mistress and teacher in the art. She confessed to most of the charges contained in the bishop's articles of accusation, and said that she had been present at the sacrifices to the demon, and had assisted in making the unguents of the intestines of the cocks offered on this occasion, mixed with spiders and certain black worms like scorpions, with a certain herb called millefoil, and other herbs and worms, and with the brains and clothes of a child that had died without baptism, in the manner before related; that with these unguents they had produced various effects upon different
persons, making the faces of certain ladies appear horned like goats; that she had been present at the nightly conventicles, and with the assistance of her mistress had frequently pronounced the sentence of excommunication against her own husband, with all the ceremonies required by their unholy rites; that she had been with the lady Alice when the demon, Robin Artisson, appeared to her, and had seen acts pass between them, in her presence, which we shall not undertake to describe. The wretched woman, having made this public confession, was carried out into the city and publicly burnt. This, says the relator, was the first witch who was ever burnt in Ireland.

The rage of the bishop of Ossory appears now to have been, to a certain degree, appeased. He was prevailed upon to remit the offences of William Outlawe, enjoining him, as a reparation for his contempt of the church, that within the period of four years he should cover with lead the whole roof of his cathedral from the steeple eastward, as well as that of the chapel of the Holy Virgin. The rest of the lady Alice's "pestiferous society" were punished in different ways, with more or less severity; one or two of them, we are told, were subsequently burnt; others were flogged publicly in the market-place and through the city; others were banished from the diocese; and a few, like their mistress, fled to a distance, or concealed themselves so effectually as to escape the hands of justice.

There was one person concerned in the foregoing events whom the bishop had not forgotten or forgiven. That was Arnald le Poer, the seneschal of
Kilkenny, who had so strenuously advocated the cause of William Outlawe and his mother, and who had treated with so much rudeness the bishop himself. The Latin narrative of this history, published for the Camden Society by the writer of this paper, gives no further information respecting him, but we learn from other sources that the bishop now accused him of heresy, had him excommunicated, and obtained a writ by which he was committed prisoner to the castle of Dublin. Here he remained in 1328, when Roger Outlawe was made lord justice of Ireland, who attempted to mitigate his sufferings. The bishop of Ossory, enraged at the lord justice's humanity, accused him also of heresy and of abetting heretics; upon which a parliament was called, and the different accusations having been duly examined, Arnald le Poer himself would probably have been declared innocent and liberated from confinement, but before the end of the investigation he died in prison, and his body, lying under sentence of excommunication, remained long unburied.

The bishop, who had been so great a persecutor of heresy in others, was at last accused of the same crime himself, and the case being laid before the archbishop of Dublin, he appealed to the apostolic see, fled the country privately, and repaired to Italy. Subsequent to this, he appears to have experienced a variety of troubles, and he suffered banishment during nine years. He died at a very great age in 1360.

The bishop's party boasted that the "nest" of sorcerers who had infested Ireland was entirely rooted out by the prosecution of the lady Alice Kyteler and her accomplices. It may, however, be well
doubted, if the belief in witchcraft were not rather extended by the publicity and magnitude of these events. Ireland would no doubt afford many equally remarkable cases in subsequent times, had the chroniclers thought them as well worth recording as the process of a lady of rank, which involved some of the leading people in the English Pale, and which agitated the whole state during several successive years.