

**THE FLITCH OF BACON;
OR, THE
CUSTOM OF DUNMOW, A
TALE OF ENGLISH HOME**

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The Flitch of Bacon; Or, The Custom of Dunmow, a Tale of English Home by William Harrison Ainsworth

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WILLIAM HARRISON AINSWORTH

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THE PROCESSION OF THE FLITCH.

THE
FLITCH OF BACON

OR

THE CUSTOM OF DUNMOW

A Tale of English Home

BY

WILLIAM HARRISON AINSWORTH

"Quem per Annum et Diem, sive dormientem, sive vigilantem, Conjugii sui non poenituerit, Dunnuam ei ire liceat, et poenam vindicare." —*De Lardo ap. Prioratum Dunmuensem obtinendo.*

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BARON AND BARONESS VON TAUCHNITZ
Of Leipzig.

As a record of rare conjugal attachment, this Tale may be appropriately inscribed to you, my good friends; than whom I have never known a more fondly-united couple.

Were I the Donor of the FLITCH, I would bestow it upon you. As it is, I must content myself with offering you this simple Chronicle of a good old English Custom—something akin to which may, perhaps, exist in your kindly Fatherland.

Accept it as a slight testimony of the great regard in which you are both held by

Yours very sincerely,

W. HARRISON AINSWORTH.

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PREFACE.

“Among the jocular tenures of England, none have been more talked of than the BACON OF DUNMOW.” So says Grose, and truly. The Dunmow Flich has passed into a proverb. It is referred to by Chaucer, in a manner which proves that allusion to it was as intelligible in his day, as it would be in our own.

The origin of the memorable Custom, hitherto enveloped in some obscurity, will be found fully explained in the course of this versacious history. Instituted by a Fitzwalter in the early part of the Thirteenth Century, the Custom continued in force till the middle of the Eighteenth—the date of the following Tale. The last delivery of the Flich occurred on the 20th June, 1751; and I possess a very curious print, quite Hogarthian in its character, from a drawing taken on the spot by David Ogborne, representing (apparently with great accuracy) the Ceremony and Procession on that occasion. This print has furnished me with a few hints for my Story.

A Custom, almost precisely similar to that of Dunmow, existed at Whichenoure, in Staffordshire, but is much less generally known. Pennant, who visited Whichenoure House in 1780, states, that it was “remarkable for the painted wooden Bacon Flich, still hung up over the hall chimney, in memory of the singular tenure by which Sir Philip de Somervile, in the time of Edward the Third, held the Manor.” The Oath ran as follows:—“Hear ye, Sir Philip de Somervile, lord of Wichenoure, maintainer and giver of this Bacon, that I, A., syth I wedded B., my wyfe, and

syth I had her in my keypyng and at wylle, by a Yere and a Daye after our Marryage, I would not have changed for none other, farer ne fowler, richer ne powrer, ne for none other descended of gretter lynage, sleeping ne waking, at noo time; and if the said B. were sole, and I sole, I would take her to be my wyfe before all the wymen of the worlde, of what condytions soevere they be, good or evyle, as helpe me God, and his Seyntys, and this flesh, and all fleshes." If the claimant were a "villeyne," corn and a cheese were given him in addition to the Flitch, and a horse was likewise provided to take him out of the limits of the Manor—all the free tenants thereof conducting him on his way with "tromptets, tabourets, and other manoir of mynstralcis." In respect to the Whichenoure Flitch Pennant remarks, that it has "remained untouched from the first century of its institution to the present;" adding, jocosely, "we are credibly informed, that the late and present worthy owners of the Manor were deterred from entering into the holy state, from the dread of not obtaining a single rasher of their own bacon."

Our Dunmow Flitch was in greater request. Despite the difficulties of the conditions annexed to the gift, it was thrice successfully claimed before the Dissolution of the Monasteries; and thrice subsequently to that period." Of late years the Custom, I regret to say, has been discontinued. "Some persons having demanded the Flitch," observes Grose, "it has, as is said, been refused, probably from conjugal affection not being now so rare as heretofore, or because qualification oaths are now supposed to be held less sacred."

Many years ago I planned this Tale; but it is only now that my long-meditated design has been accomplished.

CONTENTS.

PART THE FIRST.

	PAGE
THE OLD INN AT DUNMOW	1

PART THE SECOND.

THE LORD OF THE MANOR OF LITTLE DUNMOW	95
--	----

PART THE THIRD.

THE HAUNTED CHAMBER.	181
------------------------------	-----

PART THE FOURTH.

MONKBURY PLACE	194
--------------------------	-----

PART THE FIFTH.

THE PROCESSION OF THE FLETCH	256
--	-----

THE FLITCH OF BACON;

OR,

THE CUSTOM OF DUNMOW.

Part the First.

THE OLD INN AT DUNMOW.

I.

FROM WHICH IT MAY BE INFERRED THAT PERSEVERANCE
IN A GOOD CAUSE WILL MEET ITS REWARD.

A GOOD Old Inn was the Dunmow Flitch. None
better in Essex.

The house had known better days, and wealthier
inmates—though not merrier, perhaps—than it did,
since it had come into the occupation of Jonas Nettle-
bed: “Jovial Jonas,” as he called himself,—or “Friar
Bacon,” as some of his customers styled him: and who,
out of his exceeding love and respect for the time-
honoured custom of the Manor of Dunmow, had
adopted the Flitch as his sign, and underneath the
great gilded daub, supposed to represent a side of fatted
bacon, that hung before his door, had caused these lines
to be written:

Painted in gold,
The FLITCH behold,
Of fam'd Dunmow the boast!
Then here should call
Fond couples all,
And pledge it in a toast!

This sign caused much laughter, and provoked much
rustic wit, chiefly at the landlord's expense; but as it