

The Midwife's Double Sin

By E. Lynn Linton

Notably was arrested about this time, Alie Nisbet, midwife; and three others. Alie was accused of witchcraft; and of a softer, but as heinous a crime as witchcraft. This she confessed to; but the breaking of the seventh commandment in Christian Scotland, in the year 1632, was a far more dangerous thing than we can imagine possible in our laxer day; and Alie was on the horns of a dilemma, either of which could land her in ruin, death, and perdition. She was accused, among other things, of having taken her labour pains from off a certain woman, using "charmes and horrible words, amongs which thir ware some, *the bones to the fire and the soull to the devill;*" but this Alie denied, strenuously, though she admitted that she might have bathed the woman's legs in warm water, which she had bewitched for good, by putting her fingers into it and running thrice round the bed, widershins; but the spoken charm as given she would have none of. The labour pains, however, left the woman, and were foully and unnaturally cast upon another who had no concern therewith, so that she died in four-and-twenty hours from that time, and Alie was the murderess by all the laws of sorcery. She was accused, also, of having poured some enchanted water on a threshold over which a servant girl, against whom she had a spite, must pass, and the servant girl died therefrom. Alie was wirriet and burnt and troubled the world no more.