tion, in the firm belief of their own divine inspiration, and that they should prove to the world the truth of their pretensions, by actually rising again on the third day."

[As a suitable appendage to the foregoing, we subjoin the following account of the deplorable results of insanity, ignorance and fanaticism, exhibited by some of the inhabitants of Kent, England.]

AN INSANE RELIGIOUS IMPOSTOR.

JOHN NICOLLS THOMS.

In the summer of 1838, the people of Great Britain, were startled by the intelligence of a remarkable disturbance in Kent, caused by the assumption of divine power by a madman named John Nicolls Thoms.

This religious impostor was the son of a small farmer and maltster at St. Columb, in Cornwall. He appears to have entered life as cellarman to a wine merchant in Truro. Succeeding to his master's business he conducted it for three or four years, when his warehouse was destroyed by fire and he received £3000 in compensation from an insurance company. Since then, during more than ten years, he had been in no settled occupation. In the year 1833 he appeared as a candidate successively for the representation of Canterbury and East Kent, taking the title of Sir William Percy Honeywood Courtenay, knight of Malta and king of Jerusalem, and farther representing himself as the owner by birthright of several estates in Kent.

His fine person and manners, and the eloquent appeals he made to popular feeling, secured him a certain degree of favor, but were not sufficient to gain for an obscure adventurer a preferment usually reserved for persons possessing local importance and undoubted fortune. Though baffled in

this object, he continued to address the populace as their peculiar friend, and kept up a certain degree of influence, among them. He is supposed to have connected himself also with a number of persons engaged in the contraband trade, as, in July, 1833, he made an appearance in a court of law on behalf of the crew of a smuggling vessel, when he conducted himself in such a way as to incur a charge of perjury. He was consequently condemned to transportation for seven years, but, on a showing of his insanity, was committed to permanent confinement in a lunatic asylum, from which he was discharged a few months before his death on a supposition that he might safely be permitted to mingle once more in society.

Thoms now resumed his intercourse with the populace whose opinion of him was probably rather elevated than depressed by his having suffered from his friendship for the smugglers. He repeated his old stories of being a man of high birth, and entitled to some of the finest estates in Kent. He sided with them in their dislike of the new regulations, for the poor, and led them to expect that whatever he should recover of his birthright should be as much for their interest as his own. There were two or three persons of substance who were so far deluded by him as to lend him considerable sums of money. Latterly, pretensions of a more mysterious nature mingled in the ravings of this madman; and he induced a general belief among the ignorant peasantry around Canterbury that he was either the Saviour of mankind sent anew upon earth, or a being of the same order, and commissioned for similar purposes.

One of his followers, when asked, after his death, how he could put faith in such a man, answered in language of the following tenor: "Oh, sir, he could turn any one that once listened to him whatever way he liked, and make them believe what he pleased. He had a tongue which a poor man could not get over, and a learned man could not gainsay, although standing before him. He puzzled all the lawyers in Canterbury, and they confessed that he knew more

of law than all put together. You could not always understand what he said, but when you did, it was beautiful, and wonderful, and powerful, just like his eyes ; and then his voice was so sweet ! And he was such a grand gentleman, and sometimes latterly such an awful man, and looked so terrible if any one ventured to oppose him, that he carried all before him. Then, again he was so charitable ! While he had a shilling in his pocket, a poor man should never want. And then such expectations as he had, and which nobody could deny ! He had papers to prove himself to be either the heir or right possessor of Powderham Castle, and Evington, and Nash Court, and Chilham Castle, and all the estates of the families of the Courtenays, the Percies, and Honeywoods, and of Sir Edward Hales, and Sir Thomas Hindlay, more than I can tell of. And there was Mr. ——— of Boughton, who lent him £200 on his title deeds, and the waiter of the ——— Hotel, in Canterbury, who lent him £73, besides other respectable people throughout the county who let him have as much money on his estates as he pleased, and have kept up a subscription for him ever since he was sent to jail in 1833 about the smugglers he befriended. And at the same time it was well known that he need not have gone to prison without he liked, for the very ladies would have rescued him, only he forbade them, and the law should be fulfilled. I myself saw them kissing his hands and his clothes in hundreds that day ; and there was one woman that could not reach him with a glass of cordial gin ; she threw it into his mouth, and blessed him, and bade him keep a bold heart, and he should yet be free, and king of Canterbury !”

It is farther to be observed that the aspect of the man was imposing. His height approached six feet. His features were regular and beautiful—a broad fair forehead, aquiline nose, small well-cut mouth, and full rounded chin. The only defect of his person was a somewhat short neck ; but his shoulders were broad, and he possessed uncommon personal strength. Some curious significations of the en-

thusiasm he had excited were afterward observed in the shape of scribblings on the walls of a barn. On the left side of the door were the following sentences. "If you new he was on earth, your harts Wod turn;" "But dont Wate to late:" "They how R." On the right side were the following:—"O that great day of gudgement is close at hand." "It now peps in the dor every man according to his works;" Our rites and liberties We Will have."

On Monday, the 28th of May, 1838, the frenzy of Thoms and his followers seems to have reached its height. With twenty or thirty persons, in a kind of military order, he went about for three days, among the farm-houses in Boughton, Littingbourne, Boulton, and other villages in the vicinity of Canterbury, receiving and paying for refreshment. One woman sent her son to him with a "mother's blessing," as to join in some great and laudable work. He proclaimed a great meeting for the ensuing Sunday, which he said was to be a "glorious, but bloody day." At one of the places where he ordered provisions for his followers, it was in these words: "Feed my sheep." To convince his disciples of his divine commission, he is said to have pointed his pistol to the stars, and told them that he make them fall from their spheres. He then fired at some star, and his pistol, having been rammed down with tow steeped in oil, and sprinkled over with steel filings, produced, on being fired, certain bright sparkles of light, which he said were falling stars. On another occasion he went away from his followers with a man named Wills, and two others of the rioters, saying to them, "Do you stay here while I go yonder," pointing to a bean stack, "and strike the bloody blow." When they arrived at the stack, to which they marched with a flag, the flagbearer laid his flag on the ground, and knelt down to pray. The other then put in, it is said, a lighted match, but Thoms seized it, and forbade it to burn, and the fire was not kindled. This, on their return to the company, was announced as a miracle.

On Wednesday evening he stopped at the farm-house of

Bossenden, when the farmer, finding that his men were seduced by the impostor from their duty, sent for constables to have them apprehended. Two brothers named Mears and another man accordingly went next morning, but on their approach Thoms shot Nicholas Mears dead with a pistol, and aimed a blow at his brother with a dagger; whereupon the two survivors fled. At an early hour he was abroad with his followers, to the number of about forty, in Bossenden or Bleanwoods, which were to be the scene of the great demonstration on Sunday. The following is a description of the appearance and doings of the fanatics at this place. "Thoms undertook to administer the sacrament in bread and water to the deluded men who followed him. He told them, on this occasion, as he did on many others, that there was great oppression in the land, and indeed throughout the world, but that if they would follow him, he would lead them on to glory. He depicted the gentry as great oppressors, threatened to deprive them of their estates, and talked of partitioning these into farms of forty or fifty acres, among those who followed him. He told them he had come to earth on a cloud, and that on a cloud he should some day be removed from them; that neither bullets nor weapons could injure him or them, if they had but faith in him as their Saviour; and that if ten thousand soldiers came against him they would either turn to their side, or fall dead at his command.

"At the end of his harangue, Alexander Foad, whose jaw was afterward shot off by the military, knelt down and worshipped him; so did another named Brankford. Foad then asked Thoms whether he should follow him in the body, or go home and follow him in heart. To this Thoms replied, "Follow me in the body." Foad then sprang on his feet in an ecstasy of joy, and with a voice of great exultation exclaimed, 'Oh be joyful!—Oh, be joyful! The Saviour has accepted me. Go on—go on; till I drop I'll follow thee!' Brankford also was accepted as a follower, and exhibited the same enthusiastic fervor. At this time his denuncia-

tions against those who should desert him were terrific. Fire would come down from Heaven and consume them in this world, and in the next eternal damnation was to be their doom. His eye gleamed like a bright coal while he was scattering about these awful menaces. The eyewitness was convinced that at that moment Thoms would have shot any man dead who had ventured to quit his company. After this mockery of religion was completed, a woodcutter went to Thoms, shook hands with him, and asked him if it was true that he had shot the constable. 'Yes,' replied Thoms, coolly, 'I did shoot the vagabond, and I have eaten a hearty breakfast since. I was only executing upon him the justice of Heaven, in virtue of the power which God has given me.'

The two repulsed constables had immediately proceeded to Fairhaven, for the purpose of procuring fresh warrants and the necessary assistance. A considerable party of magistrates and other individuals now advanced to the scene of murder, and about mid-day, (Thursday, May 31,) approached Thoms's party at a place called the Ozier-bed, where the Rev. Mr. Handley, the clergyman of the parish, and a magistrate, used every exertion to induce the deluded men to surrender themselves—but in vain. Thoms defied the assailants, and fired at Mr. Handley, who then deemed it necessary to obtain military aid, before attempting farther proceedings. A detachment of the 35th regiment, consisting of a hundred men, was brought from Canterbury, under the command of Major Armstrong. At the approach of the military, Thoms and his men took up a position in Bossenden Wood, between two roads. Maj. Armstrong divided his men into two bodies of equal numbers, that the wood might be penetrated from both these roads at once, so as to enclose the rioters: the one party he took command of himself, and the other was placed under the charge of a young lieutenant named Bennett. The magistrates who accompanied the party gave orders to take Thoms, dead or alive, and as many of his men as possible.

The two parties then advanced into the wood by opposite paths, and soon came within sight of each other, close to the place where the fanatics were posted. A magistrate in Armstrong's party endeavored to address the rioters, and induce them to surrender; but while he was speaking, the unfortunate Bennett had rushed upon his fate. He had advanced, attended by a single private, probably for the purpose of calling upon the insurgents to submit, when the madman who led them advanced to meet him, and Major Armstrong had just time to exclaim, "Bennett, fall back," when Thoms fired a pistol at him within a few yards of his body. Bennett had apprehended his danger, and had his sword raised to defend himself from the approaching maniac; a momentary collision did take place between him and his slayer; but the shot had lodged with fatal effect in his side, and he fell from his horse a dead man. Thoms fought for a few seconds with others of the assailants, but was prostrated by a soldier attending Mr. Bennett, who sent a ball through his brain. The military then poured in a general discharge of firearms on the followers of the impostor, of whom nine were killed, and others severely wounded, one so much that he expired afterward. A charge was made upon the remainder, by the surviving officer, and they were speedily overpowered and taken into custody.

A reporter of the Morning Chronicle newspaper, who was immediately after on the spot where the tragedy was acted, gave the following striking account of the local feeling on the occasion: "The excitement which prevails here in Bolton exceeds anything I ever beheld. It was evident upon listening to the observations of the peasantry, especially of females, that the men who have been shot are regarded by them as martyrs, while their leader was considered, and is venerated, as a species of divinity. The rumor among them is, 'that he is to rise again on Sunday.' Incredible as it may appear, I have been assured of this as a positive fact with respect to the utter folly and madness of the lower orders here.

A more convincing proof of the fanaticism that prevails cannot be afforded than the fact that a woman was apprehended, who was discovered washing the face of Thoms, and endeavoring to pour water between his lips. Upon being interrogated she declared that she had that day followed him for more than half a mile with a pail of water, and her reason for it was, that he had desired her, if he should happen to be killed, *to put some water between his lips, and he would rise again in a month.* One of the prisoners, who had received a slight wound, told the commander that he and the other men who were with Thoms would have attacked two thousand soldiers, as *they were persuaded by him that they could not be shot,* and it was under this impression that they were determined upon fighting."

Another local observer reports: "Such is the veneration in which numbers have held Thoms, that various sums of money have been offered to obtain a lock of his hair, and a fragment of the blood stained shirt in which he died. The women, with whom he was a prodigious favorite, seek these relics with the greatest avidity, and are described as receiving them with the most enthusiastic devotion."

Two of the rioters were tried at Maidstone, on the charge of being principals with Thoms, in the murder of Nicholas Mears, and found guilty. Eight were tried on the ensuing day, charged with the murder of Lieutenant Bennett; they pleaded guilty, and received the appropriate sentence. It was, however, thought proper that capital punishment should not be inflicted on these men, seeing that they had been acting under infatuation.