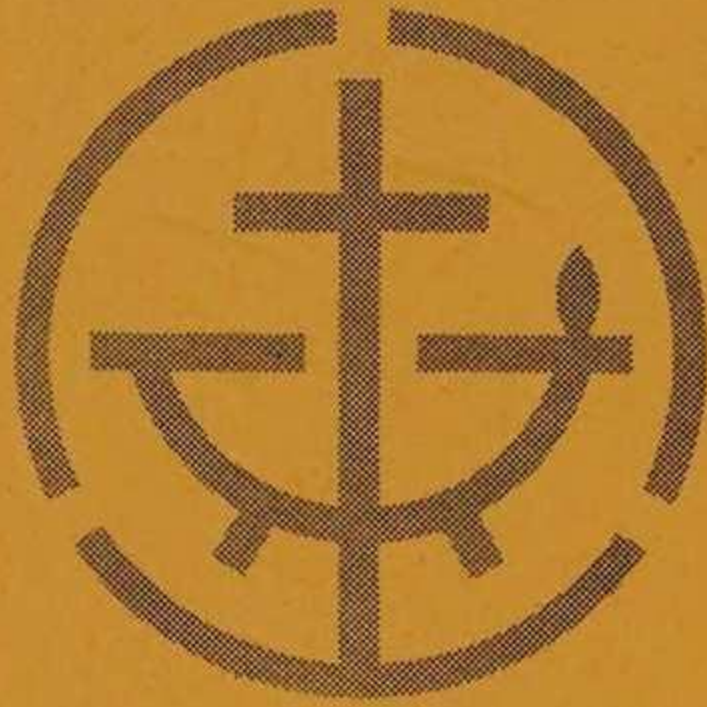


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Children Against Witches

RONALD SETH

Illustrated

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INTRODUCTION

IN RECURRENT waves of madness, between 1450 and 1750, the people of Europe encouraged by the Church, sent to their deaths at the stake, on the gallows and the strappado, on the ladder and the rack, and by squassation, hundreds of thousands of men and women. And these victims' crimes? That they were heretics because they were reputed to be witches.

Witchcraft as a heresy was an invention of the Inquisition. Pope John XXII was the man who began it all, when, in 1320, he gave permission to the inquisitors of Carcassonne, in southern France, to call to book all who worshipped demons, made pacts with them, or used images or other objects to make magic. From this time the discovery of such persons gradually became the main activity of the Holy Office.

But the concept of witchcraft as a heresy was a new one, and the early inquisitors had to make it up as they went along. By degrees, however, a full definition of it was produced, and by 1486 it was possible for two inquisitors, Jakob Sprenger and Heinrich Kramer, in collaboration, to write and publish a long work called *Malleus Maleficarum*, the *Hammer of the Witches*.

Malleus Maleficarum was, in fact, a kind of handbook for witchcraft judges and witch-hunters. It drew together all the previous folk beliefs with regard to witches and their craft and re-interpreted them from the point of view of the Church's doctrine on heresy, so that it emerged as a code by which witches and witchcraft practices might be defined and, hence, prosecuted.

Its two authors were Dominican fathers, both with a high

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scholastic reputation. Sprenger was Dean of Cologne University, and Kramer was a prior whose learning was recognised throughout the universities of western Europe. Both were appointed inquisitors for the purpose of 'discovering' the witchcraft heresy, and set about their task with an enthusiasm not employed up to this time by any other inquisitor. It was the ruthlessness with which they pursued their inquisitorial duties which doubtless prompted them to encourage their fellow inquisitors. Their book certainly achieved this aim, for it became—and, in fact, remains—the most important work on demonology ever produced, and could justifiably claim to have inspired the hysterical and inhuman attack on witchcraft which was to last for almost 300 years after its first appearance.

It carried on its title-page verse 18 of chapter 22 of *Exodus*—"Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live", and this was exactly what its authors intended should happen. It is divided into three parts, Part I of which is an adjuration to all inquisitors and administrators most diligently to seek out witch heretics, and explains why this particular heresy is the great crime against the Faith that it is. Since the Bible states categorically that witches exist, those who refuse to believe in witchcraft are also guilty of heresy. "Any man," say Kramer and Sprenger, "who gravely errs in an exposition of Holy Scripture is rightly considered a heretic." This argument they base on the heinousness of the witchcraft heresy itself, which consists, in general terms, in the renunciation by witches of the Catholic Faith, in the homage they pay to the Devil, and in the sexual intercourse they indulge in with him and his minions, the succubi and incubi.¹ And equally on account of the dreadful nature of this heresy, Sprenger and Kramer advocate—even order—that men and women who would not normally be accepted as witnesses by the civil or ecclesiastical courts—criminals, those who have been excommunicated and even

¹ A succubus was a female devil whose sole function was to seduce men to copulate with them; an incubus was the male counterpart. A succubus had the power to change herself into an incubus should the occasion necessitate that she should, and the incubus had the same powers in the opposite direction.

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convicted perjurers—shall be competent to bear witness against those suspected of witchcraft heresy and shall have the protection of anonymity.

In Part II of the *Malleus*, Sprenger and Kramer describe the *maleficia*, the evil deeds, committed by witches, and they draw upon the widest interpretation of sorcery in doing so. But the most important feature of this section is their putting forward as fact the behaviour and actions of witches which up to now had belonged to the realms of the fable. From this time on, it was believed by all but the rare sceptic that witches did make a pact with the Devil, either oral or written (when it would be signed or 'marked', or sometimes totally written in the witch's own blood); that witches did copulate with the Devil and demons; that they could fly through the air, could change themselves into other human beings, animals, insects and even objects; that they could cause a male to become impotent by various forms of sorcery and a woman to be sterile or suffer from *vaginismus* (closing of the vagina so that the penis cannot be inserted); and that they could cause injury to people, cattle and crops by spells. With one or two additions and refinements, every man or woman accused of witchcraft heresy was charged with having committed one or more of these acts.

The third part of the *Malleus* is even more specifically a handbook for judges and those authorities whose duty it was to hunt witches down. It sets out rules for bringing suspects before the courts and for obtaining a conviction, and even provides the scale of sentences and the form in which sentence should be pronounced. It deals also with the questioning of witnesses and the arrest, imprisonment, interrogation and torture of suspects. Torture was extremely important, for, by law, though a witch was presumed guilty until proved innocent, she could not be sentenced until she had herself confessed to witchcraft.

As R. H. Robbins has described the *Malleus* in his *Encyclopaedia of Witchcraft and Demonology*, it was "without question the most important and most sinister work on demonology ever

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written". It had an incalculable influence on the development of the witchcraft persecution, which, as I have already noted, lasted for 300 years and at times submerged Europe under vast tidal waves of the most obscene horror. Some idea of the ghastly impact that it made can be gained from the following few figures.

In Germany between 1450 and 1750 *at least* 100,000 people were executed as witches. In France, Nicholas Remy, Attorney-General of Lorraine, personally condemned 900 witches to death in a period of ten years (1581–1591); Henri Boguet, chief judge at St. Claude, claimed to have condemned to death 600, while Pierre de Lancre, commissioned as judge to root out witchcraft in the Pays de Labourd, burned 600 at the stake in four months in 1609; and the total for the three centuries for the whole country must far exceed 50,000.

Nor were the Catholic countries the main culprits in the persecution of witches. The Protestant countries and principalities also found the *Malleus* and its exhortations good, and, though heresy was not involved, the *Malleus's* text—"Thou shall not suffer a witch to live"—was found to be equally binding upon the secular and ecclesiastical authorities of those countries, and a complete justification for carrying out campaigns of persecution no whit less horrible and terrible than the campaigns of the Catholics.

While the Scots followed the pattern of the continental witchcraft persecutions, the English did not. Witchcraft was never regarded as a heresy in England, and so-called witches, when sentenced to death, were charged under the civil law with murder. No witch was burned at the stake here, but suffered hanging instead; and few witches were hanged unless it was found that they had killed a human being allegedly by their witchcraft. Though torture was used to extort confessions north of the border, it was forbidden under the English law, except during one of the waves of persecution in the mid-seventeenth century, when the self-styled Witch-Finder General, Matthew Hopkins, used certain kinds of physical violence—'swimming', 'watching' and 'walking'—to obtain confessions. Despite three vicious outbreaks of witch perse-

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cution in England between the passing of the Elizabethan Witchcraft Act in 1563 and the repeal of James I's 1604 Act in 1736, the authorities believe, in the absence of definite records, that only about 1,000 men and women were executed for witchcraft.

Whether on the Continent or in England—and in one notorious case in America—one of the most shocking and sickening aspects of the witchcraft persecution was the role played in it by children. On the Continent there are several cases of boys and girls between eight and fourteen years old being burned at the stake as witches; while in England, in the notable case of the Lancashire witches in 1612, one of the ten accused who were subsequently hanged was eleven-year-old Alison Redfearne.

But the role which children predominantly played in witchcraft cases was that of principal witnesses for the prosecution. The word of young children from seven upwards was accepted as sufficient testimony for the fatal condemnation of the accused. To make it possible for children to give evidence before the courts in witchcraft trials, the rules regarding children as witnesses, which applied to all other forms of judicial proceedings and laid down that no witness below the age of fourteen could be heard, were suspended.

It would appear that the reason for this suspension of the rules—which was as prevalent on the Continent as it was in England—was based chiefly on the Biblical pronouncement that “out of the mouths of babes cometh forth truth”, though one of the great French witchcraft judges, Jean Bodin (1529–1596), openly declared that he used children as witnesses because at a very young age they could without difficulty be persuaded or compelled to inform against the accused. In England this Biblical authority had a further significance, because here, among the various types of evidence on which a witch could “justifiably” be found guilty was testimony that showed the accused had made a pact with the Devil. Anyone evil enough to accept the Devil as his master, thus totally rejecting God, would clearly be recognised by the innocence of children. This is not to say that child wit-

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nesses were required to give evidence of the pact with the Devil before their testimony could be acceptable. The premise was that, since in their innocence they could unfailingly recognise evil, any information they might be able to give of acts of *maleficia* could be, even must be, accepted as true. In other words, all the evidence offered by children concerning all or any of the defined acts of witchcraft *maleficia* was sufficient to prove the guilt of the accused because it was given by "innocent" children.

In order better to apprehend the grounds on which witchcraft was held to be proved in England—for here, where witchcraft was regarded as a felony, confession of guilt was not made a *sine qua non* for the pronouncement of the death sentence, as it was in Europe where the basic charge was heresy—I propose briefly to set out the requirements of the courts. In framing these requirements it is quite clear that the judges accepted the guidance of certain so-called experts on witchcraft. Prominent among these was a Protestant minister called William Perkins, whose *Discourse of the Damned Art of Witchcraft* was published in 1608, six years after his death. Perkins's belief certainly influenced the judges from 1608 onwards, and particularly during the mid-seventeenth century wave of witchcraft persecution.

In his *Discourse* he divided his requirements for the condemnation of a witch under three headings—"uncertain or less sufficient proof", "presumptions of guilt" and "just and sufficient proofs"—and a victim could be condemned if found guilty under any one heading. On the other hand guilt could be presumed under seven headings, which he set out as follows:

1. Notorious defamation is a common report of the greater sort of people with whom the party suspected dwelleth, that he or she is a witch. This yieldeth a strong suspicion.
2. If a fellow-witch or magician give testimony of any person to be a witch, either voluntary, or at his or her examination, or at his or her death.
3. If after cursing there followeth death, or at least some mischief;

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for witches are wont to practise their mischievous acts by cursing and banning.

4. If after enmity, quarrelling, or threatening, a present mischief doth follow.
5. If the party suspected be the son or daughter, the manservant or maidservant, the familiar friend, near neighbour, or old companion of a known and convicted witch.
6. If the party suspected be found to have the devil's mark.
7. If the party examined be inconstant or contrary to himself in his deliberate answers.

For "true evidence" regarding witchcraft, Perkins laid down that there should be free and voluntary confession after the accused had been examined. On the Continent, as I have said, confession was essential even if the accused had been found guilty on other evidence, and to extort such confessions, tortures of the most horrible kind were applied. But since overt torture was forbidden under English law, the confession had to be voluntary. However, Matthew Hopkins, the self-styled Witch-Finder General, who operated in the eastern counties in 1645 and 1646, invented various hideous tortures—"walking", in which the accused was made to walk up and down unceasingly for days on end, without food or sleep; "watching", in which the accused was trussed and made to sit on a stool for days at a time while one of his assistants watched him or her; "swimming", in which the accused was stripped naked, the thumbs were tied to the great toes, and he or she was thrown into water, to drown if innocent, to float if guilty. Since these tortures employed no weapons of torture—such as the Spanish boot, which was made of iron, and crushed the victim's foot, or the thumbscrew, the ladder and squassation—they evaded the law, though the authorities did frown on "swimming".

Though a voluntary confession was preferred, it was not essential for condemnation, and if no confession was forthcoming, Perkins laid it down that sentence of guilt could be passed, provided two witnesses, "of good and honest report", swore before a magistrate that of their own knowledge the accused had either

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made a pact with the Devil, had committed some recognised act of witchcraft such as invoking the Devil's aid, "hath entertained a familiar spirit, and had conference with it in form or likeness of a mouse, cat, or some other visible creature", or used a crystal ball for divination.

All English witchcraft trials contain one or a combination of several of these features. The concept of the pact with the Devil was already recognised in the first important trial under the Elizabethan Witchcraft Act of 1563, namely the First Chelmsford Trial of 1566. It had not yet developed into an actual oral pact sworn to or a written pact signed in blood that was soon to become the more usual form of the witch's alliance with the Devil. Elizabeth Francis, wife of Christopher Francis, a yeoman, was charged with bewitching the child of one William Augur, and confessed that she had been taught the art of witchcraft when she was twelve by her deceased grandmother, Mother Eve of Hatfield Peverell, who had "counselled her to renounce God and his word, and to give her blood to Sathan . . . which she delivered her in the likeness of a white spotted cat". (Here the Devil was the actual familiar.)

The familiar figures much more extensively in English witchcraft trials than on the Continent. It is probably a manifestation of the inordinate love of the English for animals of all kinds; though it is more likely that the ancient crones who represented the majority of the confraternity sought comfort from the presence of small animals in the loneliness of their cottages. For between 1563 and 1710 nearly all those executed for witchcraft in England were aged, even ancient, crones, the butt of village children, whose teasing made them bad-tempered and whose gathering of herbs under the hedgerows gave them sinister reputations.

By the end of the sixteenth century witchcraft practices had become formalised, so to speak. The pact with the Devil, who was represented by a local witch-leader—always a man—the casting of spells, acts of *maleficia* against men and beasts; all these were constant features of witchcraft as revealed by the stories that

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emerged from the trials. A little later the sabbat made its appearance—the periodic meetings of the witches of the locality attended by the Devil—and within a few years the ritual and activities indulged in on such occasions also conformed to a set pattern. The witches went to the sabbat on foot if they lived nearby or flew on sticks or animals if they came from a distance. Proceedings opened with a reaffirmation of allegiance with the Devil, which the master of the sabbat (the local devil and Satan's representative) received. Sometimes he appeared in man's shape, but more often that not as a goat or ram, or a man with a goat's head (undoubtedly a mask) who bared his posterior and received on it the *osculum profanum*, the profane kiss, from each of the witches in turn.

The reaffirmation of allegiance was followed by a feast. At the earlier sabbat feasts the food was ordinary food, provided by the witches; but later accounts describe disgusting and obscene dishes—"The meat they ordinarily eat is the flesh of young children which they cook and make ready in the synagogue, sometimes bringing them thither alive by stealing them from the houses where they have opportunity to come", (*Madeleine de Demandolx*, 1611)—and specify that the food always tasted bitter.

The banquet was followed by dancing to the music of a pipe or a viol. This dancing was a preparation for indiscriminate copulation, for as it proceeded the music grew more and more frenzied, clothes were removed and lewd antics performed. Often the Devil had the foresight to bring to the sabbat a number of male daemons who seized any woman handy, had intercourse with her and passed on to the next. If there were no daemons present the Devil copulated with all the women, though he seems to have provided himself with a substitute phallus after the first two or three, if one correctly interprets the evidence of the witches themselves on this point. If the witches had taken along male relatives and friends, this imposed no considerations of morality upon the company—"The son did not spare the mother, neither the brother the sister,

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nor the father the daughter ". When all were exhausted the sabbat closed.

Though the sabbat made its appearance late in England (1612) and was never quite the unabandoned celebration that it usually was on the Continent, copulation with the Devil plays a prominent role in the English witchcraft story. The evidence comes always from the women themselves and was nearly always volunteered.

However, the evidence which was always taken as conclusive was the presence on the body of Devil's marks and witch's marks. These two marks have been confused in much of the literature dealing with witchcraft and indeed some of the demonologists themselves were guilty of this mis-identification.

The Devil's mark resembled a birthmark or scar. It was allegedly imprinted on the witch's body by the Devil as an insurance against the witch going back on her pact. Ludovico Sinistrari, one of the leading Italian demonologists maintained,

The demon imprints on them some mark, especially on those whose constancy he suspects. That mark, however, is not always of the same shape or figure; sometimes it is the likeness of a hare, sometimes like a toad's foot, sometimes a spider, a puppy, a dormouse. It is imprinted on the most secret parts of the body; with men, under the eyelids or perhaps under the armpits, or on the lips or shoulders, the anus or elsewhere; with women, it is generally on the breasts or private parts. Now, the stamp which makes these marks is simply the devil's talon.

The much earlier Swiss demonologist, Lambert Daneau, had also held that the Devil " set some note or token of his power and prerogative over them " on every witch, and he enjoined judges, when confronted with suspects, to pull out their hair and " shave, where occasion shall serve, all over the body, lest haply the mark may lurk under the hair in any place ". (I count myself fortunate not to have lived in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, for, had I been accused of witchcraft, there could have been no hope for me. I wear my hair long on the back of my

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head to conceal a mark the size of half-a-crown and shaped, so I am told, like a toad's foot.)

In the later phase of the witchcraft delusion, the Devil's mark did not have to be visible. It was a spot—on any part of the body—which was insensitive to pain. This concept gave rise to a class of witch-finder: the 'pricker'. Matthew Hopkins used 'pricking' along with his other 'methods of discovery', and the practice was extensively followed in England, and particularly so north of the border. Sir George Mackenzie in his *Laws and Customs of Scotland* (1678) has told how the prickers were able to produce their evidence.

This [Devil's] mark is discovered among us by a pricker, whose trade it is and who learns it as other trades; but this is a horrid cheat, for they allege that if the place bleed not, or if the person be not sensible, he or she is infallibly a witch. A villain who used this trade with us, being in the year 1666 apprehended for other villainies, did confess all this trade to be a mere cheat.

The prickers armed themselves with two bodkins, one of which was shown to the witnesses. This bodkin had a fixed blade, and would have caused pain if plunged into any body. The second bodkin, which was identical in size and shape with the first, had a blade which retracted into the handle when the point was pressed against the flesh, and gave the appearance of entering the victim's body. A fairly simple sleight of hand enabled the pricker to exchange the two bodkins after he had handed the first round for inspection.

On the other hand, some prickers did not use fake bodkins or pins. They had discovered, though they were unaware of the cause of the phenomenon, that many people when in the grip of horror—as many witch suspects were at their examination—suffer from a temporary anaesthesia. There is an account of such an occurrence which took place in Newcastle-upon-Tyne in 1649. A peripatetic pricker, who was eventually arrested and confessed that he had been responsible for sending 220 people to the gallows,

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acquainted Lieutenant-Colonel Hobson that he knew women, whether they were witches or no, by their looks, and when the said person was searching of a personable and good-like woman, the said Colonel replied and said, Surely this woman is none and need not be tried. But the Scotsman said she was, for the town said she was, and therefore he would try her. And presently in the sight of all the people, laid her body naked to the waist, with her clothes over her head, by which fright and shame, all her blood contracted into one part of her body. And then he ran a pin into her thigh, and then suddenly let her coats fall, and then demanded whether she had nothing of his in her body but did not bleed. But she being amazed, replied little. Then he put his hand up her coats and pulled out the pin, and set her aside as a guilty person and child of the Devil. And fell to try others, whom he made guilty. Lieutenant-Colonel Hobson, perceiving the alteration of the foresaid woman, by her blood settling in her right parts, caused that woman to be brought again, and her clothes pulled up to her thigh, and required the Scot to run the pin into the same place, and then it gushed out of blood, and the said Scot cleared her, and said she was not a child of the Devil.

The witch's mark, which figured more prominently in English witchcraft trials because the familiar was almost exclusive to English and Scottish witchcraft, was at the same time a primary and a secondary proof of witchhood. It differed from the Devil's mark in that it was an excrescence rather than a discoloured (visible) or an invisible area. More often than not it was a large wartlike formation, and could be found in any part of the body. It was held to be the nipple or teat by which the familiar drew its ration of blood from the witch. Since there are relatively few people who have not a blemish of some kind upon their bodies, a suspect searched for such a mark had little chance of escape. If the Devil's mark could not be found, the presence of the witch's mark was deemed sufficient to prove guilt.

These, then, are the features of witchcraft which will be encountered in the following pages. They are the common attributes of witchcraft practice and were universally accepted as such,

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except by the one or two cynics who saw it for what it really was—a simple delusion. From the accounts of every trial it is clear that those who confessed to witchcraft truly believed that they could cause cattle and people to sicken and die as the result of their spells; that they could cause 'possession by evil spirits', of which the most common manifestation was the vomiting of pins and nails by the accused while in a condition which we would now recognise as hysteria; that they could fly through the air; and that they copulated with the Devil and his demons. The belief that they did copulate with someone—a man who took on the role of the Devil—is probably the only one they held that was not hallucinatory.

It is equally clear that the belief in witchcraft by men of education, learning and sensibility—judges, doctors, divines of all ranks, scholars—was based on the witches' own delusions. It was as if the intelligent said to themselves, "If these people claim to be able to do these extraordinary things, who are we to refute them?" Naturally, it must be borne in mind that superstition was rife even among the most intellectual. Superstition is a product of fear of the unknown, and there was so much not understood, particularly in the field of medicine, that allowance must be made for the seeming naïvety with which the practices of witchcraft were accepted as reality.

Each generation produced its outstanding cynic, like Reginald Scot, the Kentish hop-grower, in the latter half of Elizabeth I's reign; the Reverend John Gaule, who attacked the excesses of Matthew Hopkins, the Witch-Finder General in the mid-seventeenth century; and the man whose writings eventually exposed the whole delusion and led to the repeal of the Witchcraft Act, Bishop Francis Hutcheson. But the majority knew all about witches and how they operated, and were kept well-informed of all developments by the sensational journalists of the times, the pamphleteers who after every great trial produced lurid accounts which sold like hot cakes in the street at a copper a time.

During the great waves of persecution the trials and what they

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revealed were the main source of conversation among all classes. A bright child interested in adult affairs—and what bright child is not?—could not fail to learn as much from the grown-ups' discussions as the grown-ups themselves knew. The precocity of many children, which has long since ceased to amaze schoolmasters and schoolma'ams of our times, and the innate devilishness of as many more, as revealed graphically by William Golding in his *Lord of the Flies*, had not penetrated the awareness of adults in the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. No class barrier differentiates between the children of the hall and the children of the labourer's cottage. As a species children are classless. On the other hand, among those adults who were accused of witchcraft, there are extraordinarily few who graced the gentry and the middle class. By and large those hanged or imprisoned were from the lowest class, nearly all of them ancient, toothless, lonely, bad-tempered old crones; and though in a few of the major trials there are young women in their thirties and forties, they were almost invariably involved as the daughters of old women reputed to be witches. The children of the lower classes might not only learn the details and ramifications of witchcraft practice from the conversation of their elders, but could have direct contact with sufferers from the delusion.

The children, then, who figure in my ensuing thesis and who were responsible for the deaths of witches, were not the innocents in the Biblical aphorism, "Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings proceedeth truth". If they were not frightened, ignorant wretches who had words put into their mouths by judges and other interested parties, they were skilfully inventive little 'demons' who, either out of sheer nastiness or pure devilment, put up a hare of witchcraft, and, being unable to stop the pursuit, joined in, and encouraged the others until the kill.

The children who set themselves against the witches fall into two categories as witnesses. There were those who, while not affected by *maleficia* themselves, gave evidence of having seen a relative—grandmother, mother, sister or brother—commit some

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act of witchcraft; or who testified from personal knowledge that the subject of their accusation possessed some attribute of witchhood.

The children in this category, particularly if they were not suborned, are interesting for the wealth of detail they supply. On the other hand, the second category—those who feigned the accepted results of *maleficia*—present a fascinating picture when viewed from any angle, for their inventiveness, for their acting ability, for the almost depraved vindictiveness they displayed, and for their persistence. In the second category, also, are the impostors—the Bilson Boy, the Nottingham Boy, the Burton Boy among them—who feigned the symptoms that made them appear victims of *maleficia*.

Drawing upon the most notable cases in English witchcraft history, I shall consider the first category all together; while I shall deal with the second category in detail.

Part One

CHILDREN IN EVIDENCE

THE ELIZABETHAN WITCHCRAFT ACT

IN 1563 Parliament passed an ' Act Against Conjurations, Enchantments and Witchcrafts ' (5 Eliz. cap. 16)—shortly known as the ' Elizabethan Witchcraft Act '. It read as follows :

Whereas at this present, there is no ordinary or condign punishment provided against the practices of the wicked offences of conjurations and invocations of evil spirits, and of sorceries, enchantments, charms, and witchcrafts, the which offences by force of a statute made in the 33rd year of the reign of the late King Henry VIII were made to be a felony, and so continued until the said statute was repealed by the act and statute of repeal made in the first year of the reign of the late King Edward VI; since the repeal whereof many fantastical and devilish persons have devised and practised invocations and conjurations of evil and wicked spirits, and have used and practised witchcrafts, enchantments, charms and sorceries, to the destruction of the persons and goods of their neighbours and other subjects of this realm, and for other lewd intents and purposes contrary to the laws of Almighty God, to the peril of their own souls and to the great infamy and disquietness of this realm :

I. For reformation whereof, be it enacted by the Queen's majesty, with the assent of the Lords' spiritual and temporal, and the Commons in this present Parliament assembled, and by the authority of the same, that if any person or persons after the first day of June next coming, use, practise or exercise, any invocations or conjurations of evil and wicked spirits, to or for any intent or purpose, or else if any person or persons after the said first day of June, shall use, practise, or exercise any witchcraft, enchantment, charm or sorcery,

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whereby any person shall happen to be killed or destroyed, that then as well every such offender or offenders in invocations or conjurations as is aforesaid, their counsellors and aiders, as also every such offender or offenders in witchcraft, enchantment, charm, or sorcery whereby the death of any person doth ensue, their aiders and counsellors, being of either of the said offences lawfully convicted and attainted, shall suffer pain of death as a felon or felons, and shall lose the privilege and benefit of sanctuary and clergy. Saving to the wife of such person her title of dower, and also to the heir and successor of such person his or their titles of inheritance, succession and other rights, as though no such attainder of the ancestor or predecessor had been had or made.

II. And further be it enacted by the authority aforesaid, that if any person or persons, after the said first day of June next coming, shall use, practise, or exercise any witchcraft, enchantment, charm or sorcery, whereby any person shall happen to be wasted, consumed, or lamed in his or her body or member, or whereby any goods or chattels of any person shall be destroyed, wasted or impaired; then every such offender or offenders, their counsellors and aiders, being lawfully convicted, shall for his or their first offence or offences suffer imprisonment by the space of one whole year, without bail or mainprize,¹ and once in every quarter of the same year shall in some market town, upon the market day or at such time as any fair shall be kept there, stand openly upon the pillory by the space of six hours, and then shall openly confess his or her error and offence, and for the second offence, being as is aforesaid lawfully convicted or attainted, shall suffer death as a felon, and shall lose the privilege of clergy and sanctuary. Saving to the wife of such person her title of dower, and also to the heir successor of such person, his or their titles of inheritance, succession, and other rights, as though no such attainder of the ancestor or predecessor had been had or made.

III. Provided always, that if the offender, in any of the cases aforesaid for which the pains of death shall ensue, shall happen to be a peer of this realm, then his trial therein to be had by his peers, as it is used in cases of felony or treason, and not otherwise.

IV. And further, to the intent that all manner of practise, use or exercise of witchcraft, enchantment, charm or sorcery should be from

¹ mainprize = surety.

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henceforth utterly avoided, abolished, and taken away; be it enacted by the authority of this present Parliament, that if any person or persons shall, from and after the first day of June next coming, take upon him or them by witchcraft, enchantment, charm or sorcery, to tell or declare in what place any treasure of gold or silver should or might be found or had in the earth, or other secret place; or where goods or things lost or stolen should be found or be come; or shall use or practise any sorcery, enchantment, charm or witchcraft to the intent to provoke any person to unlawful love; or to hurt or destroy any person in his or her body, member or goods; that then every such person or persons so offending, and being thereof lawfully convicted, shall for the said offence suffer imprisonment by the space of one whole year without bail or mainprize, and once in every quarter of the said year shall in some market town, upon the market day or at such time as any fair shall be kept there, stand openly upon the pillory by the space of six hours, and then shall openly confess his or her error and offence. And if any person or persons, being once convicted of the same offence, as is aforesaid, do eftsoons perpetrate and commit the like offence, that then every such offender, being thereof the second time convicted as is aforesaid, shall forfeit unto the Queen's majesty, her heirs and successors, all his goods and chattels and suffer imprisonment during life.

This Act is surprising in that it provides penalties that are, taking the climate and widespread superstition of the times into account, extremely light—sentence of death only if death has been caused or alleged (and "proved") to have been caused by an act construed as an act of witchcraft (and this without the normal felon's forfeiture of fortune and possessions); for a first offence in which death did *not* occur, imprisonment for a year only, with four appearances in the pillory, and death for a second offence; while a year's imprisonment and four appearances in the pillory was deemed sufficient punishment for a first offence of fortune-finding by sorcery, the giving of love charms or potions, or using charms, or other methods of sorcery, to injure or destroy a person, a second offence being atoned by life-imprisonment and forfeiture of possessions.

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The provisions of the Act seem to indicate a certain reluctance on the part of the legislators to introduce a Witchcraft Act at all. Henry VIII, who was probably the most superstitious of our monarchs, had passed a Witchcraft Act in 1541, to which the preamble read,

Where divers and sundry persons unlawfully have devised and practised Invocations and Conjurations of Sprites, pretending by such means to understand and get Knowledge for their own lucre in what place treasure of Gold and Silver should or might be found or had . . . and also have used and occupied witchcrafts, enchantments and sorceries to the destruction of their neighbours' persons and goods.

It defined all acts of witchcraft and sorcery as felonies and punishable by death. How many fell victim to it, it is not possible to decide, but they must have been few. Within six years it had been removed from the Statute Book by Protector Somerset, who adopted a more reasonable and much less harsh definition of felony.

Between 1547 and 1563 no Witchcraft Act was in force in England, and why Elizabeth should agree to one being drafted and passed by Parliament is still a bone of contention among the leading historians of witchcraft. Some hold that she surrendered to pressure from the 450-odd Protestant ministers who had lived out Mary Tudor's reign in exile on the Continent, where they had become acquainted with the European attitude towards witches and the extremely harsh punishments meted out. Some maintain that a sermon preached before Elizabeth early in 1560 by one of these returned exiles, John Jewel, lately appointed Bishop of Salisbury, in the course of which he digressed to tell the queen, "This kind of people (I mean witches and sorcerers) within these last years are marvellously increased within Your Grace's realm. These eyes have seen the most evident and manifest marks of their wickedness. . . . Wherefore Your poor subjects most humble petition unto Your Highness is that the laws touching such malefactors may be put in due execution", was the chief

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inspiration for the act. On the other hand, it has been pointed out by Professor G. L. Kittredge that the Commons had passed a similar Act in April 1559, which did not reach the Lords, because their lordships' attention was taken up with the much more important Supremacy and Uniformity Acts, and he goes on to say that this bill had been first read in the Lower House on 15th March, and Jewel did not land in England from his European exile until 20th March.

To my mind it appears to be a time-consuming occupation of little value to try to pin-point a motive. The level-headed Elizabeth, more likely than not, was merely taking a practical step to safeguard her own person. Up to her reign, the major trials involving witchcraft and sorcery had had very heavy political overtones. Walter Langton, Bishop of Lichfield and Treasurer to Edward I (1239-1307), was accused of sorcery and of making a pact with the Devil by his enemies, but cleared himself. Early in the fifteenth century Eleanor Duchess of Gloucester was charged with having her horoscope cast in order to find out what her chances were of succeeding to the throne. Later, Richard III accused Jane Shore, who had been the mistress of his brother Edward IV, of asking witchcraft to wither his arm, though it was well known that this was a congenital condition, and of attempting to interfere with his government as Protector.

In the first year of Elizabeth's reign, Sir Anthony Fortescue, a Catholic, was arrested on a charge of casting the queen's horoscope. Though soon released, three years later he was again arrested along with two of his brothers-in-law, Edmund and Arthur Pole, nephews of Cardinal Pole, and charged with plotting to marry Edmund to Mary Stuart, who was to be declared Queen of England. The inspiration of the plot, it appears, was a prophecy by two sorcerers, Edmund Cosyn and John Prestall, that "a wicked spryte" was to cause Elizabeth's early demise.

Since there was no law on the Statute Book under which the tellers of fortunes, the caster of horoscopes, or the sorcerers who claimed to be able to control "wicked sprytes", could be charged,

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such plots against the Queen, unless treason of a more practical kind could be proved, had to go unpunished. From the moment that she ascended the throne until the moment that death removed her from it, Elizabeth was the object of an almost continuous series of conspiracies. It is possible that the persuasion of the extreme Protestant former exiles did influence the decision to pass the Witchcraft Act of 1563, but it was, I suggest, the protection which such an act would afford the Queen that was the major factor in its becoming law. For three years were to pass before the first major case of what may be termed pure witchcraft—that is, the first case having no political overtones—came before the courts. It was not fortuitous that it should be in Essex, in the see of St. Albans, whose bishop was an ardent anti-sorcerer.

2

THE FIRST CHELMSFORD TRIAL

AT THE Chelmsford assizes in July 1566 three women from the village of Hatfield Peverell were accused of witchcraft. Apart from the fact that they all lived in the same village, the charges against them were quite unconnected, though there was a link between two of the women in the shape of a familiar, a cat called Sathan.

The three accused were Elizabeth Francis, Agnes Waterhouse and her daughter Joan. The charge against Mother Francis, the wife of a yeoman, Christopher Francis, was that she had bewitched the child of a certain William Augur. Under examination by the rector of a nearby parish, the Rev. Dr. Cole, and by Sir John Fortescue, who was later appointed Chancellor of the Exchequer, on the day before the trial, she not only admitted the charge but explained how she worked her spells by the aid of her familiar, Sathan, and confessed to bewitching to death an Andrew Byles whom she had seduced but who had nevertheless refused to marry her; to aborting by a charm the child which had marked their fleeting union; to seducing her present husband, Christopher Francis, who had married her when she had claimed she was pregnant by him; to requiring Sathan to kill this child when it was six months old; and to laming Francis by magic because she detested him. She was clearly a shrew, for she later told the Court that "after they were maryed they lived not so quietly as she desyred, being stirried . . . to much unquietness and . . . cursing."

The familiar who had carried out her commands in all these matters, the cat Sathan, had been given her by Mother Eve, her grandmother, who had initiated her into the craft when she was

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twelve. She had kept the cat for sixteen years and then one day she had encountered a neighbour, Agnes Waterhouse, who was "going to the oven with some cakes". She had suddenly been overcome by a desire for a cake and had offered to trade Sathan for one. Mother Waterhouse had agreed and had exchanged a cake for the cat. Mother Francis had explained how Sathan had to be fed and the uses to which his services might be put.

On her appearance in Court, this confession was laid before the judge and jury. Inevitably the verdict was one of guilty; but the judge, despite the fact that she had confessed to having killed Andrew Boyle and her two children by her witchcraft, sentenced her merely to one year's imprisonment.

Agnes Waterhouse, at the time of her trial, was sixty-four years old. She also entered a confession. It was true, she said, that Mother Francis had given her Sathan, and that he had told her that "yf she made mucche of him he would do for her what she wolde have him to do." To test his good faith, she commanded him to kill one of her own pigs. Despite the death of the pig, she was so pleased that she gave Sathan a chicken and a drop of her blood. She always rewarded him with a drop of blood when he had carried out successfully any command she gave him. She confessed to a long list of injuries she had inflicted on various neighbours who had angered her for one reason or another, and claimed that, having grown tired of her husband some nine years earlier, she had had Sathan kill him.

Joan Waterhouse, who was only eighteen, was tried with her mother. She denied the charges against her, maintaining that she had resisted her mother's attempts the previous winter to persuade her to take up witchcraft. She insisted that she had only once seen the cat, though she had heard her mother calling him by his name, Sathan. Under cross-examination, however, she admitted that once, while her mother was away from home, having no food, she "dydde as she had seen her mother doe", and had called Sathan to her. He had appeared from under her mother's bed in the likeness of a large dog and had asked her what she wanted. She told

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him that she wanted him to punish a neighbour's daughter, Agnes Brown, who had refused to give her a piece of bread and some cheese when she had asked for some. She offered Sathan a red cock if he would obey her, but he refused. He would only do what she wanted, he had said, if she would give him her "body and sowle, whereby she being soore feared, and desirous to be rydde of him, sayd she wolde".

Thereupon, Sathan appeared to Agnes Brown, in the form of an "evyll favoured Dogge with hornes on his head". He had frightened her so much that two or three days later she became lame in her right arm and leg.

Some of Joan's neighbours had apparently got wind of what had happened. Maybe they had heard her ask the child for bread and cheese and her angry reply to the girl when her request was refused. When the child went lame within a short time, purely on the strength of Mother Waterhouse's reputation, they laid information before the local magistrates that Joan had harmed Agnes Brown by witchcraft. It was this accusation, incidentally, that had led to the trials of all three women.

For some reason or other which is not explained in the contemporary documents, on the second day of her trial Joan Waterhouse was brought before a different judge, Mr. Justice Southcote, while the Attorney-General, Sir Gilbert Gerard, appeared to lead for the prosecution. A summary of the previous day's evidence was given, and then Agnes Brown, although only twelve years old and on this account in all other criminal proceedings incompetent to testify, was called. The Attorney-General asked her to tell the Court in her own words what had happened. According to eye-witnesses, she appeared to enjoy her role, and many detected a glee in her manner as she related her story.

She had been churning butter one day, she said, when "a thyng lyke a black dogge with a face like an ape, a short taile, a chaine and a sylver whystel" hanging from his neck, and a pair of horns on his head, came to her with the key of the dairy door in his mouth. Though the way in which he leaped about frightened her,

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she presently overcame her fear and asked him what he wanted. He replied that he wanted some butter and refused to take no for an answer. When she said that she had no butter, he ran to the dairy, unlocked the door and went in, presently to emerge to tell her that he had churned some butter for her.

As soon as he had gone, she ran to her aunt and told her what had happened. The aunt called for the priest, who confessed that all he could advise them to do was to pray. Their prayers, however, were ineffectual, for the next day the dog reappeared, again with the key to the dairy door in his mouth.

"I asked him, In the name of Jesus, what have you there?" the child told the Court.

"You have spoken evil words in speaking that name," the dog reproached her, and, putting down the key, he went away. He returned after some minutes, carrying a piece of bread in his mouth, and once more demanded butter. When she told him again there was no butter, "he departed, and I dyd not see hym noo more tyll Wednesday last, which was the xxiii day of July".

He was carrying a knife in his mouth and, said the child, he was surprised to see her still alive. "And then hee sayd if I wolde not dye he wolde thrust his knife to my hearte but he wolde make me to dye. I tolde him to put down the knife in the name of Jesus. But he wolde not, saying he wolde not departe from his sweet dames knyfe as yet, and then I asked hym who was his dame, and then he nodded and wagged his head to your home, Mother Waterhouse."

The Attorney-General turned to Agnes Waterhouse and asked her if she would say anything about the knife. For the first time since her arrest she made an attempt to defend herself.

Addressing the girl, she asked, "What kind of a knife was it?"

"It was a dagger knife," Agnes Brown replied.

"Then you are lying!" retorted Mother Waterhouse.

"Why do you say that?" the Attorney-General asked.

"I have not such a knife in my house, only a large knife," the old woman explained.

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Probably believing she would be helping her mother, Joan Waterhouse now intervened to exclaim, "The girl is lying, too, my lord, when she says that it had a face like an ape. The thing that came to me was like a dog."

"Well," cried the Attorney-General, again turning to Mother Waterhouse, "can you make it come before me now? If you can we will shortly release you."

"No, I can't!" the old woman told him. "If I had let him go, I could bring him; but as my daughter let him go, I have no more power over him."

Regarding her sternly, Sir Gilbert demanded, "Agnes Waterhouse, when did your cat last suck your blood?"

"Never!" she replied.

"Let me see!" he exclaimed.

The gaoler lifted her kerchief, and revealed "diverse spotted in her face and one on her nose."

"In good faith, when did thy cat last suck thee?" Sir Gilbert repeated.

Tamely the old woman maintained, "Not this last fortnight, my lord!"

With a triumphant flourish, Sir Gilbert sat down. The judge summed up briefly, the jury retired and returned presently to announce a Verdict of Guilty against Agnes Waterhouse, but found Joan Waterhouse Not Guilty. Mr. Justice Southcote, less humane than Mother Francis's judge had been, sentenced Agnes Waterhouse to death, and two days later, on 29th July, 1566, she was hanged. "She yielded up her sowle," comments the contemporary pamphlet, "trusting to be in joye with Christe her Saviour which dearely had bought her with his most precious bloudde. Amen."

This is the first (known) record of a child below the age of 14 being permitted to give evidence in an English court in a criminal trial. Unfortunately it set a precedent for witchcraft trials in England. That judges and law officers of the Crown were prepared not only to admit such evidence, but to accept it at its face value,

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and only too often to draw the attention of juries to the damning nature of the testimony indicates one of two things or, indeed, both. It seems either to express the determination of the authorities to persecute witches at all costs; it reveals the incredible gullibility of highly educated men in the sixteenth century; or it contains very strong elements of both.

The testimony of Agnes Brown appears, at first sight, to bear the stamp of adult construction. On the other hand, we shall, before long, encounter children whose imaginations were so fertile and their knowledge of contemporary witchcraft so clearly comprehensive that the witness in this first case appears almost innocent and naïve. That children should be knowledgeable about witchcraft practices is, as I have previously suggested, not extraordinary. In small communities in these times, witches and their craft were one of the subjects of general conversation among the adults.

Agnes Brown would know that Joan Waterhouse was the daughter of a reputed witch—almost all ancient, lonely women fell within this category in the popular imagination of country people—and she would also be aware of the belief that the daughter of a witch was *ipso facto* a witch herself. She would also know that when Joan Waterhouse expressed her displeasure at being refused bread and cheese, she could almost automatically expect some act of *maleficia* to be committed against her. She might have deluded herself into being struck “lame in the right arm and leg” by auto-suggestion a couple of days after her encounter with Joan. All this would also be expected by the villagers of Hatfield Peverell, and accepted in good faith by them as a deed of witchcraft carried out by Joan Waterhouse. It is also acceptable to us, if we are prepared, at this stage, to regard all witchcraft as a reality and not the delusion we are told by our intelligence it must be. That we know witchcraft to have been a delusion is the result of the tremendous advances that have been made in medicine and science since the days of Elizabeth I, and since we know it is this wide awareness of the potential of science and medicine that is chiefly, perhaps even entirely, responsible for our rejection of

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witchcraft, we may be able to understand the attitudes of the leading minds of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries towards it. Everything has a cause; if the cause is unknown the first explanation that occurs to the unsophisticated is that 'it' has been brought about by supernatural means. If 'it' is bad, then 'it' surely must emanate from the forces of evil, of which the Devil is a personification.

Nevertheless, taking the Elizabethan concept of witchcraft into account and making full allowances for it, there are still aspects of Agnes Brown's evidence which are suspect, and which ought to have appeared so to the judge and the Attorney-General.

First of all, the form that Sathan took. In all the confessions of Mother Francis and Mother Waterhouse, there is no mention at all that the familiar ever took the form of a dog. At one point in her evidence, Mother Francis told the Court that, when she had requested the cat to harm her husband, it had transformed itself into a toad, and had crawled inside one of Francis's shoes.

And when he (Francis) perceived it putte on his shoe, and had touched it with his fote, he being sodenly amazed asked of her what it was, and she bad him kil it and he was forthwith taken with a lameness whereof he can not be healed.

Mother Waterhouse also told the Court that now and again, by reciting the Doxology in Latin, she had changed Sathan into a toad. Before she grew so poor that she needed the wool with which she had lined Sathan's pot, the familiar had remained in the form of a cat. However, when she took the wool from his pot, she had changed him into a toad, and he had been content to live in the pot without wool.

Joan Waterhouse was the first to describe Sathan as being "a large, black dog". This being so, the question arises of how Agnes Brown also saw him as a dog. The village would have known about Mother Waterhouse's cat, and one would have expected that the child would have described him in that form. It would have been interesting to know precisely what happened

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when Hatfield Peverell began to grow restless.

It might be suggested that when the villagers talked of taking action, Joan Waterhouse tried to safeguard her own interests by telling her story about the dog appearing from under her mother's bed when she had called Sathan, and that the child was present, or her aunt was, and subsequently coached the child. This would account for Agnes saying she had seen a dog. But, she had told her aunt and the priest about the dog, before she became lame, so the record of her evidence shows, and this seems to dispose of the suggestion.

However, if one studies the evidence a little more closely, it emerges that Agnes did not testify that her aunt had also seen the dog. The aunt was not called, nor was the priest. Had either or both been called to corroborate Agnes's story—and it is an indication of the reliance placed on a child's evidence that they were not—the corroboration would have removed any doubts about the authenticity of her evidence. As it is, we are left with the uneasy feeling that the child was coached by adults. The final stages of her testimony underline this impression, for though, as we shall see, the fertility of the imagination displayed by other children in their evidence in circumstances which made adult coaching impossible, was extraordinary, Agnes's final declaration has more the adults' stamp than that of a twelve-year-old—"he wolde not depart from his sweet dames knyfe as yet, and then I asked of hym who was his dame, and then he nodded and wagged his head to your house, Mother Waterhouse". Altogether, it was a sorry business, but it had set a terrible precedent, as is demonstrated by the next major case in which child witnesses played an important part in the condemnation of witches.

3

THE SECOND CHELMSFORD TRIAL

WHAT IT was in the air of Essex that encouraged the practice of witchcraft will probably never be discovered; nevertheless, taking the records as a guide, no less than five of the major English witch trials took place at the Chelmsford assizes, and all the defendants were Essex folk.

The second Chelmsford trial, which took place in 1579, is interesting because one of the judges was the same Mr. Justice Southcote of the Queen's Bench who had presided over the trial of the two Waterhouses in 1566; while one of the principal accused was none other than Elizabeth Francis, who had miraculously escaped the gallows thirteen years earlier, and only a few years later had enjoyed the same good fortune. The third time, however, she was to discover she was no longer under the protection of a benign Providence.

Though the case is usually referred to in witchcraft literature as the second Chelmsford Trial (in the singular), there were, in fact, four accused who came from different and separate parishes and who had no connection with each other. The indictments against them were taken individually and the sentence was handed down at the end of each hearing. That those who were found guilty were hanged together was a matter of administrative convenience.

Besides Elizabeth Francis, the prisoners were Ellen Smith, daughter of Alice Chaundler, who had been hanged for witchcraft in 1574, and of John Chaundler of Maldon; Marjory Staunton of Wimbushe; and Alice Noakes of Lamberd Ende. The indict-

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ments of all three included charges carrying the death penalty, those against Ellen Smith and Alice Noakes including murder by witchcraft.

By this time practice had established that there should be no lenience shown towards those convicted according to law, as had happened twice to Elizabeth Francis. A finding of guilt, therefore, meant death for each one of them.

One particular feature of this trial underlines the attitude of the authorities towards witches. In the first Chelmsford trial, the precedent was set for the admissibility of uncorroborated evidence from children below the legal minimum age for all other types of crime. Here we find a deviation from normal practice also in Mr. Justice Southcote, who had tried Elizabeth Francis at her first arraignment as a witch, now once more trying her on a similar charge. This, too, must have militated against her and practically assured her death on conviction.

The evidence against Elizabeth Francis at her first trial had revealed her as a sharp-tempered, probably mentally unstable woman, who was certainly a shrew. It will be recalled that she had tried to force a shotgun wedding on Andrew Byles by getting herself pregnant by him, and when he had refused to be trapped, had killed him with the aid of her familiar, the cat Sathan. Despite this failure, she had worked the same trick on Christopher Francis and this time had succeeded. But, we are told, "after they were married they lived not so quietly as she desired, being stirred (as she said) to much unquietness and moved to swearing and cursing". In revenge for her disappointment with the matrimonial state, she had caused Sathan to lame her husband.

The indictment in her third trial indicates that she was as spiteful and vengeful as ever, if not more so. During the previous Lent—that is, only a week or two before the Chelmsford Spring Assizes—it was alleged, Mother Francis had gone one day to her neighbour, Mrs. Poole, and asked her for some old yeast. Mrs. Poole refused to give her any, so she decided to try another neighbour, a Mrs. Osborne. On the way she cursed Mrs. Poole for her

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meanness " and threatened her with meanness because she refused to give her yeast ".

Still muttering her imprecations against Mrs. Poole, she presently heard a great noise and found herself confronted by " a spirit like a little rugged dogge standing near her on the ground ".¹ The dog asked her where she was going and why, and she explained that she hoped to get some yeast from Mrs. Osborne, because Mrs. Poole had refused her. She also said that she would punish Mrs. Poole. The dog offered to help her on condition that she would " give him something ". All she had about her to give him was a crust of bread " she had in her hand ", so she broke off a portion, which he accepted. What did she want him to do to Mrs. Poole? he asked, and she said she wanted the woman to be pained in the head. The dog replied that he would " see to it, and went on his way . . . and Mrs. Poole was grievously pained in the head ".

To this accusation Mother Francis retorted that, if she were a witch, she was not the only one in Hatfield Peverell. There was Elizabeth Lloyd, for example. Eight years ago she had given John Francis, a servant of Goodman Soame, a potion and shortly afterwards he had died. Nor was this all. This same Widow Lloyd had bewitched Joan Roberts, " servant to Old Higham ", with a piece of apple cake which she gave her. The girl sickened immediately after eating the cake " and then died ".

And there was Mother Osborne, a sister of old Mother Waterhouse whom his lordship had sentenced to death in 1566. Evidence of that trial had been to the effect that Mother Waterhouse had a teat by which she had fed Sathan, her cat-familiar. Well, declared Mother Francis, Mother Osborne had a mark at the end of one of her fingers, and a teat just like her late sister's on the outside of her right leg.

How, asked Mr. Justice Southcote, did she, Elizabeth Francis, know this?

¹ Though I have used the term " familiar ", it had not yet come into general use.

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"I once asked Mother Osborne to show me her leg," she replied, "and when I saw the teat I told Mother Osborne that she had got it by want of well serving God."

None of these disclosures, however, availed her anything, and she was found guilty of bewitching Mrs. Poole. The sentence of Mr. Justice Southcote was the expected one—death by hanging.

Ellen Smith followed Elizabeth Francis into the dock. The main charge against her was of bewitching a four-year-old child. It happened like this.

Ellen Smith's daughter and a Widow Webbe of Maldon quarrelled and came to blows. The daughter told her mother, who became angry and, happening to come upon the four-year-old daughter of Mrs. Webbe, she struck the child a blow in the face. Whereupon "the child sickened, languished for two days, continually crying out 'Away with the witch!' and so died". The morning after the child's death Widow Webbe saw "a thing like a black dog go out at her door, and presently at the sight thereof she fell distraught of her wits".

The prosecution, not content to rest its case on the death of Widow Webbe's child, searched for more evidence of Ellen Smith's witchcraft, and either found her thirteen-year-old son willing to testify against his mother, or coerced him into doing so. It also came upon a neighbour prepared to describe in court the death of Ellen's father, John Chaundler.

The neighbour related how Chaundler had visited his daughter and had demanded from her a sum of money, "which she had got from her mother", Alice Chaundler, who had met her end on the gallows some five years previously. Ellen had refused to part with any of the money, and a fierce quarrel had broken out between father and daughter, with the upshot that, as Chaundler "confessed before he died, no meate digested in him, but ever it came up again as wane as it was down".

Ellen Smith, the daughter of an executed witch, really stood no chance before she entered the dock, but it was the evidence of her

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son which damned her more than any other testimony given against her.

The boy told the Court that one day he had gone to the house of John Eilwood of Maldon and begged for alms, only to be sent away empty-handed. When the boy told his mother, she flew into a rage and cursed Eilwood, whereupon "he had great paines in his bodie".

Eilwood followed the boy into the witness box and confirmed his story, adding that that same night, as he was sitting before his fire with some of his neighbours, they "saw a Ratte run up the chimney, which presently fell down in the likeness of a Toad, which they slipped on the fire with tongs. At the burning it made the fire burn blue and almost put it out". At the very moment that this was happening Ellen Smith was struck "with great paines and she did hasten to Eilwood's house to inquire how they all were".

The boy was recalled and asked if his mother had any spirits, and he replied that she had three. "One she called her Greate Dicke, which was enclosed in a wicker bottle; then her Little Dicke, in a leather bottle; the third, William, she kept in a Woolpack".

On hearing this the Court ordered Ellen Smith's house to be searched at once. The bailiff returned to report that the bottles and the woolpack had been found, but unfortunately the spirits had fled.

The bottles and the woolpack were taken as conclusive evidence of Ellen Smith's guilt. So it was on the word of her own small son that she went to the gallows.

Three charges were preferred against Alice Noakes—bewitching a man to death, bewitching a horse to death, and bewitching a child to death.

The man was a high-spirited young servant of Thomas Spicer of Lamberd Ende. Larking about one day, he snatched her gloves from Mother Noakes's daughter, a woman of twenty-eight. Mother Noakes shouted to the youth to return the gloves, but he ran off laughing, whereupon the old woman exclaimed, "I'll bounce him".

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She had scarcely uttered the words when the boy fell sprawling upon the ground, paralysed in every limb. Neighbours took the gloves from him and returned them to their owner. This did not pacify Mother Noakes, however, and she refused to remove the spell, with the result that his master had to send him home in a wheel-barrow and put him to bed. "There he languished for eight days", and then died.

The bewitching of the horse arose out of a quarrel she had with a man who was ploughing. Losing her temper, she cursed one of the horses and it fell down. The man hurried to his master and told him what had happened. The master came to the scene, and finding Mother Noakes still there, chided her. Shortly afterwards the horse died.

The third charge of bewitching a child to death arose out of a matrimonial quarrel. Alice suspected her husband of having an affair with the wife of "one Tatler of Lamberd Ende". The husband denied it, but Mother Noakes was convinced that the child the woman was expecting was his. It was still-born, and naturally Mother Noakes, in the opinion of everyone, had bewitched it.

This charge and that of bewitching Thomas Spicer's glove-snatching servant were found proved. The jury, however, acquitted her of bewitching the horse to death. Mr. Justice Southcote sentenced her to death.

The main charge against Marjory Staunton was that she had bewitched to death "one white gelding valued at three pounds, and one cow valued at forty shillings". The evidence offered against her, however, was far more copious than in any of the other cases, and had one end in view—to attach to the defendant a history of witchcraft practice. This may have seemed necessary to the prosecution, for unlike any of the other three defendants, Mother Staunton had no family witchcraft background.

The first to testify against her was Thomas Prat, who lived at Broke Walden. He related how Mother Staunton had called at his house one day when he was entertaining John Farrer of Little-

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bury and Tom Swallow. On being asked by one of the three men how she did, she replied that "a knave had beaten her, saying she was a witch".

"In good faith, Mother Staunton," the man had said to her, "I think you be no witch."

"No, master," she had answered, "I know I am none, although I could tell you all about it."

This had roused their curiosity, and they had persuaded her to tell them what she knew. While she spoke, one of them wrote down what she said, and when she had gone they all signed the document and then handed it to Master George Nicholles, another neighbour.

Apparently Prat believed her to be a witch, despite her disclaimer, for when she was at his house on another occasion he scratched her face with a needle, saying "What? You have no flea there?" Mother Staunton was naturally put out somewhat by this treatment and went away muttering to herself. On the following night Prat was suddenly taken so ill, he thought he was dying.

Then, there was a third occasion when she had come to Prat's house carrying some grain. Prat asked her for some, and, when she had inquired what he wanted the grain for, had replied "For my chickens", and had snatched a handful from her. He had fed them to his chickens, but after they had tasted them, all but one had died.

Prat was followed by a witness who testified that Marjory Staunton had called one day at the house of Richard Saunder of Broke Walden and had begged a little yeast. When this was denied her, she had gone away muttering. Immediately a small baby in a cradle was "vehemently sick". The mother had picked it up, but the cradle had continued to rock of its own accord. One of the Earl of Surrey's gentlemen had witnessed the incident and had thrust his dagger into the cradle three or four times, but it continued to rock.

On another day she had called at the house of Robert Petrie of Broke Walden and had asked for various things. Mrs. Petrie had

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not only refused all her requests but had accused her of stealing a knife. This had made Mother Staunton very angry, and that same day the Petries' youngest child "fell strangely sick", and remained so for a year.

Mother Staunton had been in the habit of going every Friday to William Torner's house. One particular Friday she had made a number of requests, all of which were refused. Put out, she asked how many children the Torners had, and was told one. This child was "at once taken sick", writhing in great pain so that the parents doubted whether it would live.

Next John Hopwood came forward and told the Court that Mother Staunton had once asked him for a leather thong. He had refused to give it to her, whereupon his gelding took sick and shortly died.

Hopwood was followed by John Cornell the Younger, who described how he had rejected Mother Staunton's request for milk. At the next milking, and for several thereafter, he averred, his cows gave blood instead of milk.

The wife of the Vicar of Wimbushe then related how Mother Staunton had called at the vicarage one day and made several requests. When these were all refused, the child, who was sitting in his nurse's lap, was taken "ill and like to have died". The vicar was out at the time, but as soon as he returned he offered up prayers, and the child was restored to health.

Robert Lathburie of Wimbushe, "dislykyng her dealyng", also sent her away empty-handed. Within a short time twenty of his pigs fell sick. He burned one of them "and so saved the rest". Then one of his cows was "strangely cast into a narrow gripe", and, though great care was taken of her, "she was in a few days likely to be lost in the mire".

Finally came Robert Cornell of Suerson. Mother Staunton had come to him one day and begged a bottle of milk. When Cornell refused to give her any, she went away, "leaving her own bottle behind and taking another belonging to Cornell". Three days later she returned with the bottle she had taken and asked for her

Matthew Hopkins Witch Finder Generall



A seventeenth-century engraving showing the witch-finder, Matthew Hopkins, with witches and their attendant imps



A witch tied in a sack
is thrown into water, to
swim if she is guilty
and sink if she is in-
nocent

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own bottle back, filled with milk. Mrs. Cornell, though believing her to be a witch, refused to give her her bottle " and bolted the door against her ".

Mother Staunton then sat down a little way from the Cornells' house and drew a circle round her with a knife, and began to dig a number of small holes within the circle. Asked by curious passers-by what she was doing she replied that she was making " a shityng house for herself of that sorte ". But this was obviously a lie, for next day " Wife Cornell began to swell as though she would burst and had still not returned to normal ".

With this mass of evidence against her, probably no one was more surprised than Mrs. Staunton was when she heard the judge direct the jury to return a verdict of not guilty. She was fortunate in having as her judge Mr. Justice Gawdy instead of Southcote, who had heard the cases against Elizabeth Francis, Alice Noakes and Ellen Smith and had sentenced them to death. Had Southcote presided at the trial of Marjory Staunton he would, more likely than not, have stopped the case half-way through the evidence and directed the jury to return a verdict of guilty. But Gawdy was less of a witch-hunter and almost with relief pounced upon a technicality which allowed him to take the action he did. The indictment against Mrs. Staunton had been carelessly drawn—the owner or owners of the gelding and cow had not been named, and the charge was therefore too vague for a conviction to be acceptable.

On the day following their sentencing Elizabeth Francis, Ellen Smith and Alice Noakes were hanged together at the place of execution in Chelmsford. Mother Staunton seems to have escaped further prosecution, for she appears no more in the official records of the Essex assizes.

Though the case of Ellen Smith is the only one of the four to be of special interest to us here, I have related the charges against the other three women in some detail, because they reveal in sharp relief the witchcraft concepts that were evolving in the countryside and which, as the years passed, were to become more closely defined and to be found in practically every account of a trial of

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a village witch. Here we have again the fear of *maleficia* produced by ignorance. Anything that went wrong with a person or a beast when the cause of the illness was not immediately discernible could only be attributed to the malicious activities of the Devil performed through his disciples, the witches. From the brief description of the illness of John Cornell the Younger's cows, for example, that "at the next milking, and for several thereafter, his cows gave blood instead of milk", it is safe to assume that the beasts were suffering either from mastitis or anthrax, since the passing of blood through the udders is a symptom of both diseases. Mastitis is more likely to be the answer in this case, for anthrax would almost certainly have killed all the cows afflicted, and there is no mention of their dying. So little was known of veterinary science in the sixteenth century that every old woman in a village, living on her own, with a pet or two for company, who grew cross-grained and misanthropic in her loneliness, stood in grave danger of a charge of witchcraft being preferred against her if a horse went lame, or a cow was "strangely cast into a narrow gripe". Equally, the sudden illness of a child, a man, or a woman at once created a grave suspicion against the ancient crones. Nor did the danger emanate only from the sickness and unaccountable deaths of human beings and animals; if the butter in the churn would not turn, if the milk in the pan curdled, if the beer went sour, the threat of witchcraft was just as great.

The American witchcraft expert, Wallace Notestein, comments on these Second Chelmsford Trials, "The Chelmsford cases find their greatest significance . . . because they exemplify the continuity of the witch movement." Certainly they must have created throughout Essex, great excitement which the pamphlet describing the cases undoubtedly helped to spread far beyond the county borders. In my view, however, while I agree with this assessment by Notestein, even greater significance attaches to them an account of the abuse of evidence which the Court permitted, and especially in the case of Ellen Smith.

As I have remarked, this young woman was as good as con-

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victed before she entered the dock and stood before Mr. Justice Southcote, simply because her mother had been hanged as a witch. But the introduction of her thirteen-year-old son—who was probably a bastard, since there is no mention of a husband or other children, and even as short a period ago as fifty years (in the time of my own children) illegitimate children were a feature of every remote East Anglian village—the introduction of this small boy at her trial was both an abuse of justice and a symbol of the nastiness of the times.

Here, as with the testimony of Agnes Brown in the First Chelmsford Trial, there are *prima facie* signs of adult prompting. Though, as I have said, bastards formed a part of most rural communities, they were regarded rather as outcasts. Children are particularly sensitive to the form of alleged social stigma, which was as sharply deprecated in Elizabeth's day among the lower, yeoman and lesser gentry classes, despite the difference in sexual moral values, as it has been up to recent times. The thirteen-year-old son of Ellen Smith could very easily have been coerced either by promises or threats, into giving evidence against his mother. On the other hand, it seems to me that his evidence relating to the bottles and the woolpack in which his mother's familiars lived was spontaneous. The discovery of these articles in Ellen Smith's cottage, although the "sprytes" had fled, was the most damning of all the evidence offered against her, and this fact serves to underline the advantage taken by the authorities of this illegal class of testimony. It is also sad that children should be the unwitting cause of their parents' suffering under the encouragement of overt persuasion and the excitement of being, for a brief moment, the most important person amid the solemnities and publicity of an assize court.

4

THE ST. OSYTH WITCH CASE

IT CAN be claimed that the example of the Essex authorities in this matter of child-witnesses was the greatest influencing factor in the spread of the practice throughout the country. Within three years of the Second Chelmsford Trial, another *cause célèbre* was staged in Chelmsford, though in witchcraft records it is referred to as the St. Osyth witch case.

The case was, in fact, one of the most remarkable in the history of English witchcraft, by reason of the licence which the presiding judges permitted to be taken with the law and with the rules governing evidence. Not only did a number of small children between the ages of 6 and 9 appear as witnesses, but hearsay evidence was also admitted. It is of special interest to students of witchcraft history for these reasons, and also for such other revelations emerging from it relating to the development of witchcraft beliefs in England since the passing of the 1563 Act. Even the most cursory reading impresses upon one the credulity which had come into being *vis-à-vis* witchcraft practices during the short space of twenty years and the establishment of a kind of special attitude towards witches which had grown up in the courts. Specifically, the St. Osyth case demonstrates the restricted nature of the English witchcraft tradition because of the role played in it by village feuds. These, though more often than not of little account in themselves, time and time again form the basis of the case and the foundations upon which the indictments were drawn.

St. Osyth is still a small village of under 2,000 inhabitants. In 1582 it was even smaller. In this tiny, isolated community lived

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Ursley Kempe, alias Gray, who scratched together a living by acting as midwife to her neighbours, occasionally hiring herself out as a wet-nurse, practising a little white witchcraft, chiefly 'unwitching' the sick, and marketing her sexual favours.

A neighbour who made use of her services was a certain Grace Thurlowe, wife of John Thurlowe. Grace's youngest son fell sick, and, upon hearing this, Ursley Kempe called at the Thurlowe house to ask how the child was, probably hoping to profit from an offer to 'unwitch' the child. Mrs. Thurlowe asked her to look at the child, and, sitting by his cot, Ursley took him by the hand and repeated three times, "A good childe, howe art thou laden". A little later, as she got up to go, Mrs. Thurlowe asked her to return in the evening to share the nursing of the child through the night, but Ursley said this would not be necessary as the boy would begin to improve from now on. She proved right, for the boy slept soundly throughout the night, and next day was almost better.

Next day Mother Kempe met Mrs. Thurlowe in the village and asked after the patient. When Mrs. Thurlowe said he was much better, Ursley replied, "Aye, I told thee it would do well". Neither now or previously had Mother Kempe asked for payment.

This had happened in 1581. A few months later, Grace Thurlowe gave birth to a daughter. As she was working for Bryan Darcy, the lord of the manor and local magistrate, Ursley Kempe suggested to her that, since it would be difficult for her, in view of her duties at the manor, to nurse the baby herself, she should put it to her to wet-nurse. However, Mrs. Thurlowe's experience of Mother Kempe's cure of her sick son had convinced her that the old woman was a witch, and, not caring for the idea of having a child of hers suckled by a witch, she refused Ursley's offer.

Ursley complained a little, but made no threats. Nevertheless, three months later, the baby fell out of its cot, broke its neck and died. At the time, Mrs. Thurlowe did not connect Ursley with the child's death.

Three months after the child died, Grace was stricken with a

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bad bout of rheumatism. Though she had not been summoned, Ursley went to her and undertook to cure her for twelve pence. Grace agreed to pay her this money provided she was cured.

The rheumatism left her almost at once, and at the end of five weeks, during which time Grace had been free of pain, Mother Kempe called on her and asked for the twelve pence. Grace told her that she could not pay her because she had not the money, and a quarrel developed, which ended with Ursley going away muttering that she would be revenged on Grace. Within a few days, Grace's rheumatism had returned worse than before.

When there was no improvement in her condition after a time, Grace decided that Ursley Kempe had bewitched her. Instead of paying Ursley her fee and asking her to remove the spell, Grace went to Mr. Darcy, her employer, and told him the whole story, to which a friend, Annis Letherdall, added her testimony regarding the witchhood of Mother Kempe. She claimed that some time before Ursley had sent her son to the Letherdalls' house to ask for some scouring sand, in return for which she offered "the dyeing of a pair of women's hose". Annis Letherdall refused the request because, she told Darcy, she knew Ursley to be "a naughty beast".

A day or two later, the youngest Letherdall child fell ill "with a great swelling of its belly and other privy parts", and on 10th February she had gone to Ursley Kempe and accused her, on the word of a wise-woman whom she had consulted, of bewitching her child. Ursley had, somewhat naturally, denied the charge.

On the following day, however, the child was so ill that Annis Letherdall took it to another wise-woman, a Mother Ratcliffe, who had a reputation for being able to 'unwitch'. Mother Ratcliffe, however, had said that she did not think her powers were strong enough to enable her to help the child.

As a result of Grace Thurlowe's and Annis Letherdall's complaints, Darcy ordered Ursley Kempe to be brought before him in his capacity as magistrate. It is worth noting that there are strong indications that Darcy was an ambitious man, and that he hoped, by being responsible for launching a witchcraft trial of

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some significance to enhance his reputation throughout the county and with the authorities.

Ursley Kempe began by denying all that Grace Thurlowe and Annis Letherdall had told the magistrate. However, when Darcy extended his examination of her, she began to weaken, and eventually described to him how, some ten or eleven years ago, a successful 'white' witch, Mother Cocke, whom she had consulted for an intolerable "lameness of her bones", had diagnosed bewitching and had taught her how she could 'unwitch' herself.

Mother Cocke's method for achieving this, though not important to our present narrative, is very interesting, since it gives a detailed example of the extraordinary practices which were beginning to form the canon of English witchcraft. She was to take some hog's dung mixed with cherwell, and, holding it in her left hand, she was to prick it three times with a knife held in her right hand. She was then to throw 'the medicine' on the fire and immediately prick the underside of her table three times with the same knife. Having done this, she was to make up a concoction consisting of three sage leaves and three leaves of Herb John steeped in ale, and was to drink a draught of it night and morning. The treatment was rapidly and entirely successful.

If Mother Cocke could do this, she could see no reason why she should not be as successful herself. So when William Page's wife and a Mrs. Gray "were struck lame" and sent for her, she told them they were bewitched and prescribed Mother Cocke's cure, which had proved efficacious.

This confession of harmless 'white' witchcraft, instead of satisfying Darcy that she was really a harmless amateur herbalist, merely convinced him that he had before him a 'black' witch of sinister powers. To encourage her to betray herself in this role, Darcy resorted to the despicable ruse of promising her clemency if she would make a full confession of her witchcraft practices. It was an outrageous promise, since it was one that he could not keep, for it was quite outside his province to show clemency—the prerogative of a much higher power than he.

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Ursley Kempe, the illiterate and by now frightened village woman, was completely deceived by this promise, and, in tears, began to talk freely. She told him that she had four familiars—" 2 hees ", Tyffin and Jack, and " 2 shees ", Pagine and Tyttey. The males she used to punish and kill; the females to inflict lameness and other bodily harm. She confessed that she had sent Tyttey to punish Grace Thurlowe and Pagine to afflict the Letherdall child with " a great swelling in the bottom of its belly and other privy parts ". Tyffin had rocked the Thurlowes' baby's cradle until it turned over and the child broke its neck in the fall.

Within a few minutes, Ursley Kempe had provided Darcy with enough evidence upon which to hang her. Delighted with his success, he decided to pause in his interrogation for supper.

When he had eaten, he had Ursley brought before him again, and this time confronted her with Grace Thurlowe and with Annis Letherdall who had her 'bewitched' child with her. The child, a girl, was clearly very ill, for " the privie and kinde parts thereof were in a most strange and wonderfull case ". (It died a few days later.) Mrs. Letherdall now added a convincing gloss to her story. When she had taken the child to Mother Ratcliffe, she said, she had had to pass Ursley Kempe's house, and, both going and coming back, as they passed the house, the child, though only nine months old, had " pointed window-wards and cried out, Wo, wo, wo "

By now Ursley Kempe had lost all her initial spirit, and, on hearing this story, she fell on her knees before Darcy and begged for mercy. Darcy, however, decided he had done enough for that day, ordered Ursley to be locked up for the night with the constable.

Ursley clearly spent part of the night in reflection and realised the harm she had done to herself, for when she came before Darcy next morning, she made a desperate attempt to make him honour his promise of clemency by proposing to 'discover' other witches. Darcy, scarcely daring to believe his good fortune, urged her to do so, and now began a series of denunciations that was to bring

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at least a dozen persons into the dock at the next Chelmsford assizes, among whom was one man.

Ursley denounced her friend, Ales Newman, who had, she said, associated in her witchcraft practices. After a quarrel, which they subsequently made up, she had given Ales her "Spirits" and Ales had "carried them away in a pot". Thereafter, when she wished to inflict punishment on neighbours who crossed her, she asked Ales to send such and such a spirit to carry out the punishment. She also denounced Elizabeth Bennet, another neighbour, telling Darcy that when she had gone to the Bennets' house for milk one morning and had had no reply to her knocking, she had peeped through the window and had seen "a spirit lift up a cloth lying over a pot, looking much like a ferret".

She had hurried home at once and consulted her own familiar, Tyffin, who, "did tell her alwayes (when she asked) what the other witches had done . . . which spirit telled her alwayes true". Tyffin told her that Elizabeth Bennet had two spirits, a black dog called Suckyn, and Lyerd, which was "redde like a Lyon". Finally, she said that Mychell Stevens, the St. Osyth shoemaker, had told her that Annis Glascocke had bewitched his child to death and "the Pages' bastard".

Ursley's denunciation of Elizabeth Bennet was corroborated by William Bonner, who claimed that "Elizabeth Bennet and my wife are lovers and familiar friends and accompany much together". Bonner then, at first sight paradoxically, went on to accuse Mrs. Bennet of bewitching his wife "her lover and familiar friend". The paradox disappears, however, as soon as one perceives that Bonner was motivated by fear. It was well known that his wife and Mrs. Bennet were intimate friends, and his claim that Mrs. Bennet bewitched his wife was clearly made in the hope that, if Mrs. Bennet was arrested, his wife, who would risk a similar fate on account of her friendship with Mrs. Bennet, would be protected by having been bewitched rather than be involved in her friend's witchcraft activities.

Darcy was now well away on the road to his *cause célèbre*, and

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he ordered Mrs. Bennet's arrest. He tried to coerce her into confessing, but, when she strenuously resisted all his attempts, he resorted to the same false promise of clemency with which he had induced Ursley Kempe to talk. The very detailed contemporary pamphlet from which these particulars are taken, was written by a certain W. W. in collaboration with Darcy, and in it the author records that the magistrate had the effrontery to tell him how he had persuaded Mrs. Bennet to confess.

Then I, calling her unto me, saide, Elizabeth as thou wilt have favour, confesse the truth. For so it is, there is a man of great cunning and knowledge come over lately unto our Queenes Maiestie, which hath advertised her what a companie and number of Witches be within England.

He was clearly referring to Bishop Jewel who, not lately, but twenty years earlier, had preached his famous sermon before Elizabeth. Not content, however, to distort the facts thus, he continued in a downright lie,

Whereupon I and other of her Justices have received Commission for apprehending of as many as are within these limites, and they which doe confesse the truth of their doings, they shall have much favour: but the other they shall bee burnt and hanged. At which speeches the saide Elizabeth falling upon her knees distilling teares confessed

Utterly deceived by the three patent falsehoods this statement contained, Elizabeth Bennet admitted that she had two familiars called Suckyn and Lyerd, and that she had bewitched to death the wives of William Byette, William Woltingalle and William Willes and had bewitched William Bonner's wife (her lover and familiar friend), John Butlers and the Fortunes' child, "whereof they did languish".

The momentum was now gathering pace. Ursley Kempe continued her denunciations, putting the finger on Ales Hunt and her

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sister Margery Sammon. Ales Hunt in turn denounced Margery Sammon and added a name of her own, Joan Pechy. Meanwhile other villagers were coming forward with other names, and soon Darcy's officers were rounding up their victims in St. Osyth and the surrounding countryside until sixteen were accused, one of whom was a man.

It was now that Darcy enhanced his despicable reputation as a witch-hunter. He had brought before him Ursley Kempe's eight-year-old bastard, Thomas Rabbet, and questioned him closely. The little boy corroborated his mother's admission that she had four familiars, and disclosed that he had often seen Ursley give them a white loaf or a cake, and beer, and how at night they sucked her blood on her arms and other parts of her body. He agreed, too, that Ales Newman, who was his godmother, had often visited Ursley, that they had quarrelled, then made up their differences and that Ursley had given Ales an earthenware pot in which he believed his mother had kept her familiars. A few days later Ales had come to Ursley and told her that she had sent "a spirit to plague Johnson and another to plague his wife".

Encouraged by his success with Thomas Rabbet, Darcy sent for Annis Herd's small daughter, Annis Dowsing, and asked her if her mother had any familiars. "Yes," the child told him, "she has 5 avices or blackbirds white speckled or all black. In another box 6 spirits like cows as big as rats, which have little short horns and lie in the box on black and white wool."

Next Darcy summoned to him Henry Celles, the nine-year-old son of Cicely Celles, who was accused of bewitching Thomas Death's child to death, of bewitching "Rosses mayde, Mary Death, whereof she did languish", and, in company with Ales Manfiede, of bewitching "Richard Rosses horse and beasts and causing their limpes to burne a barne with much corne".

If young Thomas Rabbet and Annis Dowsing displayed a lively imagination—for in my view Thomas's description of the feeding habits of his mother's familiars, and Annis's of her mother's "6 spirits like cows as big as rats, which have little short horns" were

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unprompted, though the rest of their evidence could have been and I think was put into their mouths by Darcy or someone else present at their examination—they were outshone in this respect by Henry Celles. Henry related that a familiar came to his brother John,

and took him by the left leg, and also by the little toe, which was like his sister, but that it was all black. At which time his brother cried out and said, "Father, father, come help me! There is a black thing hath me by the leg, as big as my sister!" Whereat his father said to his mother, "Why, thou whore, cannot you keep your impes from my children?" Whereat she presently called it away from her son, saying "Come away, come away." At which speech it did depart.

Henry continued that he was so frightened by the incident that "he sweat for fear, and that he could scarce get his shirt from his back".

His mother, who had been following his testimony with growing incredulity, found her voice at last, but all she would say was, "Thou liest, thou liest, whoreson!" Throughout all subsequent proceedings she refuted all the charges brought against her, and, though the jury found her guilty, she was, surprisingly for the times, reprieved. She was fortunate, as was Annis Herd, who, despite the weight of the evidence against her, was actually found not guilty. In fact, when everything was put in order Bryan Darcy did not have quite the *succes fou* he had schemed for. No True Bill was found against two of his intended victims and they were discharged; no indictment of witchcraft was drawn against two others, who, however, were kept in prison on suspicion of having committed other felonies; four, who pleaded not guilty and put up a most spirited defence, were acquitted; four, who had also entered pleas of not guilty, were convicted, sentenced to death but reprieved; and two, Ursley Kempe and Elizabeth Bennet, were found guilty and hanged.

It was, in fact, one of the strangest witchcraft trials in English

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history. That only two out of fourteen arrested were hanged does give a certain satisfaction. Nevertheless, it was the use of children as witnesses against parents and grand-parents by the examining magistrate and accepted by the trial judges that makes the St. Osyth case so notorious. But even more interesting than this fact—for the precedent established in the trial of 1566 was too useful a one not to be followed, and by 1582 the introduction of child witnesses should no longer greatly surprise us—is the new factor introduced here; that the children themselves, after the initial prompting by Darcy, produced their own embellishments, which were pure figments of their imagination. This, in my submission, is an important indication of the spread of witchcraft knowledge as a whole. By 1582 small children of 6, 7 and 8 were so knowledgeable about the practice of witchcraft and the attributes of witches that they could invent descriptions so plausible as to be entirely acceptable by educated magistrates and learned judges, without specific promptings from adults.

5

THE PENDLE FOREST WITCHES I

IN THE nature of things, it could not be long before children became the principal accusers of witches; and, indeed, this happened in just one year over the decade after the St. Osyth trial. I shall be dealing with the Children of Warboys in a subsequent chapter, but I must state here that the Warboys case had the widest ramifications, and was, in fact, the prototype for the notorious Salem case in America exactly a century later (1692). The Warboys case, however, is of a different type from those we are considering in this chapter, and though its fame was to cross the Atlantic, and though there is evidence that what had happened at Warboys in 1593 had become known in the countryside around Derby and Nottingham within three or four years, I doubt very much whether it had reached and penetrated the Forest of Pendle, in Lancashire, by 1612. I base this conclusion on the fact that whereas the Derby case (known as the Burton Boy) of 1595, and the Nottingham case of 1597 have definite similarities with the Warboys case, the case of the Pendle Forest witches in 1612 has characteristics that are entirely its own, apart from its major significance, namely, that it was the first case in English witchcraft history which had a reference to the witches' gathering, later to be called the sabbat.

In his introduction to the facsimile reproduction of the famous chap-book published by Peter Davies in London in 1929, G. B. Harrison says:

The beginnings of the Lancaster case go back to about 1591. In that

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year the Council had made great efforts to suppress Catholicism. A new proclamation was issued in the autumn and Ecclesiastical Commissioners were appointed all over the country to search out and deal with Jesuits and recusants. In Lancashire, however, the commissioners had failed; the ministers of the Church of England had no hold over the people, and the law was defied. The churches were empty, the people refused instruction, preachers were few, and unlearned ministers were being thrust into livings; drunkenness and bastardy were rife; marriages and baptisms were celebrated by Catholic priests in secret. In such conditions secret societies flourish

This is part of the back-cloth against which the Lancashire witches operated in the somewhat sinister Pendle Forest, on the Yorkshire-Lancashire border overlooking the valley of the Ribble.

The principal character in the case was an old crone called Elizabeth Sowthern, better known by her alias, Old Demdike. In 1612 she was eighty years old and blind. About 1590 or 1591, Old Demdike was one day

comming homeward from begging. [As she came] neere unto a Stone pit in Gouldshey, in the sayd Forrest of Pendle [she was met by] a Spirit or Devill in the shape of a Boy, the one halfe of his Coate blacke, and the other browne, who bade her stay, saying to her, that if she would give him her Soule, she should have anything she would request. Whereupon she demaunded his name? and the Spirit answered, his name was Tibb . . . In hope of such gaine as was promised by the sayd Devill or Tibb (she) was contented to give her Soule to the said Spirit: And for the space of five or six yeares next after, the sayd Spirit or Devill appeared at sundry times unto her about Day-light Gate, alwayes bidding her stay, and asking her what she would have or doe? To whom she replied, Nay nothing: for she said she wanted nothing yet. And so about the end of the said sixe yeares, upon a Sabbath day in the morning she, having a little Child upon her knee, and she being in a slumber, the sayd Spirit appeared unto her in the likenes of a browne Dogge, forcing himselfe

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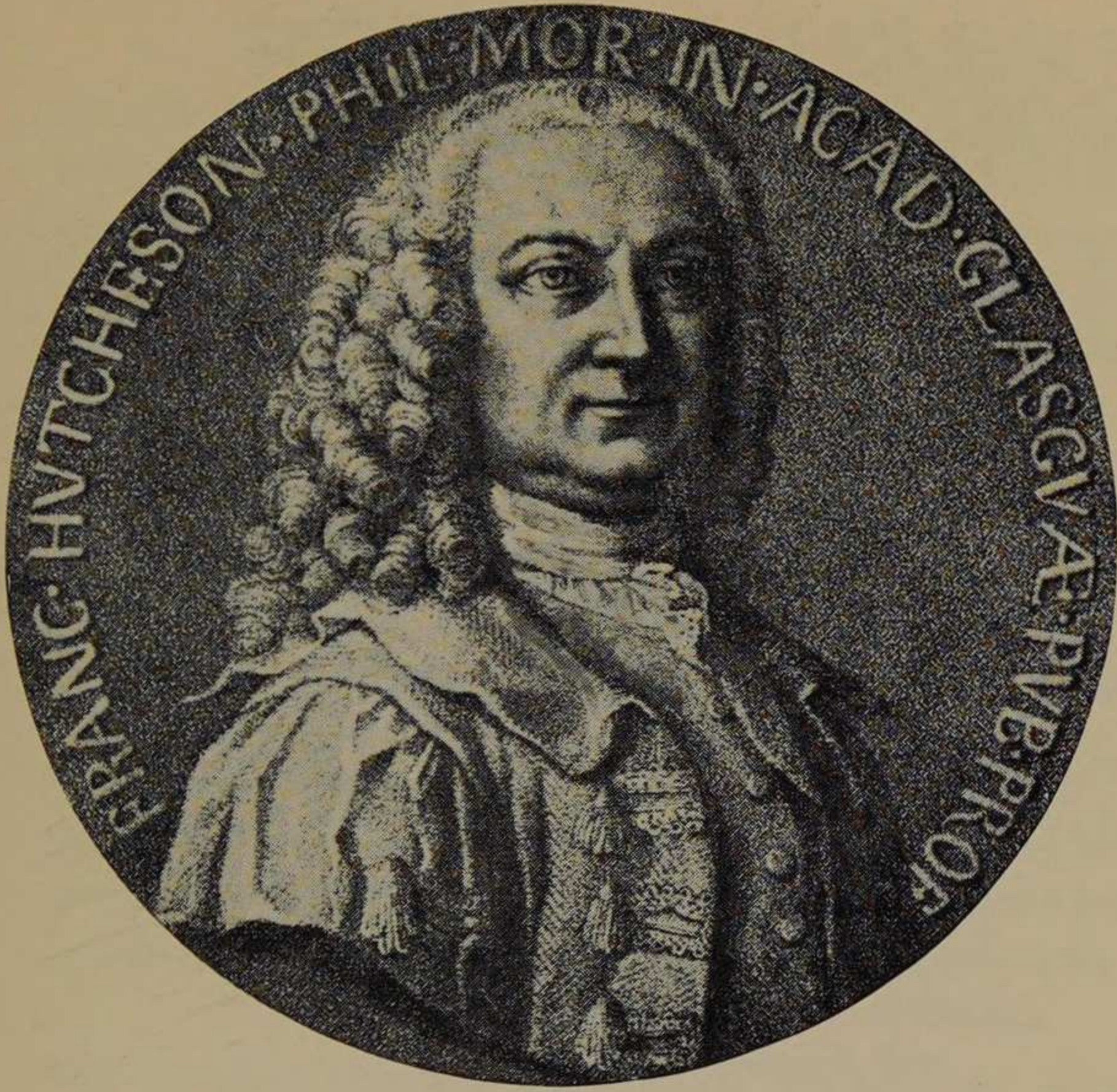
to her knee, to get blood under her left Arme: and she being without any apparrell saving her Sursake, the said Devill did get blood under her left Arme. And this Examine waking, sayd, *Jesus, save my Child*; but had no power, nor could not say, *Jesus save her selfe*. Whereupon the Browne Dogge vanished out of sight; after which, this Examine was almost starke madd for the space of eight weekes.

So begins the story of Old Demdike's downfall. Some five years later, having become deeply involved in witchcraft by this time, she persuaded a neighbour, Ann Whittle, whose alias was Old Chattox, to join her in "most barbarous and damnable practices, murders, wicked and devilish conspiracies". Soon they had brought into their activities their daughters, Elizabeth Device (daughter of Old Demdike) and Anne Redfearn (daughter of Old Chattox), and other relations and friends.

For some years the goings-on of this quite considerable band was a principal subject of conversation in the countryside round-about the Pendle Forest. By 1612 it had reached the proportions of a public scandal, and the local magistrate, Roger Nowell, decided that the time had come for him to take action. So he had Old Demdike brought before him on "suspicion of witchcraft by common report". However optimistic he might have been, he could not have hoped for the success he actually achieved by this reconnaissance.

Old Demdike decided to unburden her soul, and the passage from her confession which I have quoted above, is but the prelude to the fantastic story she had to tell. She went on:

... a little before Christmas last, her daughter having been to helpe Richard Baldwyns Folkes at the Mill, the Daughter did bid her goe to the said Baldwyns house, and aske him some thing for her helping at his Folkes at the Mill, (as aforesaid) and in going to the said Baldwyns house she [Old Demdike] met with Richard Baldwyn; Which Baldwyn sayd to her and Alizon Device [her granddaughter] who at that time ledde her, being blinde, get out of my ground Whores and Witches, I will burne the one of you and hang



Bishop Francis Hutcheson, the great eighteenth-century debunker of witchcraft, author of *An Historical Essay Concerning Witchcraft* (1718), in which he discusses the Nottingham Boy

The author of *Religio Medici* and *Urn Burial*, Sir Thomas Browne, who was present at the hearing of the Bury St. Edmunds Case





The discoverie of witchcraft,

Wherein the lewde dealing of witches
and witchmongers is notablie detected, the
knauerie of coniuors, the impietic of inchan-
tors, the follie of soothsaiers, the impudent fals-
hood of cousenors, the infidelitic of atheists,
the pestilent practises of Pythonists, the
curiositie of figurecasters, the va-
nitie of dreamers, the begger-
lic art of Alcu-
mystric,

The abhominacion of idolatric, the hor-
rible art of poisoning, the vertue and power of
naturall magike, and all the conueiances
of Legierdemaine and iuggling are deciphered:
and many other things opened, which
haue long lien hidden, howbeit
verie necessarie to
be knowne.

Heerevnto is added a treatise vpon the
nature and substance of spirits and diuels,
&c: all latelie written
by Reginald Scot
Esquire.

1. Iohn 4, 1.

Beleeue not euerie spirit, but trie the spirits, whether they are
of God; for manie false prophets are gone
out into the world, &c.

1584

The title page of *The Discovery of Witchcraft* by Reginald Scot, the sixteenth-century witchcraft sceptic

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the other. To whom she answered : I care not for thee, hang thy selfe. Presently whereupon at her going over the next hedge, the said Spirit or Divell called Tibb appeared unto her and sayd, *Revenge thee of him.* To whom she sayd again to the said Spirit, *Revenge thee eyther of him or his.* And so the sad spirit vanished out of her sight, and she never saw him since. And further she confesseth, and sayth, that the speediest way to take a man's life away by Witchcraft, is to make a Picture of Clay, like unto the shape of the person whom they meane to kill, and dry it thorowly : and when they would have them to be ill in any one place more then [*sic*] an other ; then take a Thorne or Pinne, and prick it in that part of the Picture you would so have to be ill : and when you would have any part of the Body to consume away, then take that part of the Picture and burne it. And when they would have the whole body to consume away, then take the remnant of the sayed Picture, and burne it : and so thereupon by that means, the body shall die.

Old Chattox was also implicated, and she and Alison Device were brought in for questioning. Old Chattox corroborated Old Demdike's testimony that she was

seduced to condescend and agree to become subject unto that divelish abhominable profession of Witchcraft : Soone after which, the Divell appeared to her in the liknes of a Man, about midnight, at the house of the sayd Demdike ; and thereupon the sayd Demdike and shee, went foorth of the said house unto him ; whereupon the said wicked Spirit mooved her, that she would become his Subject, and give her Soule unto him : the which at first, she refused to assent unto ; but after, by great persuasions made by the sayd Demdike, she yielded to be at his commandement and appoyntment : where upon the sayd wicked Spirit then sayd unto her, that hee must have one part of her body for him to sucke upon ; the which shee denyed then to graunt unto him, and withall asked him, what part of her body hee would have for that use ; who said, hee would have a place of her right side neere to her ribbes, for him to sucke upon : whereunto shee assented.

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She went on to describe how another "Spirit", "a thing in the likenes of a spotted Bitch", had accompanied her "Spirit" and had told Old Demdike in her hearing that she "should have Gould, Silver and wordly (*sic*) Wealth at her will". She also said that on this occasion the spirits provided them with a feast of meat, butter, cheese, bread and drink.

And after their eating, the Divell called Francie, and the other Spirit calling himselfe Tibbe, carried the remnant away: And she sayeth that although they did eate, they were never the fuller, nor better for the same; and that at their said Banquet, the said Spirits gave them light to see what they did, although they neyther had fire nor Candle light; and that they were both shee Spirites, and Divels.

Finally, she confessed that she, Old Demdike and Widdow Lomshawe, now dead, had bewitched Robert Nutter, late of the Greene-head in Pendle, to death; and claimed that Old Demdike had told her that she had bewitched to death "Richard Ashton, Sonne of Richard Ashton of Downsham Esquire".

Master Nowell next examined Alison Device, Old Demdike's granddaughter, who corroborated the old woman's story of the quarrel with Richard Baldwin and the bewitching of one of Baldwin's daughters to death in revenge.

Not yet satisfied, Nowell then had James Device, Alison's brother, brought to him. James related a strange story, obviously designed to confirm Old Demdike's witchcraft. He told of hearing "a voyce of a great number of Children screiking and crying pitifully" not far from his grandmother's house, and, five nights later, "a foule yelling like unto a great number of Cattes", in almost the same place. He told, too, of being present when Henry Bullocke had come to Old Demdike's house and accused Alison of bewitching his child, and that Alison had fallen to her knees, confessed that she had done so, and begged his forgiveness.

Nowell now decided to act, and he ordered the arrest of Old Demdike, Old Chattox, Alison Device, though she was only

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eleven years old, and Old Chattox's daughter, Anne Redfearn. The prisoners were taken to Lancaster castle to await trial at the next assizes. The experience was too much for the aged Mother Demdike, and she died before she could be brought to trial.

Now comes perhaps the most extraordinary feature of this extraordinary case. Their children and friends, led by Elizabeth Device, Old Demdike's daughter and Alison's mother, arranged a special meeting at Malking Tower, in the Forest of Pendle, on Good Friday,

of all the most dangerous, wicked and damnable Witches in the County farre and neere. Upon Good-fryday they met, according to solemne appoyntment, solemnized this great Festivall day according to their former order, with great cheare, merry company and much conference.

This, as I have earlier remarked, is the first reference in English witchcraft history, to a meeting of witches resembling the classic sabbat, so prominent a feature of Continental witchcraft records. All the company sat down to a good feast, consisting of beef, bacon and roast mutton—the latter had been stolen by James Device—and over their meal they planned to kill the Governor of Lancaster castle, blow the castle up and release Old Demdike, Old Chattox, Alison Device and Elizabeth Redfearn. When the party was over they all mounted white foals and flew away.

They had absolutely no idea of security, and news of the meeting was soon all round the countryside. Nowell heard of it, and on 27th April he ordered the arrests of a further nine people, including Elizabeth Device, the mother of Alison, James Device, her son and Alice Nutter, mother of the dead Richard Nutter, allegedly bewitched to death by Old Chattox and Anne Redfearn. Jennet Preston, one of those seized, was sent to York assizes, where she was arraigned, convicted and hanged for bewitching to death a neighbour called Lister. The rest were committed to the Lancaster assizes which opened before Mr. Justice Althan and Mr. Justice Bromley on 17th August 1612.

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The judges took particular pride in the objectivity with which they conducted the trial. Nevertheless, the proceedings contained several features which denied justice to the accused. Among them was the introduction and acceptance of hearsay evidence relating to events that had happened some time previously, some of them as long as twenty years earlier; the admission of a small child's evidence against her mother, which was the principal cause of her death; and the encouragement given to many of the accused to give evidence against each other without the protection normally afforded to those turning Queen's evidence.

Jennet Device, though only nine years old, was undoubtedly the star of the trial. She must have been a precocious, quick-thinking child, since she evaded one or two traps set for her by the judge. On the other hand, it would seem that, despite their lowly background, the Device children all had more than their natural share of wits. Jennet's older sister Alison, who was one of the prisoners, convicted and, though only eleven years old, hanged, on her own confession was as practised a witch as any of those in the dock. She apparently had her own familiar. Her brother James, in evidence, stated

That upon Good-Friday last about twelve of the clocke in the day-time, there dined in his mother's house a number of persons whereof three were men, and the rest women: and that they met there for these three causes following (as this Examinates said mother told this Examinee): First was for the naming of the Spirit, which Alison Device, now Prisoner at Lancaster, had, but did not name him, because she was not there.

Her confession reads like the confession of an adult accused of witchcraft and proud to acknowledge the fact. She told Mr. Justice Bromley, as she had examining magistrate Nowell at his inquiry,

That about two yeares agoe, her Grandmother, called Elizabeth Sothernes, alias Dembdike [*sic*] did (sundry times in going or walk-

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ing together, as they went begging) persuade and advise her to let a Divell or a Familiar appeare to her, and that shee would let him suck at some part of her; and she might have and doe what shee would. And so not long after these persuasion, she being walking towards the Rough-Lee, in a Close of one John Robinsons, there appeared unto her a thing like unto a Blacke-Dogge: speaking unto her and desiring her to give him her Soule, and he would give her power to doe any thing she would: whereupon she being therewithall inticed, and setting her downe; the said Blacke-Dogge did with his mouth (as she then thought) sucke at her breast, a little below her Paps, which place did remaine blew halfe a year next after: which said Blacke-Dogge did not appear to her untill the eighteenth day of March last: at which time she met with a Pedler in the high-way, called Colne-field, neere unto Colne: and this Examinee demanded of the said Pedler to buy some pinnies of him; but the said Pedler sturdily answered her that he would not loose his Packe; and so she parting with him: presently there appeared to her the Blacke-Dogge, which appeared unto her as before: which Blacke-Dogge spoke unto her in English, saying; What wouldst thou have me to do unto yonder man? to whom she said, What canst thou do at him? and the Dogge answered again, I can lame him: whereupon she answered, and said to the said Blacke-Dogge, Lame him: and before the Pedler was gone fortie Roddes further, he fell downe lame: and she then went after the said Pedler; and in a house about the distance aforesaid, he was lying lame: and so she went begging in Trawden Forrest that day, and came home at night: and about five daies next after, the Blacke-Dogge did appeare to her, as she was going a begging, in a Close neere the New-Church in Pendle, and spake again to her, saying; Stay and speake with me; but she would not: Sithence which time she never saw him.

The author of the famous chap-book, Thomas Potts, the Clerk of Assize, comments at this point,

My Lord Bromley (the judge), and all the whole Court not a little wondering, as they had good cause, at this liberall and voluntarie confession of the Witch; which is not ordinary with people of their condition and qualitie: and beholding also the poor distressed Pedler,

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standing by, commanded him upon his oath to declare the manner how, and in what sort he was handled; how he came to be lame, and so to be deformed.

Having been sworn, the pedlar, a man named John Lowe, corroborated Alison's confession and went on to give details of the affliction which suddenly overtook him. The symptoms suggest that he actually suffered a mild stroke. In his evidence following his father's testimony, Abraham Lowe, the son, described John Lowe as having been

a verie able sufficient stout man of Bodie, and a goodly man of stature, before his unfortunate meeting with this Witch. But by this Devilish art of Witchcraft his head is drawne awrie, his Eyes and face deformed, His speech not well to be understood; his Thighes and Legges starcke lame: his Armes lame especially the left side, his handes lame and turned out of their course, his Bodie able to induce no travell: and thus remaineth at this present time. [The little girl, however, sincerely believed that she had bewitched the pedler, and] knowing her selfe to be guiltie of every particular, humbly acknowledged the Indictment against her to be true.

The nine-year-old Jennet, as I have remarked, could have—and probably had been a witch-in-the-making. Her evidence illuminates her in a most extraordinary way.

Her mother, Elizabeth Device, Old Demdike's daughter, was brought forward on three indictments:

[One,] that shee feloniously had practized, used and exercised divers wicked and devilish Arts, called Witch-crafts, Inchantments, Charmes and Sorceries, in, and upon one John Robinson, alias Swyer: and by force of the same feloniously, the said John Robinson, alias Swyer, had killed; [two,] The said Elizabeth Device was the second time indicted in the same manner and forme, for the death of James Robinson, by Witch-craft; [three,] The said Elizabeth Device, was the third time with others viz. Alice Nutter, and Elizabeth Sothernes, alias Old Demdike, her Grand-mother,¹ Indicted in

¹ This is an error: she was Old Demdike's daughter.

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the same manner and forme, for the death of Henrie Mytton. To these three severall Indictments upon her Arraignment, shee pleaded not guiltie

When examined by Nowell, she had at first protested her innocence,

untill it pleased God to raise up a young maid, Jennet Device, her owne daughter, about the age of nine yeares (a witnesse unexpected) to discover all their Practises, Meetings, Consultations, Murthers, Charmes, and Villanies And then knowing, that both Jennet Device, her daughter, James Device, her sonne, and Alizon Device, with others, had accused her and layd open all things, in their Examinations taken before Master Nowell, and though she were their owne naturall mother, yet they did not spare to accuse her of every particular fact, which in her time she had committed, to their knowledge; she made a very liberall and voluntarie Confession

The reason she gave for bewitching John Robinson to death—which she did by means of a clay figure—was that “the said Robinson had chidden and be called Examine, for having a Bastard-child with one Seller”. She gave no reason why she and Alice, the wife of Richard Nutter—who was a very different type and class of woman, a small landowner and quite well off—bewitched Henry Mytton to death, but admitted that Jennet’s testimony with regard to James Robinson’s bewitchment to death was correct.

Thomas Potts prefaces his account of Jennet’s first examination and evidence against her mother with a number of moralising remarks, which are, nevertheless, interesting.

The said Jennet Device, being a young Maide, about the age of nine yeares, and commanded to stand up to give evidence against her Mother, Prisoner at the Barre: Her Mother, according to her accustomed manner, outrageously cursing, cryed out against the child in such fearfull manner, as all the Court did not a little wonder at her, and so amazed the child, as with weeping teares shee cryed out

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unto my Lord the Judge, and told him, she was not able to speak in the presence of her Mother.

This odious Witch was branded with a preposterous marke in Nature, even from her birth, which was her left eye, standing lower than the other; the one looking downe, the other looking up, so strangely deformed, as the best that were present in that Honourable assembly, and great Audience, did affirme, they had not often seene the like.

No intreatie, promise of favour, or other respect, could put her to silence, thinking by this her outrageous cursing and threatening of the child, to inforce her to denie that which she had formerly confessed against her Mother, before M. Nowel: Forswearing and denying her owne voluntarie confession, which you have heard, given in evidence to escape that, which the Justice of the Law had provided as a condigne punishment for the innocent bloud shee had spilt, and her wicked and devilish course of life.

In the end, when no meanes would serve, his Lordship commanded the Prisoner to be taken away, and the Maide to bee set upon the Table in the presence of the whole Court, who delivered her evidence in that Honourable assembly, to the Gentlemen of the Jury of life and death

Jennet began by declaring that her mother was a witch, and she knew this was true because she had often seen her mother's familiar "come unto her said Mother in her owne house, called Malking-Tower, in the likenesse of a browne Dogge, which shee called Ball". Ball inquired what her mother would have him to do. Once her mother had told him she would have him kill John Robinson, which he promised to do. On another occasion, about a year later, she had ordered him to kill James Robinson, and he had done so; and later she had named Henry Mytton, and Mytton also had died.

James Device, still in his teens, followed his sister into the witness-box and declared that about a year previously he had heard Old Demdike say that his mother and others had bewitched Henry Mytton to death. "The reason wherefore he was so killed, was for

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that his Grand-mother, Old Demdike, had asked the said Mytton a penny; and he denying her thereof thereupon she prepared his death. . . ." He corroborated Jennet's evidence about the familiar called Ball and the making of a clay figure of John Robinson.

When Mr. Justice Bromley asked Elizabeth Device

what answer she could give to the particular points of the Evidence against her, for the death of these severall persons; Impudently she denied them, crying out against her children, and the rest of the Witnesses against her. But because I have charged her to be the principall Agent, to procure a solemne meeting at *Malking-Tower* of the Grand-witches, to consult of some speedy course for the deliverance of her mother, Old Demdike, her daughter, and other Witches at Lancaster: the speedie Execution of Moaster Covell, who little suspected or deserved any such practise or villany against him: The blowing up of the Castle, with divers other wicked and divellish practises and murthers; I shall make it apparent unto you, by the particular Examinations and Evidence of her owne children such as were present at the time of their Consultation

Under examination by Roger Nowell and another Justice of the Peace, Nicholas Bannister, Elizabeth Device had given a full account of the Good Friday meeting of witches (the quasi sabbat) at Malking Tower, at which they had plotted to release Old Demdike and her small daughter Alison, from Lancaster Castle, but denied that there had been any discussion of killing the gaoler and blowing up the castle.

Jennet Device was called once more to the witness-box and questioned about this meeting. She said

That upon Good Friday last there was about twentie persons (whereof onlly two were men, to her remembrance) at her said Grandmother's house, called Malking-Tower aforesaid, about twelve of the clocke: all which persons this Examinates said mother told her, were witches, and that they came to give a name to Alizon Device Spirit, or Familiar, her sister, and now prisoner at Lancaster. And also she

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saith, That the persons aforesaid had to their dinners Beefe, Bacon and roasted Mutton; which Mutton (as her brother hath said) was of a Wether of Christopher Swyers of Barley: which Wether was brought in the night before into her mothers house by the said James Device, her said brother; and in her sight killed and eaten, as aforesaid. And she further saith, That shee knoweth the names of six of the said Witches . . . and the names of the residue shee doth not know, saving that her mother and brother were both there. And lastly, she confesseth and saith, That her mother hath taught her two prayers, the one to cure the bewitched, and the other to get drinke.

James Device was then examined on the same point. He corroborated his small sister's testimony—though no mention seems to have been made of his theft of a sheep, in itself a capital offence and sufficient to hang him—and added some information of his own. For example, he declared that the second reason for the meeting was

for the deliverie of his said Grandmother, Old Demdike; his said sister Allizon; the said Anne Chattox, and her daughter Redferne; killing the Gaoler at Lancaster; and before the next Assisses to blow up the Castle there: and to that end the aforesaid prisoners might by that time make an escape and get away. All which he then heard them confesse of. [He then named a number of those present, and concluded with an interesting observation] that all the Witches went out of the said House in their owne shapes and likenesses. And they all, by that they were forth of the doores, gotten on Horsebacke, like unto Foales, some of one colour, some of another; and Preston's wife¹ was the last: and when shee got on Horsebacke, they all presently vanished out of his sight. And before their said parting away, they all appointed to meete at the said Preston's wives house that day twelve-months; at which time the said Preston's wife promised to make them a great Feast. And if they had occasion to meete in the meane time, there should warning be given that they should

¹ For some reason not readily understood, Mrs. Preston had been whisked away to York after her arrest, and at the recent assizes there had been tried for her part in the sabbat and the conspiracy, found guilty and hanged.

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all meet upon Romleyes Moore. And here they parted, with resolution to execute their devillish and bloudie practises, for the deliverance of their friends, untill they came to meete here, when their power and strength was gone.

Potts comments at this point that Elizabeth Device "now finding her Meanes was gone, she cryed out for Mercie. Whereupon she being taken away, the next in order was her sonne James Device, whom shee and her Mother, Old Demdike, brought to act his part in this wofull Tragedie".

The poor boy was in an extremely wretched state when brought to the bar. Potts says,

This wicked and miserable Wretch, whether by practise, or meanes, to bring himselfe to some untimely death, and thereby to avoide his Tryall by his Country, and just judgement of the Law; or ashamed he bee openly charged with so many devillish practises, and so much innocent bloud as he had spilt; or by reason of his Imprisonement so long time before his Tryall (which was with more favour, commiseration, and reliefe than he deserved) I know not: But being brought forth to the Barre, to receive his Triall before this worthie Judge, and so Honourable and Worshipful an Assembly of Justices for this service, was so insensible, weake and unable in all thinges, as he could neither speake, heare, or stand, but was holden up when hee was brought to the place of his Arraignment, to receive his triall.

I find this passage touching and distasteful. It conjures up a scene in which ignorance, bigotry, superiority and vengefulness have banded together to make sport, in the name of Justice—and English Justice, too—of a simple country boy caught up in a web of country superstitions and lore. He had no one, no counsel, to speak for him,¹ and one can well imagine, since he was not

¹ This was true of every witch brought to trial in England between 1450 and 1750. In most cases, this was because the defendants were so poor they could not afford to brief counsel, and even people who might have raised the required fees—Alice Nutter, one of the accused here was a "rich woman and had a great estate"—seem not to have sought professional advice; though why not, it is not possible to say. On the Continent those accused of witchcraft were forbidden by law to have counsel; in fact, no defence to a charge of witchcraft was permitted to be put forward.

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yet old enough to have learned how to put up the brazen front presented by older, more experienced women, his being overawed by the "worthie Judge, and so Honourable and Worshipfull an Assembly". Certainly, he would know what his ultimate fate must be not only on his arraignment for witchcraft but as the son of a notorious witch on a charge of witchcraft. Some years older than his two sisters, he must have had a certain appreciation of death, which, without the encouragement of courage, inevitably must have inspired fear. No wonder he found it difficult to collect the few wits he had; no wonder he was weak at the knees. On the other hand, he did not grovel before the Court.

The passage also reveals, in my view, probably more so than any other record in English witchcraft history, the attitudes of allegedly educated, intelligent men towards witches and their craft. It does such men considerable moral damage, for it shows them as demanders of vengeance, gloating over those they have in their power, devoid of mercy. Thomas Potts undertakes to show us

what apparent prooffe their is to charge him with the death of these two severall persons, for the which hee now standeth upon his triall for all the rest of his devilish practises, incantations, murders, charmes, sorceries, meetings to consult with Witches, to execute mischief (take them as they are against him on Record :) Enough, I doubt not. For these with the course of his life will serve his turne to deliver you from the danger of him that never tooke felicitie in any things, but in revenge, bloud, mischief with crying out unto God for vengeance; which hath now at length brought him to the place where he standes to receive his Triall *with more honour, favour and respect, then such a Monster in Nature doth deserve;*¹ And I doubt not, but in due time by the Justice of Law, to an untimely and shameful death.

In his examination before the magistrates, the boy had admitted that two years earlier, on Maundy Thursday, Old Demdike had bade him go to church to receive Holy Communion. He was

¹ Italics added.

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not, however, to eat the bread the minister gave him, but was to bring it out of church " and deliver it to such a thing as should meet him in his way homewards ". When he was about forty roods from the church " a thing in the shape of a Hare " met him and asked him whether he had brought the bread. When he said he had not, the thing threatened to tear him to pieces. Frightened, he had crossed himself, and the thing had immediately vanished.

Four days later, near the new church in Pendle, " a thing like unto a browne Dogge " had accosted him, and asked James to give him his soul, and he should " be revenged of any whom he would ". James said that his soul was not his to give, but belonged to Christ, " but as much as was in him to give, he was contented he should have it ".

Two or three days later, he was having some words with a Mistress Townely, who accused him and his mother of having stolen some trousers of hers and sent him packing. As he passed out of the door she gave him a whack between the shoulder blades. A day or two after that " a thing like unto a black dog ", which reminded him of his falling out with Mistress Townely, and advised him to make a clay figure, like Mistress Townely with the help of his familiar, whom he called Dandy, and by means of this image he would be able to destroy Mistress Townely. He did as he was bade, and Mistress Townely died.

Then last Lent, John Duckworth of the Lawnde had promised to give James an old shirt, but went back on his promise.

And going out of the house, the said spirit Dandy appeared to him and said, Thou didst touch Duckworth . . . therefore I have power of him : whereupon this Examinee joyned with the said Spirit, and then wished the said Spirit to kill the said Duckworth : and within one weeke, the next after, Duckworth died.

Though this ' voluntary ' confession gave the jury sufficient grounds for bringing in a verdict of guilty,

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my Lord Bromley commanded, for their better satisfaction, that the Witnesses present in Court against any of the Prisoners, should be examined openly, viva voce, that the prisoner might both heare and answere to every particular point of their Evidence; notwithstanding any of their Examinations taken before any of his Majesties Justices of Peace within the same Countie. Herein do but observe the wonderful work of God; to raise up a young Infant, the very sister of the Prisoner, Jennet Device, to discover, justifie and prove these things against him. . . .

Jennet was called as the first witness against her brother. She said that he had been a witch for the last three years, and confirmed that he had a familiar called Dandy. She told the Court that she had been with James when he had summoned Dandy and ordered him to help him kill "old Mistress Townely of the Carre". A week later Jennet had gone into the kitchen at Carre Hall and seen Mistress Townely there, "nothing well", and she remembered what her brother and Dandy had plotted together.

Which Examinee, [Potts comments,] although she were but very young, yet it was wonderfull to the Court, in so great a Presence and Audience, with what modestie, government and understanding, she delivered this Evidence against the Prisoner at the Barre, being her own naturall brother, which he himselfe could not deny, but then acknowledged in every particular to be just and true.

Potts is particularly vehement against James, and one wonders why. "There is yet more bloud to be laid to his charge," he says. "For although he were but young, and in the beginning of his Time, yet he was carefull to observe his Instructions from Old Demdike, his Grandmother, and Elizabeth Device, his mother."

The Court then proceeded to hear evidence against James on two further indictments, one, of having bewitched John Hargreaves to death, the other, of having bewitched Blaze Hargreaves to death. And once more his nine-year-old sister was put up to bear principal witness against him. She claimed to have been

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present when Dandy appeared and James ordered the familiar to kill the two Hargreaves.

By this time, James was more composed. He had pleaded not guilty to both indictments, and now he had the temerity to deny the truth of his sister's evidence. But it was a flash in the pan. He only "slenderly denied them and thereupon insisted". Several witnesses were then called to testify to the time and manner of the Hargreaves' deaths.

James had also been examined by Nowell and Bannister about the meeting on Good Friday at Malking Tower, and young Jennet was now put up to give testimony about this fateful gathering. She corroborated James's account of the reason for the meeting, the food eaten at the feast, the theft of the sheep by James; and she named seven of those present—her mother and James, Hugh Hargreaves and Christopher Howget, her uncle, Dick Miles's wife and Christopher Jacks and his wife. Hargreaves and Howget had been named by James, but Mrs. Miles and the Jacks had not.

At the end of her evidence against James, Jennet told the Court that her mother "taught her two Prayers: the one to get drinke, which was this, *viz.*

CRUCIFIXUS HOC SIGNUM VITAM ETERNAM. AMEN." She said, too, that James had confessed to her that he had got drink by reciting this prayer, and had taught her another which would "cure one bewitched" and which went as follows:

A Charme

Upon Good-Friday, I will fast while I may
Untill I heare them knell
Our Lords owne Bell,
Lord in his merce
With his twelve Apostles good,
What hath he in his hand
Ligh in leath wand:
What hath he in his other hand?
Heavens doore key,
Open, open Heaven doore keyes.

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Steck, steck hell doore.
Let Crizum child
Goe to it Mother mild.
What is yonder that casts a light so farrandly,
Mine owne deare Sonne that's nailed to the Tree.
He is nailed sore by the heart and hand,
And holy barne Panne,
Well is that man
That Fryday spell can,
His Childe to learne;
A Crosse of Blew, and another of Red,
As good Lord was to the Roode.
Gabriel laid him downe to sleepe
Upon the ground of holy weepe:
Good Lord came walking by,
Sleep'st thou, walk'st thou Gabriel,
No Lord I am sted with sticke and stake,
That I can neither sleepe nor wake:
Rise up Gabriel and goe with me,
The stick nor the stake shall never cleere thee.
Sweete Jesus our Lord, Amen.

That a nine-year-old child, utterly without education, could recite a poem of this length, much of it meaningless, "in so great a Presence and Audience", reveals, in my view, a precocious aplomb, which singles Jennet Device out as a child of extraordinary wit. She was capable of assimilating and reproducing all that was told her, and, by the same token, could invent what she had not been told. There is not the unwitting innocence of childhood here. The desire to attract attention and to hold it uncovered dramatic traits in her that doubtless would have brought her great success on the stage—if women then had not been barred from the footlights. I find in her much more of the monster than Thomas Potts found in her brother James.

6

INTERRUPTION IN THE TRIAL

WHEN THE case against James Device had closed, an extraordinary interruption occurred in the trial of the Lancaster witches. Those alleged witches from Salmesbury, who had no connection whatsoever with the Lancaster witches, were brought into court and tried "for Witchcraft upon the bodie of Grace Sowerbutts". The prisoners were three elderly, though, fortunately for them, spirited ladies, called Jennet Bierley, Ellen Bierley, her daughter-in-law, and Jane Southworth.

Grace Sowerbutts, at fourteen years old, was just within the legal limits for giving testimony in a criminal trial. As we shall see, however, this did not signify that her evidence on oath was any more reliable than if she had been younger. Indeed, she lacked nine-year-old Jennet Device's precocious assurance.

The story of this interpolated trial, known as the trial of the Salmesbury witches, was even more strange than the goings-on of the Lancaster witches. Their alleged victim Grace, was the first witness.

She told the Court that for some years past she had been haunted and vexed by Jennet Bierley, her grandmother, Ellen Bierley, her aunt, Widow Southworth, and "one Old Doewife, all of Salmesburie aforesaid". Only a short time ago the quartet "did violently draw her by the haire of the head, and layd her on the toppe of a Hay-mowe", in Ellen Bierley's husband's barn. Not long after this, she met Jennet Bierley near her (Grace's) home. At first Jennet appeared in her own likeness, but then changed herself into the likeness of a black dog. As Grace was negotiating a step

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the dog pushed her off and she fell. However, she was not hurt, and when she had picked herself up, she went on to her aunt's house in Osbaldestone, where she stayed until her father fetched her in the evening.

On the way home, she told her father about the black dog, who was really Jennet Bierley, pushing her off the stile, and about the other attacks the four women had previously made on her. This was the first time she had ever told anyone how the women had been plaguing her. "And being examined why she did not, she sayth, she could not speak thereof, though she desired so to doe."

She went on, that on Saturday 4th April, just past, as she was going towards Salmesbury to meet her mother, who was coming from Preston, she met Jennet Bierley at a place called Two Bridges. Again Mother Bierley appeared first in her own shape, then in the likeness of a black dog,

with two legges, which Dogge went close by the left side of this Examinee, till they came to a Pitte of Water, and then the said Dogge spoke, and persuaded her to drowne herselfe there, saying it was a faire and easie death. Whereupon this Examinee thought there came one to her in a white sheete, and carried her away from the said Pitte, upon the coming whereof the said blacke Dogge departed away; and shortly after the said white thing departed also.

When she had gone on her way, "about the length of two or three Fields", the black dog reappeared, and carried her into a nearby barn belonging to Hugh Walshman, and, laying her on the barn floor, covered her with straw, and itself lay on top of the straw, though for how long she could not say, nor how long she lay there herself, because, as soon as she lay down "her Speech and Senses were taken from her". When she came to, she found herself lying on a bed in Hugh Walshman's house.

She had been told she had been carried there by some friends, a short time after she had been laid on the barn floor by the black

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dog; that she had been unconscious over Sunday, and had only regained her senses on the Monday. On the following day, Tuesday, her mother had fetched her and taken her home. On the way, Jennet and Ellen Bierley had appeared to her at Two Bridges in their own shapes;

whereupon she fell downe, and after that was not able to speake, or goe, till the following Friday: during which time, as she lay in her father's house, the said Jennet Bierley and Ellen did once appeare unto her in their owne shapes, but they did nothing unto her then, neither did shee ever see them since.

However, she continued, that "a good while before all this", she went with her grandmother and aunt to the house of Thomas Walshman. Though it was night, and the door was locked, Jennet had managed to open it, and all three went into the house. While Grace stayed with her Aunt Ellen in the sitting-room, Jennet Bierley went into the Walshmans' bedroom and presently returned with a little child. Jennet sat down before the fire with the child in her lap and thrust a nail into its navel.

And afterwards did take a pen and put it in at the said place, and did suck there a good space, and afterwards laid the child in bed againe; and then the said Jennet and the said Ellen returned to their owne houses, and this Examine with them. And she thinketh that neither the said Thomas Walshman, nor his wife knew that the said child was taken out of the bed from them. And she saith also, that the said childe did not crie when it was hurt, as aforesaid: But she saith, that shee thinketh that the said child did thenceforth languish, and not long after dyed.

So far, Grace had accused the three women—for some reason Old Doewife had not been arrested and brought to trial—of traditional English witchcraft practices. However, she had introduced metamorphosis, which though a Scottish Court had sent a woman to the stake in 1607 for entering a house in the form of a cat,

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had so far not featured in English trials. (It was to become a fairly common feature later in the century.) On the other hand, metamorphosis had played a prominent role in the accusations against the prisoners in Continental trials since the middle of the fifteenth century. At first sight, Grace's testimony on this would appear to indicate that Continental witchcraft beliefs which up to now had not found their way into English witchcraft practices, were at last beginning to cross the Channel. On the other hand, her account of Jennet Bierley turning herself, on several occasions, into a black dog might have had one of two alternative effects on the jury; either it could be taken as a proof of her truthfulness, on the ground that a girl of fourteen could not invent such a thing; or, it might raise suspicions that Grace had been coached by someone whose knowledge of witchcraft practices extended beyond the English tradition.

Metamorphosis, however, was not Grace's only innovation. In the history of English witchcraft I have been able to find only one case—and this is a century and a quarter before the classical period of witchcraft begins (1450)—in which the prisoners were accused of a practice similar to the one of which Grace accused Jennet and Ellen Bierley. This was the case of the first witch of Ireland, Dame Alice Kyteler, in 1324.

Continuing her evidence, Grace said that

after the death of the said child; the next night after the buriall thereof, the said Jennet Bierley and Ellen Bierley, taking her with them, went to Salmesburie Church, and there did take up the said child, and the said Jennet did carrie it out of the Church-yard in her armes, and then did put it in her lap and carryed it home to her owne house, and having it there did boile some thereof in a Pot, and some did broile on the coales, of both which the said Jennet and Ellen did eate, and would have had her and one Grace Bierley, Daughter of the said Ellen, to have eaten with them, but they refused so to do: And afterwards the said Jennet and Ellen did seethe the bones of the said child in a pot & with the Fat that came out of the said bones, they said they would annoint themselves,

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that thereby they might sometimes change themselves into other shapes. And after all this being done, they said they would lay the bones againe in the grave the next night following, but whether they did so or not, this Examinee knoweth not: Neither doth shee know how they got it out of the grave at the first taking of it up.

There was an adjournment of the court at this point, and when the judge returned to the Bench, he instructed that Grace should be re-sworn. He was already becoming a little suspicious of her evidence, it seems.

As I have pointed out previously, the meeting of Elizabeth Device and her witch friends at Malking Tower on Good Friday, is regarded by witchcraft historians to be the first account of a sabbat in English witchcraft. In fact, the goings-on at Malking Tower bear only a very faint resemblance to the recognised form that the sabbat took as practised on the Continent. At Malking Tower the company merely sat down to a good feast—over which they plotted to free Old Demdike and their other friends, blow up Lancaster Castle and kill the gaoler—and after the feast went home on horseback.

The Continental sabbat followed a set form:

1. The witches assembled.
2. When all had arrived, the Devil received their renewed homage, generally the *osculum obscenum*, the "obscene kiss" which the witches administered to the bared buttocks of the Devil, and new witches were instituted.
3. This was followed by the banquet, the food at which was usually foal.
4. After the banquet, there were festivities, which invariably ended in the witches stripping themselves and dancing naked with the Devil and his minions. The music for the dancing grew more and more wild, and its object was to induce a shedding of all inhibitions as a preparation for the final phase of the sabbat ceremonies.
5. This was indiscriminate copulation, the Devil and his

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minions and the warlocks present copulating with their witch partners. No heed was paid to relationships; father copulated with daughter, son with mother, sister with brother.

Bearing this in mind, we continue with Grace Sowerbutt's evidence.

About halfe a yeare agoe, the said Jennet Bierley, Ellen Bierley, Jane Southworth and this Examinee (who went by the appointment of the said Jennet her Grandmother) did meete at a place called Red-banck, upon the North side of the water of Ribble, every Thursday and Sunday at night by the space of a fortnight, and at the waterside there came unto them, as they went thether, foure blacke thinges, going upright, and yet not like men in the face: which foure did carrie the said three women and this Examinee over the Water, and when they came to the said Red Banck, they found something there which they did eate. But shee never saw such meate; and therefore she durst not eate thereof, although her said Grandmother did bidde her eate. And after they had eaten, the said three Women and this Examinee danced, every one of them with one of the black things aforesaid, and after their dancing the said black things did pull downe the said three Women and did abuse their bodies, as this Examinee thinketh, for shee saith, that the black thing that was with her, did abuse her bodie.

Ten days after she had been examined by the magistrates at Blackborne, she went on, Jane Southworth met her at the door of her father's house and carried her into the loft, where she laid her upon the floor. Her father found her there, brought her down and put her to bed. She was unconscious and did not come to until the following day. She had not long been herself again when Jane Southworth appeared once more. This time the old woman took her out of bed and put her on top of a hay-stack, "standing some three or four yards high from the earth, where she was found after a great search". Jane continued her visitations, and subsequently "laid her in a ditch neare to the house upon her face", and then "carried her into the Barne, and thrust her

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head amongst a companie of boards that were there standing ”.

This concluded her evidence, but before she left the witness-box, Mr. Justice Bromley asked her some questions about the sabbat held at Red Bank. She told the judge in reply

that at their said meeting in the Red-banck, there did come also divers other women, and did meete them there, some old, some young, which she thought did dwell upon the North-side of Ribble, because she saw them not come over the Water : but she knew none of them, neither did she see them eat or dance, or doe any thing else that the rest did, saving that they were there and looked on.

It is clear by this time the judge's suspicions were roused about the truth of her testimony, and the witnesses that followed her said nothing to allay his doubts. The dead child's father, Thomas Walshman, for example, testified that a one-year-old child of his had died and been buried in Salmesbury churchyard, but he had no idea what had caused its death. Only two witnesses had been found to impute witchcraft against one of the three women, Jane Southworth, and their evidence was purely hearsay.

Potts comments,

Here was likewise Thomas Sowerbutts, father of Grace Sowerbutts, examined upon his oath, and many other witnesses to little purpose : who being examined by the Court, could depose little against them . . . there was not any one witness able to charge them with one direct matter of Witchcraft; nor prove any thing for the murder of the childe.

When the last witness had stood down, Mr. Justice Bromley asked the three prisoners

what answer they could make. They humbly upon their knees with weeping teares, desired him for Gods cause to examine Grace Sowerbutts, (about) who set her on, or by whose meanes this accusation came against them.

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They had a notion what had happened, as they later made clear. When she heard the prisoners' request to the judge, Potts says,

Immediately the countenance of this Grace Sowerbutts changed: The witnesses, being behinde, began to quarrell and accuse one another. In the end his Lordship examined the Girle, who could not for her life make any directe answer, but strangely amazed, told him, shee was put to a Master to learne, but he told her nothing of this.

This, apparently, was what Sir Edward had suspected, and I believe that the basis for his suspicion was the account Grace gave of the sabbat at Red Bank, which, as I have suggested, followed closely the Continental pattern, which had not yet permeated English witchcraft practice. A child of fourteen could not possibly have known such details, and whoever coached her must have made a study of Continental witchcraft practices. The most likely person to have done so would be a Roman Catholic priest who had probably been in Europe before secretly returning to England. As I pointed out much earlier, 'underground' priests were very active in the remote parts of Yorkshire and Lancashire, where many still adhered, in secret, to Rome.

The judge put this squarely from

the Bench, and in the hearing of this great Audience: That if a Priest or Jesuit had a hand in one end of it, there would appeare to be knaverie, and practise (deceit, fraud) in the other end of it. And that it might the better appeare to the whole World, examined Thomas Sowerbutts, what Master taught his daughter; in generall termes, he denyed all.

The Wench had nothing to say, but her Master told her nothing of this. In the end, some that were present told his Lordship the truth, and the Prisoners informed him how shee went to learne with one Thompson, a Seminarie Priest, who had instructed and taught her this accusation against them, because they were once obstinate Papists, and now came to Church. . . . Still this five encreased more and more, and one witness accusing an other, all things were laid upon at large.

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To resolve the matter, the judge committed Grace to two Justices of the Peace, to be carefully examined. Before these interrogators Grace broke down and confessed that her evidence was false from beginning to end.

Shee further saith, that one Master Thompson, which she taketh to be Master Christopher Southworth, to whom shee was sent to learne her prayers, did persuade, counsell and advise her, to deale as formerly hath beene said against her said Grand-mother, Aunt and Southworth's wife.

Having heard Grace's confession, Mr. Justice Bromley directed the jury to bring in a verdict of not guilty. When this was done, he discharged the three women.

THE PENDLE FOREST WITCHES II

BROMLEY, IN his attitude in this case and in the case of the Lancaster witches, presents a certain paradox. In the Salmesbury case he demonstrated a strong desire that justice should be fully meted out, yet in the Lancaster case he admitted the evidence of a small child below legal age, hearsay evidence relating to events alleged to have taken place twenty years earlier, and showed himself ready to accept the most outrageous evidence. He also allowed himself to be swayed by public outcry, for when the jury found Anne Redfearn, Old Chattox's daughter, not guilty and acquitted her, the spectators in court made such a commotion that he ordered a re-trial to take place at once. In doing so, he disregarded one of the principal tenets of British justice—that no man shall be placed in jeopardy twice for the same crime. The jury took their cue, and this time returned a verdict of guilty.

James Device gave evidence against her, of having seen three clay images in her house. He also gave evidence against Alice Nutter, Katherine Hewytt, John Bulcock and his mother Jane Bulcock and his sister Alison.

Jennet Device also testified against Alice Nutter, Katherine Hewytt and the two Bulcocks. Against Alice Nutter she said,

That on Good-Friday last, there was about 20 persons, whereof only two were men (to this Examinate's remembrance) at her said Grandmothers house at Malking Tower, about twelve of the clock; all which persons, this Examinate's said mother tould her, were Witches. And she further saith, she knoweth the names of six of them, viz.

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the wife of Hugh Hargreives under Pendle, Christopher Howgate of Pendle, Uncle to this Examinee and Elizabeth his wife; and Dick Myles wife of the Rough-Lee, Christopher Jacks of Thorniholme, and his wife; and the names of the desidue, she this Examinee doth not know.

Having had experience of Grace Sowerbutts in the Salmsbury case, his lordship suddenly wondered whether this small girl had been coached and was telling him untruths and decided to test her.

[He] commanded one to take her away into the upper Hall, intending in the meane time to make Triall of her Evidence, and the Accusation especially against this woman, who is charged to have beene at Malking-Tower, at this great meeting. Master Covell was commanded to set all his Prisoners by themselves, and betwixt every Witch another Prisoner, and some other strange women amongst them, so as no man could judge the one from the other: and these being set in order before the Court from the prisoners, then was the wench Jennet Device commanded to be brought into the Court: and being set before my Lord, he tooke great paines to examine her of every particular Point, What women were at Malking-Tower upon Good-Friday? How she knew them? What were the names of any of them? and how she knew them to be such as she named.

In the end being examined by my Lord, Whether she knew them that were there by their faces, if she saw them? she told my Lord she should: whereupon in the presence of this great Audience, in open Court, she went and took Alice Nutter, this prisoner by the hand, and accused her to be one: and told her in what place shee sat at the Feast at Malking-Tower, at the great assembly of the Witches, and who sat next her: what conference they had, and all the rest of their proceedings at large, without any manner of contrarietie.

Being demaunded further by his Lordship, Whether she knew Johana Style? she alledged, she knew no such woman to be there, neither did she ever heare her name. This could be no forged or false Accusation, but the very ACT OF GOD to discover her.

Bromley's last question to Jennet Device was a deliberate trap,

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for a Johana Style played no part in the trial. She was probably a fictitious character invented by the judge.

As she gave witness against each of the others, Bromley requested Jennet to go up to the accused and touch him or her. In each case she made identification without hesitation.

When it was all over, Old Chattox, Elizabeth Device, her son James and her daughter Alison, Anne Redfearn, Alice Nutter, Katherine Hewytt, John Bulcock and his mother Jane and Isabel Robey were condemned to death. Margaret Pearson was found guilty and sentenced to stand in the pillory on market day in Clitheroe, Paddiham, Whalley and Lancaster and to remain in prison for one year. Elizabeth Astley, John Ramsden, Alice Gray, Isabel Sidegraves and Lawrence Hay were acquitted.

All those against whom Jennet Device gave evidence were found guilty and condemned to death, and it may justifiably be held that it was her testimony more than any other evidence given against them, that decided the jury to bring in their verdict. Except for Old Chattox and Alison Device, who were condemned on their own confessions, all the others protested their innocence, "crying out in very violent and outrageous manner, even to the gallows, where they died impenitent (for ay thing we know)".

There may be some among those who have studied young Jennet's evidence, who believe she told of what she knew and saw. Personally, I believe she was coached, though I do concede that she was at the Malking Tower feast. I find, however, that despite her 'fingering' of the various accused in the later stages of the trial, her 'fingering' of Alice Nutter confirms one's suspicions that she was repeating a lesson. Certainly this seems true of her accusation against Mrs. Nutter.

Mrs. Nutter was of quite a different class from the rest of the prisoners. She was wealthy and the owner of a fair-sized estate. She was the mother of Robert Nutter, for whose death by bewitchment Old Chattox, Anne Redfearn and others were indicted.

There was a feud between two branches of the Nutter family

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and a quarrel between Old Chattox, her daughter Anne Redfearn and Robert Nutter, which is clearly revealed in Old Chattox's 'voluntary' confession.

And this Examinee further sayth, that Robert Nutter did desire her Daughter (Anne) one Redfearns wife, to have his pleasure of her, being then in Redfearns house: but the sayed Redfearns wife denied the sayd Robert; whereupon the sayd Robert seeming to be greatly displeas'd therewith, in a great anger tooke his Horse, and went awaye, saying in a great rage, that if ever the Ground came to him, shee should never dwell upon his Land. Whereupon this Examinee did call Fancie (her familiar) to her; who came to her in the likeness of a Man in a parcell of Ground called The Laund; asking his Examinee what shee would have him to doe? And this Examinee bade him goe revenge her of the sayd Robert Nutter. After which time, the sayd Robert Nutter lived about a quarter of a yeare and then died.

And this Examinee further sayth, that Elizabeth Nutter, wife of old Robert Nutter, did request this Examinee, and Loomshawes wife of Burley, and one Jane Bootham, of the same, who are now both dead (which time of request was before that Robert Nutter desired the company of Redfearns wife) to get young Robert Nutter his death, if they could; all being together then at that time, to that end, that if Robert were dead, then the Women their Coosens might have the land: By whose persuasion, they all consented unto it.

Mrs. Nutter was indicted with bewitching a Henry Mitton. Even Thomas Potts was surprised to find her in this company. He says:

The two degrees of persons which chiefly practise Witchcraft, are such, as are in great miserie and poverty, for such the Devil allures to follow him, by promising great riches, and worldly commoditie; Others, though rich, yet burne in a desperate desire of revenge; Hee allures them by promises, to get their turne satisfied to their hearts contentment. . . . But to attempt this woman (Alice Nutter) in that sort, the Devil had small meanes: For it is certain she was a rich

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woman; had a great estate, and children of good hope: in the common opinion of the world, of good temper, free from envy and malice; yet whether by the meanes of the rest of the Witches, or some unfortunate occasion, she was drawne to fall to this wicked course of life, I know not. . . . It is very certain she was of the Grand-counsell at Malking-Tower upon Good-Friday, and was there present. . . .

The first mention of Mrs. Nutter in the proceedings was in the third indictment of Elizabeth Device. "The said Elizabeth Device was the third time with others *viz.* Alice Nutter and Elizabeth Southernnes, alias Old Demdike, her Grand-mother. Indicted in the same manner and former, for the death of Henry Mytton." It was Elizabeth Device who had involved her in the case, by claiming in her 'voluntary' confession that "shee with the wife of Richard Nutter, and this Examinates said Mother, joyned altogether, and did bewitch the said Henry Mytton to death".

In her evidence against her mother, Jennet Device made no mention of Alice Nutter, nor did James or Alison Device; and what I think is even more significant is that Old Chattox was not indicted for the death of Henry Mitton, nor, in her 'voluntary' confession or examination, did she implicate Mrs. Nutter. Neither is there any mention of Mrs. Nutter or Henry Mitton in Old Demdike's confession nor in the statements of the witnesses against her who were examined by Nowell before she died in Lancaster castle.

In my view, Mrs. Nutter was implicated by Elizabeth Device in an attempt to mitigate the charges made against herself. She probably thought that if she accused a woman so rich and so well thought of, the authorities in considering Mrs. Nutter's case might decide to be lenient, and that this leniency might be extended to her. Or, she may have involved Mrs. Nutter purely from motives of revenge, all connected with the quarrels and feuds which bedevilled the relationships of the inhabitants of Pendle.

When Mrs. Nutter was brought to the Bar, she pleaded not guilty to the only charge against her of having bewitched Henry

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Mitton to death. She maintained her innocence throughout and to the last.

And here I leave her, [says Thomas Potts, in concluding his account of her trial,] untill she came to her Execution, where you shall heare shee died very impenitent; insomuch as her owne children were never able to move her to confesse any particular offence, or declare any thing, even in Articulo Mortis : which was a very fearfull thing to all that were present, who knew shee was guiltie.

Only three witnesses were brought against her—James Device, Elizabeth Device and Jennet Device. James Device had told Nowell

That he heard his Grand-mother say, about a yeare ago, that his mother, called Elizabeth Device and his Grand-mother and the wife of Richard Nutter, of the Rough-Lee aforesaid, had killed one Henry Mitton, of the Rough-Lee aforesaid, by Witchcraft. The reason whereupon he was so killed, was for that this Examinates said Grand-mother had asked the said Mitton a penny and hee denying here thereof; thereupon shee procured his death as aforesaid. [While in his testimony before Bromley, he merely said,] The names of such Witches as were on Good-Friday at this Examinates said Grand-mothers house (the meeting at Malking Tower), and now this Examinates owne mothers, for so many of them as he doth know, were amongst others, Alice Nutter, mother of Myles Nutter, now Prisoner at the Barre.

Elizabeth Device testified

That she, with the wife of Richard Nutter, called Alice Nutter, Prisoner at the Barre; and this Examinates said mother, Elizabeth Sotherne, alias Old Demdike; joyned altogether, and bewitched the said Henry Mitton to death. She further saith, That upon Good-friday last, there dined at this examimates house two women of Burnele Parish, whose names the said Richard Nutters wife, Alice Nutter, now Prisoner at the Barre, doth know.

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That was all.

It was during Jennet Device's evidence against Mrs. Nutter, that Mr. Justice Bromley set the child his test, "and she went and took Alice Nutter this prisoner, by the hand and accused her to be one: and told her in what place shee sat at the Feast at Malking-Tower, at the great assembly of the Witches, and who sat next to her".

Thus, the sum total of the evidence against Mrs. Nutter was that Elizabeth Device testified that she had joined with her and Old Demdike in bewitching Mitton to death; that James Device testified that his Grandmother, Old Demdike, had told him that Mrs. Nutter had joined her and Elizabeth in bewitching Mitton to death (hearsay evidence, legally inadmissible); and that the three witnesses testified that Mrs. Nutter had been present at the Malking Tower meeting on Good Friday. In other words, her part in the bewitching of Mitton rested on the uncorroborated evidence of one witness alone, who claimed to have been her collaborator in the crime. This was flimsy enough evidence, unless it was assumed, from her presence at the Malking Tower meeting, that she was a witch—which Thomas Potts certainly did, and perhaps Mr. Justice Bromley, too. But did she actually attend the meeting at Malking Tower? The three witnesses said she did; but all three were suspect. Even her 'fingering' by Jennet proves nothing, for it is more than likely that the child would know by name and sight the most prominent woman of the neighbourhood; and it is noteworthy that though Jennet put forward convincing evidence of her being at Malking Tower by describing where she sat and who sat next to her, no other single witness was brought to the judge to corroborate this evidence, which could have been—and I believe was—the invention of a lively, appreciative, precocious child's imagination. Young Jennet was certainly alive to the impression she had already made on the Court during her appearances against her mother and brother, and was encouraged to steal as much of the limelight as she could. This is the normal reaction of an extroverted child. Certainly, she, by

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her 'fingering' of Alice Nutter, was chiefly responsible for the woman's fate, as she was also chiefly responsible for the hanging of her mother, brother and sister.

8

TRIAL AT THE OLD BAILEY

THE NEXT case in which a small boy gave evidence against his mother occurred some forty years later. In 1652 Joan Peterson was brought to trial at the Old Bailey charged with bewitching a certain Christopher Wilson. The case itself is significant for two features—the admission of the son's evidence against his mother, still permitted nearly a hundred years after the First Chelmsford Trial; and the strange bribery of witnesses and coercion of magistrates—both of which were responsible for Mrs. Peterson's death on Tyburn Tree on 12th April 1652.

The boundary between the practices of white and black witchcraft would seem to have been very tenuous. Despite John Walsh's assertion (before the Bishop of Exeter's commissary in 1566) that there was a sharp division of powers between the two—the performer of *beneficia* and the performer of *maleficia*—there are ample examples of the black witch providing cures and the white witch suddenly turning nasty and resorting to bewitchment to have her revenge on a customer, generally because of the latter's refusal to pay for her services.

On the Continent acts of *beneficia*, such as curing diseases or abating storms, were not subject to legal penalties. As late as 1608, the famous Italian demonologist, Francesco Guazzo, made a clear distinction between "natural magic" and "artificial magic", holding the former to emanate from God, the latter from the Devil. At the same time, he did admit that white witchcraft could be transformed into black witchcraft if it were performed for an evil purpose and placed both body and soul in jeopardy.

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In England, on the other hand, white witchcraft was looked upon as equally perverse as black witchcraft. The sixteenth century English authority, George Gifford, in his *Dialogue Concerning Witches and Witchcraft*, published in 1593, states categorically that white witches ought to be tracked down and punished; and the ecclesiastical historian of the seventeenth century, Thomas Fuller, declared that "the white and the black are both guilty alike in compounding with the Devil"—while William Perkins, the eminent Elizabethan theologian, put the view of the majority of English churchmen when he wrote in *A Discourse of the Damned Art of Witchcraft* (1608),

Though the witch were in many respects profitable, and did not hurt, but procured much good, yet because he hath renounced God, his king and governor, and hath bound himself by other laws to the service of the enemies of God and his Church, death is his portion, justly assigned him by God: he may not live.

The reasoning behind the English point of view most probably stems from the fact that, by the beginning of the sixteenth century, England had more Cunning Men and Women per head of the population than any other European country. Every village had at least one, and probably more, while in the towns they abounded in daunting hordes. But they had become a menace because of the great harm they did physically to those whom they were supposed to cure. If a physician could not at once effect a cure, the relations of the sick person sent for a white witch; whereas in the remoter villages, the white witch was the only person to whom the sick man or woman could turn for relief. Thomas Gale, an eminent surgeon, in *Certaine Workes of Galens*, published in 1586, described the terrible cases he had seen in two London hospitals twenty years earlier, all resulting from the ministrations of white witches; 300 poor patients, of whom more than a third would never recover without the loss of an arm or a leg.

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I think, [he complained,] there be not so few in London as three score women that occupieth the arte of Physicke or Chirurgerie. These women, some of them be called wise women, or holie or good women, some of them be called Witches and useth to call on certain spirits.

And John Cotta, a Northampton physician and contemporary of Gale's, in *A Short Discoverie of the Unobserved Dangers of Severall Sortes of Ignorant and Unconsiderate Practisers of Physicke in England* (1612) attacks

a sort of practitioners, whom our custom and country doth call wisemen and wisewomen, reputed a kind of good and harmless witches or wisards, who by good words, by hallowed herbes and salves, and other superstitious ceremonies promise to allay and calme divels, practises of other witches, and the forces of many diseases.

In fact, by the time Elizabeth had come to the throne the Cunning Men and Women had become as much of a social evil—and problem—as the great hordes of “sturdy beggars” created by the Tudor policies of land enclosures. As Bishop Jewel told the Queen during his famous sermon,

Witches and sorcerers have marvellously increased within Your Grace's realm. Your Grace's subjects pine away unto death. Their colour fadeth, their flesh rotteth, their speech is benumbed, their senses are bereft.

On the other hand, the magistrates were reluctant to take action against the Cunning Man and Woman, being chary of the reactions of the superstitious populace. Only if a white witch were accused of an act of *maleficia* punishable by law, was he or she brought before the courts. Such was the case of Joan Peterson, known as the Witch of Wapping.

Joan Peterson lived in Spruce Island, near Shadwell.

There are two sorts of Witches, [says the record of her story,] which

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the Vulgar people distinguish by the names of the Good Witch, (I wonder how that can be,) and the Bad; by reason, when one bewitcheth a party, the other unwitcheth him again: Now this Joan Peterson, it should seem, was both; for as it was clearly proved, that she had done much mischief, so there were divers that came to witnesse that she had cured them of several diseases, amongst the rest I heard one of them say, that he had been so grievously troubled with the Headache, that he could take no rest for 5 weeks together, and that he had made tryal of many Doctors, but could have no redress, and comming to Peterson, she gave him a Drink, which after he had drunk of thrice, he was as well as ever he was: I demanded of him if the Drink did purge him, and so removed the humours, and he answered, it did not purge him at all; which seemed very strange to me, the man being so grievously tormented with that intolerable pain.

Among other witnesses on Mother Peterson's behalf was a "Cow-keepers Wife", one of whose cows had behaved so strangely that one was forced to conclude that it had been bewitched. So she had sought the advice of Mother Peterson, who had told her to save some of the cow's urine and to bring it to her. This the woman had done, and Mother Peterson had set it on the fire. "It had not been on long, but the water rose up in bubbles, in one of which she shewed her the face of the woman which the Cow-keepers wife suspected to have bewitched it". Mother Peterson then prescribed a cure and in the course of time the cow recovered.

Mother Peterson's trouble started when one Christopher Wilson, who was very sick and weak, came to her for relief. They made an agreement that if Wilson were cured he should pay her a certain sum of money. The remedies were successful, but when Mother Peterson went to Wilson to collect her fee, he refused to pay her. This made her very angry, and she told him menacingly, "You had been better you had given me my money, for you shall be ten times worse than ever you were".

She had hardly finished speaking when Wilson went into "very

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strange fits, and for twelve hours together would slabber out his tongue, and walk up and down like a meer changeling; in this condition he remained certain days, and then he fell very sick, and at this instant (if he be not dead) languisheth away, and rots as he lies ”.

Another neighbour of hers had a young child which was clearly “tormented”. It had such strange fits “that the like was never known”. It continued in this condition for several days, the parents distracted with worry, the neighbours “greatly admiring”. Presently it was so ill that its death was expected hourly, and the parents took it in turns to sit up with it throughout the night. Two women neighbours offered to share this task with them, “which was very thankfully accepted of”, and they took up their duties together.

At about midnight on their first night they both saw what they took to be a large black cat come to the side of the child’s cradle and begin to rock it. One of the women snatched up the “fire-fork” intending to strike it, whereupon it immediately vanished. Scarcely an hour had passed when the cat returned, and the other woman lunged out at it with her foot. Again it vanished at once, but the leg the woman had aimed at it began to swell and to ache intolerably.

By this time the two women were too afraid to continue their watch, and, calling down the father, they left the house. As they were going home they met a baker, who was also the servant of one of their neighbours. He was in a very excitable condition and began to tell them about a great black cat he had just seen, which had frightened him so much that his hair had stood on end.

Naturally the women told him of their experiences and the baker said he honestly believed that Mother Peterson had bewitched the child, “For”, quoth he, “I met the witch a little before, going down the Island”.

This was the story that emerged in the Old Bailey when Joan Peterson, eventually arrested, was brought up for trial on 7th

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April 1652. The people to whom I have referred above all gave evidence against her in the terms I have set down. But the two witnesses who did most harm to Joan Peterson's cause was a maid she had once employed, and her own son, who was seven or eight years old.

The maid testified that one night, when she was sleeping in the same bed as her mistress, Mother Peterson had told her that a squirrel would come, but she was not to be afraid, because it would do her no harm. And so it turned out. About midnight, a squirrel appeared and clambered over the girl to reach Mrs. Peterson. This so scared the maid that she lay for a time as though in a trance.

When she came out of this condition, however, she heard her mistress and the squirrel talking, and they continued in conversation throughout the greater part of the night. "But being demanded what they discoursed on, she replied, that she heard their conference very perfectly, but she was so bewitched by it, that she could not remember a word".

The boy, confronted by the evidence of some of his school-fellows, admitted that when he had once been asked by them how his mother could do such strange things, he had replied that she had a squirrel "that taught her what she should do". This was accepted by the court as corroboration of the maid-servant's testimony.

But for one thing, it is more than likely that Joan Peterson would have been acquitted. However, as the magistrates assembled to enter the court at the beginning of the session, they were joined by Sir John Danvers. Danvers was a member of Cromwell's council, and he made no secret of his reason for coming—the President of the Council required a verdict of guilty in the Peterson case, and he had come to see that this wish was gratified. In such circumstances, it is small wonder that the other magistrates allowed themselves to be coerced.

Actually much more than coercion of magistrates including the Recorder of London, their chairman, had settled the fate of Joan

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Peterson long before she was brought to the bar. These facts did not become known until after she was dead, and, though Cromwell was exonerated, the case created something of a scandal.

What had happened was this. A certain Mistress Levingstone stood between some highly placed gentlemen and a legacy, and the men sought some means of removing her. After some discussion they decided to approach Mother Peterson and attempt to bribe her to say that she had given Mistress Levingstone some magic power at her request. Joan Peterson, however, though by no means well off, had refused to be bribed, not even when they raised their offer to the then huge sum of one hundred pounds.

Her refusal placed her would-be suborners in a quandary. If Joan Peterson talked their own position would at once be jeopardised. So they decided to get rid of her, choosing an accusation of witchcraft, on account of her reputation as a Cunning Woman, as the surest method.

After her arrest, witnesses were bribed to give evidence against her; and such witnesses as would have spoken in her favour were threatened with dire consequences if they did do, though some had the courage not to allow themselves to be intimidated. Even on the morning of the trial a man had been seen in the courtyard of the Old Bailey offering bribes to anyone who would testify against her. As Montague Summers comments, ". . . the accusation was the outcome of an almost overt conspiracy".

But these discoveries were made too late to save Joan Peterson, who was hanged on Tyburn Tree with uncommon haste on the day following her trial. Nor is there any record of any action being taken against those responsible for the plot.

9

THE BURY ST. EDMUNDS CASE

OUR FINAL example in this category is one of the most famous of all English witchcraft cases. It was tried at the Bury St. Edmunds spring assizes in 1662 before Mr. Justice Matthew Hale, one of the great luminaries of Charles II's Bench and later to be appointed Lord Chief Justice.

The accused were two elderly widows of Lowestoft, Mother Rose Cullender and Mother Amy Duny. The thirteen charges against them involved the bewitching of several children between the ages of a few months and eighteen years, and killing one of them by witchcraft.

The trouble began when Mrs. Dorothy Durent employed Amy Duny, her neighbour, to baby-sit for her with her newest baby, William. William was still at the breast, but Mrs. Durent gave Mother Duny strict instructions that she was not to suckle the child. This instruction somewhat puzzled the Court, for Amy Duny was long past the age at which a woman is capable of suckling an infant, and when she was asked why she had so strictly enjoined the old woman not to feed William, Mrs. Durent replied that "she very well knew that she (Amy Duny) did not give suck (she being an old Woman and not capable of giving Suck) but that for some years before she had gone under the Reputation of a Witch, which was one cause which made her give her the caution"—implying that, old though she was, Mother Duny, if she were a witch, might by her witchcraft be able to suckle. Mrs. Durent went on: "Another (cause) was. That it was customary with Old Women, that if they did look after a sucking Child to give it the

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Breast, and it did please the Child, but it sucked nothing but wind which did the Child hurt ”.

Despite her promise to obey the injunction, when William cried Mother Duny put him to her breast. What is more, when Mrs. Durent came home she told her what she had done, and so incurred a sound scolding. Mrs. Durent's tirade roused the old woman's anger, and she departed, making various vague threats.

That night, however, William fell ill with “strange fits of swoounding”. This sounds like convulsions which occur in babies for any one of a number of causes, but which were more prevalent in the past than now. After some weeks, when he showed no signs of getting better, the alarmed mother consulted a Dr. Jacob of Yarmouth who “had the reputation in the county of helping children that were bewitched”, and who prescribed putting William to bed in a blanket which had been hung all day in the chimney-corner. If by chance she found anything in the blanket when she took it down, she was to throw it in the fire.

Well, when she did take down the blanket, a great toad fell out of it, and she cried out to a youth who was in the house with her, to catch the toad and put it into the fire. As soon as the toad was in the fire it exploded and spluttered and splashed like gunpowder, until eventually it disappeared.

Next day a young kinswoman of Amy Duny, who lived next door to Mrs. Durent, called on her neighbour and told her that Mother Duny was “in a most lamentable condition”, with her face scorched by fire, and with nothing on but her smock, though there was no fire in the grate.

Mrs. Durent hurried to Mother Duny's house and found her with her face, legs and thighs all burned. When she asked Mother Duny how she had got like that, the old woman complained that she had Mrs. Durent to thank for it, concluding “You will live to see some of your children dead, and yourself upon crutches.” Nevertheless, after the burning of the toad, William began to recover, and was now alive and well.

Some two years later, however, William's ten-year-old sister

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Elizabeth, was taken with similar convulsions. Mrs. Durent had run to the apothecary's for a remedy, and, when she returned home, she had found Mother Duny there, and the old woman had told her that she had given the sick girl a drink of water. Very angry at this, Mrs. Durent had put Mother Duny out of the house. Mother Duny had chided her for losing her temper. "You need not be so angry," she had mumbled, "for your child will not live long." Two days later the child died as the result, Mrs. Durent believed, of Amy Duny's witchcraft. A few days after the child's death, Amy Duny's first prophecy had been fulfilled—she herself had become lame in both legs from the knees downwards and had had to take to crutches.

Now, Mrs. Durent had brought her charges against Mother Duny only when she heard that a substantial, intelligent Lowestoft merchant, Samuel Pacy, "who carried himself with much soberness during the Tryal, from whom proceeded no words either of Passion or Malice", was bringing charges of bewitching his children against Amy Duny and another ancient crone, Rose Cullender. The indictment of Amy Duny accused her of bewitching Elizabeth and William Durent and their mother, and she and Rose Cullender were jointly accused of bewitching Elizabeth and Deborah Pacy, Jane Bocking and Susan Chandler.

Samuel Pacy told Mr. Justice Hale and the jury that on 10th October last his younger daughter Deborah was suddenly struck lame. Unable to stand, she had lain in her bed for seven days. On 17th October, since it was a fine, sunny day, she asked to be carried to the east side of the house and put down on a bank from which she could see the sea.

While she was lying there, Amy Duny called at the house to buy some herrings. For some reason, she was sent away empty-handed. She went muttering angrily, but shortly re-appeared, only to have her request refused a second time. She came back yet again, and, on being refused a third time, she became very angry, though no one could make out exactly what she was mumbling. Before the old woman was out of sight, the nine-year-old Deborah

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fell into a violent fit, "feeling most extream pain in her Stomach, like the pricking of Pins, and Shreeking out in a most dreadful manner, like unto a Whelp and not like a sensible Creature".

She continued to have these fits during the next two weeks, her condition completely mystifying the Doctor of Physic, Dr. Feavor, called in by her parents. In her fits "the said Child . . . would cry out at Amy Duny as the cause of her Malady, and that she did affright her with Apparitions of her Person (as the Child in the intervals of her fits related)". This brought Dr. Feavor to the conclusion that Deborah had been bewitched by Mother Duny, whereupon Samuel Pacy laid an information against her, and on 28th October the magistrate caused her to be set in the stocks.

As she sat in this humiliating posture, Alice Lethbridge and Jane Buxton, two inquisitive neighbours of the Pacys, approached her and asked her whether she really was responsible for Deborah's illness. She made no direct answer, but said that the father was making a great fuss over a small thing, and that he should wait until he

hath done as much by his Children as I have done by mine. And being further examined, what she had done to her Children? She answered, that she had been fain to open her Child's Mouth with a Tap to give it Victuals.

The record goes on,

Within two days after speaking of the said words, being the Thirtieth of October, the eldest Daughter Elizabeth, fell into extream fits, insomuch, that they could not open her Mouth to give her breath, to preserve her Life, without the help of a Tap which they were enforced to use; and the younger child (Deborah) was in the like manner Afflicted, so that they used the same also for her Relief.

And further the said Children being grievously afflicted would severally complain in their extremity, and also in the intervals, That Amy Duny (together with one other Woman whose person and

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Cloathes they described) did thus Afflict them, their Apparitions appearing before them to their great terror and affrightment: And sometimes they would cry out, saying, There stands Amy Duny, and there Rose Cullender; the other Person troubling them.

The involvement of Rose Cullender, it later appeared, sprang from a set of circumstances similar to those which had brought Amy Duny into contact with the Pacys. She, too, had called at the house to buy herrings, and had also been refused.

[The children's] fits were various, sometimes they would be lame on one side of their Bodies, sometimes on the other: sometimes a soreness over their whole Bodies, so as they could endure none to touch them: at other times they would be restored to the perfect use of their Limbs, and deprived of their Hearing; at other times of their Sight, at other times of their Speech; sometimes by the space of one day, sometimes for two; and once they were wholly deprived of their Speech for Eight days together, and then restored to their Speech again. At other times they would fall into Swoundings, and upon recovery of their Speech they would Cough extreamely, and bring up much Flegme, and with the same Crooked Pins, and one time a Two-penny Nail with a very broad head, which Pins (amounting to Forty or more) together with the Two-penny Nail were produced in Court. . . . Commonly at the end of every fit they would cast up a Pin, and sometimes they would have four or five fits in one day.

This went on for two months "during which time in their Intervals" their father "would cause them to Read some Chapters in the New Testament" and on several occasions Mr. Pacy observed

that they would read till they came to the Name of *Lord*, or *Jesus*, or *Christ*; and then before they could pronounce either of the said Words they would suddenly fall into their fits. But when they came to the Name of *Satan*, or *Devil*, they would clap their Fingers upon the Book, crying out, This bites, but makes me speak right well

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And farther, the said children after their fits were past, would tell, how that Amy Duny, and Rose Cullender would appear before them, holding their Fists at them, threatening, That if they related either what they saw or heard, that they would Torment them Ten times more than ever they did before. [Sometimes the two old women would appear to them in their fits] spinning sometimes reeling, or in other postures, deriding or threatening them.

One can well understand the anxious bewilderment suffered by the parents when no remedy proved of any avail. Almost in desperation, Mr. Pacy presently decided to send the girls to his sister, Margaret Arnold, in Yarmouth, in the hope that a change of scene might do them good. He told Mrs. Arnold how the girls were afflicted and that he believed them to be bewitched. She was a level-headed, practical woman and told the Court "that she gave no credit to that which was related to her, conceiving possibly the Children might use some deceit in putting Pins in their mouths themselves".

Determined not to be taken in by such a trick, Mrs. Arnold removed every pin from the girls' clothes, but "sewed all the Cloathes they wore, instead of pinning them, and left not so much as one Pin upon them". It was to no avail, however, "the Children afterwards raised at several times at least Thirty Pins in her presence, and had most fierce and violent Fitts upon them".

During their fits the girls always "cried out against Rose Cullender and Amy Duny, affirming that they saw them". They also claimed that they saw other things: an army of mice running about the house, bees which forced broad-headed "two-penny" nails into their mouths, which they afterwards vomited up, mice that exploded with the flash of gun-powder when put into the fire, phantom ducks and chickens and so on. The nine-year-old Deborah claimed that one day "Amy Duny had been with her, and that she tempted her to Drown herself and to cut her Throat, or otherwise destroy herself". Mrs. Arnold made a note of every incident as it occurred, and though, as she had proclaimed in Court, she had begun as a sceptic, she was now con-

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vinced that the children were bewitched by the two old women.

Within a short time of the Pacy girls' antics beginning, a number of their girl-friends were also similarly affected. There was Ann Durent, the twelve-year-old daughter of Edmund Durent of Lowestoft. Rose Cullender had called at the house one day to buy herrings and had been refused. On 1st December, a day or two later, Ann had developed terrible stomach pains and had fits in which she declared she saw Rose Cullender tormenting her. She vomited pins, like the Pacy girls. Ann's older sister Elizabeth developed the same symptoms a short time afterwards.

These four girls were then joined by Jane Bocking, who had fainting fits, vomited pins daily and

at another time, being in another of her fitts, talked as if she were discoursing with some persons in the Room (though she would give no answer nor seem to take notice of any person there present) and would in like manner cast abroad her Arms, saying, I will not have it, I will not have it; and at last she said, Then I will have it, and so waving her Arm with her hand open, she would presently close the same, which instantly forced open, they found in it a Lath-Nail.

Susan Chandler was another case. Her mother, Mary Chandler, had been one of the jury of women who, on the orders of " Sir Edmund Bacon, Baronet, one of the Justices of the Peace, for the County of Suffolk ", had gone to the house of Rose Cullender to search her for witch's-mark. When they asked

whether she was contented that they should search her? she did not oppose it, whereupon they began at her Head, and so striped her naked, and in the lower part of her Belly they found a thing like a Teat of an Inch long, they questioned her about it, and she said, That she had got a strain by carrying of water which caused that Excrement. But upon narrower search, they found in her Privy Parts three more Excrecences or Teats, but smaller than the former. . . . in the long Teat at the end thereof there was a little hole, and it appeared unto them as if it had been lately sucked, and upon the straining of it there issued out white milks Matter.

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Having given this evidence, Mrs. Chandler continued

That her said Daughter (being of the Age of Eighteen Years) was then in Service in the said Town of Leystoff, and rising up early the next morning to Wash, this Rose Cullender appeared to her, and took her by the hand, whereat she was much affrighted, and went forthwith to her Mother (being in the same town) and acquainted her with what she had seen; but being extreamely terrified, she fell extream sick, much grieved at her Stomach, and that Night after being in Bed with another young Woman, she suddenly screeked out, and fell into such extream fits as if she were distracted, crying against Rose Cullender; saying she would come to bed to her. She continued in this matter beating and wearing her self, insomuch, that this Deponent was glad to get help to attend her. [She got no better, and began to have fits and to vomit pins,] and sometimes she was stricken with blindness, and at another time she was Dumb.

On this evidence it would have been strange indeed had the authorities not brought the charges of witchcraft against the two old women. In fact, others came forward with testimony concerning other acts of witchcraft against them. On the other hand, it was the evidence relating to the children that was the overriding charge against Mother Duny and Mother Cullender.

The trial itself took on something of the character of a *cause célèbre* in the history of English witchcraft trials. It was fortuitous, of course, that the Judge of the Assize Circuit should be Sir Matthew Hale. I have already pointed out that Hale was looked upon as one of the outstanding pillars of the Restoration judicature; but it is also true that, despite his great legal learning and wisdom, he was, paradoxically, a firm believer in witchcraft to the point of bigotry. Indeed, it was due to the influence of his judgments in witchcraft trials that the belief in witchcraft lasted in England as long as it did.

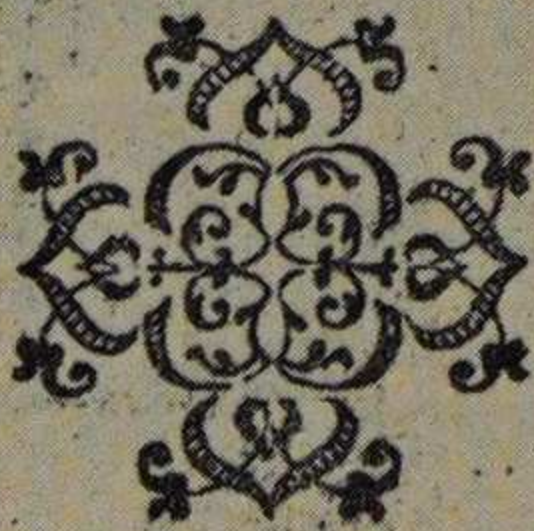
Now, this case differs from the six others we have so far considered in various points, chief of which is that there is little—in fact, I can find no—evidence of coaching of the children by



DÆMONOLOGIE,
IN FORME
OF A DIA-
LOGVE,

Divided into three books:

WRITTEN BY THE HIGH
and mightie Prince, JAMES by the
*grace of God King of England,
Scotland, France and Ireland,
Defender of the Faith, &c.*

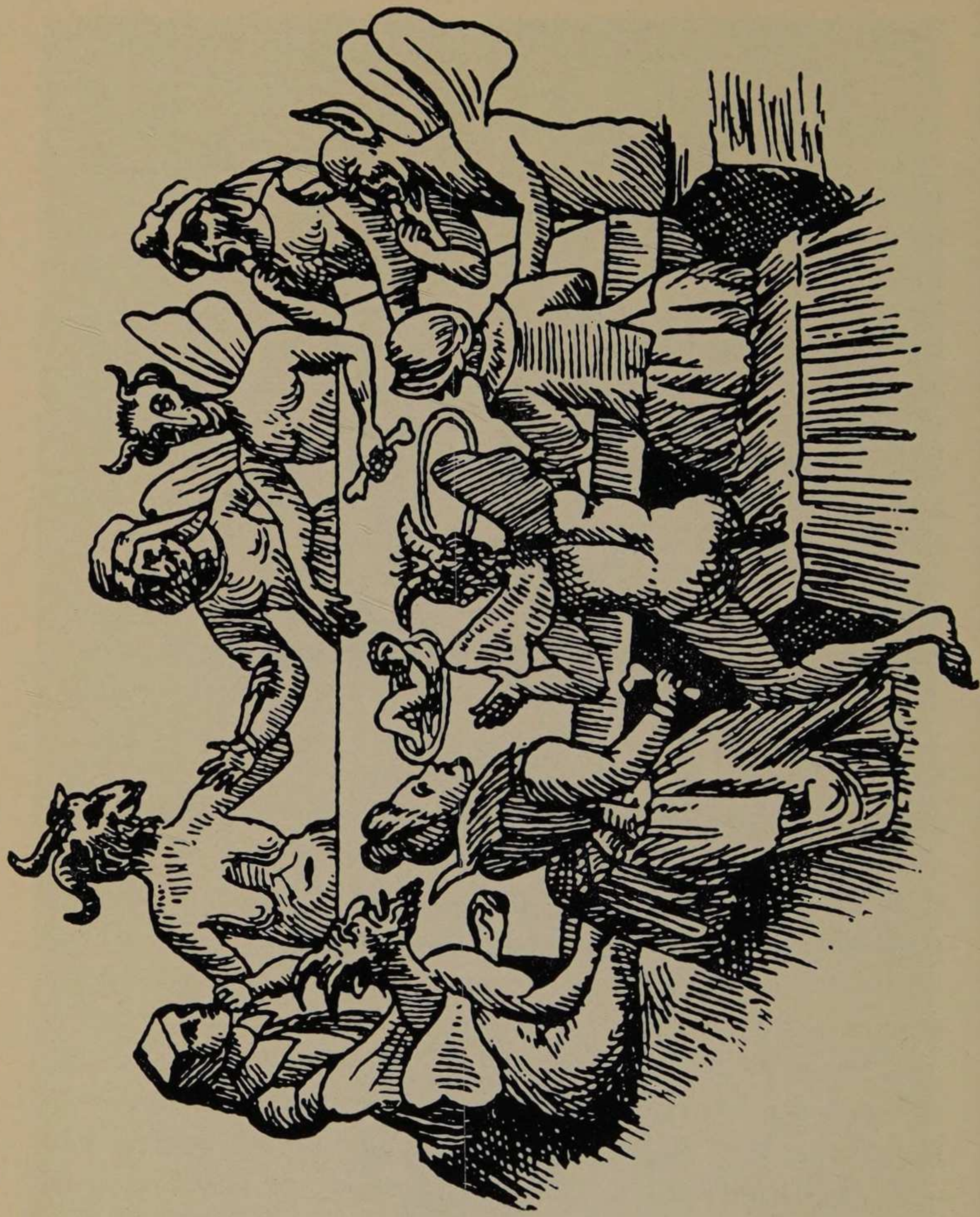


LONDON,
Printed by *Arnold Hatfield* for
Robert Wald-graue.

1603

The title page of James I's *Daemonologie*, written as a counterblast to Scot's book

Witches and devils feasting together



Children In Evidence

adults. I considered for some time whether or not to include this case with those that follow in part two. Ultimately I decided that they properly belonged to this series, for these reasons: the three children began by having genuine hysterical fits; not until sometime after the first fit did Deborah and Elizabeth begin to 'vomit' pins and crooked nails; that is to say, what began as a delusion only changed into an imposture when the girls found the attention which their behaviour excited was a pleasant experience. The other girls copied them, and were probably encouraged to do so by the adults about them. How any of them learned to perform so well the sleight of hand by which they were able to put pins into their mouths without being observed doing so is a mystery; but in this case no more mysterious than in any other cases of which vomiting pins and nails is a feature.

By the time of the trial all the girls had become part consummate actors and part genuinely afflicted by the symptoms they exhibited. By this I mean that they induced a genuine condition by having first acted the symptoms.

The record states:

As concerning Elizabeth and Deborah Pacy, the first of the Age of Eleven Years, the other of the age of Nine Years or thereabouts: as to the Elder, she was brought into the Court at the time of the Instructions given to draw up the Indictments, and afterwards at the time of Tryal of the said Prisoners, but could not speak one Word all the time, and for the most part she remained as one wholly senseless as one in a deep Sleep, and could move no part of her body, and all the Motion of Life that appeared in her was, that as she lay upon the Cushions in the Court upon her back, her stomack and belly, by the drawing of her breath, would arise to a great height: and, after the said Elizabeth had lain a long time on the Table in the Court, she came a little to her selfe and sate up, but could neither see nor speak, but was sensible of what was said to her, and after a while she laid her Head on the Bar of the Court with a Cushion under it, and her hand and her Apron upon that, and there she lay a good space of time: and by the direction of the Judge,

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Amy Duny was privately brought to Elizabeth Pacy, and she touched her hand; whereupon the Child without so much as seeing her, for her Eyes were closed all the while, suddenly leaped up, and caught Amy Duny by the hand, and afterwards by the face; and with her Nails scratched her till Blood came, and would by no means leave her till she was taken from her, and afterwards the Child would still be pressing towards her, and making signs of Anger conceived against her.¹

Deborah, the younger Pacy girl, was "held in such extream manner", that her Parents wholly despaired of her life and therefore could not bring her to the Assizes, while Susan Chandler was brought to court looking very thin and wan "by reason of her very much Affliction", and Ann Durent behaved as though the Devil were actually in the old women, "being so fearful to behold them, that she desired she might not see them". Elizabeth Durent produced few histrionics: she "continued in the Court, and Affirmed in the face of the Country, and before the Witches themselves, what before (had) been Deposed by her Friends and Relations; the Prisoners not much contradicting her." Jane Bocking, like the younger Pacy girl, was also so weak that she could not be brought to the court.

Mr. Justice Hale carried out a number of experiments, not, one feels, to assist the old women, but rather to add to the testimony against them. It was a widespread belief that if an alleged witch touched her victim, the victim would at once recognise the source of the bewitchment. So Rose Cullender and Amy Duny were brought into the court-room and made to touch the girls.

¹ Scratching was an exclusively English 'cure' for bewitchment. If the bewitched persons scratched and drew blood from the witches allegedly responsible for their condition, they would be cured of whatever ailments the bewitching had inflicted on them. R. H. Robbins in his *Encyclopaedia of Witchcraft and Demonology* (London 1967) describes it as a minor form of torture. Some old women resisted being scratched, and this often led to ugly scenes. But even William Perkins in his *Discourse of Witchcraft* listed it as one of his "less sufficient proofs" of witchcraft, "For it is a means which hath no warrant or power thereunto, either by word of God, or from Nature, but only from the Devil."

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And it was observed, that when they were in the midst of their Fitts, to all Mens apprehension wholly deprived of all sense and understanding, closing their Fists in such manner, as that the strongest Man in the Court could not force them open; yet by the least touch of one these supposed Witches, Rose Cullender by Name, they would suddenly shriek out opening their hands, which accident would not happen by the touch of any other person.

The record then goes on,

There was an ingenious person that objected there might be a great fallacy in this experiment, and there ought not to be any stress upon this to Convict the Parties, for the Children might counterfeit this their Distemper, and perceiving what was done to them, they might in such manner suddenly alter the motion and gesture of their Bodies, on purpose to induce persons to believe that they were not natural, but wrought strangely by the touch of the Prisoners.

To remove all such suspicions, the Judge asked Lord Cornwallis, Sir Edmund Bacon—Justices of the Peace—and Mr. Sergeant Keeling, together with a number of other gentlemen present, to go with one of the girls, while she was in a fit, to the other end of the hall, and “ then to send for one of the Witches, to try what would happen, which they accordingly did”. Amy Duny was led from the Bar to one of the girls, whose head had been covered by her apron, and then one of the company touched her hand,

which produced the same effect as the touch of the Witch did in the Court. Whereupon the Gentlemen returned openly protesting that they did believe the whole transaction of this business was a meer Imposture.

This, naturally, created a sensation in court, both on the Bench and among the spectators. But there was present “ a Person of great knowledge”, a certain Dr. Browne of Norwich. This was none other than the redoubtable Sir Thomas Browne, a notable

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physician, author of two great English classics, *Religio Medici*, and *Urn Burial*, among a number of other outstanding works. A considerable scholar, he was tolerant and broadminded, and the fact that he believed in astrology, alchemy and witchcraft is an indication of the strange ability of even great intellects of these times to accept matters that had no basis whatsoever in reason.

Learning that Sir Thomas was in court, Mr. Justice Hale in view of the dissatisfaction of Mr. Sergeant Keeling with the evidence, invited him to give his opinion. Sir Thomas told the judge

he was clearly of Opinion, that the persons were bewitched, and said, that in Denmark there had been lately a great Discovery of Witches who used the very same way of Afflicting Persons, by conveying Pins into them, and crooked as these Pins were, with Needles and Nails. And his Opinion was, That the Devil in such cases did work upon the Bodies of Men and Women, upon a Natural Foundation, (that is) to stir up and excite such humours superabounding in their Bodies to a great excess, whereby he did in an extraordinary manner Afflict them with such Distempers as their Bodies were most subject to, as particularly appeared in these Children; for he conceived, that these swouning Fits were Natural, and nothing else but that they call the Mother, but only heightened to a great excess by the subtilty of the Devil, co-operating with the Malice of these which we term Witches, at whose his stake he doth these Villanies.

It would at first seem that Samuel Pacy had had doubts about the genuineness of his daughters' antics for he declared, "That possibly the Maid might be deceived by a suspicion that the Witch touched her when she did not". But he went on to say that

he had observed divers times, that although they could not speak, but were deprived of the use of their Tongues and Limbs, that their understandings were perfect, for that they have related divers things which have been when they were in their fits, after they were removed out of them.

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This apparently turned out to be true, for when Elizabeth Pacy, after she had come out of her fit, was asked whether she had heard or understood anything that had happened around her while she was in her fit, replied that she did.

As I have remarked earlier, the evidence of the children was not the only evidence of witchcraft offered against the two old women. Four or five other witnesses were called, who described various strange happenings for which the women were held to be responsible. Nevertheless, it was the behaviour of the girls which constituted the only case, at least in the judge's mind, when he came to direct the jury. In fact, he added to the other injustices of the trial by announcing that he did not intend to sum up, giving one of the feeblest reasons for not doing so, ever heard, in an English court.

I will not, [he said to the jury,] repeat the evidence unto you, lest by so doing I might wrong the evidence on the one side or on the other. Only of this I will acquaint you, That you have two things to inquire after. First, whether or no these children are bewitched? Secondly, whether the prisoners at the Bar are guilty of it. That there are such creatures as witches I have no doubt at all. For first, the Scriptures affirm as much. Secondly the wisdom of all nations has provided laws against such persons, which is an argument of their confidence of such a crime. And such has been the judgment of this Kingdom, as appears by that Act of Parliament which has provided punishments proportionable to the quality of the offence. I desire you strictly to observe your evidence; and I desire the great God of Heaven to direct your Hearts in this weighty thing you have in hand; for to condemn the innocent, and to let the guilty go free, are both an abomination to the Law.

The jury were out for half an hour. When they returned they brought in a verdict of guilty against both women.

This was upon Thursday in the Afternoon, March 13, 1664.¹ The next morning, the Three Children with their Parents came to the

¹ This is an error. It should read 1662.

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Lord Chief Baron Hale's Lodgings, who all of them spoke perfectly, and were in good Health as ever they were; only Susan Chandler, by reason of her very much Affliction, did look very thin and wan. And their friends were asked, At what time they were restored thus to their Speech and Health? And Mr. Pacy did affirm. That within less than half an hour after the Witches were Convicted, they were all of them Restored, and slept well that Night, feeling no pain; only Susan Chandler felt a pain like pricking of Pins in her stomach.

After, they were all of them brought down to the Court, but Ann Durent was so fearful to behold them, she desired she might not see them. The other Two continued in the Court, and they Affirmed in the face of the Country, and before the Witches themselves, What before had been Deposed by their Friends and Relations; the Prisoners not much contradicting them. In Conclusion, the Judge and all the Court were fully satisfied with the Verdict, and there-upon gave Judgment against the Witches that they should be Hanged.

They were much urged to confess, but would not.

That morning we departed for Cambridge, but no Reprieve was granted: And they were Executed on Monday, the Seventeenth of March following, but they Confessed nothing.

Part Two

THE IMPOSTORS

MILDRED NORRINGTON OF WESTWELL

THE CHILDREN in the cases I have cited in Part I, with the possible exception of the Bury St. Edmunds case, were made the deliberate pawns of adults in their unreasoning campaign against events for which they could find no rational explanation. Some of the children, like the nine-year-old Jennet Device in the Lancashire case, had such lively imaginations that, in fact, they needed little prompting, and embroidered the bones of their stories so skilfully and authoritatively, that while they utterly convinced their contemporaries, they still surprise us.

Yet our surprise should rather be admiration. For twentieth-century parents, schoolmasters and anyone else who has had to do intimately with children between the ages of seven and young adult-hood, and, in the process, have consciously or unconsciously acquired at least some understanding of child psychology, will know that even very young children are capable of constructing the most imaginative fictions. There is a fantasy world into which almost all, except the most insensitive of children, enter to escape the unintelligible horrors of the adult world about them. I speak as a father of two children, a grandfather of five, and a schoolmaster of more than twenty years standing to children of seven at preparatory schools, adolescents at Public Schools and Grammar Schools at home and abroad, and as a university professor; and I do flatter myself that I am no longer surprised by anything I am told by children of all ages. However, I still find myself filled with admiration at the skill in story construction, the logic and feasibility of pseudo-events and claims, and the descrip-

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tive detail which embellishes the verisimilitude of the fantasy. This admiration I still find engendered in my case-hardened reactions to the stories of the child impostors whose cases I intend to describe in the following pages.

These children were for the most part the inventors of their impostures. In most of their stories there are indications that they embarked on their charades for fun, or as a pastime, and then discovered they liked the adult attention their antics attracted. This caused them to plunge deeper and deeper into the web of deception they had created, and were rescued eventually only by discovery of their fraud. But for the fact that they placed old men's and women's lives in jeopardy, one could enjoy these stories with abandon. But with the knowledge that but for discovery the lives of their victims might have been—in fact, most likely would have been—forfeited, they take on the macabre quality of the horror story. This horror is fully experienced, I think, in the Warboys case, when the victims were actually hanged; the happier antithesis is revealed in the story of the Bilson Boy. For our impostors were of both sexes, though it was the little girls who were more deadly in their inventions than the boys—which, I suppose, is not to be wondered at.

Mildred Norrington of Westwell

The first of our cases deals with demonic possession in 1574.

Mildred was the seventeen-year-old illegitimate daughter of Alice Norrington of Westwell, and was in the service of William Spooner of the same village. Without warning, one day in October, Mildred went into a kind of fit, in which she threw herself about with considerable violence. During the fit, a strange, male-like voice issued from her mouth, claiming to be the voice of the Devil himself. This voice accused "Old Alice of Westwell"—whom Wallace Notestein, the great American witchcraft expert, believes was Alice Norrington, her own mother—of witchcraft.

When Mildred had had two or three similar fits of possession,

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the story naturally reached the ears of the village authorities and on 13th October, "at Two of the Clock, in the Afternoon of the same Day", there went to the house of William Spooner, Mildred's employer, "Roger Newman, Minister of Westwell, John Brainford, Minister of Kenington", Thomas Taylor, Mrs. Henry Taylor, John Taylor, Mrs. Thomas Frenchborn, William Spooner and Mr. and Mrs. John Frenchborn, who formed a commission to inquire into the girl's claims.

After offering prayers "to God, to assist them in that needful case" they "then commanded Satan, in the Name of the eternal God, and of his Son Jesus Christ, to speak with such a Voice as they might understand, and to declare from whence he came". At first the Devil refused to comply with this request,

but roared and cryed mightily: And tho' we did command him many times, in the Name of God, and of his Son Jesus Christ, and in his mighty Power to speak, yet he would not until he had gone through all his Delays, as roaring, crying, striving and gnashing of Teeth, and otherwise, with mowing and other Terrible Countenances, and was so strong in the Maid, that four Men could scarce hold her down. And this continued by the Space of almost Two Hours: So sometimes we charged him earnestly to speak, and again praying unto God that he would assist us: At the last he spake but very strangely, and that was thus: *He comes, he comes*; And that oftentimes he repeated; and *he goes, he goes*.

Presently, however, the Devil decided to co-operate, and the following interrogation ensued.

Q: Who sent you?

A: I lay in her Way like a Log, and I made her run like Fire; but I could not hurt her.

Q: And why so?

A: Because God kept her.

Q: When then did you come to her?

A: To Night in her Bed.

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Q: What are you? Who sent you? What is your Name?

A: The Devil, the Devil!

When these questions were repeated, "he roared and cried as before, and spake terrible Words, *I will kill her, I will kill her; I will tear her in pieces, I will tear her in pieces.*"

When they declared he should not hurt her, he roared, "I will kill you all".

We said, Thou shalt hurt none of us all: Then we charged him as before: Then he said, *You will give me no Rest.*

Q: Thou shalt have none here; for thou must have no Rest within the Servants of God. But tell us, in the Name of God, what thou art, and who sent thee?

A: I will tear her in pieces.

Q: Thou shalt not hurt her.

A: I will kill you all.

Q: Thou shalt hurt none of us all, for we are the Servants of God: Now tell us what thou art, and who sent thee?

A: Will you give me no rest?

Q: Thou shalt have none here, neither shalt thou rest in her; for thou hast no right in her, since Jesus Christ hath redeemed her with his Blood, and she belongeth to Him. Now therefore tell us: What is thy name? Who sent thee?

A: My name is Satan.

Q: Who sent thee?

A: Old Alice, Old Alice.

Q: Which Old Alice?

A: Old Alice.

Q: Where dwelleth she?

A: In Westwell Street.

Q: How long hast thou been with her?

A: These twenty years.

Q: Where doth she keep you?

A: In two bottles.

Q: Where be they?

A: In the backside of her house.

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Q: In what place?

A: Under the wall.

Q: Where is the other?

A: In Kenington.

Q: In what place?

A: In the ground.

Q: What did she give you?

A: Her will, her will.

Q: What did she bid thee do?

A: Kill the maid.

Q: Why did she bid thee kill the maid?

A: Because she did not love her.

Q: How long ago is it since she sent thee to her?

A: More than a year.

Q: Where was that?

A: At her Mistress Brainford's at Kenington.

Q: How oft were thou there?

A: Many times.

Q: Where first?

A: In the garden.

Q: Where the second time?

A: In the hall.

Q: Where the third time?

A: In her bed.

Q: Where the fourth time?

A: In the field.

Q: Where the fifth time?

A: In the court.

Q: Where the sixth time?

A: In the water.

Q: Where the seventh time?

A: In her bed.

Q: Where else?

A: In Westwell.

Q: Where there?

A: In the Vicarage.

Q: Where there?

A: In the loft.

Children Against Witches

Q: How camest thou to her?

A: In the likeness of two birds.

Q: Who sent thee to that place?

A: Old Alice.

Q: What other spirit was with thee there?

A: My servant.

Q: What is his name?

A: Little Devil.

Q: What is thy name?

A: Satan.

Q: What doth Old Alice call thee?

A: Partner.

Q: What doth she give thee?

A: Her will.

Q: How many hast thou killed for her?

A: Three.

Q: Who are they?

A: A man and his child.

Q: What were their names?

A: The child's name was Edward.

Q: What more than Edward?

A: Edward Ager.

Q: What was the man's name?

A: Richard.

Q: What more than Richard?

A: Richard Ager.

Q: Where dwelt the man and the child?

A: At Dig, at Dig.

(Richard Ager of Dig ' was a Gentleman of forty Pounds hand by the Year; a very honest Man, but would often say he was bewitched, and languished long before he died.')

Q: Whom else hast thou killed for her?

A: Wolton's wife.

Q: Where did she live?

A: In Westwell.

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Q: What else hast thou done for her?

A: What she would have me.

Q: What is that?

A: To fetch her meat, drink and corn.

Q: Where has thou had it?

A: In every home.

Q: Name the houses.

A: At Potman's, at Farm's, at Millen's, at Fuller's and at every house.

Q: In the name of Jesus Christ, depart from her, and never trouble her any more, nor any man else.

A: I will go, I will go.

Q: In the name of Jesus Christ, depart from her.

A: I go, I go.

Then the maid said, He is gone, Lord have Mercy upon me; for he would have killed me; and then we kneeled down, and gave God thanks with the Maiden; praying that God would keep her from Satan's power, and assist her with his Grace; and noting this in a piece of Paper, we departed. Satan's Voice did differ much from the Maid's Voice; and all that he spake was in his own Name. Subscribed thus.

Witness to this that heard and saw the whole Matter, as followeth. . . .

This investigation by the well-meaning, but somewhat naïve, parsons of Westwell and Kennington and their friends merely served to spread the fame of Mildred Norrington far and wide, and presently she was summoned to appear before

Mr. Thomas Wotton of Bocton Malherb, a Man of great Worship and Wisdom, and, for deciding and ordering of Matters, of rare and singular Dexterity; through whose discreet handling of the Matter, with the Assistance and Aid of George Darrel Esq., being also a right, good, and discreet Justice of the same limit.

These two gentlemen were clearly far more worldly wise than the Westwell investigators, and perhaps even approached the case

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with a certain scepticism, for it was not long before they discovered that Mildred Norrington was a ventriloquist of considerable skill. In fact, she would put many modern phony spiritualistic mediums to shame, for she went into her 'trances' and produced her 'voice' in the full light of day. Wotton and Darrell immediately challenged the girl and without any attempt to deny it, she broke down and confessed.

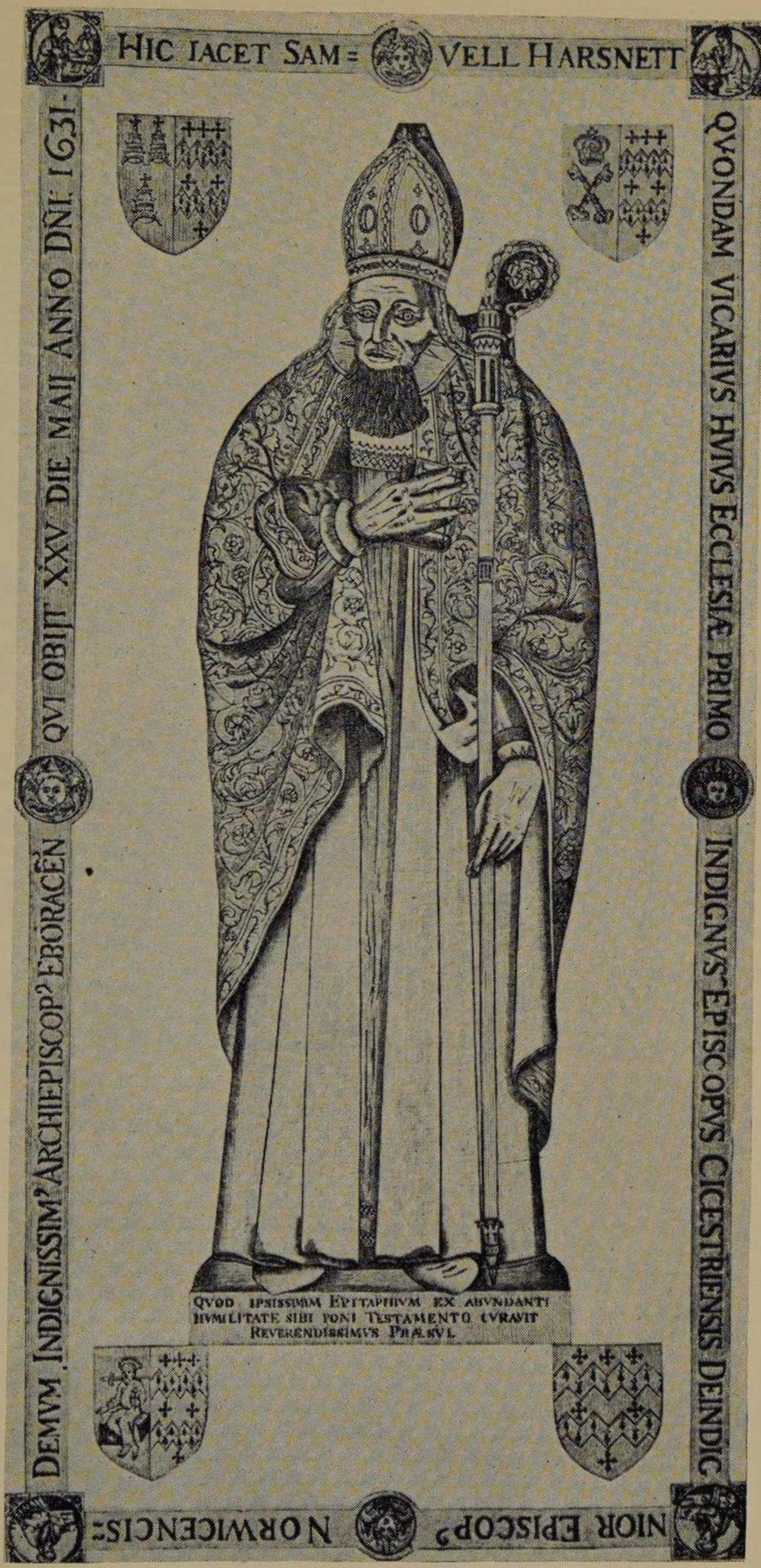
Reginald Scot, the famous sixteenth century witchcraft sceptic, in reply to whose *Discovery of Witchcraft*—in which he exposed the delusion—James VI and I published his counterblast, *Demonologie*, in describing the case, comments,

Neither was her confession won, according to the form of the Spanish inquisition, through extremity of tortures, nor yet by Guile, or Flattery, nor by presumptions, but through wise and perfect trial of every circumstance, the illusion was manifestly disclosed.

Apparently she was brought to trial, but no condign punishment seems to have been meted out to her, for Scot says,

After her due Tryal, she shewed her Feats, Illusions and Trances, with the Residue of her miraculous Works, in the presence of divers Gentlemen of Great Worship and Credit, at Bocton Malherb, in the House of the said Mr. Wotton.

The case of Mildred Norrington is, in fact, an extraordinary one. It may have been that she conceived a dislike for her mother and hoped to have her revenge by trumping up a charge of witchcraft against her. But it was the method she decided to employ for doing this which is so strange. Like any other person wishing to be avenged on a witch or a feuding enemy, she could have informed the authorities that her mother had a familiar, cast spells and dabbled in other forms of witchcraft. Why she should pretend to be possessed by the Devil himself, a pretence which she must have realised would be very difficult to keep up, I find inexplicable.



Samuel Harsnett, who exposed the Burton Boy and Anne Gunter as frauds

Witches before James I after having
been accused of raising a storm
against the King's ship



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I also find it surprising that an illiterate girl whose world was her small village, should have the acumen to use ventriloquism, no matter how poor a performer she might be; though certainly she was good enough to deceive others, who, if comparatively simple in the ways of the world, were many degrees more worldly-wise than she.

THE WICKED CHILDREN OF WARBOYS

THE WARBOYS case was one of the great *causes célèbres* not merely of English but of European witchcraft. It had a long and widespread influence on the development of the witchcraft tradition in England, it was the model on which one of the most notorious cases in the world-history of witchcraft was based—the case of Salem, Massachusetts in 1694–1695—it was the direct inspiration to a number of the impostors whom we shall be considering, as well as others.

About the tenth of November which was in the year 1589, Mistress Jane, one of the daughters of Master Throckmorton [says the contemporary pamphlet describing the subsequent trials of the victims,] being near the age of tenne years, fell upon a sudden into a strange kind of sickness and distemperature of body, the manner whereof was a followeth. Sometimes she would neeze (sneeze) very loud and thick for the space of half an hour together, and presently as one in a great trance and swoune lay quietly as long; soon after she would begin to swell and heave up her belly so as none was able to bend her, or keep her down; sometimes she would shake one legge and no other part of her, as if a paulsie had been in it; sometime the other, and soon after her head, as if she had been infected with the running paulsie.

Robert Throckmorton was the squire of Warboys, a small village a dozen miles or so north-east of Huntingdon. He had only recently moved to Warboys when Jane had her first fit.

The fits continued for two or three days, and it was during one

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of Jane's quiet intervals between fits that Mrs. Alice Samuel, an old lady of 76 who lived not far from the Throckmortons, called and was taken to the room where the child was being nursed by a woman. Jane's mother and grandmother were also present. Mother Samuel sat down and looked at the child, who presently remarked, "Did you ever see one more like a witch than she is: take off her black thrumbed cap for I cannot abide to look on her".

It was from this moment that the case properly begins. It is my view that the child was genuinely suffering from hysteria up to this point, induced, I suggest, by being uprooted from her former home and friends at Ellington, where Robert Throckmorton had been born and where he had lived until the move to Warboys. It was the child's way of protesting against having to adjust to new surroundings and make new friends. One or two of her subsequent fits may have been genuine after her remark about Mother Samuel, but the majority were feigned, as were those of her accomplices.

Jane's mother and grandmother were shocked by her rudeness to the old woman and rebuked her. They believed, however, that "it came from some lightness of the child's brain". "Alice Samuel said nothing, yet looked very ruefully", we are told by the famous pamphlet on the case, which is very full and was based on notes kept by the Throckmortons.

When Jane's condition did not improve, her parents consulted a celebrated Cambridge physician, Dr. Barrow. From the description of the child's symptoms Barrow diagnosed worms, and prescribed physick. This having failed to effect a remedy, Barrow prescribed another cure, which proved equally ineffectual, and he was asked to visit Warboys to examine Jane. He inspected her urine and asked the Throckmortons if they had any reason to suspect witchcraft. The Throckmortons rejected the suggestion energetically, but the damage was done, for this conversation took place in Jane's hearing.

Barrow then said he would like to call in a Cambridge colleague,

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a Dr. Butler, who, when he had examined Jane confirmed Barrow's first diagnosis. They prescribed another remedy for worms, and returned to Cambridge.

Jane grew no better, and a few days later two of her sisters also developed similar fits. Not to be left out, Joan, aged 15, their eldest sister, joined them. Her fits were worse than any of the others,

for she, having more strength than they, and striving more with the spirit than the rest, not being able to overcome it, was the more grievously tormented; it forced her to seeze, schrich and groan very fearfully; sometime it would heave up her bellie, and bounce up her bodie with such violence, that had she not been kept upon her bed it could not but have greatly bruised her bodie.

While in their fits, all the children cried out against Mother Samuel, Joan sometimes claiming that the old woman was at her side trying to force a cat, or a frog, or a toad down her throat.

But this was not to be the sum total of the Throckmortons' troubles, for soon a number of their female staff began to behave in the same way. No fewer than seven servant girls were thus afflicted.

After several months in this unhappy state of affairs, the Throckmortons—who were clearly level-headed for their times—at last had to admit that perhaps their daughters and servants were bewitched. Even so, it was with the greatest reluctance that they succumbed to the urgings of friends and relatives that “something must be done”.

The chief among those demanding action was Gilbert Pickering, a brother of Mrs. Throckmorton. He had heard of the happenings at Warboys and arrived on St. Valentine's Eve 1590. “He found all very well, and was told that Mistress Audley and Master Whittle of St. Ives and others, had gone to persuade Alice Samuel to come and see the children.”

Mother Samuel had previously told the Throckmortons that she would always be pleased to visit the children whenever they asked

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her, but apparently the arrival at her cottage of a number of people frightened her, and she now refused to come. As the party had been gone for some time, Pickering followed them to the Samuels' cottage, where he found the old woman protesting that she would not come if it was intended that the children should "scratch" her. Pickering, who was a Justice of the Peace—"in his own limits", Tidmarsh Grove, Northamptonshire—told her that if she would not accompany him voluntarily he would take her by force. He threatened Mother Samuel's daughter Agnes and her friend Cicely Burder, "who were all suspected witches", with the same treatment, and under this threat they gave way.

So that there should be no whispering among the women on the short walk to the Throckmorton house, Pickering separated them. Despite this, however, Mother Samuel managed to approach Agnes, and Pickering was later to swear that he heard the old woman whisper, "I charge thee not to confess anything". Apparently Pickering had challenged her on the spot, and the old woman with a flash of quick wit had retorted that she had said nothing of the kind, but had told Agnes to go home and prepare her father's dinner.

When the women reached the house, the children threw themselves on the ground, "strangely tormented". Actually they were performing the classic contortions of hysteria—"they leapt and sprung like a quick Pickerel newly taken out of the water, their bellies heaving up, their head and their heels still touching the ground as though they had been tumblers".

Whittle picked up Jane, the youngest, and put her on a bed. "And being a man of as great strength as most bee this day in England . . . yet he could not hold her down." She heaved up her belly "far bigger and in higher measure for her proportion than any woman with child ready to be delivered".

Pickering took Alice Samuel into the bedroom and made her put her hands over Jane's hands. The child scratched the old woman, and upon drawing blood, grew calm. Pickering then had Cicely Burder brought in, but before any of the other girls could

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scratch her, Throckmorton and the Warboys parson, Dr. Dorrington, arrived and told him to stop. If the children were bewitched, the parson maintained, they must be prayed over. To his great disappointment, Dr. Dorrington's prayers proved as inefficacious as Dr. Barrow's physick.

Next day, Pickering took the eldest girl home with him. But she continued to have her fits. The other girls at Warboys, on the other hand, presently began to be attacked only when Mother Samuel was present. Their parents, now convinced that the old woman was a witch, pressed her to confess. She refused, maintaining that she was no witch and would never confess it, and complaining that the girls were behaving "out of their own wantonness".

The girls now changed their technique, and went into their fits only when Mother Samuel was not with them. The Throckmortons thereupon insisted that she should move in and live permanently with them, so that she could be with the girls as much as possible—even sleeping in their room—to keep them from having fits. The girls baited the old woman unmercifully, and every day they scratched her about the face, until presently her face was a mass of raw gouges. Then for a time they went on hunger-strike, and the Throckmortons decreed that Mother Samuel should be deprived of food until the girls began to eat again. But no matter how she was treated, the old woman refused to admit that she was a witch.

Somewhat naturally, when the news of what was happening spread, visitors began to descend on the Throckmortons, outwardly to sympathise, actually to witness the strange goings on. One such visitor was Lady Cromwell, wife of Sir Henry Cromwell, who lived at Ramsey, about two miles from Warboys. Lady Cromwell decided to have a heart-to-heart talk with Mother Samuel and had her summoned, when she took her aside and "charged her deeply with this witchcraft, using also some hard speeches to her". Mother Samuel persisted in her innocence, and when Lady Cromwell realised that she was not succeeding in her attempt to make her confess

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she suddenly pulled of her (Alice Samuel's) kerchief, and taking a pair of sheers clipped off a lock of her hair and gave it privilie to Mrs. Throckmorton, mother of the children, together with her hair-locke, willing her to burn them.

Though she might be no witch, Alice Samuel was well acquainted with popular witchcraft beliefs, and realised the significance of Lady Cromwell's action, which was connected with the idea that if something belonging to a witch and a lock of her hair were burned, she would lose her power over her victims. She reproached Lady Cromwell, saying, "Madam, why do you use me thus: I never did you any harm *as yet*". Those last two words, probably uttered innocently enough, were to be the death warrant of herself, her husband and her daughter.

During the night Lady Cromwell had a nightmare in which she saw a cat sent by Alice Samuel to torment her. From that moment she went into a decline, and fifteen months later she died. It is interesting to note that no one during the whole period of Lady Cromwell's illness, nor when she died, suggested that Alice Samuel bewitched her to death; yet it was to become one of the main indictments against Mother Samuel.

Lady Cromwell's visit was followed by one from Henry Pickering, brother of Gilbert, who was a don at Christ's College, Cambridge. He brought two other scholarly gentlemen from the university with him. These gentlemen interrogated Mother Samuel almost non-stop for four days. Like his brother, Henry was convinced she was a witch, but she still maintained that she was not.

The strain of all this eventually began to be too much for the Throckmortons and they increased their pressure on Mother Samuel, entreating her to confess and to remove her spell from the children. After years of stubborn refusal, suddenly, just before Christmas 1592, she weakened and urged the children to stop their fits.

Probably no one could have been more surprised than she was when they obeyed. It was a shattering experience, which destroyed

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her faith in her own innocence. Turning to Throckmorton she exclaimed, " O Sir, I have been the cause of all this trouble to your children. Good master, forgive me ".

In their relief that their troubles were over, the Throckmortons would have been content to let matters lie as they were, but this they were not allowed to do. Dr. Dorrington, who was Mrs. Throckmorton's brother-in-law, felt bound by his profession to extract a public confession from Alice Samuel. She was so confused by what had happened that she let him have his way; but the next day, when she was more herself, she retracted all she had confessed.

This was the sign for the children to resume their fits. Neighbours and friends renewed their pressure on the Throckmortons to denounce the old woman, and eventually they agreed to her being handed over to the constable, who, on his own initiative, also arrested Agnes Samuel. Soon mother and daughter were on their way to Lincoln, where they were brought before the bishop, Dr. William Wickham. Under his careful interrogation, Mother Samuel not only admitted again that she had practised witchcraft for many years, but had been helped in her evil work by three familiars, dun chickens called Pluck, Catch and White.

The bishop, well satisfied, handed the two women over to the civil authorities. By the time they had returned to Huntingdon, the children had implicated Alice's ancient husband and had instigated a new charge against Mother Samuel—bewitching Lady Cromwell to death. Husband, wife and daughter were committed to the Huntingdon assizes.

The chief witnesses at their trial were the five Throckmorton girls, and the proceedings had not long been under way when they suggested to Mr. Justice Fenner that they could prove in open court the guilt of Alice and Agnes Samuel. They felt their fits coming on, they told the judge, but if Alice or Agnes were made to say to them " Even as I am a witch and consented to the death of Lady Cromwell, so I charge thee, spirit, to depart and let her be well ", his lordship would see what happened.

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The judge ordered the experiment to be carried out, and the effect was as the girls predicted—the fits did not develop. To add further weight to their charge, the girls then suggested that the women should be made to say, “As I am no witch and did not consent to the death of Lady Cromwell. . . .” This, too, was done, whereupon the girls went into their fits.

Several other witnesses were called and gave evidence of other acts of witchcraft attributable to Mother Samuel. But the most striking feature was the number of eminent local men and learned Cambridge scholars who went into the witness-box. They included Dr. Dorrington, parson of Warboys, Gilbert, John and Henry Pickering, the two Cambridge physicians, Dr. Barrow and Master Butler, Thomas Nult, vicar of Ellington, and Robert Poulter, vicar of Brampton, among others.

In her evidence, Mother Samuel confessed that her familiars had been given to her by one William Langley “who had carnall knowledge of her bodie”. The pamphlet comments, “Some are of opinion that it was the devil in man’s dress”.

This admission was put into her mouth by her examiners, but by this time the old woman, who was well over eighty, clearly did not know what she was saying. Her weakness of intellect is revealed in her plea, after she had been sentenced to death, that she was pregnant, a plea which made all who heard it rock with laughter, in which the poor old woman joined as merrily as any.

Father, mother and daughter were hanged on the same scaffold on 7th April 1593, two days after their trial.

The Warboys case, as I have said, had a profound effect on the development of witchcraft history in England. It was to lead to imitators most of whom were fortunately detected before they had done much harm.

THOMAS DARLING, THE BURTON BOY

THOMAS DARLING, who lived in Burton-on-Trent, was out hunting one February day in 1596, when he became separated from his uncle. When he at last found his way home, he complained of feeling ill, and next day he had a number of fits, in which, so he claimed in his more rational moments, he had visions of green cats and green angels.

A physician was summoned and he, like Dr. Barrow and the Throckmorton girls, diagnosed that the thirteen-year-old Thomas was suffering from worms, which was a very common complaint in Elizabeth's 'Merrie' England. This diagnosis, however, did not satisfy a number of the Darlings' friends, who maintained that Thomas's symptoms more closely resembled those of bewitchment. Standing by the boy's bed, they gave detailed reasons for their assertions, and these persuaded the mother and father that the doctor must be wrong.

Thomas's fits continued for several days, during which time his visions became more and more elaborate. In one, he saw a man rising from his chamber pot "amid blue Flames of Hell as the heavens opened".

When he was quiet, his parents pressed their son to recall some incident which might have provoked some old woman to bewitch him. At first he could bring no such incident to mind, but presently he described how, when he had been lost in the woods, he had "met a little old woman with three warts on her face". As he had passed her, he had broken wind. He did not do so on purpose, he declared, but the old woman believed he had,

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deliberately intending to insult her thereby. She had retorted with a gay little doggerel couplet:

Gyp with a mischief and fart with a bell
I will go to heaven, and thou shalt go to hell.

The Darlings and their friends immediately began to search for an old woman answering to Thomas's description, rather as the Tibetan lamas search for the reincarnation of their ruler god. On 8th April they came up with Alice Goodridge, aged 60, who had three warts on her face and the reputation of a witch. They hauled her off to the magistrates.

Alice Goodridge was a tough old lady, however, and it took two whole days of continuous questioning and badgering to get her to make an admission of any kind; and then she would only say that, though she was in the woods on 27th February, the boy she had met was not Thomas Darling, but a young scamp who had one day maliciously broken a basket of eggs belonging to her. Certainly she had scolded him, but insisted that she had not bewitched him.

Further questioning, however, eventually drew from her a confession that she had met Thomas, who had called jeeringly after her, "old witch of Stapenhill", to which she had replied:

Every boy doth call me witch,
But did I ever make thy arse to itch.

Since the awful doggerel of this matched Thomas's couplet, her examiners were convinced that she had spoken that too, and Thomas was told that he must accuse her of bewitching him.

Events now took a very interesting turn. Like the Throckmorton girls when Mother Samuel was with them, Thomas began to have fits whenever Mother Goodridge was nearby, and he went into fit after fit, on one occasion having no fewer than twenty-seven in six hours. The fits took various forms. Sometimes they had

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every characteristic of classic hysteria, at other times they were terrible attacks of coughing, at the climax of which Thomas, between gasps for breath, would ask those about him if they did not see various apparitions coming out of his mouth—"of a Cat, a Dragon, a Bear, a Lambe, a Dove, a Woman". On one occasion he cried out, "Do you not see the mouse that is gone out of my mouth? and so pointed after it unto the furthest part of the parlour".

Meanwhile, Alice Goodridge was searched for witch's-marks, and was found to have at least two. Told to recite the Lord's Prayer—a well-known test of witchcraft—she could not do so satisfactorily. But still she would not admit to witchhood, and to persuade her to do so, a torture was applied to her that is unique in the whole history of English witchcraft.

The torture was suggested by a Cunning Man (white wizard), a very recent newcomer to the English witchcraft scene. A new pair of shoes were put on her, and she was set "close to the fire until the shoes became extreme hot. She being thoroughly heated, desired a release and she would disclose all. Which granted, she disclosed nothing", the contemporary pamphlet declares.

Under further pressure, however, she did confess that she had a familiar "in the likeness of a little parti-coloured dog, red and white, and I called him Minny". She said that she had got it from her mother, Elizabeth Wright, who was still living.

For a time things looked black for a mongrel dog belonging to a neighbour, which resembled Alice's description of Minny. It was eventually decided, however, that "Elizabeth Wright could never have had authority over the animal", and it was spared.

Elizabeth Wright was also taken to Thomas. As soon as he saw her, he had a fit, so she was arrested, too. Alice's husband and daughter were hauled before the examining magistrates as well, but released for lack of evidence. Alice and her mother were committed to the next Derby assizes, accused of bewitching Thomas Darling.

On 27th May John Darrell made his appearance. Darrell had

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earned himself a reputation as an exorcist, though among the intelligent and thoughtful he was considered a charlatan. He was the unique professional exorcist ever to operate in England, and it was mainly on account of his very dubious practices that the Church of England outlawed exorcism in 1603.

Graduating from Cambridge, Darrell had returned to his birth-place, Mansfield, in Nottinghamshire. There he set up as a Puritan preacher, casting out devils as a side-line.

Almost at once he had fallen foul of the authorities. A girl called Catherine Wright, allegedly possessed by devils, had been brought to him, and, after praying with her for a day, he extracted from her the name of the person who had sent the demons to torment her. He had then recited the exorcising rigmarole he had invented, and 'dispossessed' the girl.

Later, however, she confessed that she had faked her fits and visions in order to make her strict step-father kinder to her. When the local magistrates got wind of this, they summoned Darrell and warned him to discontinue his exorcising antics or he would find himself in prison for fraud.

Darrell bowed to their advice and for ten years concentrated on his preaching. But in the spring of 1596, being in the neighbourhood of Burton, he heard of Thomas Darling, and could not resist the temptation.

Like Mildred Norrington of Westwell, Darrell was something of a ventriloquist, and when Thomas was brought to him, the company heard a conversation between a number of demons, which, so Darrell informed them, were the voices of the evil spirits which had possessed the boy.

As a result of their meeting, Thomas, who had been partially paralysed for the past three months, was able to walk. But bad luck still continued to dog Darrell. The Church authorities came to hear of what had happened, and Dr. Bancroft, Bishop of London, sent his chaplain, Samuel Harsnett, to investigate the Burton Boy.

Harsnett came to Burton, and examined Thomas with a skill

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which reveals a deep understanding of psychology—300 years or more before Freud. Harsnett rejected "possession by demons", and he was convinced from his first meeting with Thomas that the boy had counterfeited his fits. Thomas, however, would not admit to this, until Harsnett began to threaten him. Then his courage failed him and he made a full confession. He had heard the story of the Throckmorton girls and had decided to try to emulate them. From what he had heard from those gathered about his bed, he had gained useful knowledge for his subsequent counterfeits.

Unfortunately, Thomas's confession came too late to help Alice Goodridge.¹ She had been sentenced to a year's imprisonment for bewitching the boy, and had died in prison within a few months.

Darrell ought to have been revealed as an impostor also, but by the time Harsnett made Thomas's confession public, the 'exorcist' had had other successes. He hit back vigorously, declaring that Thomas had confessed only after having been kept in prison for seven weeks. He also alleged that the chaplain had made Thomas put his mark at the bottom of a blank page, and that he had then concocted the confession. There were to be further encounters, but Harsnett was destined to win, for preferment came to him rapidly, and as Archbishop of York he played a major part in Darrell's ultimate undoing.

Thomas Darling was the first of a number of young boys to imitate the Throckmorton girls' fits and accuse old women of bewitching them. Two years later another boy tried similar tricks.

¹ There is no record of what happened to her mother, Elizabeth Wright.

WILLIAM SOMERS, THE NOTTINGHAM BOY

WILLIAM, WHO was fourteen or fifteen years old, at the time of his notoriety, had begun his useful life as a servant-boy in the house of a Mr. Brackenbury, who lived near Ashby-de-la-Zouch. While in service there he had some "odd kind of fits" for which "he was turned out of his place, and having no Exorcist, was well of himself for several Years". From Brackenbury, he returned to Nottingham, to his step-father's house, and his mother, hoping to do her best for him, apprenticed him to Thomas Porter, a member of the town band. After some time, William

ran away from him, and came back; ran away again, but returned to him again, designing to serve out his Time, but understanding that his Master would make him stay until he had made up the Time he lost; to make his Master glad to be rid of him, he pretended himself sick; and having really got cold in the Water, he huffed up his Belly, and made it move, and practised the same Tricks he had done at Mr. Brackenbury's.

Such afflictions, in Elizabeth Tudor's days, provided a source of entertainment for a people that had to take an active part in ordering their own pastimes, and some of those who came to see William Somers declared that it was quite obvious that the boy was possessed. To support their point of view, they produced "a book, *Of the Witches of Warbois and Mr. Throgmorton's Children*; and by that he learned several things, and said, he was bewitched by an old Woman that he had met with, because he would not give her a Hatband he had found".

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Now Darrell the Exorcist had a sister living in Nottingham, who came to have a look at William. She said that her brother had cured

nine such persons; and upon that, Somers, in his fits, called for Darrel, Darrel. If it was a Devil, he had a great mind to be cast out. He liked Mr. Darrel's way; For it appeared afterwards, that he had known Mr. Darrel before, at Ashby-de-la-Zouch, and he would not rest now until Mr. Darrel was sent for

So Darrell's sister and Mr. Aldridge, vicar of St. Mary's, Nottingham, "wrote to Mr. Darrel to come, and he came the fifth of November, 1597".

On his way to William's house, Darrell called on a friend, where he said that he believed the Boy was possessed "and that he did not doubt the Boy's Deliverance". When he had seen William he repeated his diagnosis,

and added, that the Boy was senseless in his Fits; and that what he spoke, was not from himself, but the Devil. When he asked Somers, How he did? and he said Well: Mr. Darrel answered, that it is not he, but the Devil that said so. Again, he told in Somers' hearing, how he was like the Boy of Burton, and Catherine Wright, and the seven in Lancashire; that he would be much worse than he was yet; would lie in a Trance, when the Devil went out; and how all the rest had seen the Devil go out in the Likeness of some Creatures. The Shapes that the other Spirits were said to go out in, were these, a Mouse, a Man, with a Hunch-back higher than his head, an Ugly Man with a white beard, a Crow's Head round, a great Breath, ugly like a Toad, an Urchin etc. etc.

He told also, in Somers' hearing, many other things that the possessed persons had done; as casting themselves into the Fire and Water, gnashing with their Teeth, writhing their Necks, as if their Faces stood backward, drawing their Mouths awry, foaming; and the Satan used by Gestures to show the Particular Sins that reigned in the Places where they dwelt.

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On the following day, Sunday, Darrell visited the boy again, and William obligingly produced several fits.

Mr. Darrel persuaded all People to beware of Sin; for Somers, he said, was afflicted for the Sins of Nottingham. . . . At this time, as he had done the Night before, Somers acted by Signs all the Sins of Nottingham, and Mr. Darrel explained them to the People, as Somers acted them.

Naturally, " Mr. Darrel, by these Explications, and much talk of his dispossessing others . . . raised the Expectation of the People ". After some persuasion, he agreed to exorcise the boy, and ordered that a fast should be observed the next day, requiring that all the men present should refrain from sexual intercourse with their wives that night. If they obeyed his instructions implicitly, he said, then

the next Day they would see strange things; and that, if it stood with the Glory of God, they would see both the Signs of Possession and Dispossession; and intimated how unwilling the Boy would be to come to the House appointed.

Next morning William did resist going to the appointed house. It took seven strong men to get him there, but eventually they achieved it, and he was laid on a bed that had been prepared for him. The vicar of St. Mary's then preached a sermon, during which the boy lay still; but when Darrell began to speak " he roused himself up, and Mr. Darrel declaring fourteen Signs of Possession, leisurely, one after another, Somers showed all Fourteen as Mr. Darrel spake them ".

From his behaviour, Mr. Darrell told his audience, it was certain that Somers was indeed possessed, and went on, " now, if it stood to the Glory of God they should see the Signs of his Deliverance. The three Signs of that were, Crying, Rending and Lying as Dead ". As Darrell discoursed of crying, so Somers cried,

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“ when of Rending; he tore his Doublet; and when of lying, as if dead; he lay as if he was dead for half a quarter of an Hour. Upon this there was suddenly a great Noise amongst the People, Crying, Praying and Astonished”. Darrell stood with his hand raised to heaven, “ and two that were there confessed their Sins before the Company, being about one hundred and fifty”. When the boy came to himself, he said that he believed himself to be well; but Darrell warned him that though he might be well at the moment, the Devil would almost certainly try to repossess him.

During the following week Darrell bought out William’s time as an apprentice, and sent him to lodge with his step-father, Robert Cooper. He also made a public collection to buy some clothes for the boy, and to pay Cooper for his keep.

As Darrell had warned, about three or four days after he had been dispossessed, the Devil attempted to repossess him, and the boy started his fits all over again. He talked of a black dog that offered him gold and ginger; of the Devil coming to him in six more shapes—“ a Cock, a Crane, a Snake, an Angel, a Toad, a Newt, a Set of Viols and Dancers ”.

Darrell and the boy kept this up for a fortnight. The next fortnight they spent ‘ discovering ’ witches; Somers “ named many he had heard reputed bad, and threw Fits at their coming; and thirteen were sent to Jail ”. Some who were sceptical of the whole business, tried to trick him, but he successfully avoided their traps. All of which served to enhance Darrell’s reputation, and presently he grew even bolder.

This William Somers had a Sister that was often with him, and Mr. Darrel bid her be very careful of her selfe; for the Devil used to possess more than one in a Family. A little before Christmas she had a child died [*sic*], the Death of which made her ill at ease. . . . Some disorder that she had, made her Belly swell, that she thought she was with Child. Mr. Darrel said, it was no Child, but such a Child as God bless every good Body from.

Taking her cue from this, Mary Cowper began to behave

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strangely, too, and before long, she was 'fingering' old women as witches. Presently, however, she went too far, and as a result brought about the undoing of them all.

For this Mary Cowper accused one Alice Freeman, who though poor and old, yet was Sister to one of the Aldermen, but was committed to Jail, and in great Danger. Soon after her Confinement, her Brother having Intimation of Somers's Counterfeiting, prevailed with the Mayor, and some other Aldermen, to remove him to the Work House, where he might be out of Mr. Darrel's Hands, and be observed better. When he was there, he had his Fits: But one Nicholas Shepherd told him, if he would not leave and rise up, he would set such a Pair of Knips-Knaps upon him, as should make him rue it: And the Boy, being loath to venture him, lest he should be as good as his Word, rose up before them, and being weary of Mr. Darrel's practices, he confessed his Dissimulation: And they promising to speak for him to the Mayor, that he might not be punished, he voluntarily acted over all his Tricks before them. They gave the Mayor an Account of what had passed and he confessed the same before him, and some of the Aldermen: And shewed them the several Ways how he had swallowed his Tongue, and foamed, and made the Swelling, and acted all before them: And as once before he had been taken with black Lead in his Mouth, in the Time of his Fits, he confessed that he used it to help him to foam the more easily.

As Bishop Francis Hutcheson remarks in his account—on which I am relying for my own narrative—"One would have thought such Demonstrations as these should have put an end to a bad Practice". But Darrell decided to brazen it out. He "plied Somers with Threats and Persuasions to make him revoke his Confession". The boy, hoping to cut himself free of the business, replied in a letter in which he said,

This is to desire you, that you would let me be at quiet: For whereas you said that I was possessed I was not; and for those Tricks that I did before you came, was through Folks Speeches that came to me:

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And those that I did since, was through your Speeches, and others. For as you said, I could not hear, I did hear all Things that were done in the House, and all Things that I did were Counterfeit.

By this time the affair had become known almost all over the country. The Archbishop of York was fully convinced that Darrell's exorcisms were not only fraudulent, but extremely dangerous practices, and he "granted a Commission of Gentlemen and Clergymen, to enquire into the Truth of what had past".

The commission sat on 21st March 1598, and the boy, called before it, decided to stand by his confession, and went through his tricks despite many threats that were made to him of beatings, even a lynching, should the commissioners believe him. Paradoxically, the commission pronounced William's confession to be a counterfeit, and not knowing how to meet this very peculiar situation, the boy decided that if the people wanted him to be possessed, he would oblige. Darrell, of course, was completely vindicated by this turn of events, and audaciously applied for Somers to be returned to his care, which was permitted.

As may be imagined, Nottingham was all at sixes and sevens, and there is no telling what might have happened, had not Lord Chief Justice Anderson of the Common Pleas arrived on circuit to preside over the assizes. Anderson,

having had two supposed Witches tried before him, and many more accused, and the County in such a ferment, that the People were ready to quarrel in the Streets about these Witchcrafts and Possessions; he, and the Mayor, and those Alderman that had heard Somers's Confession before, and seen his Fits, had him again before them, and encouraging him to speak the Truth without Fear, he confessed himself a Counterfeit again, and shewed all his Tricks before them.

The Lord Chief Justice reported all that had happened to Archbishop Whitgift of Canterbury, who "thought it necessary to have

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the Matter examined by the High Commission; and accordingly Mr. Darrel and Somers were both called to London". The Archbishop appointed himself to the commission, and chose as the other members the Bishop of London, Dr. Bancroft—who had sent Harsnett to investigate the Burton Boy—the two Lord Chief Justices (of Common Pleas and the Queen's Bench), the Master of Requests, Dr. Caesar, the Dean of the Arches, Dr. Bing and Dr. Stanhope.

By now Somers seems to have been fully convinced that he would have nothing to fear, and stood stoutly by his confession. Aldred, vicar of St. Mary's, Nottingham, who had been instrumental in bringing Darrell on the scene, now declared "that he was satisfied he was mistaken". Robert Cooper, the boy's stepfather, made a similar declaration. Only Darrell remained adamant—as, indeed, he had to—in his contention that Somers had been possessed, that he had dispossessed him, and that he had been repossessed once more.

When Dr. Bancroft asked him direct, if Somers was repossessed, as he, Darrell, maintained, why he had no fits now, but went to chapel and was well-behaved, "and had been well for a Year together? Mr. Darrel wanted not an Answer: Said he, When the Strong Man is in quiet Possession, his House is in Peace; now the Devil lurks and lies close, like an Old Fox as he is".

The result of the investigation went against Darrell. The commission unanimously declared him to be a fraud, and sentenced him to be unfrocked, and "committed to close Prison, there to remain till order was taken for his further Punishment. And though nothing could cure his Tongue, or make him confess himself wrong, yet I never find that he attempted to dispossess any more".

Unfortunately, there is no record of what happened to the Nottingham Boy. But he set an example which several were to follow at intervals over the next 120 years.

ANNE GUNTER

THE Accession of James VI of Scotland to the throne of England had an effect on the development of English witchcraft that no other event had. The treatment of witchcraft in Scotland closely resembled, in its brutality, the Continental treatment; for example, torture was permitted to extract confessions, and, though witchcraft was not designated a heresy, burning at the stake was a common punishment.

The effect James's coming into England had on the development of witchcraft here was a direct result of the King's experience of Scottish witches. He had personally examined and supervised the trial of the notorious North Berwick witches in 1590, and what he had learned there had fully convinced him that witchcraft was real and actual. He believed this so strongly that when Reginald Scot, the Kentish hop-farmer, produced his book debunking witchcraft at about the same time that the work of Johan Weyer, a German Protestant, performing the same function there, began to be widely circulated in England, James felt obliged to make his own position quite clear. This he did in his book *Demonologie*.

He had been on the English throne only a short time when, in 1604, he repealed the Elizabethan Witchcraft Act of 1563 and replaced it with a much harsher law of his own. This act made hanging mandatory for a first offence of bewitching, even when the alleged victim did not die. It kept the year's imprisonment and exposure in the pillory for a first offence of finding stolen property by divination, making love charms and potions and

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damaging property; but it defined the pact with the Devil, making the signing of such a pact a felony punishable by death.

This Witchcraft Act of 1604 remained in force until repealed in 1736. Under it some of the most important witchcraft cases in English history were tried.

One of the first cases to be tried under this Act involved three old women at the Abingdon assizes in 1605. Fortunately, they were found not guilty, for their accuser, a fourteen-year-old girl called Anne Gunter, was discovered to be counterfeiting her symptoms of bewitchment.

With the exception of the Warboys girls—and in some respects even including them—Anne's performance was far superior to that of any other impostor. Her body swelled up in a most extraordinary fashion, she foamed at the mouth, for long periods she could not see, and at other times appeared to be stone deaf. She fasted for twelve days—a rare feat for a pubescent girl—she sneezed and vomited constantly, and she produced pins from her mouth, breasts and fingers, to do which she must have been mistress of a considerable sleight of hand. She claimed that her condition was caused by three witches, Mary and Agnes Pepwell and Elizabeth Gregory.

Anne's father was a country gentleman of some estate, and he summoned eminent physicians from Oxford to attend to his daughter. They diagnosed "falling sickness" (epilepsy) and/or "suffocation of the mother" (hysteria).

As always happened in these cases, the girl's fits attracted crowds of spectators to the Gunter's house. Most of them rejected the opinions of the doctors and insisted that Anne was showing every sign of being bewitched. To support their contention they took to the house various books and pamphlets on witchcraft and witchcraft cases, among which was a book by Darrell the exorcist, and the pamphlet on the Warboys case. Either they read and discussed these works in Anne Gunter's hearing, or the girl obtained access to them from private study. She drew heavily upon the Warboys pamphlet, for she said that Elizabeth Gregory's

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familiar was named Catch—the name of one of Alice Samuel's familiars—and she made the three women repeat the charm concocted by the Warboys girls. As Bishop Hutcheson relates it,

About this Time, the Spirits, as they said, taught them, but, in Truth, their own Folly led them to use a Charm to try them by: and tho' it was a desperate Snare to their own Lives, Mr. Throgmorton had that Power, that they made the poor Woman (Alice Samuels) say it a hundred Times over, *I charge thee, thou Devil, as I love thee, and have authority over thee, and am a Witch, and guilty of the Matter, that thou suffer this Child to be well at present.*

Against all rational argument, a complaint was laid against the three women, and, as I have said, they were brought to trial at the Abingdon assizes in the spring of 1605. But there was something about the girl that made the jury suspicious, and they returned the verdict, rare in witchcraft trials, of not guilty.

The Judge was also of a mind with the jury, and he handed Anne over to Bishop Cotton of Salisbury to investigate the girl's antics. Though it is not specifically stated, it would seem that the Judge selected the bishop on account of his special qualification—he was the father of nineteen children, the majority of whom were girls. If anyone could handle girls, it must be the bishop. And indeed, he soon discovered how she was operating her deceptions. He marked some pins and left them in a place accessible to Anne. When she next produced pins during a fit, they were Bishop Cotton's marked pins. However, when she was taxed with counterfeiting, she adamantly refused to admit it; not even the King could win an admission from her when he personally examined her on 27th August 1605.

James, nevertheless, was not impressed, and he sent her to Dr. Harsnett, who, by this time, was gaining a reputation as a discoverer of frauds and was also engaged still in a pamphlet war with Darrell. Harsnett examined the girl over several months and engaged to help him the eminent physician, Dr. Edmund Jordan.

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In time the two men pierced Anne's defences, and she eventually confessed that "though she suffered from a natural distemper", her father had made her produce more spectacular tricks than she would normally have done.

It would seem that Anne remained in Harsnett's care for a year, for in 1606 Sir Edward Coke, the Attorney-General, one of the greatest luminaries of the English judiciary, indicted Brian Gunter and his daughter Anne with conspiracy to deceive. Though the outcome of the proceedings has not been recorded—and there are doubts whether the process was ever concluded—several witnesses were examined. Among them was the vicar of Abingdon, who testified that, without any help at all, Anne's garters could "tie themselves in knots like chitterlings".

THE LEICESTER BOY

OF ALL the impostors to be detected, the Leicester Boy presents at once one of the most remarkable and most terrible cases of this kind.

Sir Roger Smith, an ancestor of the Earl of Derby, lived at Husbands Bosworth in Leicestershire. Among his numerous children was a boy called John, who, when only four years old (in 1607), began to suffer the kind of fits with which we are now familiar—convulsions, vomiting, exuding pins and so on. He accused a number of women of bewitching him, but apparently, precocious in many ways though he was, his accusations were not convincing enough to lead to the arrest of those he denounced.

These early failures, however, did not discourage John Smith. He continued his antics and improved his techniques, until, in 1616, his accusations could no longer be ignored. When in his fits it took several strong men to hold him down, he described his many visions with extraordinary authenticating detail, he made the sounds of the animal in which he claimed his tormenting witch was appearing to him at the moment, and, like the Warboys girls and Anne Gunter, he had his own formula for seeking relief from his fits.

A letter written at the time by Robert Heyrick of Leicester to his brother William describes some of the boy's performances.

A young gentleman of the age of twelve or thirteen years old hath had divers strange and wonderful fits. Sir Henry Hastings hath done what he could to hold him in his fit, but he and another as strong as

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he could not hold him. If he might have an arm at liberty, he would strike himself such blows on his breast, being in his shirt, that you might hear the sound of it the length of a long chamber, sometimes fifty blows, sometimes one hundred, yea, sometimes two or three hundred blows, that the least of them was able to strike down a strong man. And yet did to himself no hurt Six of the witches (he had accused *nine* old women of bewitching him) had six several spirits, one in the likeness of a horse, another like a dog, another a cat, another a foumart,¹ another a fish, another a toad, with whom every one of them tormented him. He would make some sign according to the spirit, as, when the horse tormented him, he would whinney,² when the cat tormented him he would cry like a cat &c. When he was in his fit, they were brought to him and then were charged to speak certain words and to name their spirits, and one of them to speak it after another, as thus: "I such a one charge thee, horse, if I be a witch, that thou come forth of the child.³ And then another by her spirit to do the like, and so till all had done. If any of them would speak a word contrary to that charm, he would

¹ A polecat.

² In Aix-en-Provence in the year 1611 Father Louis Gaufridi, a handsome curé of Marseilles was accused and tried on charges of bewitching a number of young nuns. Among Gaufridi's alleged victims was a Sister Madeleine de Demandolx de la Palud, who came of an aristocratic and rich Provençal family. At the age of fourteen Madeleine fell in love with the thirty-four-year-old priest, who often visited her at her parents' home to give her instruction and sometimes stayed closeted with her for an hour or more. This gave rise to a certain scandal, and when Madeleine confessed to her mother that Father Gaufridi had taken her "most precious rose", it was decided that Madeleine should enter the Ursuline convent at Aix. In 1609, now 16 or 17, the girl began to have fits and see visions, and no attempt to exorcise her was successful in dispossessing her. Her hysteria presently spread to five other nuns, and their antics and claims became so shocking that the authorities had to take action since Madeleine accused Father Gaufridi of "every obscenity known to demonologists", and he was arrested. His trial gave rise to the most widespread interest, and a full account of the nuns' accusations against Gaufridi had reached England in 1612, where it achieved a considerable circulation. The connection between this case and the Leicester Boy is that Madeleine de Demandolx used to make animal noises in her fits. She was the first recorded victim of alleged possession to do so. The Smith family were well educated for the times, and it would seem either that a copy of the account of the Aix trial had reached Husbands Bosworth or that the case was known to the adults there in some detail and discussed by them in the Leicester Boy's hearing.

³ Note the similarity with the Warboys formula.

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be mightily tormented; but if they would speak as he had first directed them, at the end of the last he would fall out of his fit as quietly as if one lay him down to sleep.

Young John Smith completely deceived the Judge, the prosecuting counsel, Sergeant Crew, and the jury this time, and the nine old women accused by the boy were found guilty and on 18th July 1616 were hanged. How many more innocent women would have suffered the same fate had not chance intervened, it is, of course, not possible to say. On 15th August King James arrived in Leicester on one of his progresses. Because of his interest in witchcraft he was naturally told about John Smith's remarkable fits.

Now, true-believer in witchcraft that he was, James was by no means gullible. Quite early in his reign he had heard of a woman who "cast up at her mouth pins, and pins were taken by divers in her fits, out of her breast". He had had the woman brought to him and had personally examined her; and had not interrogated long when he charged her with pretence and trickery, to which she confessed.

The antics of the boy reminded him of this woman, and he ordered Smith to be brought to him. Almost as soon as James began to question him, "John Smith began to falter, so as the King discovered a fallacy". James committed the boy to the servants of Archbishop Abbot of Canterbury, who "did in a few weeks discover the whole deceit, for upon a small entreaty he would repeat all his tricks oftentimes in a day".

There were six other women accused by Smith lying in Leicester gaol under sentence of death, and James commanded that their executions should be stayed until the boy had been thoroughly examined. When the fraud was exposed they were granted a re-trial, at which a representative of the Archbishop of Canterbury was present to see that justice was done. One of them had died in prison, but the other five women were acquitted and released.

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James took no steps to punish the judge and prosecutor, but he gave Ben Jonson permission to ridicule them in a play, *The Devil Is an Ass*, which utterly discredited them. The fate of the boy is not recorded.

THE CASE OF WILLIAM PERRY

FOUR YEARS after the exposure of the Leicester Boy, another young rogue appeared on the scene. This was William Perry, more widely known as the Bilson Boy, who was destined, with possibly one exception, to become the most outstanding of English child impostors.

William was twelve years old, and one day in 1620, as he was going home from school, he was to allege, he met an old woman called Joan Clark. Mother Clark was to deny the encounter, but, because of the boy's authentic-sounding account of the meeting, her denials at first went unheeded.

The boy declared that Mother Clark had greeted him. When he did not return the greeting—why he did not was never revealed—the old woman became angry, “called him a foul thing”, and cursed him, “and he felt a thing pricke him to the very hearte”.

The similarity between this opening gambit and that of the Burton Boy may have its origins in the fact that Bilson—nowadays known as Bilston—is in Staffordshire, less than thirty miles from Burton-on-Trent. Though William Somers had preceded William Perry by twenty years or so, the story of his exploits was kept alive in this part of the world and would be well-known to those involved with the Bilson Boy.

When Perry arrived home after his alleged encounter with Joan Clark he gave every indication of being bewitched. His symptoms were frequently recurring fits of convulsions and visions.

His parents, who were devout Roman Catholics, resorted first

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to prayers in the hope of curing their son, but when their supplications were disregarded by the Almighty they had their priest exorcise the boy. William recovered, but after a short time he fell into new fits, which were worse than the first. He not only vomited the now familiar pins, but rags, straw, feathers and thread.

This strange collection of objects also has a special significance, as will be revealed shortly. In no other English case of possession up to now did the victim vomit anything but pins and twopenny nails. However, a fifteen-year-old girl in Louvain, France,

voided a living eel at stool. . . . Then she vomited great flocks of hair, with filthy water, such as is in ulcers, and sometimes like the dung of doves and geese, and in them pieces of wood. After this she vomited innumerable stones, some like walnuts, like pieces broken out of old walls with some of the lime on them.

Though Catherine Gaulter's case might not have been known in England, it had a very wide circulation on the Continent, where it was regarded as one of the classic cases of possession, and would be known to any cleric trained on the Continent in the ministry of Rome.

Nor was this vomiting of strange objects Perry's only distinction. He also voided black urine.

Somewhat naturally, since he was a Roman Catholic, he was possessed by a devil who could not bear Protestants, and who railed, in particular, against Luther, Calvin and Foxe. If the opening verse of St. John's gospel were read in the Latin Vulgate aloud, it could be guaranteed to send Perry into a fit.

Since the exorcism had failed and their confessor had no other remedy to apply, the boy's parents urged him to tell them if he suspected any particular person of having bewitched him. Initially he declared he could think of no one, but under further pressure he eventually named Joan Clark, and related the story of the meeting. The parents at once laid a complaint before the magis-

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trates and Joan Clark was arrested, interrogated and committed to the Stafford assizes.

Now though James had not directly admonished the Judge and prosecutor in the Leicester case, he had issued a memorandum to the Bench at large, requiring all magistrates and judges, and especially judges, to be extremely careful in their trial of witches, and to condemn only on irrefutable evidence. The wretched Mr. Justice Winch and Sergeant Crew had become such national laughing-stocks that none of their fellow judges were anxious to emulate them, and for this reason Mr. Justice Warburton and Mr. Justice Davies, his Majesty's Justices of Assize on that circuit, carefully sifted the boy's evidence against Joan Clark and

after some Speech, manifesting the Idleness of such fantastical Delusions, the Woman was freed by the Inquest; and the Judges were pleased to commit the Care of the Boy unto Dr. Morton, the Lord Bishop of Coventry and Lichfield, then and there present.

The Bishop carried him home with him to Ecchshal-Castle, whither his Fits followed him with great Violence; for being but out of his Road, and People being hinder'd from coming to admire him, he grew sullen, and would not eat, sometimes in two or three Days together; so that his Belly almost clung to his Back. He lay in his Bed sometimes as it were senseless; sometimes staring with his Eyes, and foaming with his Mouth. The Bishop often visited him, sometimes striving to soften him with Gentleness; at other times handled him roughly with Chidings and Threatenings; but his evil Spirit would be mollified by neither.

The Father of the Boy, an honest Husbandman, innocent and ignorant of any Practice [trickery] in his Child, came to see him, and earnestly ask'd, What might be thought of his Son's Case? and, Whether he was possessed or not? Whereto it was purposely answered, That nothing seemed so marvellous, as at the hearing of those Words of the Holy Gospel (*In the beginning was the Word &c*) he fell into Fits. Then presently, in the hearing of the Father, those Words were repeated; and upon the Repetition, the Boy fell into his fit. The Bishop called for a Greek Testament, said, Boy, it is either thou or the Devil that abhorest those Words of the

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Gospel; and if it be the Devil, he (being so ancient a Scholar, as of almost six thousand Years standing) knows, and understands all Languages; so that he cannot but know when I recite the same Sentence out of the Greek Text: But if it be thy self, then art thou an execrable Wretch, who plays the Devil's part; wherefore look to thy self, for now thou art to be put on Trial, and mark diligently, whether it be the same Scripture which shall be read. Then was read in Greek the twelfth Verse of that Chapter, which he supposing to be the first, fell into his Trance, as he was wont.

This Fit being quick pass'd over, there was read in Greek the first Verse: But he supposing it was not the same Text, was not moved by it. By this means his Fraud was discovered, that he seemed to be greatly confounded. Notwithstanding staring with his Eyes, and casting his Head on both sides the Bed, he told the Company that he was troubled at the Sight of two Mice.

By this the Bishop was confirmed, that he was a pertinacious Imposter; and finding Words and Menaces make no Impression on him, he fell to blows; for taking him out of his Bed, and having one to help him, the Bishop gave him six smart Lashes with a Rod, at which the Boy was no more concerned than an Insensible Stock. They also thrust Needles into his Toes and Fingers; but with all their Persecutions he neither winched [*sic*] nor stirred. In this Condition, growing almost desperate, he would make Signs for Knives to do himself Mischief, and continued in the manner almost a quarter of a Year. At last his Urine grew so black, that the Physicians were of Opinion, that Nature had left her usual Operations. That struck the good Bishop very near, that he resolved if his Water continued so, he would make no farther Trial: But to find out the Truth of this, he set a Trusty Servant to watch him through a hole that looked into the Chamber upon the Bed. The Bishop and his Family going that Morning to Church, all things were still in the House, and the Boy finding all quiet, lifts up himself, and stares, and listens, and at length gets out of his Bed, and in the Straw or Mat under it, takes out a lukhorn [*inkhorn*], and makes Water in the Chamber-Pot, through a piece of the Cotton in his Hand, and another little piece he put into his Praeputium [*foreskin*], covering it with the Skin, which was for a reserve, if he should be forced to make Water be-

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fore Company; then he hid his lukhorn, and returned to Bed.

The Man that was appointed to watch him, seeing all this, discovered it to the Bishop at his coming home, who came to him, and ask'd, How he did? The Boy, according to his usual manner, pointed to his Water, looked ghastly upon it, and muttered out his own howling Tone. The Bishop resolved now to deal roundly with him, said, Sirrah, you have luk in your Bed-Straw: Your Knaving is found out; and calling in his Man, he took out the lukhorn where the Boy had hid it, and justified that he saw him make Water through Cotton. This struck the Boy into such a Terror, that he rose from the Bed, and fell upon his knees, and besought the Bishop to Pardon him, and he would tell him the whole Truth.

Accordingly, he did, and afterwards he was examined again by the Bishop, the 13th of October, 1620, and the Questions and Answers were taken and attested, and printed by Richard Baddeley, a Public Notary. The Substance of his several Confessions is, That an old Man, called Thomas, with grey Hair, and a Cradle of Glasses, met him not far from his Father's House, and asked him where he dwelled? and if he went to School, and promised him, if he would do as he taught him, he should not need to go to School: for, said he, I can teach thee such Tricks, that the People that see these shall believe that thou art bewitched, and so shall lament and pity thee. Upon this, he said, he taught him, at six several times, to groan, and mourn, and roll, and cast up his Eyes, &c., and bade him accuse some body or other that was accounted a Witch. This was in Lent, and about Easter following he practised his Tricks; and some Papists persuaded him to seek for help of some Catholic Priests. He said three had tried to cure him; and though he had not seen the Priest's Narrative before, yet his Confession agreed with it.

The Bishop asked him, Whether he did not design to have yielded to their Exorcisms? He said, he did; but he continued his counterfeiting so long, because much People resorted to him, and brought him good things, and because he was not willing to go to School again. He stay'd with the Bishop till he had recovered his Strength; and the next Summer Assizes, held at Stafford, July 26, 1621, before Sir Peter Warburton, and Sir Humphrey Winch, his Majesty's Justices of Assize, the Boy crav'd Pardon first of Almighty God,

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and then desired the Woman¹ there present to forgive him; and lastly requested the whole County, whom he had scandalized to admit of that his hearty Confession for their Satisfaction.

The great care which James required his judges to exercise in their examination of the accusers of witches, as well as the witches themselves, had a profound effect on the prosecution of witchcraft in England. It would seem that the detection of impostors, and particularly of Anne Gunter, John Smith and William Perry, had the effect of weakening James's belief in the actuality of witchcraft. At all events, a tailing off of the witch-hunt is observable in the latter part of his reign; and though it would be an exaggeration to declare that the king who had begun his reign firmly convinced of the reality of witchcraft ended it by being a sceptic, nevertheless the frequency of witchcraft trials in England between 1620 and 1625 was considerably lower than at any period since 1563.

Charles I seems to have held much the same views as his father's later ones, for there is only one recorded execution for witchcraft in the first seven years of his reign. In 1633, however, the country was shaken by what quickly became known as the great Pendle Swindle, in which the leading player was a farmer's son.

¹ Joan Clark.

EDMUND ROBINSON

THE SCENE of the Pendle Swindle is, of course, the sinister locality in which Old Demdike, Old Chattox and their broods had operated in 1612. If a reviewer of my book *Witches and Their Craft* can be taken as a safe guide—and I am quite sure he can—those old women are still a potent force in the Pendle area of Lancashire.

In the *Huddersfield Daily Examiner* of 7th March 1968, my reviewer, signing himself merely D. T. wrote—it is as well to note the singular number here—

Having been born in witch countryside, I feel fully competent to discuss *Witches and Their Craft* by Ronald Seth. When we were children we were certainly smug about our witches, one having lived in a cottage now owned by friends of ours. And the witch surnames still lingered in our neighbourhood.

We knew that witches used to fly through the air on broomsticks to Malkin Tower in the Forest of Pendle, where they met their witch friends and indulged in orgies. We didn't know what orgies were, and received no enlightenment from our parents. . . . On the other hand, there was the sinister fact that our local load of them had been carted through the Trough of Bowland to Lancaster Assizes, and there tried and executed as true witches. This was in 1612, but country people have long memories, and stories are handed down from father to son.

Again, when we did 'table-rapping' in the said cottage where Mother Demdike had lived, the tumbler always spelled out 'Demdike' and the table itself careered round the room in no uncertain fashion. . . .

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And if Demdike and Chattox are recalled in the middle of the twentieth century, their influence must have been considerable just twenty years after they went to the gallows. In fact, among the seventeen involved in the Pendle Swindle was one named Jennet Device. Now a woman of 30, it had been her evidence that had been chiefly instrumental in sending her grandmother, mother, sister and brother to their deaths, in 1612.

Edmund Robinson was the eleven-year-old son of Edmund Robinson of Pendle. On 10th February 1633 he was examined by Richard Shuttleworth and John Starkey "Esquires, two of his Majesty's Justices of the Peace, within the County of Lancaster", when he told them the following story.

On All Saints' Day 1632, he said, he had gone to Henry Parker, who lived near him in Wheatley Lane, and asked Parker's permission to gather some bulrushes. Parker granted him permission, and, as he was gathering the rushes, he saw two greyhounds, one brown and the other black, come running over the next field towards him. He believed that one of the dogs belonged to Mr. Nutter and the other to Mr. Robinson, as they had dogs of these colours.

The greyhounds came up to him, in a friendly fashion, and fawned on him. Each had about its neck a collar to which a string was attached. The collars shone like gold. Believing that some of Nutter's and Robinson's people must be following the dogs, he looked about to see if he could spy anyone. But no one was in sight, so he decided to have a little fun with the dogs, coursing them.

Presently, a hare got up very close to them, "at the Sight whereof he cried, Loo, Loo, Loo; but the Dogs would not run". This made him angry, so seizing the dogs' leads he tied them up to a nearby bush and began to beat them with a switch he was carrying.

Immediately the greyhounds vanished and in their places stood Mrs. Dickinson, wife of a neighbour, and a small boy whom he did not know. Frightened by these strange and sudden transfor-

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mations, Edmund Robinson tried to run away, but found he could not move. Mrs. Dickinson put her hand into her pocket and pulled out a silver shilling, which she said he might have, if he would promise to hold his tongue. He refused, exclaiming, "Nay, thou art a Witch".

Mrs. Dickinson put her hand into her pocket again, and this time brought out "a thing like unto a Bridal, that gingled", which she put on the little boy's head, and immediately the boy vanished, and in his place, stood a white horse. The woman then picked up Robinson, and with him mounted the horse, "and carried him to a new House called Hoarstones, being about a quarter of a Mile off".

When they arrived, he saw a number of people at the door of the house, and others were riding towards the house on horses of different colours. All these people—Robinson calculated that there were about sixty of them—went into the house, where there was a fire, with meat roasting over it. A young woman gave him a cut of meat and a slice of bread on a trencher, "and Drink in a Glass, which after the first Taste he refused and would have no more; but said, It was naught".

After a short time, seeing a number of people going into a nearby barn, Robinson followed them.

And there he saw six of them, kneeling and pulling, all six of them, six several Ropes, which were fastend or tied to the top of the Barn; presently after which pulling, there came into this Informer's sight Flesh smoaking, Butter in lumps, and Milk as it were flying from the said Ropes. All which fell into Basons, which were placed under the said Ropes.

After this six had finished, six others took their places. As they pulled on the ropes, they made such terrible faces, that the boy was so frightened, he ran out of the barn intending "to steal homewards". However, he was immediately missed by the company, some of whom chased after him. But at a place near the

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highroad, called Boggard Hole, two horsemen came on the scene, and the boy's pursuers turned and fled.

But the foremost of those Persons that followed him, he knew to be one Loind's wife; which said Wife, together with one Dickinson's Wife, and one Jennet Device, he hath since seen several times, in a Croft or Close, adjoining to his Father's House, which put him in great fear.

On the first Thursday in the new year, the boy went on, he had seen Mrs. Loind sitting on a wooden cross-piece in the chimney of his father's house. He had called up to her, " ' Come down thou Loind's wife ', and immediately the said Loind's wife went up out of his sight".

On another evening, his father had told him to fetch home two cows. As he was doing so in Eller's field, he met a boy who began a quarrel with him. They fought until young Edmund's ears and face " were bloody ". Happening to glance down, he saw that the boy had a cloven foot, at which he took fright, and fled. As he ran, he saw what he took to be the light of a lantern and hurried towards it. He had thought it might be carried by some of Mr. Robinson's people, but instead he found only a woman, whom he recognised as Mrs. Loind. This scared him even more, and he began to run away, but again encountered the boy with whom he had fought, " Which Boy gave him a Blow that made him cry ".

He concluded his account by describing how, when he was in the barn, he had seen three women take down six wax or clay images with pins stuck in them. One of the women was Mrs. Loind; but he did not know the other two.

And being further asked, What persons were at the aforesaid Meeting? He nominated these Persons following, viz. Dickinson's Wife &c. and eighteen that he knew; and one man, as he believed.

Edmund Robinson senior, described as a mason, was then

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questioned. He said that having sent young Edmund to bring in two cows, when the boy was gone longer than he thought he should, he went to look for him, and found him crying, and so frightened "that he neither knew his Father, nor where he was, and so continued very near a quarter of an Hour before he came to himself". He then repeated what the boy had told him.

On this evidence alone the nineteen were arrested, and after preliminary examination seventeen were committed to the next assizes. The boy and his father, finding their story believed,

being poor . . . made a Practice to go from Church to Church, that the Boy might reveal and discover Witches, pretending that there were a great Number at the Witches Meeting, whose Faces he could know, and by that means they got a Living.

At this time a Mr. Webster was the curate at Kildwick, "and in the Afternoon, as he was preaching, the Boy was brought into the Church, and set upon a Stool, to see round about, whether he could no any there".

After the service, the curate went to the house where the boy was staying, and asked permission to be allowed to examine him in private; but two men who were with the boy refused to allow it. So he asked the boy "whether some body did not teach him to say such things of himself; but the two Men pluck'd the Boy from him and said, he had been examined before two Justices of the Peace, and they had never asked him such a Question".

The seventeen alleged witches were indicted because all were found to have witch-marks; for the same reason, all seventeen were found guilty by the jury. The local justices, however, had doubts about some of the most pertinent evidence, and decided to send the case up to the King's Bench for further consideration.

Before any legal step was taken, it was decided that Robinson and his father and their victims should be examined by Bishop Bridgeman of Chester. The Bishop, on weighing all the testimony on both sides, reached the conclusion that blackmail and revenge

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were the motives for the charges in most cases, rather than any real evidence of witchcraft. The boy and his father and four of the accused were then sent to London. There Dr. Harvey, the Royal Physician, and the King himself searched the prisoners for witch-marks, and found none.

It was now decided to challenge the boy directly concerning the truth of his story, and, under only a small amount of pressure, he broke down and confessed that his father had invented every word of it "for envy, revenge and hope of gain".

All the accused were at once acquitted and discharged. But the fate of the Robinsons is unknown.

Lancashire, however, was to continue to have a significance on the development of witchcraft history, right up to the time when the delusion was recognised for what it was. More than sixty years after the Pendle Swindle, a certain Richard Dugdale appeared on the scene.

THE SUREY DEMONIAK

DUGDALE WAS between 19 and 20 in 1697, the son of a gardener of Surey, not far from Pendle Forest. The youth had one burning passion—to be the best dancer in Lancashire. So when the Devil appeared to him one day and announced that in return for his soul, he, Satan, would grant Richard his heart's desire, he willingly agreed.

But, [says Bishop Hutcheson,] instead of dancing in the way he hoped to have done, he seems to be possess'd. He stands upon his Head, dances upon his Knees, and runs on all Four like a Dog, and barks. He seems sometimes extreme heavy, and at other Times light; hath a Swelling running from the Calf of his Leg up to his Neck; he talks shreads of Latin, runs into the Water, and tells Things at a Distance (prophesying) and is thought to be possess'd with a merry, ludicrous Spirit.

His father, finding that the clergy of the Church of England neither believed that the boy was possessed, nor showed any desire to interest themselves in the boy's welfare, approached the Presbyterians. The Presbyterians were only too happy to undertake the casting out of the boy's devil. It was too good an opportunity to miss for making some snide observations on Anglican clergymen, whom they likened to the priest and Levite in the Gospel story of the Good Samaritan. It appears to have escaped their memory that the Church of England had outlawed exorcism in 1603.

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The Presbyterian ministers appointed days of fasting and prayer on behalf of Richard Dugdale, and continued them weekly for nine months to a year. But during all this time none of their prayers and fastings proved the least bit efficacious. About five or six ministers would gather at the Dugdale house on each occasion, and "all the County flock'd in to see and hear them".

At first the crowds admired them, but when it became clear that their exorcisms were of no avail, they turned against them. Before the end of the year so did Richard and his parents, who complained that "they did him no good". By degrees, the ministers stopped attending the meetings, until eventually there was only one left; and he, too, decided to quit at the end of a year.

And as they [the ministers] could not forbear making some Excuse to cover the Shame of their Disappointment, they made the most disingenuous and silly one that could be. They gave it out, That they believed the Family of these Dugdales to be Witches, and in Contract with the Devil; and that that had been the Cause why they had not been able to help them.

They even gained permission to have some of the Dugdales stripped and searched for Devil's-marks, and for witch-marks; and they set them the well-known test for witches—the recitation of the Lord's Prayer. "And if their Insinuations would have done it, they had set the Rabble upon them, and made them undergo the rest of their barbarous Tryals".

After the Presbyterian ministers departed from the scene, Richard Dugdale continued to have fits: not so frequently as before, nor did he prophesy.

Some honest Gentlemen of the Church of England gave him some money in Charity, that he might go to some sober Physician, and he went to one Dr. Chew, and never had a Fit after his Physick, tho' he had a severe one the Day before.

Left at that, the case of the Surey Demoniac might have

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achieved no more elevated status than a footnote of history. But the affair developed into a sectarian controversy between the Dissenters on the one hand and the Established Church on the other. A pamphlet war, surpassed only by the duel between Samuel Harsnett and John Darrell over the Burton Boy, broke out, in which both sides claimed that they had achieved Richard Dugdale's recovery.

A study of the blasts and counter-blasts proves particularly unrewarding until an anonymous writer joined the lists with *The Lancashire Levite Rebuked by "N.N."*. N.N.—who has never been identified—professed himself to be impartial and admitted that he believed in possession by spirits. Nevertheless he disclosed that he was on the side of Zachary Taylor, Rector of Wigan and chaplain to the Bishop of Chester, who, in his riposte to a pamphlet produced by the Dissenters, *Entituled The Surey Demoniac*, declared that Dugdale was an impostor.

Taylor claims that as a result of his own investigations, he had discovered that Dugdale had been "given to such Tricks when he was at School. He discovered [admitted] that his Sister whispered to him at a Hole in the Barn, where he us'd to pretend that he talk'd with a Spirit".

And what more likely? [comments Bishop Hutcheson on this confession.] For if the Spirit was within him, What occasion had he to go so often to that Hole to whisper? Besides he discovered plainly, that some Popish Priests had the secret Management of him, and that the Demoniac, in his Fits, named them that would be likely to cure him. . . . And to all this I must add, That this Richard Dugdale, the supposed Demoniac, upon Examination, declar'd, That he believed he never had any evil Spirit in him.

By the time the Surey Demoniac had joined the company of the impostors, witchcraft itself was coming under increasing pressure from the sceptics. The clerics and the judges and the learned men were beginning to see it for what it really was—I was going to

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say, a *simple* delusion; but it was, in fact, one of the most devastating delusions ever to assault mankind.

Under the leadership of such justiciars as Lord Chief Justice John Holt and such eminent clergymen as Bishop Hutcheson, who, for the first time in more than 200 years, brought the cold clear light of reason to focus on the whole terrible subject, the fundamentally logical Englishman began to realise how very illogical he had been in his approach to and acceptance of witchcraft. The new century was quickly to reinstate reason, and, though the Witchcraft Act of James I was not removed from the Statute Book until 1736, after 1717—when Mr. Justice Parker found in his list the case of “Old woman Norton and her daughter”, against whom the Grand Jury found No True Bill—no one was brought before magistrate or judge on a charge of witchcraft.

The witch persecutions in England between 1563 and 1736, though but a shadow of the persecutions which raged throughout Europe between 1450 and 1750, are nevertheless a dark stain on the history of English justice. And no element of the whole sordid business is more anti-justice than the admission of the evidence of children, whose fertile minds and cunning hands and superb dramatic qualities caused innocent men and women to suffer the depths of humiliation, the pain of torture and an ultimate squalid end on the scaffold.

In contemplating what I have written in the foregoing pages, I find myself questioning the clear pure innocence of childhood. It has taken on all the trappings of a lurid myth.

For this, one cannot blame the children so much as the adults who, if they did not actually provoke their lying and deceits, encouraged them by the apparent trust they placed in them. This, I believe, to be the most hideous blot of all on our national history.

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PINS, TWOPENNY NAILS AND THE LIKE

OF THE two categories of child-witnesses against witches, it is counterfeiterers, the impostors, who are the more interesting, because they present more of a challenge to one's understanding. As I have remarked earlier, the children who gave testimony before magistrates and judges, grew up in an atmosphere and a setting in which witches and their craft were part and parcel of the living scene. They heard their elders discussing the subject in all its ramifications, and could speak with as much authority, as children do who eavesdrop on adult conversations. If they had to be suborned, they presented no difficulty, for there were threats by the score which could strike fear into any child of this superstition-ridden age; while if they had to be coached in a specific role they were even more responsive subjects, since the back-drop of their lives was the *mise-en-scène* of their lives. Well chosen, as was nine-year-old Jennet Device in the case of the Lancashire witches, they could surpass their elders' best hopes by virtue of their fantastic imaginations, their coolness and, above all, their apparent childish innocence.

The counterfeiterers, in contrast, are more of a challenge, because they present us with a mystery. How was it possible for them to put on an act which would deceive all about them, experts included? Perhaps it was because medical knowledge was yet in its rudimentary state that the experts were deceived. On the other hand, it is, in my view, all the more remarkable that the children who went into trances and the like, were able to go through the motions of what we recognise today as hysterics.

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Admittedly, hysteria had been known to international medicine in ancient times. The Greeks put the name to it, deriving it from their word for 'the womb'; suggesting thereby the notion that the strange fits that women were often subject to were specifically female in origin, having their source in that organ of the female anatomy which enshrined the great mystery of all times—the creation of human life. It was, they believed, some aberration of the womb, that led to the fits which attack women for no manifest reason.

The classical symptoms of these fits were those exhibited by the Throckmorton girls in the Warboys case—the body rigid, with the back arched and the belly grotesquely swollen, accompanied by an access of strength so great that two or three men were required to restrain the victim if she became violent, even though she was not yet in her teens; the symptoms of what we know as hysterical epilepsy. More often than not the victim exhibited a trance-like condition, or, if she were not unconscious, gave every sign of being unable to hear the slightest sound, or to make one, beyond an unintelligible grunt. If the coma state were not present, the patient, while clearly unresponsive to or unappreciative of the world about her, might talk of strange things, of which she had no memory when she returned to normality.

Hysteria continued to confound the doctors until Freud opened up the gateway to the mind. Even so, it was not until the beginning of the present century that particular attention was devoted to the study of its causes. Though it is still not fully understood, it is now widely accepted that hysteria is a pattern of reaction. Gaupp, one of the leading German experts, defined hysteria as "an abnormal manner of reacting to the demands of life". In reaching this conclusion, he had been influenced by one of the great German pioneer investigators of hysteria, Hoche, who had put forward the concept that "hysteria is no ordinary condition, but an extraordinary mental state", and had suggested that, under sufficient stress, everyone is susceptible to hysteria.

Under the terms of this general definition, hysteria manifests

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itself in many forms. There are, however, two main manifestations, one of which concerns us here. It is described by Dr. Ernst Kretschmer, in the following quotation from his study, *Hysteria, Reflex and Instinct*. "Underlying symptoms of hysteria," he writes, "is a tendency or a will to become sick, a deliberately induced or self-imposed sickness, or a weakness or constitutional defect."

This sickness is a defence-mechanism designed by the patient, sometimes unconsciously, but often consciously, to protect him from his fears, that may be imagined or real. The forms which this protective sickness takes are numerous, but most common are a cataleptic stupor, a hypnotic sleeplike or dreamlike state of consciousness without simultaneous motor paralysis, a total paralysis, automatic spasms, tremors and muscular cramps. In most cases, the protection once sought and proved effective will be resorted to again and again whenever the patient feels he is being threatened or is likely to be threatened. All these hysterical symptoms we have met in the cases described in Part II.

At another point in his study Dr. Kretschmer says, "The most striking problems of adjustment and understanding arise during the age of puberty and concern among other things the parent-child relationship." Unfortunately there exists no evidence in any of the cases we have considered of the relationship between our subject and his or her parents, except in that of the Nottingham Boy, who devised his imposture in order to escape from his apprenticeship to the town band, to which his mother and stepfather had insisted he should be articled. In the Warboys case I suggested that the behaviour of the child who began it all may have been caused by her resentment at being uprooted from her familiar birthplace and friends. It will be recalled that the girl was ill for some days with a kind of lassitude from which nothing could distract her. During this preliminary illness there were no signs or even thoughts of witches or witchcraft. Then one day, old Mother Samuel called "and sat in the Chimney-Corner with a black knit cap on her head". When the child saw the old

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woman, she exclaimed that she had never seen anyone who looked so much like a witch.

From that moment the child "took a Fancy" that Mother Samuel had bewitched her. It was now that the girl manifested her first fit of hysterical epilepsy, her body going rigid, her back arched and her belly swollen.

The first time these symptoms occurred it is likely that they were genuine, since they are, like the death-feint, a common hysterical reaction to fear. The subsequent fits, up to the first time that crooked pins and other strange objects were vomited, may also have been genuine, for the hysterics victim needs only a kind of 'pass-word'—known in medical jargon as the 'key-stimulus'—to trigger off a fit. Professor Uchimura, a leading Japanese expert in hysteria, in a study of the Ainu, a small, primitive race living in northern Japan, says that many Ainu women have a horror of snakes. The sight of one is sufficient to induce a fear-reaction, the symptoms of which are extreme agitation, dashing hither and thither, and other actions signifying ungovernable panic. Nor is the *sight* of a snake necessary to bring on such a fit; the pronouncing of the word 'snake' alone can have exactly the same effects. A snake, and the word 'snake', are key-stimuli to Ainu women.

The Throckmorton girls at one time during their charade had their fits only when Mother Samuel was present, or when something to do with witchcraft was spoken of. The old woman and witchcraft were the key-stimuli. But the counterfeiting is revealed when the children change their pattern of hysterical behaviour; for once the pattern has been established it is very rarely changed.

Acceptance of the idea that for the greater part of the time the Throckmorton children were counterfeiting raises the question of the ability of hysterics to counterfeit the symptoms of hysteria. On this Dr. Kretschmer says,

The so-called hysterical person uses his symptoms to accomplish his ends. He puts on an impressive show for us, for he knows that our

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credulity will free him from an unpleasant situation. He resorts to a *purposive, studied pretence* and thereby actually achieves his goal.

A little later, Kretschmer relates the case of a soldier who maintained that he was suffering from combat hysteria.

The third patient came from the front, along with eight others suffering from combat hysteria and tremors. He had a serious speech disturbance which resembled stammering, and his shoulders twitched. . . . Following first-aid treatment, he was accused of simulation. He confessed, and explained that as a child he had suffered for a whole day following a scare; then after his stammering disappeared he deliberately revived it. He had imitated the shoulder twitch which he had observed in others on the way back. At first it was very hard to keep up the tremor; it was very tiring. But after one day it was easy to keep up the tremor without tiring.

This, I believe, is what happened in the case of the Warboys girls. The young one, having begun with genuine fits of hysterical epilepsy and finding the attention she attracted was good fun, continued by counterfeiting her attacks. There is no evidence that there was or was not collusion between her and her sisters to bring them into her games; hysterics can be as catching as a contagious or infectious disease, and it is possible that the girls and the serving-maids were subconsciously, at the beginning, affected by what they saw and heard. Perhaps the fits were genuine for the first few months; but after that they were certainly faked.

None of this was appreciated by the physicians of 1593. However, by the time that Bishop Francis Hutcheson came to write his *Historical Essay Concerning Witchcraft*, in 1720, there had been some advances, if not towards discovering the causes of the fits, at least towards understanding the nature of the symptoms. Indeed, Hutcheson, despite some very odd suggestions, comes occasionally very close to our modern knowledge of the causes of hysterical epilepsy. For example, he says, "And when some poor old creature, through poverty and old age, and bad diet, and

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want of convenient linen, is grown nasty, may she not have some rank unsavoury smell that may grow into an antipathy against those that have fallen into fits by their fear at the sight of her?"

The *Historical Essay* is written in the form of a dialogue, and a little later he makes one of his characters say, "But the bare fits make the least part of the wonder. They tell of strange actions beside them;" to which another character (himself) responds,

And yet they may be natural fits and vapours, for all that. For when some sort of fits, which are undoubtedly natural, continue, they alter the habit of the body; whence many times there grows a lurking intermitting fever, and delirium, or particular madness; and then their fancies and strange symptoms are more surprising. . . . Their minds will sometimes be so clouded, and oppressed, and dull, that they think themselves dead: at another time, they shall be elevated far above their usual pitch. Those that were slow, and of a few words in their health, shall then be full of raptures and high discourses, and give strange answers, and repeat prayers or chapters by memory; and sometimes speak their fancies in verse. . . . Another thing that is very observable, is the great strength that they have at such times. One hour they will be stiff that you cannot bend them: the next hour (perhaps when those fixed spirits are kindled into a rapid motion) three men shall hardly hold them from really acting that which happens to be in their mind. . . . Convulsive motions turn their heads, as if their necks were broken; draw their mouths on one side: wring their arms out of joint: turn their eyes inward, and make them lamentable spectacles. . . . Pins or needles that have been swallowed long before, will work their way to the outward parts of the body, and be taken out of the persons' thighs or sides. . . .

We are aware today that hysterical-epileptics are extremely adept at feats of legerdemain and other acts of deception, such as ventriloquism. Hutcheson was not unaware of this ability and he makes a very apt observation with regard to the vomiting of pins, twopenny nails and the like, when he points out that this strange manifestation, though occurring frequently at the homes of the

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afflicted *was never once demonstrated in a court-room before judge and jury*, though often the alleged victims went into fits, exhibiting swollen bellies, paralytic rigidity and various other symptoms of hysterical-epilepsy, for the entertainment of the court.

Though it would be an exaggeration to hold the Warboys girls responsible for *all* the impostures that followed their celebrated case, they must take a very large share of it. Few other cases in all the history of English witchcraft received such wide and continuing publicity as theirs. It is known that the notorious pamphlet describing it was well known to William Somers, the Nottingham Boy, to the Bilson Boy, William Perry, and was the prime inspiration of the Parrish girls of Salem exactly one hundred and one years later. Apart from these known cases in which the pamphlet played such a prominent role—so prominent, in fact, that but for it the imposture might never have been attempted—it is more than likely that several other counterfeit cases had their origins in it. However one regards any of the cases I have related, whether with sickening horror, as in the Warboys case; with mounting disgust, as in the case of Amy Duny and Rose Cullender; or with a degree of bawdy delight, as in the Boy of Bilson's case, one is brought ultimately to the incredible naïveté of allegedly educated, intelligent men who, for all their learning and worldly wisdom, could accept the charades of naughty boys and girls, and, taking the figments of their childish fantasy worlds as acceptable truths, could send old women and men to their deaths on the gallows. In doing so they were really indulging in hysterics themselves. Their belief in witchcraft was a direct outcome of their failure to understand the causes of much that went on about them. Ignorance breeds fear, and fear of the unknown can cause two reactions—either you worship what you do not understand, or you destroy it ruthlessly.

What was so sad about the persecution of witchcraft was that there was nothing of substance to destroy, only a delusion.

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