



**I**N the present day, we look back with a degree of wonder on the belief in witchcraft, which may be said to have formed an article of religious faith in every European country throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. A notion was universally entertained, that the devil and subordinate evil spirits, in pursuance of their malevolent ends, went about, sometimes in visible shape, seducing poor human nature. To gain their wicked designs, they were supposed to tempt men, but more particularly aged women, by conferring on them supernatural powers; as, for example, that of riding through the air, and operating vengefully and secretly on the health and happiness of those against whom they had any real or imaginary cause of offence. Such 'trafficking with the powers of darkness,' as it was technically called, was witchcraft, and, according both to the letter of Scripture and of the civil law, was a crime punishable with death. Like all popular manias, the witchcraft delusion had its paroxysms.

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It rose, existed for a time with great energy, then declined into insignificance. What was exceedingly remarkable, the frenzy never lacked victims: it followed the well-known law of supply and demand. As soon as witches were in request, they made their appearance. Any severe denunciation, followed by a rigorous scrutiny, brought them prominently into notice. Nor, what was still more curious, did the newly discovered witches in all cases deny the accusations against them. Many acknowledged, with a species of pride, that they had entered into a compact with the devil. They seem, on occasions, to have gloried in being the objects of so much interest, and hastened to confess, although death at the stake or on the gallows was the consequence. It must be considered as in some degree explanatory of this self-condemnation, that torture was always at hand to enforce confession; and as there was little chance, therefore, of escape after accusation, the wish to die on the speediest terms had probably no small share in inducing the alleged witches to boast of their mysterious crimes. In the majority of cases, however, there was stout denial; but this generally served no good purpose, and we are painfully assured, that many thousands of individuals, in almost every country, were sacrificed as victims to the petty spite and vengeance of accusers. At the height of the successive paroxysms, no one, whatever his rank or character, was safe from an accusation of trafficking with evil spirits. If he lived a profligate life, he was of course chargeable with the offence; if he lived quietly and unobtrusively, and was seemingly pious in character, he was only hypocritically concealing his diabolical practices; if he had acquired wealth somewhat rapidly, that was a sure sign of his guilt; and if he was poor, there was the greater reason for believing that he was in league with the devil to become rich. There was only one means of escaping suspicion, and that was to become an accuser. The choice was before every man and woman, of acting the part of accusers, or of being themselves accused. The result may be anticipated. Perceiving the tremendous danger of affecting to disbelieve witchcraft, people readily assumed the proper degree of credulity; and to mark their detestation of the crime, as well as secure themselves from attack, they hastened to denounce acquaintances and neighbours. Nothing could be more easy than to do so in a manner perfectly satisfactory. Pretending to fall sick, or to go into convulsions, or to have a strange pain in some part of the body or limbs, people were doubtless bewitched! Any sudden storm at sea, causing the wreck of vessels, was another evidence that witches were concerned; and so far did these allegations descend, that even so small a matter as a failure in churning milk for butter, was a sure sign of diabolical agency. On the occasion of every unforeseen catastrophe, therefore, or the occurrence of any unaccountable malady, the question was immediately agitated: Who was the witch? Then was the time for querulous old men or women

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in the neighbourhood to tremble. Long suspected of carrying on a correspondence with demons, they were seized and brought to trial. The accusations, as is now clearly understood, were for the most part spiteful, or wantonly mischievous. In making these charges and testifying to them, children and young women appear to have in many places excelled; the probability being that, besides a mere spirit of mischief, they enjoyed amusement from the consternation they were able to produce.

Strange how all this prejudice, imposture, and cruelty should have received the solemn sanction of the most learned and devout men: clergymen of every degree, from popes to presbyters; kings, legislators, and judges; and private citizens of every quality and profession! The folly, while it lasted, was complete.

It only excites the greater horror to know, that the belief in witchcraft—essentially mean and vulgar in all its details—has been a reproach to religious profession; and that, while seemingly founded on scriptural authority, it really rested, in its main features, on the visionary superstitions of the pagan world. Historians make it clear to the understanding, that the popular fancy respecting the bodily aspect of the great Spirit of Evil is drawn from the description of satyrs in the heathen mythology—a malicious monster, with the hide, horns, tail, and cloven feet of a beast of the field, which roamed about in the dark or in retired places, performing idle and wicked tricks, and undoing schemes of benevolence. Sometimes, as was alleged, this great enemy of man assumed disguises that were exceedingly difficult to penetrate. It is recorded by an author of talent, that the devil once delivered a course of lectures on magic at Salamanca, habited in a professor's gown and wig. Even Luther entertained similar notions about the fiend; and in fact thought so meanly of him, as to believe that he could come by night and steal nuts, and that he cracked them against the bedposts, for the solacement of his monkey-like appetite.

That the delusion originated, to a great degree, in a misconception of the real purport of allusions to the so-called witchcraft in various parts of the Old Testament, is now universally acknowledged. By biblical critics, as we understand, the term translated *witch*, properly signifies a person who by vile deceptions practised on popular credulity, and by means of poisoning, accomplished certain wicked designs. 'Leaving,' as Sir Walter Scott remarks, 'the further discussion of this dark and difficult question to those whose studies have qualified them to give judgment on so obscure a subject, it so far appears clear, that the Witch of Endor was not a being such as those believed in by our ancestors, who could transform themselves and others into the appearance of the lower animals, raise and allay tempests, frequent the company and join the revels of evil spirits, and, by their counsel and assistance, destroy human lives, and waste the fruits of the earth, or perform feats of such magnitude as to



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alter the face of nature. The Witch of Endor was a mere fortune-teller, to whom, in despair of all aid or answer from the Almighty, the unfortunate king of Israel had recourse in his despair, and by whom, in some way or other, he obtained the awful certainty of his own defeat and death. She was liable, indeed deservedly, to the punishment of death, for intruding herself upon the task of the real prophets, by whom the will of God was in that time regularly made known. But her existence and her crimes can go no length to prove the possibility that another class of witches, no otherwise resembling her than as called by the same name, either existed at a more recent period, or were liable to the same capital punishment, for a very different and much more doubtful class of offences, which, however odious, are nevertheless to be proved possible before they can be received as a criminal charge.\*

Originating in ignorance, a love of the marvellous, along with the religious misconceptions to which we have referred, a belief in witchcraft may be traced through the early ages of Christianity; but the modern prevalence of the delusion may be said to date from the promulgation of an edict of Pope Innocent VIII. in 1484, declaring witchcraft to be a crime punishable with death. This fixed the subject deeply in the public mind, and the effect was deepened by the prosecution of witches which followed. It is a curious law of human nature, of which we have seen many modern illustrations, that even crimes, real or imputed, when they excite much public attention, tend to produce repetitions of themselves. In this way, offences sometimes assume a character approaching that of epidemical diseases. It was found, as has been remarked, that the more energy there was displayed in seeking out and prosecuting witches, the more apparent occasion for such prosecutions was presented. In 1515, during the space of three months, 500 witches were burned in Geneva; in a single year, in the diocese of Como, in the north of Italy, 1000 were executed; and it is related that, altogether, more than 100,000 individuals perished in Germany before the general mania terminated. In France, the belief in witchcraft led to a remarkable variety of superstition, known in French law as *lycanthropy*, or the transformation of a witch into a wolf. It was currently believed by all classes, that witches assumed at pleasure the wolfish form in order to work mischief—by ravaging flocks of sheep. Many unfortunate persons, the victims of petty prejudice, were tried and executed for this imaginary crime. At length, by an edict of Louis XIV., all future proceedings on the score of witchcraft were prohibited; and from that time no more was heard of village dames assuming the forms and habits of wolves.

In England, to which we now turn, a belief in witchcraft was of

\* *Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft.*



as respectable antiquity as on the continent of Europe, and, elsewhere, drew particular attention in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, at which period the public mind was deeply affected with religious distractions. Witchcraft, though always penal, now became the subject of the express statutes of Henry VII., 1541, Elizabeth, 1562, and also of James I. This last monarch, who, we shall afterwards see, was a great witch-fancier while in Scotland, brought with him to England a keen sense of the duty of finding out and punishing all sorts of diablery. The act passed in the first year of his reign in England defines the crime with a degree of minuteness worthy of the adept from whose pen it undoubtedly proceeded. 'Any one that shall use, practise, or exercise any invocation of any evil or wicked spirit, or consult or covenant with, entertain or employ, feed or reward any evil or wicked spirit, *to or for ANY purpose*; or take up any dead man, &c. &c. &c. ; such offenders, duly and lawfully convicted and attainted, shall suffer death.' We have here witchcraft first distinctly made, of itself, a *capital* crime. Many years had not passed away after the passing of this statute, ere the delusion, which had heretofore committed but occasional and local mischief, became an epidemical frenzy, devastating every corner of England. Leaving out of sight single executions, we find such wholesale murders as the following in abundance on the record : In 1612, twelve persons were condemned at once at Lancaster, and many more in 1613, when the whole kingdom rang with the fame of the 'Lancashire witches ;' in 1622, six at York ; in 1634, seventeen in Lancashire ; in 1644, sixteen at Yarmouth ; in 1645, fifteen at Chelmsford ; and in 1645 and 1646, sixty persons perished in Suffolk, and nearly an equal number at the same time in Huntingdon. These are but a few selected cases. The poor creatures who usually composed these ill-fated bands are thus described by an able observer : 'An old woman with a wrinkled face, a furred brow, a hairy lip, a gobber tooth, a squint eye, a squeaking voice, or a scolding tongue, having a ragged coat on her back, a spindle in her hand, and a dog by her side—a wretched, infirm, and impotent creature, pelted and persecuted by all the neighbourhood, because the farmer's cart had stuck in the gateway, or some idle boy had pretended to spit needles and pins for the sake of a holiday from school or work'—such were the poor unfortunates selected to undergo the last tests and tortures sanctioned by the laws, and which tests were of a nature so severe, that no one would have dreamed of inflicting them on the vilest of murderers. They were administered by a class of wretches, who, with one Matthew Hopkins at their head, sprung up in England in the middle of the seventeenth century, and took the professional name of *witch-finders*. The practices of the monster Hopkins, who, with his assistants, moved from place to place in the regular and authorised pursuit of his trade, will give a full idea of the tests referred to, as well as of the

horrible fruits of the witchcraft frenzy in general. From each town which he visited, Hopkins exacted the stated fee of twenty shillings, and in consideration thereof, he cleared the locality of all suspected persons, bringing them to confession and the stake in the following manner: He stripped them naked, shaved them, and thrust pins into their bodies, to discover the witch's mark; he wrapped them in sheets, with the great toes and thumbs tied together, and dragged them through ponds or rivers, when, if they sunk, it was held as a sign that the baptismal element did not reject them, and they were cleared; but if they floated, as they usually would do for a time, they were then set down as guilty, and doomed. He kept them fasting and awake, and sometimes incessantly walking, for twenty-four or forty-eight hours, as an inducement to confession; and, in short, practised on the accused such abominable cruelties, that they were glad to escape from life by confession. If a witch could not shed tears at command, said the further items of this wretch's creed, or if she hesitated at a single word in repeating the Lord's Prayer, she was in league with the Evil One. The results of these and such-like tests were actually and universally admitted as evidence by the administrators of the law, who, acting upon them, condemned all such as had the amazing constancy to hold out against the tortures inflicted. Few gave the courts that trouble. Butler has described Hopkins in his *Hudibras* as one

'Fully empowered to treat about  
Finding revolted witches out.  
And has he not, within this year,  
Hanged *threescore* of them in *one* shire?  
Some only for *not* being drowned,  
And some for sitting above ground.'

After he had murdered hundreds, and pursued his trade for many years (from 1644 downwards), the tide of popular opinion finally turned against Hopkins, and he was subjected, by a party of indignant experimenters, to his own favourite test of swimming. It is said that he escaped with life, but from that time forth, he was never heard of again.

A belief in witchcraft, however, still continued virulent in England, and was argumentatively supported by grave and pious men. The grounds of credibility do not seem to have been earnestly investigated. Richard Baxter, who wrote in 1651, founds his opinion of the truth of witchcraft on the fact, that many persons had been tried and put to death for the crime. It did not occur to him to inquire whether the imputed crime were well or ill founded. Such was the loose reasoning that prevailed in England and elsewhere in the seventeenth century. Witchcraft was a truth, because everybody had acted upon the conviction of its being a truth! How has the progress of society, with the reign of peace and

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good-will on earth, been retarded by this accommodating method of argument !

It is an undoubted fact, however to be accounted for or palliated, that during the troublous seventeenth century, prosecutions for witchcraft were prominent in some proportion to the ascendancy of the Puritanic cause. While, as during the time of the Civil War and Commonwealth, the ruling powers acted under strong religious impulses, the scriptural maxim of 'Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live,' had the force of a commandment. In a time of indifference, as in the reign of Charles II., rulers were disposed, so far as popular prepossessions would permit, to let these poor old creatures cheaply off. The era of the Long Parliament was that during which the witch-mania attained its growth. *Three thousand persons* are said to have perished during the continuance of the sittings of that body, by legal executions, independently of summary deaths at the hands of the mob. With the Restoration came a relaxation, but not a cessation, of this severity. One noted case occurred in 1664, when the enlightened and just Sir Matthew Hale tried and condemned two women, Amy Dunny and Rose Callender, at Bury St Edmunds, for bewitching children, and other similar offences. Some of the items of the charge may be mentioned. Being capriciously refused some herrings, which they desired to purchase, the two old women expressed themselves in impatient language, and a child of the herring-dealer soon afterwards fell ill—in consequence. A carter drove his wagon against the cottage of Amy Dunny, and drew from her some not unnatural objurgations ; immediately after which, the vehicle of the man stuck fast in a gate, without its wheels being impeded by either of the *posts*, and the unfortunate Amy was credited with the accident. Such accusations formed the burden of the ditty, in addition to the bewitching of the children. These young accusers were produced in court, and, on being touched by the old women, fell into fits. But on their eyes being covered, they were thrown into the same convulsions by *other* persons, precisely in the same way. In the face of this palpable proof of imposture, and despite the general absurdity of the charges, Sir Matthew Hale committed Amy Dunny and Rose Callender to the tender mercies of the hangman. It is stated that the opinion of the learned Sir Thomas Browne, who was accidentally present, had great weight against the prisoners. He declared his belief that the children were truly bewitched, and supported the possibility of such possessions by long and learned arguments, theological and metaphysical. Yet Sir Matthew Hale was one of the wisest and best men of his time, and Sir Thomas Browne had written an able work in exposition of popular fallacies !

It was during the reign of Charles II. that many persons in high station were found to express a doubt of the reality of witchcraft. The first book treating the subject rationally, and trying to disprove



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that the Scripture warranted either the crime or its punishment, was that of Webster, published in 1677. It is amusing to observe in this treatise the anxiety of the author to vindicate himself from the charge of irreligion, which he foresaw would be brought against him, for 'crossing the common stream of vulgar opinion.' Chief-justices North and Holt, to their lasting credit, were the first individuals occupying the high places of the law who had at once the good sense and the courage to set their faces against the continuance of this murderous delusion. In one case, by detecting a piece of gross imposture, Chief-justice North threw into disrepute, once for all, the trick of *pin-vomiting*, one of the most striking and convincing practices of the possessed. A male sorcerer stood at the bar, and his supposed victim was in court, vomiting pins in profusion. These pins were straight, a circumstance which made the greater impression, as those commonly ejected in such cases were bent, engendering frequently the suspicion of their having been previously and purposely placed in the mouth. The chief-justice was led to suspect something in this case by certain movements of the bewitched woman; and by closely cross-questioning one of her own witnesses, he brought it fully out, that the woman placed pins in her stomacher, and, by a dexterous dropping of her head in her simulated fits, picked up the articles for each successive ejection. The man was found not guilty. The acquittal called forth such pointed benedictions on the judge from a very old woman present, that he was induced to ask the cause. 'O my lord,' said she, 'twenty years ago they would have hanged me for a witch if they could; and now, but for your lordship, they would have murdered my innocent son.'

The detected imposture in this case saved the accused. It was under Holt's justiceship, however, that the first acquittal is supposed to have taken place, in *despite* of all evidence, and upon the fair ground of the general absurdity of such a charge. In the case of Mother Munnings, tried in 1694, the unfortunate prisoner would assuredly have perished, had not Chief-justice Holt summed up in a tone so decidedly adverse to the prosecution, that the verdict of Not Guilty was called forth from the jury. In about ten other trials before Holt, between the years 1694 and 1701, the result was the same, through the same influences. It must be remembered, however, that these were merely noted cases, in which the parties withstood all preliminary inducements to confession, and came to the bar with the plea of not guilty. About the same period—that is, during the latter years of the seventeenth century—summary executions were still common, in consequence of confessions extracted after the Hopkins fashion, still too much in favour with the lower classes. The acquittals mentioned only prove that the regular ministers of the law were becoming too enlightened to countenance such barbarities. Cases of possession, too, were latterly overlooked by the law, which would have brought the parties concerned to a speedy end in earlier days,

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even though they had done no injury to other people, and were simply unfortunate enough to have made compacts with the demon for the attainment of some purely personal advantages. For example, in 1689, there occurred the famous case of a youth, named Richard Dugdale, who sacrificed himself to the devil, on condition of being made the best dancer in Lancashire. The dissenting clergy took this youth under their charge, and a committee of them fasted and prayed, publicly and almost incessantly, for a whole year, in order to expel the dancing demon. The idea of this impostor leaping for a twelvemonth, and playing fantastic tricks before these grave divines, is extremely ludicrous. But the divines played tricks not less fantastic. They became so contemptuously intimate with the demon as to mock him on account of saltatory deficiencies. A portion of their addresses to him on this score has been preserved, but of too ridiculous a nature for quotation in these pages. If anything else than a mere impostor, it is probable that Dugdale was affected with St Vitus's Dance; and this is the more likely, as it was after all a regular physician who brought his dancing to a close. But the divines took care to claim the merit of the cure.

After the time of Holt, the ministers of the law went a step farther in their course of improvement, and spared the accused in spite of condemnatory verdicts. In 1711, Chief-justice Powell presided at a trial where an old woman was pronounced guilty. The judge, who had sneered openly at the whole proceedings, asked the jury if they found the woman 'guilty upon the indictment of conversing with the devil in the shape of a cat.' The reply was: 'We do find her guilty of that;' but the question of the judge produced its intended effect in casting ridicule on the whole charge, and the woman was pardoned. An able writer in the *Foreign Quarterly Review* remarks, after noticing this case: 'Yet, frightful to think, after all this, in 1716, Mrs Hicks and her daughter, aged nine, were hanged at Huntingdon for selling their souls to the devil, and raising a storm by pulling off their stockings, and making a lather of soap! With this crowning atrocity, the catalogue of murders in England closes.' And a long and a black catalogue it was. 'Barrington, in his observations on the statute of Henry VI., does not hesitate to estimate the numbers of those put to death in England on this charge at THIRTY THOUSAND!'

Notwithstanding that condemnations were no longer obtainable after 1716, popular outrages on supposed witches continued to take place in England for many years afterwards. On an occasion of this kind, an aged female pauper was killed by a mob near Tring, in Staffordshire; and for the murder, one of the perpetrators was tried and executed. The occurrence of such outrages having been traced to the unrepealed statute of James I. against witchcraft, an act was passed, in 1736 (10th George II. cap. 55), discharging all legal proceedings on the ground of sorcery or witchcraft; and since

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this period, prosecutions for following hidden arts have had no higher aim than the punishing of a pretended skill in fortune-telling and other forms of practical knavery.

It has been said that James I. brought with him from Scotland strong impressions on the subject of witchcraft, and, accordingly, we now refer to the history of the delusion in that country. In the reign of Queen Mary, the contemporary of Elizabeth, the public mind in Scotland fell into the common frenzy, and an act was passed by the Scottish parliament for the suppression and punishment of witchcraft. In virtue of this law, great numbers were tried and executed. At this time, and subsequently, the Scottish witches were nearly all aged women; only a few men figured in the prosecutions. On coming to exercise the functions of majesty, James made numerous judicial investigations into alleged cases of witchcraft, and derived a pleasure in questioning old women respecting their dealings with Satan. The depositions made at these formal inquests are still preserved, and are among the most curious memorials of the sixteenth century.

The witch mania in Scotland was, through these prosecutions, brought to an extravagant height in the year 1591, when a large number of unhappy beings were cruelly burned to death on the Castle-hill of Edinburgh. About this period, some cases occurred to shew that witchcraft was an art not confined to the vulgar. A woman of high rank and family, Catherine Ross, Lady Fowlis, was indicted at the instance of the king's advocate for the practice of witchcraft. On inquiry, it was clearly proved that this lady had endeavoured, by the aid of witchcraft and poisons, to take away the lives of three or more persons who stood between her and an object she had at heart. She was desirous to make young Lady Fowlis possessor of the property of Fowlis, and to marry her to the Laird of Balnagown. Before this could be effected, Lady Fowlis had to cut off her sons-in-law, Robert and Hector Munro, and the young wife of Balnagown, besides several others. Having consulted with witches, Lady Fowlis began her work by getting pictures of the intended victims made in clay, which she hung up, and shot at with arrows shod with flints of a particular kind, called elf arrow-heads. No effect being thus produced, this really abandoned woman took to poisoning ale and dishes, none of which cut off the proper persons, though others, who accidentally tasted them, lost their lives. By the confession of some of the assistant hags, the purposes of Lady Fowlis were discovered, and she was brought to trial; but a local or provincial jury of dependants acquitted her. One of her purposed victims, Hector Munro, was then tried in turn for conspiring with witches against the life of his brother George. It was proved that a curious ceremony had been practised to effect this end. Hector, being sick, was carried abroad in blankets, and laid in an open grave, on which his foster-mother ran the breadth of



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nine rigs, and, returning, was asked by the chief attendant witch which she chose should live, Hector or George. She answered : 'Hector.' George Munro did die soon afterwards, and Hector recovered. The latter was also acquitted, by a provincial jury, on his trial.

These disgraceful proceedings were not without their parallel in other families of note of the day. Euphemia Macalzean, daughter of an eminent judge, Lord Cliftonhall, was burned at the stake in 1591, having been convicted, if not of witchcraft, at least of a long career of intercourse with pretenders to witchcraft, whom she employed to remove obnoxious persons out of her way—tasks which they accomplished by the very simple means of poisoning, where they did accomplish them at all. The jury found this violent and abandoned woman, for such she certainly was, guilty of participation in the murder of her own godfather, of her husband's nephew, and another individual. They also found her guilty of having been at the Wise Woman of Keith's great witch-convention of North Berwick ; but every witch of the day was compelled to admit having been there, out of compliment to the king, to whom it was a source of agreeable terror to think himself of so much importance as to call for a solemn convocation of the powers of evil to overthrow him. Euphemia Macalzean was 'burnt in ashes, *quick*, to the death.' This was a doom not assigned to the less guilty. Alluding to cases of this latter class, a writer (already quoted) in the *Foreign Quarterly Review* remarks : 'In the trials of Bessie Roy, of James Reid, of Patrick Currie, of Isobel Grierson, and of Grizel Gardiner, the charges are principally of taking off and laying on diseases either on men or cattle ; meetings with the devil in various shapes and places ; raising and dismembering dead bodies for the purpose of enchantments ; destroying crops ; scaring honest persons in the shape of cats ; taking away women's milk ; committing house-breaking and theft by means of enchantments ; and so on. South-running water, salt, rowan-tree, enchanted flints (probably elf arrow-heads), and doggerel verses, generally a translation of the Creed or Lord's Prayer, were the means employed for effecting a cure.' Diseases, again, were laid on by forming pictures of clay or wax ; by placing a dead hand, or some mutilated member, in the house of the intended victim ; or by throwing enchanted articles at his door. A good purpose did not save the witch ; intercourse with spirits in any shape being the crime.

Of course, in the revelations of the various witches, inconsistencies were abundant, and even plain and evident impossibilities were frequently among the things averred. The sapient James, however, in place of being led by these things to doubt the whole, was only strengthened in his opinions, it being a maxim of his that the witches were 'all extreme lyars.' Other persons came to different conclusions from the same premises ; and before the close of James's

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reign, many men of sense began to weary of the torturings and burnings that took place almost *every day*, in town or country, and had done so for a period of thirty years (between 1590 and 1620). Advocates now came forward to defend the accused, and in their pleadings ventured even to arraign some of the received axioms of 'Dæmonologie' laid down by the king himself, in a book bearing that name. The removal of James to England moderated, but did not altogether stop, the witch prosecutions. After his death they slackened more considerably. Only eight witchcraft cases are on the record as having occurred between 1625 and 1640 in Scotland, and in one of these cases, remarkable to tell, the accused escaped. The mania, as it appears, was beginning to wear itself out.

As the spirit of puritanism gained strength, however, which it gradually did during the latter part of the reign of Charles I., the partially cleared horizon became again overcast; and again was this owing to ill-judged edicts, which, by indicating the belief of the great and the educated in witchcraft, had the natural effect of reviving the frenzy among the flexible populace. The General Assembly was the body in fault on this occasion, and thenceforward the clergy were the great witch-hunters in Scotland. The Assembly passed condemnatory acts in 1640, '43, '44, '45, and '49; and with every successive act, the cases and convictions increased, with even a deeper degree of attendant horrors than at any previous time. 'The old impossible and abominable fancies,' says the *Review* formerly quoted, 'of the *Malleus* were revived. About thirty trials appear on the record between 1649 and the Restoration, only one of which seems to have terminated in an acquittal; while at a single circuit, held at Glasgow, Stirling, and Ayr, in 1659, seventeen persons were convicted and burnt for this crime.' But it must be remembered that the phrase, 'on the record,' alludes only to justiciary trials, which formed but a small proportion of the cases really tried. The justiciary lists take no note of the commissions perpetually given by the Privy-council to resident gentlemen and clergymen to try and burn witches in their respective districts. These commissions executed people over the whole country in multitudes. Wodrow, Lamont, Mercer, and Whitelocke prove this but too satisfactorily.

The clergy continued, after the Restoration, to pursue these imaginary criminals with a zeal altogether deplorable. The Justiciary Court condemned twenty persons in the first year of Charles II.'s reign (1661), and in one day of the same year the council issued fourteen new provincial commissions, the aggregate doings of which one shudders to guess at. To compute their condemnations would be impossible, for victim after victim perished at the stake, unnamed and unheard of. Morayshire became at this particular period the scene of a violent fit of the great moral frenzy, and some of the most remarkable examinations, signalling the whole course of Scottish witchcraft, took place in that county. The details, though

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occasionally ludicrous from their absurdity, are too horrible for narration in the present pages.

On the new government becoming thoroughly fixed in power, this form of religious persecution—for in some degree such it was—abated. From 1662, there is an interval of six years without a single Justiciary trial for the crime of witchcraft, and one fellow was actually whipped for charging some person with it. After this period, the dying embers of the delusion only burst out on occasions, here and there, into a momentary flame. In 1678, several women were condemned, 'on their own confession,' says the Register; but we suspect this only means, in reality, that one malicious being made voluntary admissions involving others, as must often have been the case, we fear, in these proceedings. Scattered cases took place near the beginning of the eighteenth century—such as those at Paisley in 1697, at Pittenweem in 1704, and at Spott about the same time. It is curious, that as something like direct evidence became necessary for condemnation, evidence did present itself, and in the shape of possessed or enchanted young persons, who were brought into court to play off their tricks. The most striking case of this nature was that of Christian Shaw, a girl about eleven years old, and the daughter of Mr Shaw of Bargarran, in Renfrewshire. This wretched girl, who seems to have been an accomplished hypocrite, young as she was, quarrelled with a maid-servant, and, to be revenged, fell into convulsions, saw spirits, and, in short, feigned herself bewitched. To sustain her story, she accused one person after another, till not less than twenty were implicated, some of them children of the ages of twelve and fourteen! They were tried on the evidence of the girl, and five human beings perished through her malicious impostures. It is remarkable that this very girl afterwards founded the thread manufacture in Renfrewshire. From a friend who had been in Holland, she learned some secrets in spinning, and, putting them skilfully in practice, she led the way to the extensive operations carried on of late years in that department. She became the wife of the minister of Kilmaurs, and, it is to be hoped, had leisure and grace to repent of the wicked misapplication in her youth of those talents which she undoubtedly possessed.

The last Justiciary trial for witchcraft in Scotland was in the case of Elspeth Rule, who was convicted in 1708, and banished. A belief in the crime was evidently expiring in the minds of the Scottish law authorities; and the Lord Advocate, or public prosecutor, endeavoured to prevent the county courts from taking cognisance of the subject. Notwithstanding his remonstrances, however, a case of trial and execution for witchcraft was conducted by Captain David Ross of Littledean, sheriff-depute of Sutherlandshire, in 1722. 'The victim,' observes Sir Walter Scott, in his *Letters on Demonology*, 'was an insane old woman belonging to the parish of Loth, who had so little idea of her situation as to rejoice at the sight of the fire



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which was destined to consume her. She had a daughter lame both of hands and feet, a circumstance attributed to the witch's having been used to transform her into a pony, and get her shod by the devil. It does not appear that any punishment was inflicted for this cruel abuse of the law on the person of a creature so helpless.' The execution took place at Dornoch, and was the last that was inflicted for witchcraft in Great Britain. Here may be said to end the tragical annals of witchcraft in Scotland. The number of its victims, from first to last, it would be difficult accurately to compute; but the black scroll would include, according to those who have most attentively inquired into the subject, upwards of FOUR THOUSAND persons!

Having thus presented a historical sketch of witchcraft in England and Scotland, we proceed to give an account of the mania as it occurred in the North American colonies.

Carrying their religious opinions to an excess, and generally ignorant of the economy of nature, the inhabitants of New England yielded a remarkable credence to the popular superstition, and carried it as far, in the way of judicial punishment, as it had gone in any European nation. Their situation, perhaps, as colonists in a pagan region helped to fan the flame of their fury against witches. They regarded the Indians as worshippers of the devil, and practisers of incantations; they therefore felt it to be necessary to be doubly on their guard, and to watch the first appearances of witchcraft within the settlements. We learn from a respectable authority—Chandler's *Criminal Trials*—to which we are indebted for many subsequent particulars, that the first suspicion of witchcraft among the English in America was about the year 1645.

'At Springfield, on the Connecticut river, several persons were supposed to be under an evil hand; but no one was convicted until 1650, when a poor wretch, Mary Oliver, after a long examination, was brought to a confession of her guilt, but it does not appear that she was executed. About the same time, three persons were executed near Boston, all of whom at their death asserted their innocence. In 1655, Anne Hibbins, the widow of a magistrate and a man of note in Boston, was tried for this offence before the Court of Assistants. The jury found her guilty, but the magistrates refused to accept the verdict. The case was carried up to the General Court, where the popular voice prevailed, and the prisoner was executed. In 1662, at Hartford, Connecticut, a woman named Greensmith confessed that she had been grossly familiar with a demon, and she was executed. In 1669, Susanna Martin of Salisbury was bound over to the court upon suspicion of witchcraft, but escaped. She suffered death in 1692. In 1671, Elizabeth Knap, who possessed ventriloquial powers, alarmed the people of Groton; but as her demon railed at the minister of the town, and other persons of good character, the people would not believe him.

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Her fraud and imposture were soon discovered. In 1694, Philip Smith, a judge of the court, a military officer, and a representative of the town of Hadley, fancied himself under an evil hand, and suspected an old woman, one of his neighbours, as the cause of his sickness. She was dragged from her house by some young men, who hung her up until she was nearly dead, then rolled her in the snow, and at last buried her in it; but it happened that she survived, and the melancholy man died. Trials for witchcraft out of New England were not common. In 1665, Ralph Hall and his wife were tried for the offence in New York, and acquitted. In 1660, in Queen's County, Long Island, Mary Wright was suspected of corresponding with the Author of Evil. She was arraigned, and it was finally concluded to transport her to the General Court of Massachusetts, "where charges of this kind were more common, and the proofs necessary to support them better understood." She was accordingly arraigned there, and acquitted of witchcraft, but was convicted of being a Quaker, and banished out of the jurisdiction. In Pennsylvania, when William Penn officiated as judge in his new colony, two women, accused of witchcraft, were presented by the grand-jury. Without treating the charge with contempt, which the public mind would not have borne, he charged the jury to bring them in guilty of being suspected of witchcraft, which was not a crime that exposed them to the penalty of the law. Notwithstanding the frequent instances of supposed witchcraft in Massachusetts, no person had suffered death there on that account for nearly thirty years after the execution of Anne Hibbins. The sentence of this woman was disapproved of by many influential men, and her fate probably prevented further prosecutions. But in 1685, a very circumstantial account of most of the cases above mentioned was published, and many arguments were brought to convince the country that they were no delusions or impostures, but the effects of a familiarity between the devil and such as he found fit for his instruments.'

Before going further with our account of these strange doings, it is necessary to introduce to the reader a person who made himself exceedingly prominent in exciting and keeping up the witchcraft mania. This individual was the Rev. Cotton Mather—a noted character in American biography.

Cotton Mather was descended from a respectable English family. His grandfather and father were ministers of the Congregational body, in which he also was destined to perform a distinguished part. He was born at Boston in 1662; and his mother being a daughter of John Cotton, an eminent nonconformist divine, he received from him the name of Cotton. In his youth, he was considered a prodigy of piety and devotion to study, and at an early age he was raised to the ministry as assistant to his father. Later in life, he did good service to the colony, as a zealous advocate of

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popular rights during the struggles with the Stuarts and the establishment of the revolution of 1688. Cotton Mather, however, is chiefly remembered for his indefatigable zeal in seeking out and getting witches tried and executed. This great work he felt to be his mission : his mind was full of it. He seems to have considered that in nothing could he do the commonwealth such good service as in ridding it of traffickers with every order of demons. In order to make known his opinion on the subject, he wrote various treatises, expounding the nature of the invisible world, and all breathing an earnest belief in the constant personal interference of Satan with his ministerial prelections. Among his manuscripts, which have been collected by the Massachusetts Historical Society, there is a paper on which is endorsed the following curious record in his handwriting: 'November 29, 1692.—While I was preaching at a private fast (kept for a possessed young woman), on Mark ix. 28, 29, the devil in the damsel flew upon me, and tore the leaf, as it is now torn, over against the text.' For a fac-simile of this strange record, we refer to Jared Sparks's Life of Mather, from which we derive the present account of this credulous and meddling personage.

Several instances of alleged witchcraft, as has been seen, prepared the way for the great Salem tragedy, and these doubtless stimulated the zeal of Cotton Mather. In 1688, a case occurred which, being under his own eye, afforded materials for minute investigation. The family of John Goodwin, a respectable and devout man, living in the northern part of Boston, began to be troubled with supernatural visitations. The children had all been religiously educated, and were thought to be without guile. The eldest was a girl of thirteen or fourteen years. She had a quarrel with a laundress, whom she had charged with taking away some of the family linen. The mother of the laundress was an Irish-woman, who, resenting the imputations on her daughter's character, gave the girl harsh language. Shortly afterwards, the girl, her sister, and two brothers, complained of being tormented with strange pains in different parts of their bodies, and these affections were pronounced to be diabolical by the physicians who happened to be consulted. 'One or two things were said to be very remarkable: all their complaints were in the daytime, and they slept comfortably all night; they were struck dead at the sight of the *Assembly's Catechism*, Cotton's *Milk for Babes*, and some other good books; but could read in Oxford jests, Popish and Quaker books, and the Common Prayer, without any difficulty. Sometimes they would be deaf, then dumb, then blind; and sometimes all these disorders together would come upon them. Their tongues would be drawn down their throats, then pulled out upon their chins. Their jaws, necks, shoulders, elbows, and all their joints, would appear to be dislocated; and they would make most piteous



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outcries of burnings, of being cut with knives, beat, &c., and the marks of wounds were afterwards to be seen. The ministers of Boston and Charlestown kept a day of fasting and prayer at the troubled house; after which, the youngest child made no more complaints. The others continuing to be afflicted, the magistrates interposed, and the old woman was apprehended; but upon examination, would neither confess nor deny, and appeared to be disordered in her senses.' In order to satisfy themselves on this latter point, the magistrates appointed several physicians 'to examine her very strictly, whether she was no way crazed in her intellectuals.' These sage inquisitors do not appear to have been acquainted with the fact, that a person may be deranged on one subject, and yet sane on all others. They conversed with the woman a good deal, and, finding that she gave connected replies, agreed that she was in full possession of her mind. She was then found guilty of witchcraft, and sentenced to die. Cotton Mather eagerly seized on this admirable opportunity of conversing with a legally condemned witch. He paid many visits to the poor woman while she was in prison, and was vastly edified with her communications. She described her interviews with the Prince of Darkness, and her attendance upon his meetings, with a clearness that seems to have filled him with perfect delight. No sentiments of compassion appear to have been excited in his mind towards this unfortunate woman. He accompanied her to the scaffold, and rejoiced in seeing what he considered justice done upon her. To the moment of her death, she continued to declare that the children should not be relieved—an unequivocal proof of disordered intellect.

Sure enough, the execution did not stay the disorder. The children complained of suffering as much as before. Some of these facts are amusing. Mather, in his simplicity, says: "They were often near drowning or burning themselves, and they often strangled themselves with their neckcloths; but the providence of God still ordered the seasonable succours of them that looked after them." On the least reproof of their parents, "they would roar excessively." It usually took abundance of time to dress or undress them, through the strange postures into which they would be twisted on purpose to hinder it. "If they were bidden to do a needless thing, such as to rub a clean table, they were able to do it unmolested; but if to do a useful thing, as to rub a dirty table, they would presently, with many torments, be made incapable." Such a choice opportunity as this family afforded for inquiry into the physiology of witchcraft, was not to be lost. In order to inspect the specimen more at leisure, he had the eldest daughter brought to his own house. He wished "to confute the Sadducism of that debauched age," and the girl took care that the materials should not be wanting.'

A number of cunningly devised tricks were performed by this artful young creature, all of which imposed on Cotton, who resolved

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to give an account of her case in a sermon. This publicity, however, was by no means pleasing to the victim of witchcraft. She made many attempts to prevent the preaching of the sermon, threatening Mather with the vengeance of the spirits, till he was almost out of patience, and exorcised them in Latin, Greek, and Hebrew. All these were perfectly intelligible to them; 'but the Indian languages they did not seem so well to understand.'

The whole particulars of this amusing case were published in a regular form, and afterwards reprinted in London, by Richard Baxter, who confidently says in the preface: 'This great instance comes with such convincing evidence, that he must be a very obdurate Sadducee that will not believe it.' We may here explain, that, during the seventeenth century, 'Sadducee' was the term usually employed to denote any one who did not come up to a certain standard of belief, and was employed often towards persons of high ecclesiastical position.

That it was feasible to doubt the validity of the pretended complaints of Goodwin's children, and yet not be a Sadducee, was afterwards manifest. These young persons had, from first to last, carried on a system of imposture; and the idea of doing so had been suggested by the relation of tales of English witchcraft. 'Glanvil,' observes Mr Chandler, 'not many years before, published his witch stories in England; Perkins and other nonconformists were earlier; but the great authority was that of Sir Matthew Hale, revered in New England, not only for his knowledge in the law, but for his gravity and piety. The trial of the witches in Suffolk was published in 1684. All these books were in New England; and the conformity between the behaviour of Goodwin's children, and most of the supposed bewitched at Salem, and the behaviour of those in England, is so exact, as to leave no room to doubt the stories had been read by the New England persons themselves, or had been told to them by others who had read them.'

We now come to the great witch-battue at Salem, a village in Massachusetts, which at present forms a part of the town of Danvers. The commencement of the Salem witchcraft was in February 1692, and broke out in the family of Samuel Parris, the minister of the village. There had been a bitter strife between Mr Parris and a portion of his people; and the 'very active part he took in the prosecutions for witchcraft, has been justly attributed, not less to motives of revenge, than to a blind zeal in the performance of what he considered his duty. A daughter of Mr Parris, nine years of age, his niece, a girl of less than twelve, and two other girls in the neighbourhood, began to make the same sort of complaints that Goodwin's children had made two or three years before. The physicians, having no other way of accounting for their disorder, pronounced them bewitched. An Indian woman, who had been brought into the country from New Spain, and then lived with Mr

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Parris, tried some experiments, which she pretended to have been used to in her own country, in order to find out the witch. This coming to the children's knowledge, they cried out upon the poor Indian as appearing to them, pinching, pricking, and tormenting them; and they fell into fits. Tituba, the Indian, acknowledged that she had learned how to find out a witch, but denied that she was one herself. Several private fasts were kept at the minister's house, and several, more public, by the whole village; and then a general fast through the colony, to implore God to rebuke Satan. The great notice taken of the children, together with the pity and compassion of the persons by whom they were visited, not only tended to confirm them in their conduct, but to draw others into the like. Accordingly, the number of the sufferers soon increased; and among them, there were two or three women, and some girls old enough for witnesses. These, too, had their fits, and, when in them, cried out, not only against Tituba, but against Sarah Osburn, a melancholy, distracted old woman, and Sarah Good, another old woman, who was bedrid. Tituba having, as it is alleged, been scourged by her master, at length confessed herself a witch, and that the two old women were her confederates. The three were then committed to prison; and Tituba, upon search, was found to have scars upon her back, which were called the devil's marks. This took place on the 1st of March. About three weeks afterwards, two other women, of good character, and church members, Corey and Nurse, were complained of, and brought to an examination; on which these children fell into fits, and the mother of one of them, the wife of Thomas Putman, joined with the children, and complained of Nurse as tormenting her: she made most terrible shrieks, to the amazement of all the neighbourhood. The women, notwithstanding they denied everything, were sent to prison; and such was the infatuation, that a child of Sarah Good, about four or five years old, was also committed, being charged with biting some of the afflicted, who shewed the print of small teeth on their arms. On April 3d, Mr Parris took for his text: "Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil." Sarah Cloyse, supposing it to be occasioned by Nurse's case, who was her sister, went out of meeting, and she was thereupon complained of for a witch, examined, and committed. Elizabeth Proctor was charged about the same time; her husband accompanied her to her examination, but it cost him his life. Some of the afflicted cried out upon him also, and they were both committed to prison.

'The subject acquired new interest; and, to examine Sarah Cloyse and Elizabeth Proctor, the deputy-governor and five other magistrates came to Salem. It was a great day; several ministers were present. Parris officiated, and, by his own record, it is plain that he himself elicited every accusation. His first witness, John, the Indian servant, husband to Tituba, was rebuked by Sarah

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Cloyse, as a grievous liar. Abigail Williams, the niece of Parris, was also at hand with her tales: the prisoner had been at the witches' sacrament. Struck with horror, Sarah Cloyse asked for water, and sank down "in a dying fainting-fit." "Her spirit," shouted the band of the afflicted, "is gone to prison to her sister Nurse." Against Elizabeth Proctor, the niece of Parris told stories yet more foolish than false: the prisoner had invited her to sign the devil's book. "Dear child," exclaimed the accused in her agony, "it is not so. There is another judgment, dear child;" and her accusers, turning towards her husband, declared that he too was a wizard. All three were committed.

'No wonder that the whole country was in a consternation, when persons of sober lives and unblemished characters were committed to prison upon such evidence. Nobody was safe. The most effectual way to prevent an accusation was to become an accuser; and, accordingly, the number of the afflicted increased every day, and the number of the accused in proportion. As yet no one had confessed; but at length Deliverance Hobbs owned everything that was asked of her, and was left unharmed. Then it was that the monstrous doctrine seems to have been first thought of, that "the gallows was to be set up, not for those who professed themselves witches, but for those who rebuked the delusion;" not for the guilty, but for the unbelieving. As might be expected, confessions rose in importance. They were the avenue of safety. Examinations and commitments were of daily occurrence, and the whole community was in a state of terror and alarm, which can more easily be imagined than described. The purest life, the strictest integrity, the most solemn asseverations of innocence, were of no avail. Husband was torn from wife, parents from children, brother from sister, and, in some cases, the unhappy victims saw in their accusers their nearest and dearest friends: in one instance, a wife and a daughter accused the husband and father to save themselves; and, in another, a daughter seven years old testified against her mother.

'The manner in which the examinations were conducted was eminently calculated to increase the number of the accused and of the accusers. Mr Parris was present at all of them, and was over-officious, putting leading questions, and artfully entrapping the witnesses into contradictions, by which they became confused, and were eagerly cried out upon as guilty of the offence. The appearance of the persons accused was also carefully noted by the magistrates, and was used in evidence against them at their trials. "As to the method which the Salem justices do take," says a contemporary writer, "it is truly this: A warrant being issued out to apprehend the persons that are charged and complained of by the afflicted children, as they are called; said persons are brought before the justices, the afflicted being present. The justices ask the apprehended why they afflict these poor children, to which the



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apprehended answer, they do not afflict them. The justices order the apprehended to look upon the said children, which accordingly they do; and at the time of that look (I dare not say *by* that look, as the Salem gentlemen do), the afflicted are cast into a fit. The apprehended are then blinded, and ordered to touch the afflicted; and at that touch, though not *by* that touch (as above), the afflicted do ordinarily come out of their fits. The afflicted persons then declare and affirm that the apprehended have afflicted them; upon which the apprehended persons, though of never so good repute, are forthwith committed to prison, on suspicion of witchcraft."

Cotton Mather was in his element during these transactions. He recommended the magistrates to study his works on Witchcraft, and to use all the enginery in their power to purify the land from the wicked practices of necromancy. The authorities scarcely needed these incitements. They carried on their examinations with much vigour, and the manner in which they did so affords one a melancholy insight into the minutiae of the delusion.

While various preliminary examinations had been made by the authorities, the jails were gradually filling with persons awaiting the commencement of the trials, which could not take place for several months, in consequence of there being a kind of suspension of the chartered rights of the colony. In May, a new royal charter arrived, along with Sir William Phipps as governor—a person, as it would appear, unfitted for this important trust; he was a protégé of the Mathers, inclined to walk by their counsel, and a firm believer in witchcraft. Finding on his arrival that the prisons were full of victims charged with this offence, and urged on by the seeming urgency of the occasion, he took it upon him to issue a special commission, constituting the persons named in it a court to act in and for the counties of Suffolk, Essex, and Middlesex. This court, beyond all question an illegal tribunal, because the governor had no shadow of authority to constitute it, consisted of seven judges. 'At the opening of the court at Salem, on the 2d of June 1692, the commission of the governor was published, and the oath of office was administered to Thomas Newton as attorney-general, and to Stephen Sewall as clerk. The general course of proceedings at these trials was entirely consistent with the character of the court and the nature of their business. After pleading to the indictment, if the prisoner denied his guilt, the afflicted persons were first brought into court and sworn as to who afflicted them. Then the confessors, that is, those who had voluntarily acknowledged themselves witches, were called upon to tell what they knew of the accused. Proclamation was then made for all who could give any testimony, however foreign to the charge, to come into court, and whatever any one volunteered to tell, was admitted as evidence. The next process was to search for "witch-marks," the doctrine being, that the devil affixed his mark to those in alliance with him,

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and that this point on the body became callous and dead. This duty was performed by a jury of the same sex, who made a particular return of the appearance of the body, and whether there was any preternatural excrescence. A wart or a mole on the body of a prisoner was often conclusive against him, when the evidence was otherwise doubtful. These examinations in the case of women were made by a jury of matrons, aided by a medical man as foreman. They were very minute, and, in some respects, the most cruel and disgusting part of the proceedings. The unhappy prisoners were not only subjected to the mortification of a gross exposure before the jury of examination, but when any witch-mark was found, it was punctured with pins, to ascertain whether there was any feeling. There were usually several examinations of the same individual. In one instance, a woman was examined at ten o'clock in the morning, and at four o'clock in the afternoon the jury certified that they had again examined her, and that her breast, which "in the morning search appeared to us very full, the nibblis fresh and starting, now at this search all lancke and pendent." Of the nine women who were on this jury, but one could write her name; the remainder made their marks.

'Evidence was also received respecting the appearance of the accused at the preliminary examinations; and the various signs of witchcraft which then appeared were detailed with much particularity. It was a great sign of witchcraft to make an error in the Lord's Prayer, which the accused on those occasions were required to repeat, and if they made a single error, it was brought up at their trial as evidence against them. Thus, one repeated the prayer correctly in every particular, excepting that she said "deliver us from *all* evil," "which was looked upon as if she prayed against what she was now justly under." Upon making another attempt, she said "hollowed be thy name," instead of "hallowed be thy name;" and this "was counted a depraving the words, as signifying to make void, and so a curse, rather than a prayer." The appearance of the accused, and of those supposed to be bewitched, also had an effect against the prisoner. Sometimes the witnesses were struck dumb for a long time; at others, they would fall into terrible fits, and were insensible to the touch of all but the accused, who, they declared, tormented them. Sometimes the accused were ordered to look on the afflicted, when the latter would be immediately thrown into fits. It was thought that an invisible and impalpable fluid darted from the eyes of the witch, and penetrated the brain of the bewitched. A touch by the witch attracted back the malignant fluid, and the sufferers recovered their senses. Another sign of witchcraft, of great consideration, was an inability of the accused to shed tears.

'There was one species of evidence which was of great effect in these prosecutions, and which it was impossible to rebut. Witnesses were allowed to testify to certain acts of the accused, when the latter

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were not present in the body ; that they were tormented by apparitions or spectres of the accused, which pinched them, robbed them of their goods, caused them to languish and pine away, pricked them ; and they produced the identical pins which were used for this purpose.'

The first session of the Special Court of Oyer and Terminer was held in June 1692, and at this time one trial only took place. 'The victim selected for this occasion was Bridget Bishop or Oliver, a poor and friendless old woman, who had been charged with witchcraft twenty years before. The indictment against her set forth, that on the 19th day of April, and at divers other days and times, as well before as after, she used, practised, and exercised certain detestable arts, called witchcrafts and sorceries, at and within the township of Salem, in, upon, and against one Mercy Lewis, of Salem village ; by which wicked arts, the said Mercy Lewis "was hurt, tortured, afflicted, pined, consumed, wasted, and tormented, against the peace of our sovereign lord and lady, the king and queen, and against the form of the statute in that case made and provided." There were four other indictments against the prisoner for the same crime in afflicting other persons. On her arraignment, she pleaded not guilty.

'The fact that the crime had been committed, or that certain persons were bewitched by some one, was considered too notorious to require much proof ; and to fix the crime on the prisoner, the first testimony adduced was that of the persons supposed to be bewitched. Several of them testified, that the shape of the prisoner sometimes very grievously pinched, choked, bit, and afflicted them, urging them to write their names in a book, which the said spectre called "ours." One of them further testified, that the shape of the prisoner, with another, one day took her from her wheel, and, carrying her to the river-side, threatened there to drown her, if she did not sign the book. Others testified that the said shape did in her threats brag to them that she had been the death of sundry persons, then by her named. Another testified to the apparition of ghosts to the spectre of the prisoner, crying out : "You murdered us." "About the truth whereof," adds the reporter of this trial, "there was, in the matter of fact, but too much suspicion."

The evidence given by John Louder on this ridiculous trial may be taken as a fair sample of the nonsense which was uttered on the occasion. 'John Louder testified, that, upon some little controversy with Bishop about her fowls, going well to bed, he awoke in the night by moonlight, and saw clearly the likeness of this woman grievously oppressing him ; in which miserable condition she held him, unable to help himself, till near day. He told Bishop of this ; but she utterly denied it, and threatened him very much. Quickly after this, being at home on a Lord's-day, with the doors shut about him, he saw a black pig approach him, which endeavouring to kick, it vanished away. Immediately after, sitting down, he saw a black



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thing jump in at the window, and come and stand before him. The body was like that of a monkey, the feet like a cock's, but the face much like a man's. He being so extremely affrighted that he could not speak, this monster spoke to him, and said : " I am a messenger sent unto you, for I understand that you are in some trouble of mind ; and if you will be ruled by me, you shall want for nothing in this world." Whereupon he endeavoured to clap his hands upon it, but he could feel no substance, and it jumped out of the window again, but immediately came in by the porch, though the doors were shut, and said : " You had better take my counsel." He then struck at it with a stick, but struck only the groundsel, and broke the stick. The arm with which he struck was presently disabled, and it vanished away. He presently went out at the back-door, and spied this Bishop, in her orchard, going toward her house : but he had not power to set one foot forward unto her. Whereupon, returning into the house, he was immediately accosted by the monster he had seen before, which goblin was going to fly at him ; whereat he cried out : " The whole armour of God be between me and you !" So it sprung back, and flew over the apple-tree, shaking many apples off the tree in its flying over. At its leap, it flung dirt with its feet against the stomach of the man ; whereon he was then struck dumb, and so continued for three days together. " Upon the producing of this testimony," says Cotton Mather, " Bishop denied that she knew this deponent. Yet their two orchards joined, and they had often had their little quarrels for some years together."

All this trash being gravely listened to and approved of by the court, it was resolved, as a final step in the procedure, to have the prisoner examined by a jury of women. This was accordingly done ; the matrons reported that they found a preternatural 'tet' upon her body, and on making a second examination within three or four hours, there was no such thing to be seen.

'The poor woman undertook to explain the circumstances which had been related against her, but she was constantly harassed ; and becoming confused, she apparently prevaricated somewhat, and all she said made against her. She seems to have been a woman of violent temper, who had lived on ill terms with her neighbours for many years, and who had long had the reputation of being a witch. Those of her neighbours who had suffered from her uncomfortable disposition, were nothing loath to attribute all their misfortunes to her ; and she thus stood little chance of a fair trial.

'She was convicted, and sentenced to be hanged, and was remanded to prison to await her doom. " As she was under a guard, passing by the great and spacious meeting-house of Salem " —Cotton Mather relates this—" she gave a look towards the house ; and immediately a demon, invisibly entering the meeting-house, tore down a part of it ; so that though there were no person to be seen there, yet the people at the noise running in found a board,



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which was strongly fastened with several nails, transported unto another quarter of the house." She was executed on the 10th of June, solemnly protesting her innocence to the last.

'After the trial and condemnation of Bridget Bishop, the court adjourned to the 30th of June; and the governor and council thought proper, in the meantime, to take the opinion of several ministers upon the state of things as they then stood. Their return, understood to have been drawn up by Cotton Mather, was as follows :

"1. The afflicted state of our poor neighbours, that are now suffering by molestations from the invisible world, we apprehend so deplorable, that we think their condition calls for the utmost help of all persons in their several capacities.

"2. We cannot but with all thankfulness acknowledge the success which the merciful God has given to the sedulous and assiduous endeavours of our honourable rulers, to defeat the abominable witchcrafts which have been committed in the country; humbly praying, that the discovery of those mysterious and mischievous wickednesses may be perfected.

"3. We judge that in the prosecution of these and all such witchcrafts, there is need of a very critical and exquisite caution, lest by too much credulity for things received only upon the devil's authority, there be a door opened for a long train of miserable consequences, and Satan get an advantage over us; for we should not be ignorant of his devices.

"4. As in complaints upon witchcrafts there may be matters of inquiry which do not amount unto matters of presumption, and there may be matters of presumption which yet may not be matters of conviction, so it is necessary that all proceedings thereabout be managed with an exceeding tenderness towards those that may be complained of, especially if they have been persons formerly of an unblemished reputation.

"5. When the first inquiry is made into the circumstances of such as may lie under the just suspicion of witchcrafts, we could wish that there may be admitted as little as possible of such noise, company, and openness, as may too hastily expose them that are examined; and that there may be nothing used as a test for the trial of the suspected, the lawfulness whereof may be doubted by the people of God; but that the directions given by such judicious writers as Perkins and Bernard may be observed.

"6. Presumptions whereupon persons may be committed, and, much more, convictions whereupon persons may be condemned as guilty of witchcrafts, ought certainly to be more considerable than barely the accused person's being represented by a spectre unto the afflicted; inasmuch as it is an undoubted and a notorious thing, that a demon may, by God's permission, appear, even to ill purposes, in the shape of an innocent, yea, and a virtuous man. Nor can we esteem alterations made in the sufferers, by a look or touch of the

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accused, to be an infallible evidence of guilt, but frequently liable to be abused by the devil's legerdemain.

"7. We know not whether some remarkable affronts given the devils, by our disbelieving those testimonies whose whole force and strength is from them alone, may not put a period unto the progress of the dreadful calamity begun upon us, in the accusation of so many persons, whereof some, we hope, are yet clear from the great transgression laid to their charge.

"8. Nevertheless, we cannot but humbly recommend unto the government, the speedy and vigorous prosecutions of such as have rendered themselves obnoxious, according to the directions given in the laws of God, and the wholesome statutes of the English nation, for the detection of witchcrafts."

These suggestions met with due attention. Accordingly, when the court again met on the 30th of June, five women were brought to trial—namely, Sarah Good and Rebecca Nurse, of Salem village, Susannah Martin of Amesbury, Elizabeth How of Ipswich, and Sarah Wildes of Topsfield. They were condemned, and executed on the 19th of July. There was no difficulty with any but Rebecca Nurse. She was a member of the Church, and of a good character; as to her, the jury brought in a verdict of not guilty. The accusers made a great clamour, and the court expressed much dissatisfaction. The jury again retired, and this time brought in a verdict of guilty. On the next communion-day, the poor woman, declaring her innocence, was taken in chains to the meeting-house, to be formally excommunicated. She was hanged with the rest on the 19th of July. In August, six persons were tried, and condemned to be executed; one of the unhappy prisoners on this occasion being a person named Willard, who had formerly been employed to detect witchcraft, but had latterly revolted at the office, and expressed a disbelief of the crime.

The next trial was that of George Burroughs, a person of education, who had formerly been a minister in Salem village. 'His trial and condemnation form one of the darkest transactions which the annals of crime in America present. There were at the time vague hints, which became at length positive assertions, of difficulties between him and Parris, which render his fate a terrible commentary on the power thrown into the hands of a few designing men, by the excited state of public feeling. Moreover, he boldly denied that there was or could be such a thing as witchcraft in the current sense of the term. He was among the first who were accused, and, after lying in jail several months, he was brought to trial on the 5th of August. The indictment set forth that the prisoner, on the 9th day of May, and divers other days, as well before as after, "certain detestable arts, called witchcraft and sorceries, wickedly and feloniously hath used, practised, and exercised, at and within the township of Salem, in the county of Essex aforesaid, in, upon, and

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against one Anne Putnam, single woman, by which said wicked arts, the said Anne Putnam, the 9th day of May, and divers other days and times, as well before as after, was and is tortured, afflicted, pined, consumed, wasted, and tormented, against the peace of our sovereign lord and lady, the king and queen, and against the form of the statute in that case made and provided."

There were three other indictments against the prisoner, to all of which, on his arraignment, he pleaded not guilty. The evidence against him was of a very loose and general nature, consisting, in a great measure, of things said and done by his shape or apparition, when he was not present as to the body. The following is a condensation of the absurd evidence of two of the witnesses :

Anne Putnam said : ' On the 9th of May 1692, in the evening, I saw the apparition of George Burroughs, who grievously tortured me, and urged me to write in his book ; which I refused. He then told me that his two first wives would appear to me presently, and tell me a great many lies ; but I should not believe them. Immediately there appeared to me the forms of two women in winding-sheets, and napkins about their heads, at which I was greatly affrighted. They turned their faces towards Mr Burroughs, and looked very red and angry at him, telling him that he had been a cruel man to them, and that their blood cried for vengeance against him. They also told him they should be clothed with white robes in heaven, when he should be cast into hell. Immediately he vanished away ; and as soon as he was gone, the two women turned their faces towards me, looking as pale as a white wall. They said they were Mr Burroughs' first wives, and that he had murdered them. One of them said she was his first wife, and he stabbed her under the left arm, and put a piece of sealing-wax on the wound ; and she pulled aside the winding-sheet, and shewed me the place ; and also told me that she was in the house where Mr Parris now lives, when it was done. The other told me that Mr Burroughs and his present wife killed her in the vessel as she was coming to see her friends, because they would have one another ; and they both charged me that I should tell these things to the magistrates before Mr Burroughs' face, and, if he did not own them, they did not know but they should appear there this morning. Mrs Lawson and her daughter also appeared to me, and told me that Mr Burroughs murdered them. This morning there also appeared to me another woman in a winding-sheet, and told me that she was goodman Fuller's first wife, and that Mr Burroughs killed her, because of some difference between her husband and himself. The prisoner, on the 9th of May, also, at his first examination, most grievously tormented and afflicted Mary Walcott, Mercy Lewis, Elizabeth Hubbard, and Abigail Williams, by pinching, pricking, and choking them.'

Elizabeth Hubbard said : ' One night there appeared to me a little black-bearded man, in dark apparel, who told me his name was

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Burroughs. He took a book out of his pocket, and bade me set my hand to it. I refused. The lines in the book were as red as blood. He then pinched me, and went away. He has often appeared to me since, and threatened to kill me if I would not sign the book. He tortured me very much by biting, pinching, and squeezing my body, and running pins into me. At his first examination on 9th May, he did most grievously afflict and torment the bodies of Mary Walcott, Mercy Lewis, Anne Putnam, and Abigail Williams. If he did but look upon them, he would strike them down, or almost choke them to death. I believe in my heart that Mr George Burroughs is a dreadful wizard.'

Other witnesses told similar stories, all so ridiculous, that it is amazing how they should have been listened to by a court of justice. The unfortunate prisoner said but little at his trial. He made some attempt to explain away the testimony against him, but became confused, and made contradictory statements. He also handed in a paper to the jury, in which he utterly denied that there was any truth in the received notions of witchcraft. The jury returned a verdict of guilty, and he was sentenced to die.

On the 19th of August, he was carried in a cart through the streets of Salem with the others who were to die. Upon the ladder he made a calm and powerful address to the multitude, in which he asserted his innocence 'with such solemn and serious expressions as were to the admiration of all present.' He then made a prayer, concluding with the Lord's Prayer, which he repeated in a clear, sonorous tone, with entire exactness, and with a fervency that astonished. Many were affected to tears, and it seemed as if the spectators would hinder the execution. But the accusers cried that the devil assisted him. The execution proceeded, and the husband, the father, and the minister of God was violently sent to his long home. Cotton Mather, on horseback in the crowd, addressed the people, declaring that Burroughs was no ordained minister, insisted on his guilt, and asserted that the devil had often been transformed into an angel of light. When the body was cut down, it was dragged by the halter to a hole, and there interred with every mark of indignity.

A few weeks afterwards, fourteen persons of both sexes were tried, condemned, and executed. One of these, Samuel Wardwell, had confessed, and was safe; but he retracted his confession, and was executed—not for witchcraft, but for denying witchcraft. Another victim, Martha Cory, protested her innocence to the last, and concluded her life with a prayer on the ladder. Her husband, Giles Cory, an octogenarian, seeing that no one escaped—knowing that a trial was but the form of convicting him of a felony, by which his estate would be forfeited, refused to plead, and was condemned to be pressed to death; the only instance in which the horrible death by the common-law judgment, for standing mute on arraignment,



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has been inflicted in America. As the aged frame of the dying man yielded to the dreadful pressure, his tongue protruded from his mouth, and the sheriff thrust it back again with the point of his cane!

The parting scene between Mary Easty and her husband, children, and friends, is described as having been as serious, religious, distinct, and affectionate as could well be expressed, drawing tears from the eyes of almost all present. She was hanged with the others. 'There hang eight firebrands of hell,' said Noyes, the minister of Salem, pointing to the bodies hanging on the gallows.

Although satisfactory to the malignant bigoted, these executions did not meet with universal approbation. The atrocities were too great to be endured, and served to raise a reaction against the witchcraft delusion. 'The common mind of Massachusetts,' observes Chandler, 'more wise than those in authority and influence, became concentrated against such monstrous proceedings, and jurors refused to convict while the judicial power was yet unsatisfied with victims. Already twenty persons had suffered death; more than fifty had been tortured or terrified into confession; the jails were full, and hundreds were under suspicion. Where was this to end? Moreover, the frauds and imposture attending these scenes began to be apparent. It was observed, that no one of the condemned confessing witchcraft had been hanged; no one who confessed and retracted a confession escaped either hanging or imprisonment for trial. Favouritism had been shewn in refusing to listen to accusations which were directed against friends or partisans. Corrupt means had been used to tempt people to become accusers, and accusations began to be made against the most respectable inhabitants of the province and some ministers. It was also observed that the trials were not fairly conducted: they were but a form to condemn the accused. No one brought to the bar escaped, and all who were cried out upon expected death. The wife of the wealthiest person in Salem, a merchant, and a man of the highest respectability, being accused, the warrant was read to her in the evening in her bed-chamber, and guards were placed round the house. In the morning, she attended the devotions of her family, gave instructions for the education of her children, kissed them, commended them to God, bade them farewell, and committed herself to the sheriff, declaring her readiness to die. Such a state of things could not continue long in any age, whilst the essential elements of human nature remain the same. No wonder the miserable creatures who endured these sufferings felt that New England was indeed deserted by God.'

The court made several attempts to go on with its trials, but the grand-juries dismissed the cases, and the executions were accordingly stopped. 'The causes of this change in public opinion,' proceeds our authority, 'are variously stated. Some attribute it to the fact, that the wife of the minister of Beverly being accused, he

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immediately changed his mind in regard to the propriety of the prosecutions, and thenceforward opposed, as zealously as he had previously encouraged them. Others relate that the wife of a gentleman in Boston being accused, he brought an action for slander, claiming a thousand pounds damages ; and that this turned back the current of accusations. But such causes were inadequate to the effect. These incidental facts were rather the result of the change that was taking place, than the cause of it. The force of public sentiment, which had hanged one minister, could scarcely have been resisted by the efforts of another. An action at law, sounding in damages, would hardly stop the mouths of accusing witnesses, who professed to have given themselves to the powers of darkness. The cause of the change is rather to be sought in the principles of our nature, and is to be found partly in that instinctive effort for self-preservation, which, in communities of individuals, unites the weak against oppression, and gives courage to the feeble and unprotected. A belief in witchcraft was one of the superstitions of the age ; and the change of public sentiment, which now took place, was not so much a loss of faith in its reality, as a conviction of the uselessness and danger of punishing it by human laws. Of the causes of the transient delusion, which rose so high, and terminated so fatally, among the sober and godly people of New England, no definite explanation can, at this distance of time, be given ; but their descendants may be allowed, in the same spirit of trust in Providence which distinguished them, to cherish the belief, that it was permitted for purposes of wisdom and benevolence, which could not otherwise have been accomplished. When its work was done, it properly ceased. Such moral desolations often pass over the face of society : the thunder-storm does its work—the atmosphere becomes clear—the sun shines forth, and reveals to all the work of death.

‘The change in the public mind was complete and universal. Bitter was the lamentation of the whole community for the sad consequences of their rashness and delusion ; contrite the repentance of all who had been actors in the tragedy. The indignation of the people, not loud, but deep and strong, was directed with resistless force against those who had been particularly active in these insane enormities. Parris, the minister who had been the chief agent in these acts of frenzy and folly, and who, beyond all question, made use of the popular feeling to gratify his own malignant feelings of revenge against obnoxious individuals, was compelled to leave his people. No entreaties were of any avail ; the humblest confession could not save him ; it was not fitting that he should minister at the altar of a merciful God, within sight of the graves of those whose entreaties for mercy he had despised. Noyes, the minister of Salem, consecrated his life to deeds of mercy ; made a full confession ; loved and blessed the survivors whom he had injured ; asked forgiveness of all, and was by all forgiven. Cotton Mather, by artful

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appeals and publications, in which he wilfully suppressed the truth, succeeded for a while in deceiving the public, and perhaps himself, as to the encouragement he had given to the proceedings at Salem. Still eager "to lift up a standard against the infernal enemy," he got up a case of witchcraft in his own parish; but the imposture was promptly exposed to ridicule, and came to nothing. Mather died in 1727; his latter years being imbittered by the contempt of many persons for his frenzied zeal in the witch prosecutions; and it would appear that, before his death, he had occasional doubts and qualms of conscience on the same grave subject.'

The belief in witchcraft gradually died out in America, as it has done in this country, and only lingered a clandestine existence among the most ignorant in the community. Whether in England, Wales, and Scotland, the belief is yet utterly gone, may perhaps be doubted; for paragraphs occasionally appear in the newspapers descriptive of outrages committed on old women, who are supposed by the ignorant to practise diabolical incantations. Within our own recollection, which extends to the first decade of the present century, a belief in witchcraft was to a certain degree entertained in a small country town in Scotland. It was whispered about among children, that a certain old woman was a witch, and in passing the thatched cottage of this poor creature, we were instructed by companions to put our thumb across one of our fingers, as a preservative from harm—a curious relic of the old usage of making the figure of the cross.

As a crime recognised and punishable by law, witchcraft was protracted till comparatively recent times in certain continental countries. So lately as 1780, a woman was condemned and executed for witchcraft in the Swiss canton of Glarus. In January 1853, an account appeared in a foreign journal, significant of the superstitious belief which still maintains its hold among the less-instructed classes in the north of Italy; and with this strange record of witchcraft in the nineteenth century, we may appropriately dismiss the subject:

'A very singular case was a short time ago submitted to the Court of Justice of Rovigo, in the Lombardo-Venetian kingdom. Several of the inhabitants of the island of Cherso had constructed a lime-kiln; but the fire, after burning constantly for twelve days, and thereby giving a promise that the operation would be a successful one, became suddenly extinguished, and all attempts to relight it failed. An old woman, named Anna Gurlan, who was considered a sorceress, was immediately suspected of having, by her charms, extinguished the fire, and it was stated that she had been seen walking in a mysterious way round the kiln, and had passed a night in an adjacent house. On this the people to whom the kiln belonged resolved that they would make the old woman undo her charm and relight the fire. In compliance with the request of one of them, Giuseppe Micich, she one morning went to the kiln, carrying with her a bottle of holy water. She then began blessing the kiln and

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reciting litanies. While so engaged, a priest went to her, and told her that if she would remain until the fire should spring up again, he would pay her well. She asked if he thought she was a sorceress, or possessed of heavenly powers; and he answered, that she might probably be more favoured by grace than he was. He then left her, and she continued her incantations. But as the fire did not return, Micich and his companions swore that they would kill and burn her if she did not succeed; and they assured her that they had an axe and a furnace ready. At the same time, they heaped maledictions on her for having, by her infernal arts, extinguished the fire. Greatly terrified, she implored them to have pity on her, and, when a favourable opportunity presented itself, she took to flight. The house to which she went was closed against her, and Micich and his companions, having gone in pursuit, seized her with great brutality, and threatened more violently than before to kill her if she would not put an end to the charm. She then began reciting prayers, but as no effect was produced, the men deliberated as to what they should do. They at length resolved to consult a retired sea-captain, called the "American," from his having been to America, who possessed a great reputation in the neighbourhood as an authority in matters of witchcraft. He refused to go, lest, as he said, the sorceress should bewitch his children, but he directed what should be done. In execution of his instructions, the old woman was placed on a chair close to the kiln; Micich then cut off a piece of her garments and a lock of her hair, and threw them both in the kiln, retaining, however, a portion of the hair, which he placed in his pocket; half an hour was then allowed to elapse; Micich then took his knife and made three cuts on her forehead, causing blood to flow abundantly; then another half-hour elapsed, and he made three cuts in the back part of the head; then another half-hour was suffered to pass, and he made three cuts in the cartilage of her left ear. While all this was going on, she begged them, in the name of God, to kill her at once, sooner than subject her to such torture. At length, when they had, as she supposed, executed to the letter all the instructions of the American, they ceased to hold her, and she fled to a wood, where she wandered about all night. The next morning she went home; but the injuries she had sustained were such, that she was obliged to keep her bed for twenty-six days. After the facts had been proved, Micich, being called on by the court for his defence, gravely asserted that the kiln had been burning well enough until the old woman had been seen hanging about it; and he brought witnesses to prove that she was fond of talking in a mysterious way, and of meddling in her neighbours' affairs; that when she could not get what she wished for, she was accustomed to make threats of death against adults and children; and that more than once, chance apparently caused her menaces to be fulfilled. The court condemned Micich to three months' imprisonment, and to pay an indemnity to the old woman.'