

# Witchcraft in England

From *Witch Stories*

By Mrs E. Lynn Linton

“Every old woman with a wrinkled face, a furr’d brow, a hairy lip, a gobber tooth, a squint eye, a squeaking voice, or a scolding tongue, having a ragged coate on her back, a skull-cap on her head, a spindle in her hand, and a Dog or Cat by her side, is not only suspected but pronounced for a witch,” says John Gaule author of “Select Cases of Conscience”; while Reginald Scot in his “Discoverie of Witchcraft” (1584) puts forth as his experience:— “One sort of such as are said to be witches, are women which be commonly old, lame, blear-eyed, pale, fowle, and full of wrinckles; poor, sullen, superstitious, and Papists; or such as know no religion; in whose drousie minds the devill hath gotten a fine scat; so as, what mischief, mischance, calamity or slaughter is brought to passe, they are easily persuaded the same is done by themselves; imprinting in their minds an earnest and constant imagination thereof.”

These are the sentiments of two somewhat wise and sane men, who lived in a time of universal madness, and gave their minds to the task of stemming the raging torrent. For the whole world was overrun with witches. From every town came crowds of these lost and damned souls; from every hovel peered out the cursing witch, or cried aloud for help the stricken victims. These poor and old and wretched beings, upon whose heads lighted the wrath of a world, and against whom every idle lad had a curse and a stone to fling at his will, were held capable of all but omnipotence. They could destroy the babe in the womb and make “the mother of many children childless among women;” they could kill with a look and disable with a curse; bring storms or sunshine as they listed; by their “witch-ropes,” artfully woven, draw to themselves all the profit of their neighbours’ barns and breweries; yet ever remained poor and miserable, glad to beg a mouthful of meat, or a can of sour milk from the hands of those whom they could ruin by half a dozen mutered words; they could take on themselves what shapes they would, and transport themselves wither they would; no bolt or bar kept them out, no distance by land or sea was too great for them to accomplish; a straw—a broomstick—the serviceable imp ever at hand—was enough for them; and with a pot of magic ointment, and a charm of spoken gibberish, they might visit the king on his throne, or the lady in her bower, to do what ill was in their hearts against them, or to gather to themselves what gain and store they would. Yet with all this power the superstitious world of the time saw nothing doubtful or illogical in the fact of their exceeding poverty, and never stayed to think that if they could transport themselves through the air to any distance they chose, they would be but slippery holding in prison, and not very likely to remain there for the pleasure of being tortured and burnt at the end. But neither reason nor logic had anything to do with the matter. The whole thing rested on fear, and that practical atheism of fear, which denies the power of God and the wholesome beauty of Nature, to exalt in their stead the supremacy of the Devil. This belief in the Devil’s material presence and power over men was the dark chain that bound them all. Even the boldest opponent of the Witchcraft Delusion dared not fling it off; not the bravest man or freest thinker could shake his mind clear of this terrible trammel, this bugbear, this mere phantasm of human fear and ignorance, this ghastly lie and morbid delusion, or abandon the slavish worship of Satan for the glad freedom of God and Nature. It was much when such men as Reginald Scot, Gaule of Straughton, Sir Robert Filrner,

and a dozen more shining lights could bring themselves to deny the supernatural power of a few half-crazed old beggar-women, and plead for humanity and mercy towards them, instead of cruelty and condemnation; but not one dare take the wider step beyond, and deny the existence of that phantom fiend, belief in whom wrought all this misery and despair. Even the very best of the time gave in to this delusion, and discussed gravely the properties and proportions of what we know now were mere lies. In the Church and amongst the more notoriously “religious” men of the time it was worse. In Archbishop Cranmer’s ‘Articles of Visitation’ (1549) is this clause:— “You shall enquire whether you know of any that use Charms, Sorcery, Enchantments, Soothsaying, or any like Craft invented by the Devil”; and Bishop Jewel, preaching before Queen Elizabeth (1558), informed her how that “witches and sorcerers within these last few years are marvellously increased in your Grace’s realm. Your Grace’s subjects pine away even unto their death, their colour fadeth, their flesh rotteth, their speech is benumbed, their senses are bereft; I pray God they never practise further than upon the subject . . . These eyes have seen most evident and manifest marks of their wickedness”. At the next Parliament the new Bill against the detestable sin of witchcraft was passed, and Strype says, partly on account of the Lord Bishop’s earnest objurgation. Dalton’s ‘Country Justice’ (1655)<sup>1</sup> shows to what a pass, a century later, witchcraft had come in credulous England. Truly Scot was right when he said that his greatest adversaries were “young ignorance and old customs.” They have always been the greatest adversaries of all truth. Of late, thank God, the march of humanity has been steadily, if slowly, towards the daylight; but at present you and I, my reader, have to do with the most debasing superstition that ever afflicted history, in the matter of those poor wretched servants of the devil—those witches and wizards, who somehow managed to lose on all sides—to suffer in time and be ruined for eternity, and to get only ill-will and ill-usage from man and fiend alike.

### THE WITCH OF BERKELEY

One of our earliest English witches, so early indeed that she becomes mythical and misty and out of all possible proportion, was the celebrated Witch of Berkeley, who got the reward of her sins in the middle of the ninth century, leaving behind her a tremendous lesson, by which, however, after generations did not much profit. The witch had been rich and the witch had been gay, but the moment of reckoning had to come in the morning; the feast had been noble and well enjoyed, but the terrible account had to be paid when all was over; and the poor witch found her ruddy-checked apple, now that the rind was off and eaten, filled with nothing but dust and ashes—which she must digest as best she may. As the moment of her death approached, she called for the monks and the nuns of the neighbouring monasteries, and sent for her children to hear her confession; and then she told them of the compact she had made, and how the Devil was to come for her body as well as her soul. “But,” said she, “sew me in the hide of a stag, then place me in a

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<sup>1</sup> Conjuraton or invocation of any evil spirit was felony without benefit of clergy; so also to consult, covenant with, entertain, feed, or reward any evil spirit, or to take up any dead body for charms or spells; to use or practise witchcrafts, enchantment, charm, or sorcery, so that any one was lamed, killed, or pined, was felony without benefit of clergy, to be followed up by burning. Then ‘The Country Justice’ goes on to give the legal signs of a witch, and those on which a magistrate might safely act, as legal “discoveries.” She was to be found and proved by insensible marks; by teats; by imps in various shapes, such as toads, mice, flies, spiders, cats, dogs, &c.; by pictures of wax or clay; by the accusations of the afflicted; by her apparition seen by the afflicted as coming to torment them; by her own sudden or frequent inquiries at the house of the sick; by common report; by the accusations of the dying; and the bleeding of the corpse at her touch; by the testimony of children; by the afflicted vomiting pins, needles, straw, &c.; in short, by all the foolery, gravely formularized, to be found in the lies and deceptions hereafter related.

stone coffin, and fasten in the covering lead and iron. Upon this place another stone, and chain the whole down with heavy chains of iron. Let fifty psalms be sung each night, and fifty masses be said by day, to break the power of the demons. If you can thus keep my body for three nights safe, on the fourth day you may bury it—the Devil will have sought and not found.” The monks and the nuns did as they were desired; and on the first night, though the demons kept up a loud howling and wailing outside the church, the ‘priests conquered, and the old witch slept undisturbed.’ On the second night the demons were more fierce and clamorous, and the monks and the nuns told their beads faster and faster; but the fiends were getting more powerful as time went on, and at last broke open the gates of the monastery, in spite of prayer and bolt and bar; and two chains of the coffin burst asunder, but the middle one held firm. On the third night the fiends raged sore and wild. The monastery was shaken to its foundations, and the monks and the nuns almost forgot their pater and their aves in the uproar that drowned their voices and quailed their hearts; but they still went on, until, with an awful crash, and a yell from all the smaller demons about, a Devil, larger and more terrible than any that had come yet, stalked into the church and up to the foot of the altar, where the old woman and coffin lay. Here he stopped, and bade the witch rise and follow him. Piteously she answered that she could not—she was kept down by the chain in the middle: but the Devil soon settled that difficulty; for he put his foot to the coffin, and broke the iron chain like a bit of burnt thread. Then off flew the covering of lead and iron, and there lay the witch, pale and horrible to see. Slowly she uprose, blue, dead, stark, as she was; and then the Devil took her by the hand, and led her to the door where stood a gigantic black horse, whose back was all studded with iron spikes, and whose nostrils, breathing fire, told of his infernal manger below. The Devil vaulted into the saddle, flung the witch on before him, and off and away they rode—the yells of the clamouring demons, and the shrieks of the tortured soul, sounding for hours, far and wide, in the ears of the monks and the nuns. So here too, in this legend, as in all the rest, the Devil is greater than God, and prayer and penitence inefficacious to redeem iniquity.

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A rare and curious black—letter pamphlet<sup>2</sup> gives a marvellous account of a woman’s possession, as it happened in Somersetshire; which perchance we of the light—minded and sceptical nineteenth century might interpret differently to what the believing sixteenth held likely.

### THE WOMAN AND THE BEAR

One Stephen Cooper, of Ditchet, a yeoman of honest reputation, good wealth, and well beloved by his neighbours, being sick and weak, sent his wife Margaret to a farm of his at Rockington, Gloucestershire, where she remained a few days—not finding all to her liking, she said. When she returned she found her husband somewhat better, but she herself was strange and wild, using much idle talk to him concerning an old coin which her little son had found and which she wanted to see, and raving about the farm in Gloucestershire, as if she had been bewitched, and knew not what she said. Then she began to change in very face, and to look on her husband with

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<sup>2</sup> ‘A true and most dreadfull discourse of a Woman possessed with the Deuill; who, in the likenesse of a headlesse Beare, fetched her oute of her Bedde, in the presence of seven persons, most straungely roulded her thorow three Chambers, and downe a high paire of stairres on the fower and twentie of May last, 1584. At Ditchet, in Somersetshire. A matter as miraculous as ever was seen in our time. Imprinted at London for Thomas Nelson.’

“a sad and staring countenance;” and, one night, things came to a climax, for she got very wild and bad, and shook so frightfully that they could scarce keep her down in the bed; and then she began talking of a headless bear, which, she said, she had been into the town to beat away during the time of her fit, and which had followed her from Rockington: as the sequel proved was true. Her friends and husband exhorted her to prayer and patience, but she still continued marvellously holden, the Devil getting quite the better of her until Sunday night, when she seemed to come to her worst. Suddenly the candle, which they had not been noticing, went out, and she set up a lamentable cry; they lighted another, but it burnt so dim it was almost useless, and the friends and neighbours themselves began to be disquieted. Wildly and hurriedly cried Margaret, “Look! do you not see the Devil?” herself all terrified and disturbed. They bade her be still and pray. Then said Margaret, “Well, if you see nothing now, you shall see something by and bye;” and “forthwith they heard a noise in the streete, as it had been the coming of two or three carts, and presently they in the chamber cried out, “Lord helpe us, what manner of thing is this that commeth here!” For up to the bedside where the woman lay with heaving breasts and dilated eyes, came a thing like a bear, only that it had no head and no tail; a thing “half a yard in height and half a yard in length” (no bigger, Margaret? not so big as a well-trussed man on all-fours?) which, when her husband saw, he took a joyn’d stool, and “stroke” at it, and the blow sounded as though it had fallen on a feather bed. But the creature took no notice of the man: it wanted only Margaret. Slowly it paddled round the bed, then smote her thrice on the feet, took her out of bed, and rolled her to and fro in the chamber, round about the floor and under the bed; the husband and friends, sore amazed and affrighted, only calling on God to assist them, not daring to lift a hand for themselves or her. And all the while the candle grew dimmer and dimmer, so that they could scarce see each other: which was what Margaret and the headless bear, no doubt, desired. Then the creature took her in its arms, thrust her head between her legs so that he made her into a round ball, and “so roulled her in a rounde compasse like an Hoope through each other Chambers, downe an highe paire of staires, in the Hall, where he kept her for the space of a quarter of an hour.” The people above durst not come down, but remained above, weeping pitifully and praying with loud and fervent prayer. And there was such a terrible stench in the hall, and such fiery flames darting hither and thither, that they were fain to stop their noses with clothes and napkins, expecting every moment to find that hell was opening beneath their feet, and that they would be no longer able to keep out of harm’s way and the Devil’s. Then Margaret cried out, “He is gone. Now he is gone!” and her husband joyfully bade her come up to him again; which she did, but so quickly that they greatly marvelled at it, and thought to be sure the Devil had helped her. Yet she proved to be none the worse for the encounter: which was singular, as times went. They then put her in bed, and four of them kept down the clothes, praying fervently. Suddenly the woman was got out of bed: she did not move herself by nerves, muscles, or will, of course; but she was carried out by a supernatural power, and taken to the window at the head of the bed. But whether the devil or she opened the window, the pamphlet does not determine. Then her legs were thrust out of the window, and the people heard a thing knock at her feet as if it had been upon a tub; and they saw a great fire, and they smelt a grievous smell; and then, by the help of their prayers, they pulled Margaret into the room again, and set her upon her feet. After a few moments she cried out, “O Lord, methinks I see a little childe!” But they paid no heed to her. Twice or thrice she said this, and ever more earnestly; and at last they all looked out at the window, for they thought to be sure she must have some meaning for her raving. And “loe, they espied a thing like unto a little child, with a bright shining countenance casting a greate light in the chamber.” And then the candle, which had hitherto

burnt blue and dim, gave out its natural light so that they could all see each other. Whereupon they fell to joyful prayer, and gave thanks to God for the deliverance. And Margaret Cooper was laid in her bed again, calm, smiling, and collected, never more to be troubled by a Headless Bear which rolled her about like a ball, or by a bright shining child looking out for the chinks of a rude magic lantern. As for the bear, I confess I think he was nearer akin to man than devil; that he was known about Rockington in Gloucestershire; and that Margaret Cooper understood the conduct of the plot from first to last. But then this is the sceptical nineteenth century, wherein the wiles of human cunning are more believed in than the power of the devil, or the miracles of supernaturalism. Yet this was a case which, in spite of all its fraud and folly so patently displayed, was cited as one of the most notorious and striking instances of the power of Satan over the bodies as well as the souls of those who gave themselves up to the things of the world.

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### THE WITCHES OF LANCASHIRE

In Pendle Forest, a wild tract of land on the borders of Yorkshire, lived an old woman about the age of fourscore, who had been a witch for fifty years, and had brought up her own children, and instructed her grandchildren to be witches. "She was a generall agent for the Deuill in all these partes;" her name was Elizabeth Southernnes, usually called Mother Demdike; the date of her arraignment 1612. She was the first tried of this celebrated "coven", twenty of whom stood before Sir James Altham and Sir Edward Bromley, charged with all the crimes lying in sorcery, magic, and witchcraft. Old Mother Demdike died in prison before her trial, but on her being taken before the magistrate who convicted them all, Roger Nowell, Esq., she made such a confession as effectually insured her due share of execration, and hedged in the consciences of all who had assailed her from any possible pangs of self-reproach or doubt.

About fifty years ago, she said, she was returning home from begging, when, near a stone pit in the Pendle Forest, she met a spirit or devil in the shape of a boy, with one half of his coat brown and the other half black, who said to her, if she would give him her soul, she should have all that she might desire. After a little further talk, during which he told her that his name was Tibb, he vanished away, and she saw him no more for this time. For five or six years Mother Demdike never asked any kind of help or harm of Tibb, who always came to her at "daylight gate" (twilight); but one Sabbath morning, she having her little child on her knee, and being in a light slumber, Tibb came to her in the likeness of a brown dog, and forced himself on her knee, trying to get blood from under her left arm. Mother Demdike awoke sore troubled and amazed, and strove to say, "Jesus, save my child," but could not, neither could she say, "Jesus, save myself." In a short time the brown dog vanished away, and she was "almost starke madde for the space of eight weekes." She and Tibb had never done much harm, she said; not even to Richard Baldwin, for all that he had put them off his land, and taken her daughter's day's work at his mill without fee or reward, and when she, led by her grandchild Alison (for she was quite blind), went to ask for pay, gave them only hard words and insolence for their pains, saying, "he would burn the one, and hang the other," and bidding them begone for a couple of witches—and worse. She confessed though, after a little pressing, that at that moment Tibb called out to her, "Revenge thee of him!" to whom she answered, "Revenge thou either of him or his!" on which he vanished away, and she saw him no more. She would not say what was the vengeance done, or if any. But if she was silent, and not prone to confession, there were others, and those of her own blood, not

so reticent. Elizabeth Device her daughter, and Alison and James and Jennet Device, her grandchildren, testified against her and each other in a wonderful manner, and filled up all the blanks in the most masterly and graphic style.

Alison said that her grandmother had seduced her to the service of the devil, by giving her a great black dog as her imp or spirit, with which dog she had lamed one John Law, a petit chapman or pedlar, as he was going through Colnefield with his pack at his back. Alison wanted to buy pins off him, but John Law refused to loose his pack or sell them to her; so Alison in a rage called for her black dog, to see if revenge could not do what fair words had failed in. When the black dog came he said, "What wouldst thou have me to do with yonder man?" To whom she answered, "What canst thou do at him?" and the dog answered again, "I can lame him." "Lame him," says Alison Device; and before the pedlar went forty yards he fell lame. When questioned, he, on his side, said, that as he was going through Colnefield he met a big black dog with very fearful fiery eyes, great teeth, and a terrible countenance, which looked at him steadily then passed away; and immediately after he was bewitched into lameness and deformity. And this took place after having met Alison Device and refused to sell her any pins. Then Alison fell to weeping and praying, beseeching God and that worshipful company to pardon her sins. She said further that her grandmother had bewitched John Nutter's cow to death, and Richard Baldwin's woman-child on account of the quarrel before reported, saying that she would pray for Baldwin himself, "both still and loud," and that she was always after some matter of devilry and enchantment, if not for the bad of others then for the good of herself. For once, Alison got a piggin<sup>3</sup> full of blue milk .by begging, and when she came to look into it she found a quarter of a pound of butter there, which was not there before, and which she verily believed old Mother Demdike had procured by her enchantments. Then Alison turned against the rival Hecate, Anne Whittle, *alias* Chattox, between whom and her family raged a deadly feud with Mother Demdike and her family; accusing her of having bewitched her father, John Device, to death, because he had neglected to pay her the yearly tax of an aghen dole (eight pounds) of meal, which he had covenanted to give her on consideration that she would not harm him. For they had been robbed, these poor people, of a quarter of a peck of cut oatmeal and linens worth some twenty shillings, and they had found a coif and band belonging to them on Anne Whittle's daughter; so John Device was afraid that old Chattox would do them some grievous injury by her sorceries if they cried out about it, therefore made that covenant for the aghen dole of meal, the nonpayment of which for one year set Chattox free from her side of the bargain and cost John's life. She said, too, that Chattox had bewitched sundry persons and cattle, killing John Nutter's cow because he, John Nutter, had kicked over her canfull of milk, misliking her devilish way of placing two sticks across it; and slaying Anne Nutter because she laughed and mocked at her; slaying John Morris' child, too, by a picture of clay—with other misdeeds to be hereafter verified and substantiated. So Alison Device was hanged, weeping bitterly, and very penitent.

James Device, her brother, testified to meeting a brown dog coming from his grandmother's about a month ago, and to hearing a noise as of a number of children shrieking and crying, "near daylight gate." Another time he heard a foul yelling as of a multitude of cats, and soon after this there came into his bed a thing like a cat or a hare, and coloured black; which lay heavily on him for about an hour. He said that his sister Alison had bewitched Bullock's child, and that old Mother Chattox had dug up three skulls, and taken out eight teeth, four of which she kept for herself and gave four to Mother Demdike; and that Demdike had made a picture of clay of Anne Nutter, and had burned it, by which the said Anne had been bewitched to death. Also she had

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<sup>3</sup> An earthenware swine trough.

bewitched to death one Mitton, because he would not give her a penny; with other iniquities of the same sort. He said that his mother, Elizabeth Device, had a spirit like a brown dog called Ball, and that they all met at Malking Tower; all the witches of Pendle—and they were not a few—going out in their own shapes, and finding foals of different colours ready for their riding when they got out: Jennet Preston was the last: when they all vanished. He then confessed, for his own part, that his grandmother Demdike told him not to eat the communion bread one day when he went to church, but to give it to the first thing he met on the road on his way homewards. He did not obey her, but ate the bread as a good Christian should; and on the way he met with a thing like a hare which asked him for the bread; but he said he had not got it; whereupon the hare got very angry and threatened to tear him in pieces, but James “sained”<sup>4</sup> himself, and the devil vanished. This, repeated in various forms, was about the pith of what James Device confessed, his confession not including any remarkable betrayal of himself, or admission of any practical and positive evil. His young sister Jennet, a little lassie of nine, supplied the deficiencies. She had evidently been suborned, says Wright, and gave evidence enough to have hanged half Lancashire. She said that James had sold himself to the devil, and that his spirit was a black dog called Dandy, by whom he had bewitched many people to death; and she confirmed what he had said of Jennet Preston’s spirit, which was a white foal with a black spot in its forehead. And then she said that she had seen the witches’ meetings, but had taken no part in them; and that on Good Friday they had all dined off a roasted wether which James had stolen from Christian Swyers; and that John Bulcocke turned the spit. She said that her mother Elizabeth had taught her two prayers, the one to get drink and the other to cure the bewitched. The one to get drink was a very short one, simply—“Crucifixus, hoc signum vitam eternam, Amen:” but this would bring good drink into the house in a very strange manner. The other, the prayer to cure the bewitched, was longer:—

“Vpon Good Friday, I will fast while I may,  
 Vntill I beare them knell,  
 Our Lord’s owne Bell,  
 Lord in his messe  
 With his twelve Apostles good,  
 What hath he in his hand?  
 Ligh in<sup>5</sup> heath<sup>6</sup> wand:  
 What hath he in his other hand?  
 Heauen’s doore key.  
 Open, open, Heauen doore keyes,  
 Steck, steck, hell doore.  
 Let Crizum<sup>7</sup> child  
 Go to it Mother mild.  
 What is yonder that casts a light so farrandly?<sup>8</sup>  
 Mine owne deare Sone that’s nail’d to the Tree,

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<sup>4</sup> Made the sign of the cross.

<sup>5</sup> Lusty.

<sup>6</sup> Flexible.

<sup>7</sup> The chrism was the white cloth placed over the brow of a newly-baptized child in the Roman Catholic service. When children died within the month they were called chrisoms.

<sup>8</sup> Fair, handsome.

He is nail'd sore by the heart and hand,  
And holy harne Panne.<sup>9</sup>  
Well is that man  
That Fryday spell can,  
His Childe to learne  
A Crosse of Blewe, and another of Red,  
As good Lord was to the Roode.  
Gabriel laid him downe to sleepe  
Vpon the grounde<sup>10</sup> of holy weepe;  
Good Lord came walking by,  
Sleep'st thou, wak'st thou, Gabriel?  
No, Lord, I am sted with stick and stake,  
That I can neither sleepe nor wake:  
Rise vp, Gabriel, and goe with me,  
The stick nor the stake shall neuer decre<sup>11</sup> thee,  
Sweete Jesus our Lorde. Amen."

On such conclusive testimony as this, and for such fearful crimes, James Device was condemned for "as dangerous and malicious a witch as ever lived in these parts of Lancashire, of his time, and spotted with as much Innocent bloud as euer any witch of his yeares." Poor lad!

"O Barbarous and inhumane Monster, beyond example; so farre from sensible vnderstanding of thy owne miserie as to bring thy owne naturall children into mischief and bondage, and thyselfe to be a wnesse vpon the gallows, to see thy owne children, by thy deuilish instructions, hatcht vp in villanie and witchcraft, to suffer with thee, euen in he beginning of their time, a shamefull and untimely Death!" These are the words which Thomas Potts addresses to Elizabeth Device, widow of John the bewitched, daughter to old Demdike the "rankest hag that ever troubled daylight," and mother of Alison and James the confessing witches; mother, also, of young Jennet on nine, their accuser and hers, by whose testimony she was mainly condemned. Elizabeth was charged with having bewitched sundry people to death, by means and aid of her spirit, the brown dog Ball, spoken of by James; also she had gone to the Sabbath held at Malking Tower, where they had assembled to consult how they could get old Mother Demdike, their leader, out of prison, by killing her gaoler and blowing up the castle, and where they had beef and bacon and roasted mutton—the mutton that same wether of Christopher Swyers' of Barley, which James had stolen and killed; with other things as damnable and insignificant. So Elizabeth Device, "this odious witch, who was branded with a preposterous marke in Nature even from her Birth, which was her left Eye standing lower than the other, the one looking down the other looking up," was condemned to die because she was poor and ugly, and had a little lying jade for a daughter, who made up fine stories for the gentlefolks.

Anne Whittle, *alias* Chattox, was next in influence, power, and age to Mother Demdike, and she began her confession by saying that old Demdike had originally seduced her by giving her the devil in the shape and proportion of a man, who got her, body and soul, and sucked on her left ribs, and was called Fancie. Afterwards she had another spirit like a spotted bitch, called Tibbe, who gave them all to eat and to drink, and said they should have gold and silver as much

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<sup>9</sup> Brain case, cranium.

<sup>10</sup> Gethsemane.

<sup>11</sup> Hurt.



as they wanted. But they never got the gold and silver at all, and what they ate and drank did not satisfy them. “This Anne ‘Whittle, *alias* Chattox, was a very old withered, spent, decrepid creature, her Sight almost gone; A dangerous Witch of very long continuance; always opposite to old Demdike; For whom the one faoured the other hated deadly: and how they curse and accuse one an other in their Examinations may appear. In her Witchcraft always more ready to doe mischief to men’s goods than themselves; Her lippes ever chattering and talking; but no man knew what. She lived in the Forest of Pendle amongst this wicked Company of dangerous Witches. Yet in her Examination and Confession she dealt always very plainely and truely; for vpon a speciall occasion, being oftentimes examined in open Court, she was neuer found to vary, but alwayes to agree in one and the selfe same thing. I place her in order next to that wicked Firebrand of mischief, old Demdike, because from these two sprung all the rest in order; and even the Children and Friendes of these two notorious Witches.”

Nothing special or very graphic was elicited about old Chattox. She had certainly bewitched to death sundry of the neighbourhood, lately deceased; but then they all did that; and her devil, Fancie, came to her in various shapes—sometimes like a bear, gaping as though he would worry her, which was not a pleasant manner of fulfilling his contract—but generally as a man, in whom she took great delight. She confessed to a charm for blessing forespoken drink; which she had chanted for John Moore’s wife, she said, whose beer had been spoilt by Mother Demdike or some of her crew:—

“Three Biters hast thou bitten,  
The hart, ill Eye, ill Tonge;  
Three Bitter shall be thy boote,  
Father, Sonne, and Holy Ghost.  
a God’s Name  
Fiue Paternosters, flue Auies,  
and a Creede,  
For worship of flue woundes  
of our Lord.”

Of course there was no help or hope for old Chattox if she said such wicked things as these. The righteous justice of England must be satisfied, and Anne Whittle was hung—one of the twelve who sorrowed the sunlight in Lancaster on that bloody assize.

Her daughter, Ann Redfearne, was then taken, accused of making pictures of clay and other maleficent arts; and she, too, was hanged; and then well-born, well-bred, but unfortunate Alice Nutter—a gentlewoman of fortune living at Rough Lee, whose relatives were anxious for her death that they might come into some property, out of which she kept them while living, and between whom and Mr. Justice Nowell there was a long-standing grudge on the question of a boundary-line between their several properties—Alice Nutter, whom one would have thought far removed from any such possibility was accused by young Jennet of complicity and companionship, and put upon her trial with but a faint chance of escape behind her. For Elizabeth Device swore that she had joined with her and old Demdike in bewitching the man Mitton, because of that twopence so fatally refused; and young Jennet swore that she was one of the party who went on many-coloured foals to the great witch meeting at Malking Tower; and so poor Alice Nutter, of Rough Lee, the well-bred gentlewoman, was hanged with the rest of that ragged crew; and her relations stood in her place, quite satisfied with their dexterity.

Then there was Katherine Hewitt, *alias* Mouldheels, accused by James Device, who seemed to think that if he had to be hanged for nothing he would be hanged in brave company, and, by sharing with as many as could be found, lessen the obloquy he could not escape; and John Bulcocke, who turned the spit, and Jane his mother, for the same crimes and on the same testimony; for the added crime, too, of helping in the bewitching of Master Leslie, about which nefarious deed other hands were also busy; and Margaret Pearson, delated by Chattox as entertaining a man spirit cloven-footed, with whom she went by a loophole into Dodson's stable, and sat all night, on his mare until it died. She was also accused by Jennet Booth, who went into her house and begged some milk for her child; Margaret good-naturedly gave her some, and boiled it in a pan, but all her reward was, that Jennet accused her of witchcraft, for there was, said she, a toad, or something very like a toad, at the bottom of the pan when the milk was boiled, which Margaret took up with a pair of tongs and carried out of the house. Of course the toad was an imp, and Jennet Booth was quite right to repay an act of neighbourly generosity by accusation and slander. Margaret got off with standing in the pillory in open market, at four market towns on four market days, bearing a paper on her head setting forth her offence written in great letters, about which there could be no mistake; after which she was to confess, and afterwards be taken to prison, where she was to lie for a year, and then be only released when good and responsible sureties would come forward to answer for her good behaviour.

And there was Isabel Roby, who bewitched Peter Chaddock for jilting her, and in the spirit pinched and buffeted Jane Williams, so that she fell sick with the impression of a thumb and four fingers on her thigh; and Jennet Preston, she who had the white foal spirit, and who was afterwards hung at York for the murder of Master Thomas Lister—for Master Thomas in his last illness had been for ever crying out that Jennet Preston was lying on him, and when she was brought to see the body it gushed out fresh blood on her, which settled all doubts, if haply there had been any. So the famous trial of the Pendle Witches came to an end; and of the twenty who were accused twelve were hanged while the rest escaped only for the present, many of them meeting with their doom a few years afterwards.

#### THE WITCH ON A PLANK

“Many are in a belief that this silly sex of women can by no means attain to that so vile and damned a practise of Sorcery and Witchcraft, in regard of their illiterateneses and want of learning, which many men have by great learning done;” nevertheless the Earl of Essex and his army, marching through Newberry, saw a feat done by a woman which not the most learned man of them all could have accomplished by natural means.<sup>12</sup> Two soldiers were loitering behind the main body, gathering nuts, blackberries, and the like, when one climbed up a tree for sport, and the other followed him, jesting. From their vantage place, looking on the river, they there espied a “tall, lean, slender woman treading of the water with her feet with as much ease and firmnesse as if one should walk or trample on the earth.” The soldier called to his companion, and he to the rest; and soon they all—captains, privates, and commanders alike—saw this marvellous lean woman, who now they perceived was standing on a thin plank, “which she pushed this way and that at her pleasure, making it a pastime to her, little perceiving who was on her tracks.’ Then she crossed the river, and the army after her; but there they lost her for a time, and when they found

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<sup>12</sup> ‘A most Certain Strange and true Discovery of a witch, being taken by some Parliamentary Forces as she was standing on a small planck-board and sayling on it over the River of Newberry. 1643.’ The author believes that politics were at the back of this story and there may have been no truth in it at all.

her all were too cowardly to seize her. At last one dare-devil went up and boldly caught her, demanding what she was. The poor wretch was dumb—perhaps with terror—and spoke nothing; so they dragged her before the commanders, “to whom, though she was mightily urged, she did reply as little.” As they could bethink themselves of nothing better to do with her, they set her upright against a mud bank or wall, and two of the soldiers, at their captain’s command, made ready and fired. “But with a deriding and loud laughter at them, she caught their bullets in her hands and chew’d them, which was a stronger testimony then her treading water that she was the same that their imagination thought her for to be.” Then one of the men set his carbine against her breast and fired; but the bullet rebounded like a ball, and narrowly missed the face of the shooter, which “so enraged the Gentleman, that one drew out his sword and manfully run at her with all the force his strength had power to make, but it prevailed no more than did the shot, the woman though still speechlesse, yet in a most contemptible way of Scorn still laughing at them, which did the more exhaust their furie against her life; yet one amongst the rest had heard that piercing or drawing blood from forth the veines that crosse the temples of the head, it would prevail against the strongest sorcery, and quell the force of Witchcraft, which was allowed for Triall: the woman, hearing this, knew then the Devil had left her, and her power was gone; wherefore she began aloud to cry and roare, tearing her haire, and making pitious moan, which in these words expressed were: And is it come to passe that I must dye indeed? Why then his Excellency the Earle of Essex shall be fortunate and win the field. After which no more words could be got from her; wherewith they immediatly discharged a Pistoll underneath her eare at which she straight sunk down and dyed, leaving her legacy of a detested carcasse to the wormes, her soul we ought not to judge of, though the euills of her wicked life and death can scape no censure. Finis. This Book is not Printed according to order.”

#### DOLL BILBY AND HER COMPEER

Burton Agnes, in the county of York, was troubled; for Faith Corbet, the young daughter of Henry Corbet, was taken violently ill, and Alice Huson and Doll Bilby had bewitched her. Good Mrs Corbet—beyond her age in generous unbelief—refused to entertain her daughter’s suspicions; indeed she had chidden her some years ago for calling old Alice a witch, for she had a liking to the poor widow, and kept her about the house, looking after her young turkeys, &c., and was kind and liberal to her, and sought to make her wasting life pass as easily as might be. But Miss Faith hated the old woman and cried out against her as a witch; and when she lost her gloves, swore that Alice had taken them to play cantrips with, and that she should never be well again. Then she began to fall into fits, when she would be so terribly tormented that it took two or three to hold her; and she would screech and cry out vehemently, and bite and scratch anything she could lay hold of, all the while exclaiming, “Ah, Alice, old witch, have I gotten thee!” And sometimes she would lie down, all drawn together in a round, and be speechless and half swooning for days together; and then she would be wildly merry, and as full of antics as a monkey. Physicians were consulted, but none came near to her disorder; and though her father carried her about hither and thither, for change of air, nothing would cure her, she said, so long as Alice Huson and Doll Bilby remained at liberty. Still the father and mother held out, until, one day, before a whole concourse of people come to look at her in her fits, she cried out, “O Faithless and incredulous People! shall I never be believed till it be past Time? For I am as near Death as possibly may be, and when they have got my Life you will repent when it is past Time.” On hearing this the father went to the minister of Burton Agnes, Mr Wehlfet, and he, Sir.

Fr. Boynton—a justice of the peace—amid Mr Corbet himself at last dragged the old woman Huson into Faith's chamber. At which Miss Faith gave a great screech, but presently called for toast and beer; then for cordials; and having taken a somewhat large quantity of both, she got up, dressed herself, and came down stairs. This, too, after she had been so weak that she could not turn herself in bed: which proved that Mother Huson had some extraordinary influence over the girl—an influence more potent than holy said the bystanders. This happy state did not continue. Faith said she should never be well while the two women were at liberty; and so it proved; for when at last arrested, and held in strict security and durance, the young lady pronounced herself healed, and gave no one any more trouble. Then Alice Huson was got to make confession to Mr. Wellfet, the minister, and thus sealed her own doom, and saved the prosecution the pain of conviction.

She said that for three years she had had intercourse with the devil, who, one day as she was on the moor, appeared to her in the form of a black man riding on horseback. He told her she should never want if she would follow his ways and give herself up to him: which Alice promised to. Then he sealed the bargain by giving her five shillings; at another time he gave her seven; and often—indeed six or seven times—repeating his gifts to the like munificent extent. He was like a black man with cloven feet, riding on a black horse, and Alice fell down and worshipped him, as she had covenanted. And she had hurt Faith Corbet by her evil spirit, for she did, in her apprehension, ride her; and when Mr Wellfet examined her once before, the devil stood by, and gave her answers; and she was under the Corbets' window as a cat when Mrs Corbet said she was—for even her kindly faith was shaken at last; and Doll Bilby had a hand in all this evil too; for Doll wanted to kill Faith outright, but old Alice interposed thinking they had done enough harm already. She confessed to killing Dick Warmers “by my wicked heart and wicked eyes;” and to having lent Lancelot Harrison eight shillings of the ten which the devil had given her at Baxter's door, a fortnight ago, “about twilight or daygate;” and she had a bigge, or witch mark, where the devil sucked from supper-time till after cock-crow, twitching at her heart as if it was drawn with pincers the while; and she meant to practise witchcraft four years ago, when she begged old clothes of Mrs Corbet, and the children refused her; and the devil told her not to tell of Doll Bilby. And to all this raving Timothy Wellfet, minister of Burton Agnes, set his name, and so hanged Alice Huson and Doll Bilby at the next York assizes: after which Miss Faith Corbet was for ever rid of her fits and fancies.

### JULIAN'S TOADS

At the Taunton assizes, in 1663, Julian Cox, about seventy years old, was indicted before Judge Archer for practising her arts of witchcraft upon a “young Maid, whereby her Body languished, and was impaired of Health.” And first were taken proofs of her witchcraft. One witness, a huntsman, swore that one day, as he was hunting not far from Julian's house, he started a hare, which the dogs ran very close till it came to a bush; when, going round to the other side to keep it from the dogs, he perceived Julian Cox grovelling on the ground, panting and out of breath. She was the hare, and had had just time enough to say the magic stave which changed her back to woman's form again, ere the dogs had caught her. Another man swore that one day, passing her house as “she was taking a Pipe of Tobacco upon the Threshold of the Door,” she invited him to come in and join her; which he did; when presently she cried out, “Neighbour, look what a pretty thing there is!” and there was a “monstrous great Toad betwixt his Legs, staring him in the Face.” He tried to hit it, but could not, whereupon Julian told him to desist striking it and it

would do him no hurt; but he was frightened, and went off to his family, telling them that he had seen one of Julian Cox's devils. Yet even when he was at home this same toad appeared again betwixt his legs, and though he took it out, and cut it in several pieces, still, when he returned to his pipe, there was the toad. He tried to burn it, but could not; then to beat it with a switch, but the toad ran about the room to escape him; presently it gave a cry and vanished, and he was never after troubled with it. A third witness swore that one day, when milking, Julian Cox passed by the yard where he was and "stooping down scored upon the ground for some small time during which time his Cattle ran Mad, and some of them ran their Heads against the Trees, and most of them died speedily." Concluding by which signs that they were bewitched, he cut off their ears to burn them and, while they were on the fire, Julian Cox came in a great heat and rage, crying out that they abused her without cause; but, going slily up to the fire, she took off the ears, and then was quiet. By the laws of witchcraft it was she who was burning, not the beasts' ears. A fourth, as veracious as the former, swore to having seen her "fly into her own Chamber-window in her full proportion;" all of which testimony gave weight and substance to the maid's charge.

The maid was servant at a certain house, where Julian came one day to ask for alms; but the maid gave her a cross answer, and said she should have none; so Julian told the maid she should repent her incivility before night. And she did; for she was taken with convulsions, and cried out to the people of the house to save her from Julian, for she saw her following her. In the night she became worse, saying that she saw Julian Cox and the black man by her bedside, and that they tempted her to drink, but "she defy'd the Devil's Drenches." The next night, expecting the same kind of conflict, she took up a knife and laid it at the head of her bed. In the middle of the night came the spiritual Julian and the black man, as before, so the maid took the knife, and stabbed at Julian, whom she said she had wounded in the leg. The people, riding out to see, found Julian in her own house with a fresh wound on her leg, and blood was also on the maid's bed. The next day Julian appeared to the maid and forced her to eat pins. Her apparition was on the house wall; and "all the Day the Maid was observ'd to convey her Hand to the House wall, and from the Wall to her Mouth, and she seem'd by the motion of her Mouth as if she did eat something." So towards night, still crying out on Julian, she was undressed, and all over her body were seen great swellings and bunches in which were huge pins—as many as thirty or more—which she said Julian Cox, when in the house wall, had forced her to eat. Was not all this enough to hang a dozen Julian Coxes? Judge Archer thought so; especially when was added to this testimony Julian's own enforced confession, of how she had been tempted by the devil to become a witch, but would never consent; yet how one evening, walking about a mile from her house, she met three persons riding on broom-staves, borne up about a yard and a half from the ground, two of whom she knew—a witch and a wizard, hanged for witchcraft several years ago—but the third, a black man, she did not then know. He however tempted her to give up her soul, which she did by pricking her finger and signing her name with her blood. So that, by her own showing, as well as by the unimpeachable testimony of reputable witnesses, she was a witch and one coming under the provisions of the Awful Verse. And further, as she could not repeat the Lord's Prayer, but stumbled over the clause "And lead us not into Temptation," which she made into "And lead us into temptation," or "And lead us not into no temptation," but could in no manner repeat correctly, the judge and jury had one conclusion to come to, which was that she be hanged four days after her trial. But some of the less blind and besotted spoke harsh words of Judge Archer for his zeal and precipitancy, and openly declared poor Julian's innocence when advocacy could do her strangled corpse no good.

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We come now (1712) to the last authentic trial for witchcraft where the accused was condemned to death for an impossible crime by a jury of sane, decent, respectable Englishmen. Jane Wenham was this latest offshoot of the old tree of judicial bigotry; not the latest fruit, but the last instance of the law and judgment. There is a report current in most witch books of a case at a later period—but I can find no *authentic* account of it—that, in 1716, of a Mrs Hicks and her little daughter of nine, hanged at Huntingdon for selling their souls to the devil, bewitching their neighbours to death and their crops to ruin, and, as a climax to all, taking off their stockings to raise a storm. It may well be so, but I have not met with it in any reliable shape, so meanwhile we must accept Jane Wenham as the last officially condemned.

### THE WITCH OF WALKERNE

Jane Wenham was the witch of Walkerne, a little village in the north of Hertford. She had long lived under ill fame, and her neighbours were resolved to get rid of her at the earliest opportunity. That opportunity presented itself in the person of John Chapman's man, one Matthew Gilson, whom Jane sent into a daft state by asking him for a pennyworth of straw, which he refused to give her. The old woman went away, muttering and complaining, whereupon Matthew, impelled by he knew not what impulse, ran out of the barn for a distance of three miles, asking as he went for pennyworths of straw. Not getting any, he went on to some dirt heaps, and gathered up straw from them, which he put in his shirt and brought home. A witness testified that he had seen Gilson come back with his shirt stuffed full of straw, that he moved along quickly, and walked straight through the water, instead of passing over the bridge like any other decent man. For this odd behaviour of his servant, John Chapman, who had all along suspected Jane of more cunning than was good for him or her, called her a witch the next time he saw her; and Jane took him before the magistrate, Sir Herbert Chauncey, to answer to the charge of defamation. But the magistrate recommended them to go to Mr Gardiner the minister, and a great believer in witchcraft, and get their matter settled without more trouble or vexation. Mr Gardiner was too zealous to be just. He scolded poor old Jane roundly, and advised her to live more peaceably with her neighbours—which was just what she wanted to do—and gave as his award that Chapman do pay the fine of one shilling. While this bit of one-sided justice was going on, Anne Thorne, Mr Gardiner's servant, was sitting by the fire with a dislocated knee. Jane, not able to compass her wicked will on Chapman, and angry that Mr. Gardiner had spoken so harshly to her, turned her malice on the girl, and bewitched her, so that as soon as they all left the kitchen Anne felt a strange "Roaming in her Head, and she thought she must of Necessity run somewhere." In spite then of her dislocated knee, she started off and ran up the close, and away over a five-barred gate "as nimbly as a greyhound," along the highway and up a hill. And there she met two of John Chapman's men, who wanted her to go home with them; and one took her hand; but she was forced away from them, speechless, and not of her own volition, and so was driven on, on, towards Cromer, where the great sea would have either stopped or received her. But when she came to Hockney Lane, she met there a "little Old Woman muffled up in a Riding-Hood," who asked her whither she was going. "To Cromer," says Anne, "for sticks to make me a fire." "There be no sticks at Cromer," says the little old woman in the riding hood: "here be sticks enow; go to that oak tree and pluck them there." Which Anne did, laying them on the ground as they were gathered. Then the old woman bade her pull off her gown and apron, and

wrap the sticks in them; asking her if she had ne'er a pin about her; but finding that she had not, she gave her a large crooked pin, with which she bade her pin her bundle, then vanished away. So Anne Thorne ran home half-naked, with her bundle of leaves and sticks in her hand, and sat down in the kitchen, crying out "I am ruined and undone!"

When Mrs Gardiner had opened the bundle, and seen all the twigs and leaves, she said they would burn the witch, and not wait long about it; so they flung the twigs and leaves into the fires and while they were burning in came Jane Wenham, asking for Anne's mother, for she had, sue said, a message to her, how that she was to go and wash next day at Ardley Bury, Sir Herbert Chauncey's place: which on inquiry turned out to be a falsehood: consequently Jane Wenham was set down doubly as a witch, the charm of burning her in the sticks having proved so effectual. John Chapman and his men then told their tale. Mr Gardiner was not slow in fanning the flame into a fire, and poor old Jane was examined, searched for marks but none found, and committed to gaol, there to wait her trial at the next assizes. She earnestly entreated not to go to prison; protested her innocence, and appealed to Mrs Gardiner to help her, woman-like, and not to swear against her; offering to submit to be swum—anything they would—so that she might be kept free of jail. But Sir Herbert Chauncey was just manly and rational enough not to allow of this test, though the Vicar of Ardeley tried her with the Lord's Prayer, which she could not repeat: and terrified and tortured her into a kind of confession, wherein she implicated three other women, who were immediately put under arrest, though they came to no harm in the end. When she was brought to trial, sixteen witnesses, including three clergymen, were standing there ready to testify against her, how that she had bewitched this one's cattle, and that one's sheep; and taken all the power from this one's body, and all the good from that one's gear; and slaughtered this child, and that man, by her evil eye and her curses; and in fact how that she had done all the mischief that had happened in the neighbourhood for years past. And there was Matthew Gilson, who had been sent mad, and forced to wander about the country with his shirt stuffed full of straw like a scare-crow; and Anne Thorne, who had had fits ever since her marvellous journey with the dislocated knee; and another Anne, very nearly as hardly holden as the first; and others beside, whom her malice had rendered sick and lame, and unfit for decent life: moreover, two veracious witnesses deposed positively to her taking the form of a cat when she would, and to hearing her converse with the devil when under the form of a cat, he also as a cat; together with Anne Thorne's distinct accusation that she was beset with cats—tormented exceedingly—and that all the cats had the face and the voice of Jane Wenham.

The lawyers, who believed little in the devil and less in witchcraft, refused to draw up the indictment on any other charge save that of "conversing familiarly with the devil in the form of a cat." But in spite of Mr Bragge's earnest appeals against such profanation, and the ridicule which it threw over the whole matter, the jury found the poor old creature guilty, and the judge passed sentence of death against her. The evidence was too strong. Even one of the Mr Chaunceys deposed that a cat came knocking at his door, and that he killed it—when it vanished away, for it was no other than one of Jane Wenham's imps; and all Mr Gardiner's house went mad, some in one way and some in another: and credible witnesses deposed that they had seen pins come jumping through the air into Anne Thorne's mouth, and when George Chapman clapped his hand before her mouth to prevent them skipping in, he felt one stick against his hand, as sharp as might be; and every night Anne's pincushion was left full, and every morning found empty, and who but Jane could have conveyed them all from the pincushion into her mouth, where they were to be found all crooked and bent? But though the jury could not resist the tremendous weight of all this evidence, and the judge could not resist the jury, he managed to get a reprieve

which left the people time to cool and reflect, and then he got a pardon for her—quietly and kindly done. And Colonel Plummer, of Gilston, took her under his protection, and gave her a small cottage near his house, where she lived, poor soul, in peace and safety to the end of her days, doing harm to no one and feared by none. As for Anne Thorne, the doctor, who had ordered her, as part of his remedy, to wash her hands and face twice a day in fair water, and who, as another part, had her watched and sat with by a “lusty young fellow” who asked nothing better, managed matters so well, that in a short time Anne and her brisk bachelor were married; and from that time we hear no more of her vomiting crooked pins, or being tormented with visions of cats wearing Jane Wenham’s face, and speaking with Jane Wenham’s voice. But though all the rest got well off with their frights and follies, no public compensation was given to poor old Jane for the brutal attacks of the mob upon her, for the hauling and maiming and scratching and tearing, by which they proved to their own satisfaction that she was a witch, and deserved only the treatment accorded to witches.

### OUR LATEST

But if the last officially condemned, Jane was not the last actually destroyed, for a curious MS. letter to be found in the British Museum “From Mr Manning, Dissenting Teacher, at Halstead, in Essex, to John Morley, Esq., Halstead,” gives us a strange garbled account of a reputed sacrifice; and the sadder and more brutal story of Ruth Osborne follows a few years after.

“Halstead, August 2, 1732.

“SIR—The narrative which I gave you in relation to witchcraft, and which you are pleased to lay your commands upon me to repeat, is as follows:—There was one Master Collett, a smith by trade, of Haveningham, in the county of Suffolk, who, as ’twas customary with him, assisting the maide to churne, and not being able (as the phrase is) to make the butter come, threw a hot iron into the churn, under the notion of witchcraft in the case, upon which a poore labourer, then employed in carrying of dung in the yard, cried out in a terrible manner, ‘They have killed me, they have killed me;’ still keeping his hand upon his back, intimating where the pain was, and died upon the spot.

“Mr Collett, with the rest of the servants then present, took off the poor man’s clothes, and found to their great surprise, the mark of the iron that was heated and thrown into the churn, deeply impressed upon his back. This account I had from Mr Collett’s own mouth, who being a man of unblemished character, I verily believe to be matter of fact.

“I am, Sir, your obliged humble Servant,

“SAM. MANNING.”

The only falsehood, probably, in the history is the manner of the poor fellow’s death, for either he was foully murdered on a wild suspicion of being concerned in the witching of a dirty milk vessel, or he died suddenly of some ordinary organic complaint, and the circumstances of the horse-shoe and the scarred back were purely imaginary. But again in 1751 was witch blood actually poured out on English soil, and the cry of the innocent murdered sent up to heaven in vain for mercy. At Tring, in Hertfordshire, lived an old man, one Osborne, and his wife; poor as witches always were; old—past seventy both of them—and obliged to beg from door to door for what, if the popular superstition was true, the devil had given them power to possess at any moment for themselves. But this was a point of view no one ever took. In the rebellion of ’45,



just six years ago, old Mother Osborne had gone to one Butterfield, a dairyman living at Gubblecot, to beg for buttermilk. Butterfield was a churlish fellow, and told her roughly that he had not enough for his hogs, still less for her. Says old Mother Osborne, grumbling, "The Pretender will soon have thee and thy hogs too." Now the Pretender and the devil were in league together, according to the belief of many, and old Mother Osborne might just as well have told the dairyman at once that he was going to the devil, or that she would send her imps to bewitch him; for soon Butterfield's calves became distempered, and soon his cows died, and his affairs went so far to the bad that he left his dairy and took a public-house, in hopes that the imps which could bewitch the one might be powerless against the other. But he reckoned without his host, for in 1751 he himself was bewitched; he had fits—bad fits—and sent for a white witch all the way from Northamptonshire to tell him what ailed him. The white witch told him he was bewitched, and bade six men, with staves and pitchforks hanging round their necks as counter charms for their own safety, watch his house night and day. Doubtless they discovered all they were set there to seek.

Suddenly there appeared a notice that certain and various witches were to be ducked at Longmarston the 22<sup>nd</sup> day of April. A crowd assembled at Tring to watch the sport; and but one thought went through that crowd—the Osbornes were to be the ducked witches, and the sport they would have would be rare. The parish officers had taken the old couple into the workhouse for safety, but the mob broke through the gates, and crushed down the doors, and searched the whole place through, from end to end, even to the salt box, "lest the witch should have made herself little," and have hidden in the corners. But they could not find her, not even there; so, in a rage, they broke the windows, smashed the furniture, and then heaped up straw high against the house, threatening to burn it down, and every living soul within it, if the Osbornes were not given up to them. The master was frightened he had never faced such a scene before, and his nerve forsook him—not unreasonably. He brought the old people from their hiding place, and gave them up to that wild, tossing, furious mob. In a moment they were stripped stark naked, then cross-bound in the prescribed manner, wrapped loosely in a sheet, and dragged two miles along the road to a small pond or river, where with many a curse and many a kick they were thrown in, to prove whether they were witches or not. A chimney sweeper, called Colley, was the most active of the crew. Seeing that Mother Osborne did not sink, he waded into the water and turned her over with his stick. She slipped out of the sheet, and thus lay exposed, naked, and half choked with mud, before the brutal crowd, who saw nothing pitiful, and nothing shameful, in her state. After a time they dragged her out, flung her on the bank, and kicked and beat her till she died. Her husband died also, but not on the spot. The man who had arranged this rare diversion then went round among the crowd collecting money in return for his amusement. But government took the matter up. A coroner's inquest was held, and a verdict of wilful murder returned against Colley, the chimney sweep, who, much to his own surprise and the indignation of the people—many ranking him as a martyr—was hanged by the neck till he was dead, for the murder of the witch of Tring, poor old Ruth Osborne. The act against witchcraft, under colour and favour of which all the judicial murders had been done had been repealed a few years before, namely, in 1736, and Colley's comrades bewailed piteously the degenerate times that were at hand, when a witch was no longer held fit sport for the public, but was protected and defended like ordinary folk, and let to live on to work her wicked will unchecked.

But the snake is scotched, not killed. So far are we in advance of the men of the ruder past, inasmuch as our superstitions, though quite as silly, are less cruel than theirs, and hurt no one but ourselves. Yet still we have our wizards and witches lurking round area gates and prowling

through the lanes and yards of the remoter country districts; still we have our necromancers, who call up the dead from their graves to talk to us more trivial nonsense than ever they talked while living, and who reconcile us with earth and humanity by showing us how infinitely inferior are heaven and spirituality; still we have the unknown mapped out in clear lines sharp and firm; and still the impossible is asserted as existing, and men are ready to give their lives in attestation of what contravenes every law of reason and of nature; still we are not content to watch and wait and collect and fathom before deciding, but for every new group of facts or appearances must at once draw up a code of laws and reasons, and prove, to a mathematical certainty, the properties of a chimera, and the divine life and beauty—of a lie. Even the mere vulgar belief in witchcraft remains among the lower classes; as witness the old gentleman who died at Polstead not so long ago, and who, when a boy, had seen a witch swum in Polstead Ponds, “and she went over the water like a cork;” who had also watched another witch feeding her three imps like blackbirds; and who only wanted five pounds to have seen all the witches in the parish dance on a knoll together: as witness also the strange letter of the magistrate, in the ‘Times’ of April 7, 1857; and the stranger trial at Stafford, concerning the bewitched condition of the Charlesworths, small farmers living at Rugeley, which trial is to be found in the ‘Times’ of March 28, 1857; the case reported by the clergyman of East Thorpe, Essex, who had actually to mount guard against the door of an old Trot accused of witchcraft; while the instances of silly servant maids, and fortune tellers, whose hands are to be crossed with silver, and the stars propitiated with cast off dresses and broken meat, are as numerous as ever. And, indeed, so long as conviction without examination, and belief without proof, pass as the righteous operations of faith, so long will superstition and credulity reign supreme over the mind, and the functions of critical reason be abandoned and foresworn.