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SCOTTISH DEMONOLOGY IN THE SIXTEENTH AND SEVENTEENTH
CENTURIES AND ITS THEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

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ABBREVIATIONS

- A.P.S. Acts of the Parliament of Scotland.
Cal. Scot. Calendar of State Papers relating to Scotland.
C.T.S. Calvin Translation Society.
D.N.B. Dictionary of National Biography.
R.P.C. Register of the Privy Council of Scotland.
R.S.V. Revised Standard Version of the Bible.
S.H.R. Scottish Historical Review.
S.H.S. Scottish History Society.
S.T.S. Scottish Text Society.
Stat. Eccl. Scot. Statuta Ecclesiae Scoticae.
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INTRODUCTION.

There are two principal sources for our knowledge of the Scottish witchcraft persecution: the trials and confessions of the witches themselves, and the theories of those contemporaries who wrote about them. Previous studies have concentrated on the accumulation of cases of witchcraft. But such studies tend to reveal more about ancient superstitions and local malice than they do about the minds of those who were in charge of the prosecutions and trials. They ignore the intellectual basis of the persecution of witchcraft in Scotland; generally this is dismissed in parenthesis as being the result of the introduction to Scotland of Calvinism, puritanism, and bibliolatry.

In fact a further examination of the Scottish persecution on the basis of the witch confessions would be of doubtful value. A complete statistical survey by region and decade is impossible since the records do not exist. Indeed the discovery of more cases over the last sixty years has added almost nothing to the general picture. The purpose of this essay therefore is to examine the Scottish witchcraft persecution from its intellectual aspect. An attempt will be made to cover the principal works written in Scotland on the subject

of witchcraft, concentrating on those produced during the period of the persecution; that is, from about 1590 to 1736 when the Witchcraft Act, which abolished the death penalty for that offence, was passed. The word "demonology" is used throughout as a general term to cover all theorising, whether legal or theological, about the Devil, demons, and witchcraft.

These more sophisticated demonological theories (as opposed to the long-standing superstitions of the uneducated) which arrived in Scotland about the time when the persecution began in earnest, had already been developed and discussed on the continent for some hundred years. It is, therefore, natural that Scottish demonology should draw much on continental experience and ideas. It is of interest to assess the nature and extent of the borrowing which was done, and to follow up the references and allusions of the Scottish demonologists wherever these are given. In doing this it should be possible to obtain a clearer picture of the faith and reasoning of the age; it should be possible to discover the source of the almost universal conviction of the best minds of the century, that the confessed witch was the enemy of God as well as of the people, and that she must not escape death.

The first chapter is a general account and discussion of the development of the witch theory in

Europe, and the second shows how Scotland remained more or less in ignorance of this until towards the end of the sixteenth century. The third chapter is a digression in which John Calvin's attitude to demonology is discussed. This digression is made necessary by the insistence of witchcraft historians on his culpability in this matter, rather than because of any actual influence his thought may have had on the Scottish development of witch theories, for, as we shall see, this was minimal.

The remainder of the study deals with actual Scottish writing, beginning with the Anglo-Scottish witch tract of 1591 and the *Daemonologie* of King James VI. The first striking feature of demonic literature in Scotland is its scarcity, and the lack, apart from one tract of 1620, of any material at all between the publication of the *Daemonologie* in 1597, and Sir George Mackenzie's *Pleadings in Some Remarkable Cases* in 1672. The bulk of the extant writing belongs to the last years of the persecution: from the 1670's to the early years of the eighteenth century.

The final chapter gives a survey of some works omitted from the more detailed account, and describes changing attitudes to Scottish witchcraft and its history from the eighteenth century to the present day.

CHAPTER ONE.

THE WITCH THEORY.⁽¹⁾

The witch is as old as human society. She was known to Homer - Circe, indeed, is one of the most compelling figures of the Odyssey, and doubtless she was known to pre-history. But the witch theory, which is a combination of ancient witch superstitions and of elaborate theological ideas, was active for only three centuries. From the middle of the fifteenth to the eighteenth century the witch was given a significance which she⁽²⁾ had never held before; she was given a theological importance and was persecuted by society as its most deadly enemy.

The reactions of early Christianity to the witch were confused and ambiguous, but three principal strands in the attitude of the Church can be isolated.

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1. *There is no complete account of the development of the witch theory in the Middle Ages. The material for this chapter (which is only designed to serve as an introduction) has been drawn mainly from H.C. Lea's Materials Towards a History of Witchcraft, 3 vols. Philadelphia, 1939, and his History of the Inquisition in the Middle Ages, New York, 1887, Vol. III, chaps. VI and VII, and from Lynn Thorndike, A History of Magic and Experimental Science, New York, 1941, and C.H. Haskins, Studies in the History of Medieval Science, 2nd ed., Cambridge Mass., 1927.*
 2. *For convenience witches are usually referred to in the feminine, but an appreciable number of witches were male.*

The first opinion claimed that after the birth of Christ magic was helpless and unreal. It expressed the thought repeated by Milton with conscious archaism when speaking of the supernatural powers of the ancient world "on the morning of Christ's nativity":

"The Oracles are dumb;
No voice or hideous hum
Runs through the arched roof in words deceiving.
Apollo from his shrine
Can no more divine,
With hollow shriek the steep of Delphos leaving.
No nightly trance, or breathed spell,
Inspires the pale-eyed priest from the prophetic spell.."

- and so on; the Lares and Lemures, Peor and Baalim, sullen Moloch, the brutish gods of Nile, and the sorcerers of Osiris, have all been vanquished. In the second chapter of St. Matthew's Gospel the three magi or wizards discover by astrological investigation that their true master has been born, and travel, following a star, to lay down before him the tools of their trade: the myrrh and frankincense used in the spells and incantations of sorcerers and the gold of illicit gain or of alchemy. Magic had been made obsolete by the Incarnation.⁽¹⁾

This theory was not by any means universally held. To some, for example St. Augustine, the demons still had power, and the old gods of the Graeco-Roman

1. See C.S. Mann, *Epiphany - Wise Men or Charlatans? in Theology*, Vol. LXI, no. 422, Dec., 1958, p.496. Compare, T.H. Robinson, *The Gospel of St. Matthew*, London, 1928, p.7, and A.H. McNeille's edition of the Gospel (London, 1915), pp. 13-14.

world, demons themselves, still roamed the world in search of souls.⁽¹⁾ Indeed, this belief in the reality of the old gods as demons played a large part in the diffidence of early medieval writers before the great Latin and Greek classics. When St. Jerome repented of his constant temptation to read Cicero, for instance, at the base of his feelings was the fear that if he did so he would be contaminated by the *reality* of the old demonic gods.

The third strand in early Christian belief, and one which was found mostly among the laity and rarely among theologians, was that which distinguished between white and black magic. This distinction indeed was reflected in the great Christian compilation of Roman law: the *Corpus Iuris Civilis*.⁽²⁾ The witch herself was a neutral figure; her power, resting upon the psychological basis of spell and incantation and upon the secret knowledge of herbs and healing handed down within her family, might act for good or for ill. As a white witch she could practice the healing arts and was recognised as a useful and necessary member of a primitive and peasant society, but if crossed she might use her powers for harm; she might perform *maleficium*.

1. See e.g. *De Civitate Dei*, Book II, Ch. X.

2. See *Corpus Iuris Civilis Codex* 9, Tit. 18.

This view of the witch was powerfully reinforced by what we may call the magical element in the Church's own ritual; those formulas which appear to be an attempt to manipulate the supernatural. Part of the appeal even today of the popular hymn "St. Patrick's Breastplate" is the irresistible attraction of a spell. And in the seventh century the people were told:

"Every person who sings it every day with all his attention on God shall not have demons appearing to his face. It will be a safeguard to him against sudden death. It will be a protection to him against poison and envy. It will be an armor to his soul after death."⁽¹⁾

Already we have a clause promising specific physical benefits: protection against sudden death and against poison, to those reciting it. It can hardly be expected, however, that the Church at this stage would have the sophistication to understand the psychological similarities behind sacred and demonic magic.

Amidst these conflicting concepts of witchcraft, the first: the view that witchcraft was vain after the Incarnation of Christ, seems generally to have triumphed in official ecclesiastical pronouncements until the end of the twelfth century. An Irish Council of the ninth century anathematized any Christian who believed in the existence of witches. In the canons of Burchard of Worms in the early eleventh century, the belief in witchcraft

1. In an Irish Penitential quoted by H.C. Lea in *A History of the Inquisition in the Middle Ages*, Vol. III, p.400.

was denounced as unchristian. This remained in Canon Law even after the papal bulls of the fifteenth century had pronounced against witchcraft as though it were a genuine physical danger instead of a foolish and heretical illusion.

John of Salisbury writing in 1180 described with contempt the popular beliefs in the powers of witches.⁽¹⁾ At the time that John of Salisbury was writing, however, the intellectual life of Europe was being transformed by the movement known as the Twelfth Century Renaissance. The translation from the Arabic both of original Arabic treatises on science and philosophy, and of Arab translations of Greek studies on the same themes, introduced a powerful solvent of all established cultural traditions. In philosophy it created scholasticism; in science it introduced the new studies of mathematics, physics, and chemistry, into the schools of Oxford and Salerno. On the belief in witchcraft it also had its effect. Chemistry, to the Arabs and to the new race of scholars who absorbed in the West the Arabic beliefs, was above all a study of alchemy. Alchemy, the transmutation of base metals into gold,⁽²⁾ depended not only upon the true

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1. *Policraticus*, Ed. C.J. Webb, Oxford, 1909, Vol. I, Lib. II, Cap. XVII, pp. 100-101.
 2. On this, see C.H. Haskins, *The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century*, Harvard University Press, 1927, Chap. IX, "The Translators" and Chap. X, "The Revival of Science"; the same author's *Studies in the History of Medieval Science*, ed. cit. passim; and E.J. Holmyard, *Alchemy*, Harmondsworth, 1957, chaps. 5 and 6.

arrangement and combination of physical matter, but also upon the correct invocation of those magic and supernatural forces which were held to underlie nature. This view indeed was held of all the practical sciences in the Middle Ages. Chaucer's doctor, he tells us, was skilled in that reading of the stars which was an essential part of post-twelfth century medicine:

"In all this world ne was ther noon hym lik,
To speke of phisik and of surgerie;
For he was grounded in astronomye.
He kepte his pacient a ful greet deel
In houres, by his magyk natureel."⁽¹⁾

The Twelfth Century Renaissance, then, introduced to the European intellectual the idea of forces of natural magic which might be harnessed to man's own needs. A chair of astrology was founded at the University of Bologna and had a hundred years of flourishing life. Michael Scot, the translator of scientific works from the Arabic,⁽²⁾ came by a natural identification to have the reputation of being a great wizard. The University of Toledo, which was a principal centre for the translation of Arabic manuscripts into Latin, came to be regarded in popular tradition as the seat of demonological knowledge.

"In Paris the scholars seek the arts, in Orleans the authors, in Bologna codices, in Salerno gallipots, in

1. *Prologue*, 412-416.

2. See C.H. Haskins, *Studies in Medieval Culture*, Oxford, 1929, chap. VII, "The alchemy ascribed to Michael Scot".

Toledo demons," wrote Helinand, the scholar-trouvère.⁽¹⁾ But this new interest in natural magic could no more be disregarded by the Church than could the new Averrhoist philosophy which came from the same source. Nor was there an Aquinas of the sciences to reconcile the new science and Christianity as there had been in philosophy. Michael Scot, the wizard:

*"che veramente
delle magiche frode seppe il gioco",*

Guido Bonatti, the astrologer, and Asdente, the soothsayer, are all found with the diviners of antiquity in the twentieth canto of Dante's *Inferno*.⁽²⁾

The Church, in fact, was faced with a new enemy, and society with a new temptation. Witchcraft became part of the consciousness of Christianity. The Church, in attacking the Waldensians and the Cathars, branded them with the accusation of invoking the aid of the devil and of seeking the aid of supernatural powers by illicit means. In inquisitors' manuals of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries questions began to appear upon the relations of the accused with the devil, on the possibility

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1. See H. Waddell, *The Wandering Scholars*, London, 1926, p. 134. Pope Sylvester II was said to have studied magic and invoked the devil there, *ibid.*, p. 67. On Scot's supposed residence at Toledo: Haskins, *Medieval Culture*, 156 *et seq.*
 2. *Inferno*, XX, 115-120.

of his having invoked against nature natural powers of magic.⁽¹⁾

How these themes developed in the two centuries that followed is obscure. An important stage, however, seems to be marked by the issue in 1398 by the University of Paris of twenty-eight articles which included a statement to the effect that there was an implied contract with Satan in every superstitious observance. This academic interest in witchcraft inevitably increased the belief. A succession of Popes throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries used the accusation of sorcery as a political weapon, and the Inquisition was called upon to investigate more and more cases. Wherever they investigated they found corroborative evidence from witnesses and from the confessions of the accused. The most remarkable and improbable occurrences were regarded as scientific proof of witchcraft. And the more evidence that was found the more investigations were conducted. It can be assumed that in this milieu the theologians among the inquisitors of heretical pravity, seeking to give definition and form to their investigations, gradually

1. See for instance, Bernard Gui, *Manuel de l'Inquisiteur*, Edited and translated by G. Mollat, Paris, 1927, Vol. I, XXIV, XLIV, 9; Vol. II, 51-55, 21-25. If anything theories of natural magic came with the fifteenth century to be more highly regarded than before. See D.P. Walker, *Spiritual and Demonic Magic from Ficino to Campanella*, London, 1958.

expanded the first tentative enquiries into the possibility of witchcraft into the complex, fully developed, and sophisticated body of doctrine which is found at the end of the fifteenth century in the *Malleus Maleficarum*.

The *Malleus Maleficarum* was the key document of the new age. It inaugurated three centuries of savage persecution. Is there any special reason why the *Malleus Maleficarum* should appear when it did? Is there any special reason why witchcraft persecution should burst upon Europe precisely at this moment? There had been, of course, isolated examples of charges of sorcery in the previous two centuries. The sinister Matteo Visconti had been accused by Pope John XXII of performing maleficium with a waxen image.⁽¹⁾ Joan of Arc, the Duchess of Gloucester: wife of Duke Humphrey, and others among the great or the politically important, had had the charge levelled against them. But with the exception of the trial of Dame Alice Kyteler in 1324 in Ireland, these cases had been primarily political trials and had been

1. R. Michel, *Le procès de Matteo et de Galeazzo Visconti. L'accusation de sorcellerie et d'hérésie, Dante et l'affaire d'envoûtement. In Mélanges d'histoire et d'archéologie, t. XXIX, 1909, pp.269-337. C. Foligno, Di alcuni documenti visconei in biblioteche inglesi, in Archivio Storico Lombardo serie IV, To. IV, 1905, prints a fragmentary letter of Galeazzo Visconti to Edward III, asking him for the loan of a skilled witch, with sacred book to cure his gout!*

directed by the secular authorities. What was lacking in the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries was any widespread investigation into the witchcraft activities of the obscure and the humble.

Some have asserted that the witchcraft persecution began to flourish as a result of the specific conditions found in the society of Europe at the end of the fifteenth and beginning of the sixteenth centuries; that it was the inevitable concomitant of an era of international war introduced by Charles VIII's invasion of Italy, and by the distressed conditions which follow war. Yet the economy of Europe among all sectors of the population was much more prosperous at the end of the fifteenth century than it was during the second half of the fourteenth when the continent suffered a secular decline in agriculture and commerce as a result, among other things, of the Black Death. The currents of human mass emotion run in more obscure channels than those which can be directly equated with economic or political causes. Yet looking at the literature and art of northern Europe at the end of the fifteenth century, recalling those dark shades in which Huizinga, for instance, has portrayed the spirit of western man in this era, it is possible to say without significant exaggeration that there was a sickness in the European soul. Looking at those constant

portrayals of the Dance of Death, looking at the fearful world of imagery produced by Hieronymous Bosch in the sixteenth century, we feel in contact with minds which are over-conscious of their own corruption.

Obviously we must not overemphasize this thought: for in southern Europe art and literature are light, graceful, airy, and paint man's perfection. But in the northern world we can only feel that the age was suffering from a long term spiritual crisis deriving ultimately from the Black Death: the infections of bubonic plague in the middle of the fourteenth century which carried off half Europe's population and brought about the death of a million individual hopes and human aspirations.

It would be hazardous to dwell for long upon this argument. The psychological investigation of history is a science which has not yet developed to the stature of investigating these problems; perhaps it is incapable of it. Patently the Freudian explanation of the witchcraft fear; that the fear which drove men to persecution was a result of a castration complex; is not a satisfactory one. According to this theory the sexual aspects of the witch concept are the most important, and the central feature of the practice of witchcraft was the orgy. Witch persecution was thus merely an incident in the war of the sexes. Yet it would be difficult to

assert that men were more afraid of castration at the end of the fifteenth century than at other times.

As much might be said of any theory which explains witchcraft as a psychological phenomenon: for example, the theory that the fear of the witch springs from fear of the witch as murderer. There is no obvious reason why ~~witches~~ ^{this power} should be more readily ascribed with ~~this power~~ ^{to witches} in the fifteenth century. If anything, life was cheaper in the Hundred Years War than in the Hapsburg-Valois conflicts. Again, there are those who claim that the witchcraft persecution originated at the end of the fifteenth century precisely because this was the era of the creation of the modern state. In this theory a settled order of society is necessary for the mechanism of arrest, inquisition, and punishment. Yet most historians today would not give that importance to the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries in the creation of fully developed administrative systems which writers of an earlier generation did. Nor is there any obvious correlation between administrative development and witch persecution. Spain, which had the most highly developed system of ecclesiastical inquisition in Europe and whose state machinery cannot be seen in any way as inferior to that of the principalities of Germany, was notably free from the witchcraft hysteria, though

of course it might be that it vented its psychosis upon other elements in society: the Moriscos. It is difficult, in short, to connect directly the outbreak of widespread witch persecution with any specific social or political factor. And therefore without lingering on these remoter causes we must return to those which are immediate and capable of historical analysis.

In doing this we must turn to the *Malleus Maleficarum* written by two German Dominicans, Heinrich Kramer and Jacob Sprenger, and to the Bull of Pope Innocent VIII which prefaced the first edition of this work: *Summis Desiderantes*. The Bull has frequently and properly been blamed for being an important cause of the persecution, but it seems unlikely that much blame should be attached to Innocent himself. He was one of the most worldly of popes; and unlikely to be unduly troubled by the discovery that agents of the Devil were at work - always provided that their activities were not to be observed in Italian politics. Furthermore, the Bull itself was local in intent, giving power only to Kramer and Sprenger for their inquisitorial activities in specified parts of Germany; the document itself, with its long list of enormities attributed to witchcraft, reads more like the kind of routine phraseology some Vatican secretary would concoct, rather than an expression

of the genuine anxieties of Innocent VIII. The most immediate origin of the witchcraft fervour should probably be found in the *Malleus Maleficarum* itself. This work which was disseminated in numerous editions⁽¹⁾ was intended primarily as an inquisitors' manual.

At the end of the fifteenth century it is clear that the belief was fluid and inchoate. A variety of opinions based in the first place upon pre-twelfth century canons and concepts, in the second upon such pronouncements as those of the University of Paris which we have already noticed, were current and unreconciled. It is against this background that we must see the *Malleus*. In fact, the authors are the last in the great medieval tradition of the *Concordantia Disconcordantium*. As Burchard of Worms and the canon lawyers reconciled the discordant interpretation of the canons, as Azzo and the Glossators reconciled the diverse pronouncements of Roman law, as Aquinas and the scholastics reconciled the conflicting traditions of religious and philosophic beliefs, so did Sprenger and Kramer reconcile the conflicting opinions on the character of witchcraft. They come at the end of the scholastic tradition and their method is wholly scholastic.

1. See the account of the bibliography of the *Malleus Maleficarum* on p. xvii of the translation by Montague Summers, 2nd ed. London, 1948.

As in the scholastic treatises of the thirteenth century they elucidate the whole of their argument by *quaestio* and response. A question is asked, objections to an affirmative answer are put forward, these objections are then dealt with in a logical and ordered manner, and finally a solution is arrived at by the use of the dialectic method.

The enormous influence which the *Malleus Maleficarum* was to have in the following century rests upon the precision and comprehensiveness with which its authors used the scholastic method. All opinions on witchcraft were discussed, and satisfactory logical solutions were given to any questions that might be asked. The work is divided into three parts, the first "treating of the three necessary concomitants of witchcraft, which are the Devil, a witch, and the permission of Almighty God", the second "treating of the methods by which the works of witchcraft are wrought and directed and how they may be successfully annulled and dissolved", and the third "relating to the judicial proceedings in both the ecclesiastical and civil courts against witches and indeed all heretics". In order fully to appreciate the witchcraft theory in its developed form it is necessary to summarise briefly the conclusions of the *Malleus*. In doing so one is almost overcome by the stupidity which can be the product of high intelligence

and great learning working in a logical and ordered manner; but such were the precepts rationally accepted as we shall see by the intellectual world of the sixteenth century. But the dearest axioms of our own present age may alike be as cruel and as stupid - and indeed some of them are.

The first part opens with the question as to whether a belief in witchcraft is manifestly a part of the Catholic faith. The conclusion is that "to maintain an opposite opinion manifestly savours of heresy". The learned authors continue by showing that the witch must necessarily co-operate with the devil. Questions three and four deal with the operation of incubi and succubi. Question five asks why it is "that the practice of witchcraft hath so noticeably increased." The authors explain that this is not due to the power of the stars but from the increase in human wickedness and malice. Question six inquires why it is that it is women who are chiefly addicted to evil superstitions, and the answer, given in full accord with medieval and renaissance traditions, is that women are necessarily more weak and unstable, more emotional and irrational than men.

In this last connection it is perhaps profitable to enquire independently of our source why in fact witchcraft was by and large the special preserve of women.

The social explanation could be that women resorted to the fantasy world opened up by the belief in witchcraft as a means of redressing their inferior status. It may be too that, psychologically, hysteria in women, of a neurotic kind or artificially induced by torture, more easily moves towards this kind of fantasy. Again we should note here one particular class of women who were supposed to be especially prone to witchcraft. These were the midwives. In an age when childbirth was attended by considerable danger, and when there was a high rate of infant mortality, the midwife herself, at any unsuccessful accouchment, was likely to be the victim of bitterly frustrated hopes and of irrational fears.

Returning to our consideration of the first part of the *Malleus*, it is shown in questions seven, eight, nine, and ten, that witches can sway the minds of men to love or hatred, that they can induce impotence, and can change men into beasts. Question eleven deals specifically with the witchcraft of midwives, underlining particularly their propensity for offering newborn children to devils.

Question twelve has an interesting discussion on the permissive power which Almighty God gives to witchcraft. This follows much the same lines as the orthodox Christian argument on sin. The conclusions embody the characteristic

Christian arguments which will already be familiar in another context: "It is just in God to permit man to sin or to be tempted". Question thirteen pursues the same discussion and shows that witchcraft itself is an inevitable accompaniment of the Fall. The remainder of the first part dwells upon the enormity of witchcraft and concludes with arguments which may be adduced by preachers who wish to convince the laity of its reality.

The second part of the work is more discursive and anecdotal in tone. It consists merely of two primary questions: first on the power of witches, and second on the means by which witchcraft may be destroyed. It describes how cows have been injured by being deprived of their milk, of the manner in which witches change men into beasts, of the methods they adopted in raising up tempests and so on. The remedies are to be found in going through various ecclesiastical forms: by making confession, for example, by making the sign of the cross, by reciting the Hail Mary, and above all, by the lawful exorcisms of the Church.

The third part of the work deals with judicial proceedings in the ecclesiastical and civil courts against witches, and the procedure to be adopted in such cases. Perhaps it was this part of the work which had the greatest practical effect, for the judicial proceedings against

witches show how very slight were the chances of acquittal for an accused witch. Some sure signs of the demonic pact were the inability in the accused to recite the Lord's Prayer or the Creed, and an inability to shed tears, or to feel pain when tortured, or when pins were used to search for the Devil's mark. (This mark was traditionally insensible). If on the other hand the accused could weep, feel pain, and say her prayers, this was regarded as a special device of the devil to deceive the judge. Torture was a regular accompaniment of all proceedings against witches. The work ends with a recommendation to judges to be extremely cautious in allowing condemned witches to appeal against their sentence.

The solutions proposed by Sprenger and Kramer to the questions aroused by the possibility of witchcraft were rapidly accepted by the whole of Christian Europe. Scepticism was extremely rare. None of the sixteenth century reformers attempted to discredit the belief, and Luther was notorious for his encouragement of the persecution. There has been a great deal of discussion about whether the Catholics or the Protestants were the worst offenders, but the really striking feature of the era of demonology was the way in which the debate cut right across the principal theological alignments of the

period of the Reformation and the Wars of Religion. Tracts and treatises were written by Protestant against Protestant, and eventually by Catholic against Catholic. Admittedly it was not until the seventeenth century that there was any serious Catholic opposition to the witch theory,⁽¹⁾ but for many decades it was also an essential part of the Christian faith to the majority of Protestants. In general, the belief was most strongly held by whichever ecclesiastical group was in the ascendant at any particular time or place. The religious minorities seldom had the time or the opportunity for a witch hunt. Meanwhile the best minds and highest intelligences of the sixteenth century accepted the reality of witchcraft and feared witches as the active agents of the devil.

Erasmus, for example, fully accepted the latest pronouncements of the Church on the subject, and was worried by the recent prominence of witch cases. In a letter of 14th January, 1501, written from Paris to Antony of Bergen, he ends up an already long letter by saying that in order that the letter shall not be cut too short, he will tell him a fearful story of evil greater even than that known in the days of ancient Greece and Rome.⁽²⁾

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1. *Freidrich von Spee (1591-1635), a Jesuit professor at Wurzburg, and a confessor to convicted witches, became sickened and incredulous at the things he heard, and published in 1631 his Cantio Criminalis seu de processibus contra sagas liber.*
 2. *Opus Epistolarum Des. Erasmi Roterdami, ed. P.S. Allen, Oxford, 1906, To., I, The whole story occupies pp. 336-341.*

He then related a story of a wizard he had heard of near Orleans, who had died leaving his magical books to his wife. She, with the aid of another friend, his young daughter, and a renegade priest, performed the horrid rites of the Black Mass. Erasmus ended by considering its significance, and offered as an explanation of the comparative absence of trials for witchcraft in previous epochs the suggestion that there was in fact less wickedness then, or, alternatively, that the compilers of the Canon Law had wished to conceal from the people the amount of depravity which had in fact existed:

"But to the point. When the Papal Decrees and the letters known as Decretals refer to sorceries and that kind of accursed superstition they do not touch upon this sort of witchcraft with even one word: either because those centuries did not have even a suspicion of such impiety, or because they who committed these things to writing thought that mortal ears should be spared them. This new and unheard of portent has been produced not, as the poets fable, by Night the Mother of the Eumenides, but by avarice, parent of all wickedness. And it is no simple portent, but one kindled by superstition, impiety, idolatry, sacrilege, and diverse unnatural things. And shall men wonder that our age is swept with wars, famine, and plague, with this evil and with that, when besides those vices which, so common are they, have already ceased to appear as vices, we have long time surpassed in our wickedness the Giants themselves who were struck down by a thunderbolt, and the Licaonian inhumanity which was scarcely expiated even by the great flood? Shall we wonder that we are daily afflicted by new scourges when daily we offend the best and greatest God with new vices, or that, as Horace says, for our

wickedness, we should endure the wrathful thunderbolts of Jove?"⁽¹⁾

By the time when Erasmus was writing, the belief in witchcraft had become so integral a part of the Christian faith that it was not abandoned at the Reformation either by humanist or reformer. As late as 1612, Kepler, whose scientific perceptions have made him a hero in the pantheon of natural philosophy, in defending his mother against the charge of witchcraft made no attempt to deny the reality of witchcraft but simply argued that his mother was not herself a witch. Did he believe in witchcraft? Was he arguing in this way with his tongue in his cheek, as it has been assumed he was acting when he drew up his prognostications of "what the Stars foretell", for his patron Wallenstein?⁽²⁾ It is difficult

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1. *"Sed ad rem. Decreta vero Pontificia et item epistolae quas Decretales vocant, ubi de sortilegiis et id genus damnatis superstitionibus meminerunt, huiusmodi maleficium ne verbo quidem attingunt: sive quod ea secula ne suspicionem quidem tantae impietatis habuerunt; sive quod qui ea literis prodiderunt, mortalium auribus parcendum esse putarunt. Novum hoc et inauditum portentum non Nox Eumenidum mater, ut poetae fabulantur, sed scelerum omnium parens avaricia produxit, et portentum non simplex, sed ex superstitione, impietate, idololatria, sacrilegio, tanquam variis ex monstris conflatum. Et mirantur homines, si nostra aetas nunc bellis, nunc fame, nunc peste, nunc aliis atque aliis malis laboret; cum praeter ea vitia, quae iam propemodum vitia videri desierunt, quod nimis vulgaria, Gigantes ipsos fulmine deturbatos et Licaoniam inhumanitatem diluvio tanto vix expiatam nostris sceleribus longe vincamus? Miramur si quotidie novis plagis afficimur, cum quotidie novis Vitiis Deum optimum maximumque irretemus, neque, ut ait Placcus, per nostrum patiamur scelus iracunda Iovem fulmina ponere?"* *Loc. cit.*, p.340.
 2. See Arthur Koestler, *The Sleepwalkers*, London, 1959, pp.384-388, and p.413.

to say, but the fact that he should argue in this way is at least an illustration of the intellectual milieu in which he lived.

Yet already by this time some isolated individuals had begun to attack the orthodoxy which had been established by the *Malleus Maleficarum*. The first opponent to make any impression was the Belgian physician, Johann Weyer, who published his *De Praestigiis Daemonum et incantationibus ac veneficiis*, in 1563. It aroused a great deal of antagonism. Weyer himself was accused of witchcraft: it was argued that only a witch would wish to prevent witches from being burnt alive; and a spate of pamphlets and treatises demonstrated the reality and wickedness of the crime of witchcraft, both on the continent and in England. The work was instantly put on the *Index*, but this might have happened to anything Weyer wrote, since he held an extreme position, denying spiritual power altogether, even in the sacraments.

One of the most influential of the replies to Weyer was by Jean Bodin, in his *De la Démonomanie des Sorciers*, published in Paris in 1580. Another important, though much briefer, contribution was by the Calvinist, Lambertus Daneus, whose treatise was translated into English from the Latin as *A Dialogue of Witches* in 1575, the same year as its original publication at Orleans.

The first major work in Weyer's support was published in London in 1584 (twenty-one years after the publication of *De Praestigiis Daemonum*, and two years before Weyer's death) by an Englishman, Reginald Scot, and was entitled *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*.⁽¹⁾ This was an extremely long and erudite work arguing slightly less strongly than Weyer against the power of witches, but very strongly indeed that the majority of cases were frauds and impostors, that many of the powers attributed to witches were inherently impossible, and that very few of those accused of witchcraft had ever done anything worthy of the death penalty. In its turn Scot's book inspired a good many witch pamphlets in England in the twenty years or so that followed its publication - most of them designed to entertain as well as to instruct.

It was at this point in the demonological debate that Church and State in Scotland began to be aware of the principal theories disseminated by it. The discussion

1. The title page to the first edition begins: *The discoverie of witchcraft, wherein the lewde dealing of witches and witchmongers is notable detected, the knaverie of conjurors, the impietie of enchantors, the follie of soothsaiers, the impudent falshood of couseners, the infidelitie of atheists, the pestilent practises of Pythonists, the curiosities of figure casters, the vanities of dreamers, the beggerlie art of Alcumystries. The abomination of idolatries, the horrible art of poisoning, the vertue and power of naturall magike, and all the conuiciences of Legierdemaine and iuggling are decipher'd: and many other things opened, which have long bien hidden, howbeit verie necessarie to be knowne.*

was already a hundred years old when the King of Scotland published his attack on Weyer and Reginald Scot, and it had another hundred years of life left to it before it was to peter out. As in many other aspects of intellectual life in the seventeenth century, the history of Scotland's part in the latter half of the demonological discussion is the history of the borrowing and absorption of ideas.

CHAPTER TWO.

WITCHCRAFT IN SCOTLAND BEFORE 1590.

The material for the early history of witchcraft in Scotland is very scanty indeed, but it is too much to deduce from this, as many have done,⁽¹⁾ that there was no attack on witchcraft either by secular or ecclesiastical authorities before the Reformation. The evidence which we do have suggests the contrary. We cannot, however, draw any satisfactory conclusions about the extent and nature of witchcraft and sorcery in pre-Reformation Scotland. We do not even know how much of the myth and legend in which the novels of Scott and Buchan are steeped, and which is still to be found today, goes back to medieval times, and how much is simply a relic of the seventeenth-century witch fever.

It is safe to assume, both from our anthropological knowledge of the psychology of primitive societies, and from the evidence of surviving medieval brooches with anti-witchcraft inscriptions on them⁽²⁾ that there was

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1. e.g. William Lecky, *Rise and Influence of the Spirit of Rationalism in Europe*, 2nd ed., Vol. I, p. 144; W.L. Mathieson, *Politics and Religion in Scotland, 1550-1695*, Glasgow, 1902, Vol. I, pp. 194-195; Charles Mackay, *Memoirs of Extraordinary Popular Delusions*, London 1841, Vol. II, p.214; T.H. Buckle, *History of Civilisation in England*, London, 1861, Vol. II, pp. 366-376; H.C. Lea, *Materials towards a History of Witchcraft*, Philadelphia, 1939, Vol. III, p. 1325.
 2. *In the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland, Queen Street, Edinburgh.*

magic, both black and white; but that is as far as we can go. We know nothing of any lynchings, and it is unlikely that they occurred, for there was clearly no real witch panic in Scotland until the closing years of the sixteenth century. Of the attitude of the Church we can tell a little more, and the records we do have indicate that she was well aware, throughout the Middle Ages, of the problem of sorcery in one form or another.

The first documentary evidence of official opposition to witchcraft in Scotland is to be found in the general forms of excommunication⁽¹⁾ which were in use by the thirteenth century. This must be faced both by those who wish to maintain that such opposition began with the Reformation, and by those who would like to make a case for the existence of the diabolic type of witchcraft in Scotland since the time of the Druids or earlier.

Hitherto it had been considered that a sentence of excommunication could only effectively be pronounced upon a particular named person, and general sentences of excommunication were not considered by Gratian to be

1. *Statuta Ecclesiae Scoticae*, ed. J. Robertson, Edin., 1866, Vol. II, pp. 5, 6, 26, 38, 71.

valid; but in England such general forms were in use by the first quarter of the thirteenth century and were continued until the late fourteenth;⁽¹⁾ and in Scotland they were promulgated in the vernacular in the fifteenth century and continued until shortly before the Reformation.⁽²⁾ These comminations were proclaimed in the churches four times a year at special services; and apparently the idea behind this use of the sentence was to reinforce the power of the secular courts against lay criminals.

There are two main difficulties in assessing the value of the surviving Scottish forms as evidence of the Church's interest in witchcraft in medieval Scotland. The first is that of knowing how far they are in fact distinctively Scottish, and how far borrowed from English or continental forms. The second is a problem of terminology; for the precise meaning, or lack of precise meaning, to be attached to the different Latin and vernacular words for witchcraft at different times and in different regions is a very obscure matter.⁽³⁾

It is said that in Scotland after the Church was brought under Roman rule by Queen Margaret, Canon Law,

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1. Rosalind Hill, *The Theory and Practice of Excommunication in Medieval England*, in *History*, Vol. XL, 1957, p. 9.
 2. See *St. Andrews Formulare*, ed. G. Donaldson, Edin., 1942, Vol. I, p. 268, for a long vernacular sentence of 1525 against border reivers.
 3. Little help is given in du Cange, *Glossarium Mediae et Infimae Latinitatis*. He simply lists under *maleficus*: *incantator*, *divinus*, *mathematicus*, *magus*, etc.

in the forms produced at English Church councils, was regarded as authoritative.⁽¹⁾ Whether this continued to be so during and after the Great Schism when Scotland and England accepted different Popes is not clear, but Robertson, the editor of the *Statuta Ecclesiae Scoticae*, lists, in his notes on the thirteenth century statutes, contemporary English ones with which they may be compared.⁽²⁾ Such a comparison shows many phrases and isolated items to be identical or similar, but at no point in any of the documents with which we are concerned has a passage of any length been borrowed as it stood. It seems probable that the Scottish forms of excommunication were in fact specifically local in intent. Only those items relevant to Scotland were taken; others were inserted and expanded where necessary. Those who are condemned are simply a miscellaneous collection of public nuisances. The only example which it is surprising to find in Scotland is the fourteenth century reference to "those who aid the Saracens in arms or in any other way against Christians, and to those who favour heretics

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1. In the introduction by David Patrick to his edition and translation of *Statutes of the Scottish Church*, Edin., 1907, pp. xxxv-xxxvi.
 2. *Stat. Eccl. Scot.*, II, pp. 267 ff.

and receive schismatics knowingly."⁽¹⁾ Even here, though, the condemnation is not of heretics, of whom there were scarcely any in Scotland at the time, but of those who favour them. The reference to schismatics would presumably include Englishmen. The curiously haphazard way in which criminals of very different degrees of wickedness are listed together in all these documents, is apparently an indication that several statutes have been summarised.⁽²⁾

Of the Scottish statutes which have survived five make some reference to sorcery. One of the earliest, a thirteenth century general sentence of excommunication, includes among its objects of condemnation,

"nec non sorciarias et omnes eas foventes et protegentes et in suis maleficiis manutenentes ac etiam cum eis in maleficiis suis communicantes." (3)

The proper translation of "sorciaria" at this date is probably "sorceress", rather than "witch" as it is given by Patrick,⁽⁴⁾ but in any case, as already suggested, the whole matter is somewhat confused.

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1. Stat. Eccl. Scot. II, p. 72: "Omnes qui adjuvant Saricenos in armis vel aliter contra Christianos. Omnes faventes hereticos et scismaticos recipientes scienter."
 2. Patrick, Statutes, p. 7.
 3. Stat. Eccl. Scot. II, pp. 5-6.
 4. Statutes, p. 4.

The statute of the Council of Oxford of 1221⁽¹⁾ on which this statute draws is much shorter and makes no mention at all of any kind of sorcery, soothsaying, or witchcraft. Other contemporary English statutes, however, do condemn practitioners of the magical arts in similar phraseology to that of the Scottish statutes. The forty-eighth statute of the Council of Durham in 1220 begins,

"Singulis autem annis in tribus solennitatibus majoribus solenniter excommunicati denuncientur in genere sortitarii, auxilium daemonum invocantes, incendiarii raptores," etc.⁽²⁾

and the thirty-third chapter of the Constitutions of Sarum, 1217, has,

"Singulis autem annis in tribus solennitatibus majoribus, solemniter excommunicandi denuntientur sortitarii, auxilium daemonum quocumque modo invocantes, sacramentis et sacramentalibus abutentes, vel ad usus profanos ducentes, testes perjuri super sacrosanctum evangelium, incendiarii, raptores publici," etc.⁽³⁾

The two other Scottish thirteenth-century forms extant are slightly less specific than the Salisbury version, though they also place sorcerers at the very head of the list of those to be excommunicated. One general form begins:

"In proximis Dominicis post observacionem Quatuor Temporum. excommunicentur in genere - sortilegi - venefici - incendiarii - ecclesiarum fractores ..."⁽⁴⁾

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1. *Concilia Magnae Britanniae et Hiberniae*, ed. David Wilkins, London, 1737, Vol. I, p. 585.
 2. *Ibid.*, p. 578.
 3. *Labbei et Cossartii Concilia*, edit. Lutet. Paris, 1671, tom. XI. Pars. i. coll. 256-257.
 4. *Stat. Eccl. Scot.*, II, p. 26.

The second, a statute of the diocese of Aberdeen, later to become a notorious home of witchcraft, is the first to refer to witches as *malefici*, which became the standard Latin for those who renounced their baptism and worshipped the Devil as their god. Whether that was what those who drew up the statute intended by the term is quite a different matter. In the form in which we have the document the *malefici* are separated from the *sorciarii* by two other items, which may indicate that they were considered to be two different crimes. But again, *malefici* could here simply mean a malefactor:

"Excommunicentur quater in anno per totam dyocesim sorciarii et incendiarii manifesti, usurarii, malefici, raptores publici ..."⁽¹⁾

If the difference in Latin terminology can be taken seriously at this date, the general statute is referring to a slightly different order of wickedness than the Aberdeen one. *Sortilegi* were "fortune tellers", and *venefici*, which is translated by Patrick as "witches male and female"⁽²⁾ could equally well mean simply "poisoners", who are not mentioned elsewhere in this document though they feature in all the other extant forms of excommunication.

The fourteenth century form already mentioned,

1. *Stat. Eccl. Scot.*, II, p. 38.

2. *Statutes*, p. 26.

which is found in the St. Andrews Synodal Statutes, also included sorcerers in its list of those deserving condemnation; and it is interesting that it does so in the sceptical manner common to all official references to witchcraft in Scotland up to about 1590:

"Item omnes sortilegos et omnes in eis firmiter credentes".⁽¹⁾

This scepticism is evident also in the late fifteenth century vernacular form in use in the Aberdeen diocese.⁽²⁾

This document does in fact refer to "wichis", but is clearly indicating persons whose principal crime was to mislead the credulous, rather than demonic agents:

"Item all thaim that strublis the fredome of Haly Kirk in wod, watir, or pastur or consentis tharto. Al wichis and trowaris in thaim. Al commone reifarais and resettaris of thaim. Al thaim that puttys violent hand on preist or clerk. bot in thare defens. Al commone sclanderaris. Al thaim that strikis fals monee or clippis the kings monee without leyff. Al erratikis kynd and kend ..."⁽³⁾

Not the least interesting feature of this list is the complete separation, by several items, of "wichis" and "erratikis". As in England there was no close connection made between witchcraft and heresy. The two sins were separately punished.

When we turn from document to legend and chronicle we find there is abundant material for witchcraft, but it

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1. *Stat. Eccl. Scot.*, II, p. 72.
 2. J. Robertson in *Stat. Eccl. Scot.*, II, p. 257, gives St. Andrews as its place of origin, but Patrick suggests Aberdeen because of the inclusion of St. Nicholas and St. Ternan in its preamble. *Statutes*, p. 7
 3. *Stat. Eccl. Scot.*, II, p. 7.

is all of very limited value in discerning what actually happened. Perhaps the most notorious victim of legend in medieval Scotland was Michael Scot "the wizard", sometimes confused with Sir Michael Scot of Balwearie, the man who was sent to fetch the Maid of Norway in 1290. (In fact Scot "the wizard" is known to have died by 1235, for in that year Vincent of Beauvais wrote of him as being dead).

Michael Scot, who was born about 1175, and who has been already mentioned in our brief survey of European demonology, was primarily a scholar and scientist. He was a mathematician, an alchemist, an astronomer, a physician, a friend of Roger Bacon, and eventually astrologer at the court of Frederick II. He translated Aristotle from the Arabic, and also Averroes, and wrote many treatises of his own, mostly on aspects of astronomy, mathematics, and alchemy. If he was indeed Scottish, he was the first cultured intellectual that Scotland produced; it is little wonder that legend was not slow to grow up around him. In Scotland it was said that he died in Melrose and his books of black magic were buried there with him, and there is a similar Italian tradition of his death in Italy. But in fact, despite his strongly secular interests, Scot was on good terms not only with the Emperor but also with the Pope. During

his life no taint of heresy or unorthodoxy was attached to his name; and indeed Honorius III wrote to Stephen Langton on 16th January, 1223-4 to ask him to find a benefice for Master Michael Scot who was a distinguished man of science. His reputation as a soothsayer was, however, a contemporary one; and it is no doubt around this that the accretions of diabolism and necromancy gathered.

An even more legendary figure was Lord Soulis, who was boiled in lead for his sins, and whose castle is said to have sunk into the ground with the weight of iniquity it had to bear.⁽¹⁾ But very little is known about him, and he seems to have been the only major demonic figure in early Scottish history.

Towards the end of the thirteenth century, in 1282, we have a reference in the Chronicle of Lanercost to a most curious episode. The story is given there, as follows:

"About this time, at Inverkeithing in Easter week, the parish priest, named John, preparing the profane rites of Priapus, collected young girls from the village and compelled them to dance in circles to Father Bacchus. When he had these females in a troop, out of sheer wantonness, he led the dance, carrying in front on a pole a representation of the human organs of reproduction, and singing and dancing himself like a mime, he examined them all and stirred them to lust by filthy language. Those who held respectable matrimony in honour were scandalised by such a shameless performance, although

1. *Sir Walter Scott, Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border, 5th ed. Edin., 1821, Vol. III, pp. 249-274.*

they respected his person on account of his high position. If anyone remonstrated with him out of affection the priest became worse than before and violently reviled that person. And whereas the iniquity of some young men manifestly brings them to justice, so in the same year, when his parishioners assembled according to custom in the church at dawn in Penance Week, at the hour of discipline, he would insist that certain persons should prick with goads those stripped for penance. The burghers, resenting the indignity inflicted upon them, turned upon its author; and he, while he was as author defending his nefarious work, in that same churchyard where the dance had begun fell that very night stabbed by a knife, God thus awarding him what he deserved for his wickedness."⁽¹⁾

The difficulty about this story is that it seems to be unique in Scottish medieval history. It has been taken up and used by anthropologists to demonstrate how pagan Scotland really was at heart, and by Protestant historians to show the extent of the corruption of the Roman Church.

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1. *"Insuper hoc tempore apud Inverchethin, in hebdomada paschae sacerdos parochialis, nomine Johannes, Priapi prophana parans, congregatis ex villa puellulis, cogebat eas, choreis factis, Libero patri circuire; ut ille feminas in exercitu habuit, sic iste, procacitatis causa, membra humana virtuti feminariae serventia super asserem artificiata ante talem choream praeferebat, et ipse tripudians cum cantantibus motu mimico omnes inspectantes et verbo impudico ad luxuriam incitabat. Hi qui honesto matrimonio honorem deferebant, tam insolenti officio, licet reverentur personam, scandalizabant propter gradus eminentiam. Si quis ei seorsum ex amore correptionis sermonem inferret, fiebat deterior, et conviciis eos impetebat. Et quorundam hominum peccata manifesta sunt praecedentia ad iudicium, sub ejusdem anni circulo cum parochiani sui ad ecclesiam in hebdomada poenosa ad matutinum in crepusculo, ut moris est, convenirent, in hora disciplinarum instaret ac suo documento (ut) quidam aculeis pungerent derudatos ad poenitentiam. Burgenses, contumeliam sibi factam dedignant, in auctorem retorquent; et ille, dum opus nefarium defendit ut auctor, in eodem coemeterio ecclesiae, ubi choream inceperat, cultro perfossus ipsa nocte occubuit, Deo ei pro scelere reddente quod meruit."* *Chronicon de Lanercost*, ed. J. Stevenson, Maitland Club, 1839, p. 109. *The translation is an amended version of that given by H. Maxwell, Chronicle of Lanercost, Glasgow, 1913.*

It seems probable from internal evidence that this part of the chronicle was written by a contemporary in the north of England,⁽¹⁾ and there is no particular reason for thinking that the story could have been entirely fabricated. It may well, however, have been interpreted and embellished. Did the priest really deliberately revive the rites of Priapus, or was the chronicler, recognising the performance as a fertility rite, simply airing his classical knowledge?

There may well be some truth in the shocked comment of Bishop Dowden that "one can only imagine that he was drunk, or not in his senses at the time."⁽²⁾ The most likely explanation of the affair, especially when we bear in mind the second episode in the week of penance, is that John the priest was a sensualist and something of a sadist. He was looking for an excuse for an orgy, and clearly in the end he brought about his own downfall through his excesses. It is reading far too much into it to see it as one example of a widespread fertility cult.

As we have already suggested,⁽³⁾ one of the interesting facts about witch persecution is that in the early stages nearly all the victims are important people. The accusation of witchcraft is used mainly as a cover

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1. Its authorship is discussed by H. Maxwell in his introduction to his translation of the chronicle, and by A.G. Little in *E.H.R.* Vols. 31 and 32, 1916 and 1917.
 2. *The Medieval Church in Scotland*, Glasgow, 1910, p. 145.
 3. Above p. 12.

for political reasons. It is only when the fear of witchcraft gets a really strong hold that insignificant people in large numbers take the place of the isolated noble traitors. Scotland illustrates this pattern very well; there are certain kings: Kenneth I in the ninth century, Duffus in the tenth, and Macbeth in the eleventh, whose names have been connected with stories of sorcery. In the case of Duffus it was the familiar tale of sympathetic magic: the wax image into which pins were stuck while the victim faded and pined. All these stories, however, are of fairly late origin. In fact there is little mention of witchcraft in written chronicle before the sixteenth century. The *Scotichronicon*, of Fordun (who died in 1384) and Bower (who died in 1449), which is considered reliable history from Kenneth McAlpine onwards, mentions no witches at all in connection with any of these monarchs.⁽¹⁾ The death of Duffus at Forres, for example, is related in some detail, including that of the darkness which covered the earth during the time the body of Duffus lay undiscovered, but without any reference to sorcery. Apparently there was in fact an eclipse at this time.

Andrew Wyntoun (1350-1420) in his vernacular

1. *Scotichronicon*, Oxford, 1722, Vol. II, pp. 328-330 and 367-371.

verse chronicle, also refers to Duffus being slain at Forres without mentioning any previous attempts at assassination by sorcery.⁽¹⁾ He does make the first reference to Macbeth's encounter with the soothsayers, but entirely in psychological terms.⁽²⁾

More credence can be given to the story of the ^{Highland} Irish soothsayer who foretold the murder of James I in 1437. It is told in some detail in a vernacular translation, by "John Stirling in his late age", of a Latin fragment of a chronicle in an appendix to Pinkerton's *History of Scotland*.⁽³⁾ It is interesting that in his account of the assassination the writer refers to, "the forsaid Sir Robert Graeme, with other of his covyne unto the nowmbre of Three Hundreth persons".⁽⁴⁾

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1. Original Chronicle, Book VI, Chap. X, S.T.S. Vol. IV, Edin., 1906, p. 192.
 2. "A nycht he thocht in his dremynge
That sittande he was beside the kyng,
At a seit in hunting sua,
And in a lesche had grewhundis twa.
Him thocht, till he wes sa sittand,
He saw thre women by gangand,
And thei thre women than thocht he
Thre werd sisteris like to be.
The first he herd say gangand by:
"Lo, yhonder the thayne of Crumbaghty!"
The tother sister said agane:
"Oft Murray yhonder I see the thayne."
The thrid said: "Yhonder I se the king."
All this herd he in his dremyng."
Original Chronicle, Book VI, Chap. XVIII, S.T.S. Vol. IV, pp. 273-274.
 3. The History of Scotland under the House of Stewart, London, 1797, Vol. I, pp. 462-475.
 4. Ibid., p. 467.

Much could be made of this by the believers in a continuous tradition of coven witchcraft, but there is no evidence that the word "coven" has ever meant more than simply any kind of coterie, group, or "gang".⁽¹⁾

What is evident at least is the fatalism of the writer:

"Bot ellas the while, hit wil not be! Fortune was to hym adverse, as yn the preserwyng of his life any longer."⁽²⁾

Also published as an appendix to Pinkerton's History⁽³⁾ is a fragment from an old chronicle which is attached to the Wyntoun Manuscript in the British Museum. This chronicle was assigned by Pinkerton to 1540, but is probably of older date: 1500-1510, if not earlier.⁽⁴⁾

It makes the first reference to witches being burned in Scotland:

"1479. King James the Thred banysit Alexander his brother, duke of Albany: and passyt in France, and was maryit thar; and after that come in Inngland, and maid his residence with King Edward of Inngland. And than the King of Scotland gart sege Dunbar the Dukis castell, and Lord of Bunterdail was capitane, and he and his stall away be the se, and so the king gat the castell. And that yer was money weches and warlois brint on Crag Gayt; and Jhone the erle of Mar, the King's brother, was slayne becaus thai said he faworyt the weches and warlois."⁽⁵⁾

The difficulties of James III were exacerbated by the fact that he was of a scholarly rather than a warlike disposition, that Scotland still required a warrior king,

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1. *Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue.*
 2. *History of Scotland, Vol. I, p. 470.*
 3. *Vol. I, pp. 502-504.*
 4. According to D. Laing in his introduction to his edition of *Wyntoun's Chronicle, Vol. III, Edin., 1879, p. xix.*
 5. Pinkerton, *History of Scotland, Vol. I, p. 503.*

and that his brothers were good-looking, semi-illiterate soldiers, and correspondingly popular. James himself aroused dislike by his preference for the company of intellectuals and musicians of insignificant station, who may conceivably have been interested in sophisticated natural magic or diabolism. In any case treason by sorcery was one of the accusations laid against Mar when the trouble came to a head. He died in captivity in mysterious circumstances, and the mass burning of witches and warlocks was no doubt to add verisimilitude to the sorcery charge.

The most credulous of all historians, and the most given to stories of sorcery and witchcraft, was Hector Boece who was born about 1465 and died in 1536, the year in which a translation of his history was published in Edinburgh. Boece had been to the University of Paris and travelled on the continent a good deal. From 1492 to 1498 he was a professor in Montaigu, and he was a friend of Erasmus whom we have already noted as a believer in witchcraft. He helped to found the university of Aberdeen and remained there as its principal.⁽¹⁾ His *Scotorum Historiae* was first published in Paris in 1527, and a vernacular translation by John Bellenden undertaken at the request of James V was published by Thomas Davidson

1. D.N.B.

at Edinburgh in 1536.⁽¹⁾

Prior to 1527 no history of Scotland had been printed, except a compendium of John Major, though copies of ~~Pitscottie~~ and Wyntoun were in circulation in manuscript. Boece's main interest was in writing an entertaining and smoothly flowing narrative in a good Latin style. Accuracy was of secondary importance. Not only are all the witch stories there, but also tales of incubi and succubi: a continental feature. There is one story of how a lady of breeding was found with her demon lover (the incubus), and how she later gave birth to a monster which was promptly cremated by the family lest disgrace be brought upon their name.⁽²⁾ Writers of an earlier age might have thought up a less esoteric explanation for this and similar incidents.

Another historian who was conscious of the demonological beliefs was John Major whose *Historia Majoris Britanniae* was published in Paris in 1521. He goes into the possibility of Merlin being without a physical father, and suggests that he may in fact have been conceived by a demon lover. He is aware of the discussion on whether demons can beget children, and like the authors of the

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1. It was this version which was the source for Holinshed.
 2. Hector Boece, *Scotorum Historiae*, 2nd ed., Paris, 1574, Book VIII, p. 149.

Malleus Maleficarum he spares no details.⁽¹⁾ Major points out on the title-page that he regards himself primarily as a theologian. He uses the argument about the possibility of demonic procreation as a means of distinguishing between such a birth and the virgin birth of Christ, in which no human father took part by any method. At a later point in his history Major describes the belief that Henry II of England was the child of a demon succubus, and dismisses it as a "mythica de incubo historia"; and one which had been eagerly propagated by his anti-English fellow Scots.⁽²⁾

It is interesting that after the Reformation we hear no more of incubi and succubi. Their successors were "familiaris" in the forms of cats, dogs, imps, black men, and sometimes fairy men and women.

Evidence for actual cases of witchcraft is still extremely rare in the early part of the sixteenth century, but it is recorded that one of the matters to be considered at the Justice Ayre of Jedburgh in the year 1510 was:

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1. *Secundo modo daemon succubus semen prolificum ab aliquo viro accipere poterat, & cameram clausam secreti aperire, vel per rimam aut fenestras cum semine intrare a viri corpore assumpto mulierem cognoscere, a semen prolificum in eam iacere, & sic ipsa conciperet, non sine semine viri, quia illud semen erat primo alicuius viri. Historia Majoris Britanniae, Lib II, Chap. IV, fol. XXVI. cf. Malleus Maleficarum, pp. 21-23.*
 2. *Book IV, Chap. VII, Fol. LX.*

"Item, gif thair be ony Wichecraft or Sossary usyt in the realme."⁽¹⁾

The list of items to be dealt with is taken by Pitcairn to be part of a general circular proclamation for regulating the proceedings of Justice Ayres throughout the land, rather than a list of problems peculiar to Jedburgh.⁽²⁾ All the other items in the list are quite distinctly civil crimes such as the coining of false money, the obtaining of land under false pretences, murder, and arson; so it seems clear that the authorities in listing witchcraft among them believed it to be anti-social as well as sinful or heretical.

Unfortunately there is no mention of sorcery among the recorded cases which came up for trial on this occasion,⁽³⁾ so we are left without any indication as to the punishment which would have been administered to anyone found guilty of practising witchcraft. Branding and hanging are both known after the Reformation, and banishment and burning both before and after, but it is very uncertain whether at this time any of these were regarded as the normal punishment for witchcraft or whether the sentence was quite arbitrary.

After this date no other official references

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1. Robert Pitcairn: *Criminal Trials in Scotland*, Edin., 1833, Vol. I, p. 66.
 2. *Ibid.* Vol. I, p. 64.
 3. *Ibid.* Vol. I, pp. 67-71.

have come to light until 1536, when in the Appendix to the Exchequer Rolls there appears a commission for bringing to justice a heretic and a witch already convicted by an ecclesiastical court:

"A Commission was given to William Lyon, bailie to the bishop of Aberdeen, for bring to justice Andrew Johnson and Agnes or Lanie Scot, to wit the said Andrew convicted of heresy and the same Agnes convicted of (practising) the magic arts, vulgarly called witchcraft."⁽¹⁾

Again there are no details given as to the kind of punishment which it was expected would be carried out.

The next document of interest is a commission by Cardinal Betoun to William Gibson, bishop of Libaria, as suffragan for the see of St. Andrews. This contains, among a list of general instructions, the injunction that he must take up the task "of inquiring into or causing to be inquired into, and of committing those guilty of the crime of heresy, and whatsoever other crimes too: sorceries (*sortiligiis*), homicides and murders of priests..."⁽²⁾

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1. "*Commissio datur Willelmo Lyoun, ballivo episcopi Abirdonensis ad justificandum Andream Johnson et Agnetem alias Lanie Scot videlicet dictum Andream convictum de heresi et ipsam Agnetem de magica arte vulgo wichcraft etiam convictam etc.*" *Exchequer Rolls of Scotland, Edin., 1897, Vol. 16, p. 612.*
 2. "... *de crimine heresis et aliis quibuscunque criminibus etiam sortiligiis homicidiis et presbytericidiis inquirendi et inquiri faciendi et committendi ...*" *St. Andrews Formulare, Vol. II, p. 121.*

In this document fortune-telling or sorcery is dealt with in a different clause from heresy and considered quite separately; its gravity is quite clear from its conjunction with homicide and presbytericide.

From the same source comes the most important of all pre-Reformation witchcraft documents. There is only one known instance of obscure women being burnt for witchcraft as such before the Witchcraft Act of 1563, and this event took place on October 10th, 1542, when three witches were burnt at the stake in St. Andrews. We have two separate sources for this: the reference to expenses for the witches,⁽¹⁾ and the commission for their trial, which is headed,

"Commission for the accusing and summoning of witches and soothsayers and the proceeding against them to their condemnation and the handing over of them to the power of the secular judiciary."⁽²⁾

There was to be no question of their acquittal.

It is by no means obvious from the writ as to whether this trial was an unusual occasion or not. On the one hand, the phraseology of the commission is common form, and the subject matter consists mainly of arrangements for the trial, and pious references to the heinousness of the crimes. Even the actual wording of

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1. In *Rentale Sancti Andree*, ed. R.K. Hannay, S.H.S. 1913, p. 139.
 2. "Commissio ad accusandum et vocandum maleficas et sortilegas ac contra eas ad earum condemnationem et iudicis secularis potestati procedendum." *St. Andrews Formulare*, Vol. II, p. 365.

the crimes of the prisoners has the slickness of familiarity:

"... de et super premissis conspirationibus machinationibus illusionibus diabolicis ac superstitionibus et aliis maleficiis et sortilegiis per eas respective usitatis et praedicatis ..."

To weigh against this is the fact that not only were four very distinguished churchmen, John Major, Peter Chaplain, Martin Balfour, and John Winram, to try them, but they were to summon as assessors all the doctors, licentiates, and bachelors of theology they could get hold of. Furthermore we know that the witches were transported from Edinburgh and Dunfermline (at a cost of thirty three shillings and fourpence) in order to face this tribunal.⁽¹⁾

The legal position is also rather obscure, for the law instituting the death penalty for witchcraft was not passed until 1563. The writ makes more than one passing reference to Canon Law, but the inclusion of the charge of heresy alongside that of "diabolical machinations" may have been intended as a covering capital charge.⁽²⁾

Two points, however, stand out quite plainly. The first is that the women were hounded to death by

1. *Rentale Sancti Andree*, p. 139.

2. After a passage on the crime of sorcery the writ continues, *"... ac etiam heresis et aliis lese majestatis divine criminibus ac apostasiis ..."*

neighbours who feared them. There are frequent references to "trusty witnesses", to the witches having been denounced to them, and to "temporal damages"⁽¹⁾ which were inflicted upon people, or at least, threatened.⁽²⁾ The women were undistinguished and may well have been little more than common scolds. We know them only by their initials as they were preserved by John Lauder in his *Formulare*, but they seem to have aroused a great deal of local hatred.

The other important feature of the writ is the almost complete scepticism of the Bishop, and presumably of the other leaders of the Scottish Church, as to the reality of witchcraft. The worst aspect of the crime as far as he was concerned was that the women had led others away from their Christian faith. Their practices were diabolical illusions and superstitions, and apostasy from true religion:

"In recent days, to our great displeasure, it has been brought to our notice by many creditable witnesses that certain women, viz. J. S. and M. L. and J. G. alias S., caring little for the salvation of their souls, and putting aside the fear of the Most High, have engaged, collectively and singularly, in divers conspiracies, diabolic machinations and illusions and apostacies; using respectively in that the apostate art of witchcraft and sorcery, and have committed various other temporal crimes, and have brought about, or threatened to bring about, various bodily infirmities on the subjects of this

1. "... et damnis temporalibus et corporalibus per eas et earum quamlibet nequiter et respective perpetratis illatis et commissis seu perpetrari et committi saltem comminatis"
St. Andrews Formulare, p. 176.

2. *My italics.*



kingdom through their witchcrafts and enchantments. And (which is yet more serious), on this occasion, they strove by their incantations, superstitions, illusions, and harmful witchcraft, to draw with them and corrupt various of both sexes faithful to Christ, from true Christian piety and religion to heresy and the slime of apostacy and witchcrafts, to death and damnation. Being therefore in many respects of ill reputation, and vehemently suspect, and their offence being denounced to us, they stand committed to the strong guard of the prisons in our castle at St. Andrews by the command (since we, at that time, were in France) of our vicars general."⁽¹⁾

To regard witchcraft in this manner in the year 1542 was to be almost alone in Christendom. Both in England and on the continent, in Catholic and Reformed areas, witchcraft was regarded as an evil reality, rather than an illusion.

Ten years later, in 1552, John Hamilton,

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1. *"Sane superioribus diebus ad aures nostras non sine animi nostri gravi displicentia multorum fidedignorum relatione pervenit quod quedam mulieres, viz. J.S. ac M.L. et J.G. alias S., animarum suarum saluti providere minime satagentes sed dei altissimi timore postposito, de nonnullis conspirationibus et machinationibus ac illusionibus diabolicis et apostasiis per eas et earum quamlibet ut malifrice sortilege et apostate arte malifica ea in parte respective utentes commissis ac diversis aliis damnis etiam temporalibus et infirmitatibus corporalibus diversis hujus regni incolis per earum malificia et sortilegia illatis seu inferri comminatis, et ea occasione (quod et deterius est) diversos utriusque sexus Christifideles per earum incantationes superstitiones ac illusiones et malificia abutentes a vera Christiana pietate et religione et in hereseos ac apostasie et malificarum labe secum in interitum et damnationem subtrahere et subvertere nitentes, multipliciter infamate vehementerque suspecte et nobis denuntiate ac propterea per nostros vicarios generales et de eorum mandato (nobis tunc apud Gallias agentibus) in castro nostro S. Andree carceribus et firme custodie, sufficientibus contra eas et earum quamlibet precedentibus judiciis, mancipate existunt." St. Andrews Formulare, pp. 175-176.*

Archbishop of St. Andrews, published his catechism.

The authorship is in fact in dispute; it may well have been John Winram who wrote it, but whoever is responsible it is a very simple exposition of the basic tenets of the Christian faith. It contains a passage against the practice of witchcraft and the belief in it:

"... The nynt, thai brek this command,⁽¹⁾ quhasaevir usis wichecraft, Nicromansie, Enchantment, Juglarie or trastis in thame, or seikis thair help, quhasa lippinnis to werdis or dremis, quhasa lippinnis to defend thair self or thair beistis, or geir aganis fyre, watter, swerd, noysum beistis, with certene takinnis or writingis superstitiously.

And gyf ony man or woman wald say: Oft tymis we se, that thingis cummis to passe, quilk divinaris sais. Oft tymes men and beistis ar helpit be wytchis charmis. Oft tymes geir, tynt or stowin, is gettin agane be cowngerars, and sa apperandly, it is nocht evil done to seike for siclike help. O thou wretchit and blind man or woman, that thinkis or says siclike wordis, know thow weil and understand, that quhen saevir thow speris or seikis for ony help, counsel, remede, consolation or defence at ony wytche, socerar, cowngerar or siclike dissaveris, thow dois greit injure to thi Lord God, because that thow takis the honour and service quhilk aucht to be gevin to God allanerly, and giffis it to the devil quhilk is deidly enemye to thy saul. For without dout, all Wytches, Nigromanceris and siclike, workis be operation of the devil under a paction, condition, band or obligation of service and honour to be made to him. Mairour thow sa doand, condemnis thi awin saule to panis eternal, because that thow forsakis utterly thi Lord God quhilk hais creat the to his awin ymage and liknes, and redemit the with na lesse price than with the precious blud of his awin natural sone our salviour Jesus Christ. Attour thow brekis thi condition and bank of service made to him in the sacrament of Baptyme. Finally thou art made as ane Pagan, Saracene or Infidele and sall perische for evirmair, except thou amend thy lyfe be trew, scharp, and lang penance. Quhat is deidly syn, bot wilfull transressioun of the command of God? Than, how

1. *"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul ..."* Luke 10.27. R.S.V.

can thow that is ane wytche, or giffis credite to be helpit be wytchcraft, excuse the fra deidly syn and endles damnation, seand that God almychty expresly in his haly law forbiddis al kindis of wytchecraft and siclike devilrie saiaand thus: *Non augurabimini, nec observabitis somnia.* Use na kynd of wytchcraft, and tak na tent to dremis. And a litle efter hend: *Non declinetis ad Magos, nec ab ariolis aliquid sciscitemi ut polluamini per eos, ego dominus deus vester.* Gang nocht to witchis for ony help or confort, nother seik for counsell at ony sorcerer, for sa doand, ye are fylit in your saulis be thame, for I am your Lord God. And to mak an answer to thi argument. The devil sumtyme in smal matters schawis to the verite, bot to that effeck, that finally he may cause the gif credit to his lesingis and black falset, in maters of greit wecht concerning thi saul. Sumtyme he will help the to get agane the guddis of this world, bot his intent is, that finally he may cause the tyme the guddis of the world to cum. Sumtyme he wil help the to recover the helth of thi body, bot to that effeck, that finally he may bring the to eternal dede of thi saul. Quharfor all trew christin men and wemen, suld nocht only be the command of God use na kind of witchcraft, bot alsua suld seik for na help at witchis, because that all sicklike doingis is injurius to God, and damnable to man's saul."⁽¹⁾

This is very nearly the voice of the early medieval Church on the subject of witchcraft: the real issue is that of the damnation of the soul. But there is a difference, for though there is mention of the folly of giving "credite to be helpit be wytchcraft," and a certain vagueness about the extent to which the sorcerer may or may not have power to make or mar, harm or heal, credulity about the physical power of the Devil and his agents is explicit. Furthermore, the demonic pact is mentioned in passing, though without any of the normal details. There is no mention of nocturnal gatherings

1. *The Catechism of Archbishop Hamilton*, ed. T.G. Law, Oxford, 1884, pp. 49-51.

or demon lovers. The main point is that so far as the Devil has power to assist human beings in their affairs, he does so only to the damnation of the souls of those who have asked for his help. In so far as this point of view is representative of the leaders of the Scottish Church at this point, it can be said that while they accepted and shared in the common beliefs of the time, they had not yet lost their sense of perspective in the way that the German, French, and north Italian ecclesiastical authorities had done. It is interesting that the authorities for this passage on witchcraft (which are cited in the margin of the catechism) are St. Augustine and the Bible: the Latin quotations are from Leviticus, chapter nineteen. Both these would be acceptable to Reformed theologians.

The next pre-Reformation case known to us occurs in the town records of Elgin:

"The comptur in 1560,⁽¹⁾ discharges him of 40s debursed be him at ye town's command, for the binns to ye wyffis yat war wardit in ye stepill for witches in summer last bypast."⁽²⁾

There is no record of what happened to these women.

They may well have been executed. Two years later

Stirling banished two witches from the town. In the

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1. G. F. Black queries this date, but gives no reason for doing so, in *Calendar of Cases of Witchcraft in Scotland, 1510-1727*, New York, 1938, (hereafter cited as *Cases of Witchcraft*), p. 21.
 2. Quoted by Herbert B. Mackintosh in *Elgin, Past and Present*, Elgin, 1914, p. 120.

words of the Burgh records:

"Janet Lyndsay being sumtyme duelland in Cambus, and Isabell Keir, hir dochter, being brutit with wichecraft, and na man to persew thame thairfoir, oblist thaim of thair awin confessioun that thai sall nocht be fundin in this town again, undir the pane of deid."⁽¹⁾

This is the last recorded case of witchcraft before the passing of the Witchcraft Act, (9 Mary c. 73) in June, 1563.

There is no evidence that the Reformation in itself affected the prevailing beliefs at all. On the matter of witchcraft John Knox believed more or less what his Roman predecessors in Scotland had. He may have been credulous about the powers of the witch, but his account of the death of Huntly in 1562 is ambiguous on this point:

"The Erle himself (Huntly) was tacken alyve; his two sons, Johne foirsaid, and Adam Gordoun, war tacken with him. The Erle, immediatlie after his tacken, departed this lyiff without any wound,, or yitt appearance of any strock, whair of death might have ensued; and so, becaus it was laitt, he was cassen over-thorte a pair of crealles, and so was caryed to Abirdene, and was laid in the Tolbuyth thairof, that the response whiche his wyffis wyttches had gevin mycht be fulfilled, whay all affirmed (as the most parte say) that that same nycht should he be in the Tobuyth of Abirdine without any wound upoun his body. When his Lady gatt knowledge thairof, sche blamed hir principale witche, called Janet; but sche stoutlie defended hir self (as the devill can ever do,) and affirmed that she geve a trew answer, albeit she spack nott all the treuth; for she knew that he should be thair dead: but that could nott proffeit my Lady. Scho was angrye and sorye for a seassone, but the Devill, the

1. *Extracts from the Burgh Records of Stirling, 1519-1666,* Glasgow, 1887, p. 80.

Messe, and wyttches have als great credyte of hir this day as thei had sevin yearis ago."⁽¹⁾

The last passage shows an interesting turning of the tables. The medieval Church had accused heretics of witchcraft; now, at the Reformation, Knox connected it with Catholicism. For him, diabolism and adherence to the old Church were very closely linked. Indeed, references by the first Scottish Reformers to the activity of the Devil among the affairs of men, were more often meant to indicate the progress of Rome than the doings of witches. When Knox remarked that, "The Devill finding his rainzeis lowse, ran fordwarte in his course ..." ⁽²⁾

he was simply referring to the Queen's Catholic practices in 1561.

Knox was himself accused of witchcraft by a Catholic opponent, on the grounds that only by the use of love potions could he have won the affections of, "ane damosel of nobil blud, and he ane auld decrepit creatur of maist bais degrie of onie that could be found in the cuntrey". For when Knox was ^{about fifty three,} ~~sixty~~; he married Margaret Stewart, daughter of Lord Ochiltree, who was only fourteen at the time. And a Catholic account of Scotland, written about 1660, attributes the

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1. *The History of the Reformation, in The Works of John Knox, ed. David Laing, Edin., 1848, Vol. II, pp. 357-358.*
 2. *Op. cit. Vol. II, p. 291.*

increase in witchcraft in the later years of the sixteenth century to the influence of the Reformers.⁽¹⁾

In fact, as in other countries, both parties in Scotland tried to associate the practice of diabolism with the opposing faith; neither condemned the belief along with the practice.

Before 1563, as we have seen, witchcraft appears to have been punished by the secular authorities only when it was also treasonable, or when there was a previous prosecution and conviction under Canon Law by an ecclesiastical court. In 1563 witchcraft made its entrance into the criminal law of Scotland. Before that date there is no mention of witchcraft in any form, not even of simple sorcery, astrology, or fortune-telling, in the Statutes. This Witchcraft Act was one of a series through which the legislature took over responsibility for various moral issues. According to Knox, "Thei began a newe schift, to wit, to speak of the punishment of adulterye, of witchcraft, and to seik the restitution of the glebes and manses to the Ministeris of the Kirk, and of the reparatioun of churches: and theirby thei thought to have pleased the godlye that war hyghtlie offended at their slackness."⁽²⁾

The Act certainly appears to have been passed at lay rather than clerical instigation, and, as might be expected, stresses the social more than the theological

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1. *Ballentine's Report in Innes Review*, 1957, Vol. 8, pp. 102-103, and pp. 116-118.
 2. *Op. cit.* Vol. II, p. 383.

nature of the crime.⁽¹⁾ Its sceptical phrasing has been commented on, though usually underemphasised. The Witchcraft Act is even less credulous than Hamilton's catechism. The phrase,

"That na manner of persoun ... take upone hand in ony tymes heir after to use ony maner of Witchcraftis Sorsarie or Necromancie nor gif thame selfis furth to have ony sic craft or knowlege thair of thairthrow abusand the pepill ..."

has been interpreted to mean that those who drew up the law believed that "to use ony maner of Witchcraftis Sorsarie or Necromancie" was a genuine possibility for gaining unnatural power, although some persons might be merely "giving themselves forth" to have such power.

In fact, it is not stretching interpretation of the Act too far to say that the preamble concerning,

"The havy and abominabill superstition usit be divers of the liegis of this Realme be using of Witchcraftis Sorsarie and Necromancie and credence gevin thairto in tymes bygane aganis the Law of God And for avoyding and away putting of all sic vane superstition in tymes to cum.."

makes the attitude of the legislators to the crime quite clear. It was superstition in general, and exploiters and tricksters in particular, against whom they were legislating. The distinction between users of witchcraft and those who pretended knowledge of witchcraft was less a distinction than an attempt to be comprehensive. Nor is there any illogicality in their imposition of

1. See Appendix I for the full text of the Witchcraft Act.

punishment - that of the death penalty - equally upon the consulters of witches as on the witches themselves. They were all part of the network of superstition that it was hoped to eradicate.

The Scottish Witchcraft Act of 1563 was, in fact, just precisely as sceptical as the Witchcraft Act of 1736 that repealed it.⁽¹⁾ There is no essential difference between "giving themselves forth to have such power", and "pretending to exercise or use any kind of witchcraft enchantment or sorcery". The two acts, which were passed one at the beginning, and the other at the end of the period of witchcraft persecution in the British Isles express very similar attitudes to the credibility of magical practice. They differ only in the severity of the punishment that they award for such an attempt.

It is also interesting to compare the Scottish Act with the contemporary English ones. The two early English Statutes are those of 33 Henry VIII, c. 8., passed in the Parliament of 1541-1542, which was repealed by Somerset's government in 1548, and of 5. Elizabeth, c. 16,⁽²⁾ passed early in 1563, a few months before the Scottish Act.

Both of these are longer and more detailed than the Scottish one, and they go into many aspects of magical

1. See Appendix I.

2. See Appendix I.

practice. The principal difference between them is that the 1542 Act is sceptical and speaks of "gyving faithe & credit to such fantsticall practises", and of "pretending to understand and get knowledge." The real sin and crime then believed to be inherent in such practises and beliefs, was that they were "to the great Offence of Godes lawe, hurt and damage of the Kinges Subjectes" - a phrase which does already indicate some element of credulity - "and losse of the sowles of such Offenders." The Elizabethan Act is very much more credulous:

"... many fantasticall and devilishe persons have divised and practised Invocations and Conjuracions of evill and wicked Spirites, and have used and practised Wytche-craftes Enchantementes Charmes and Sorceries, to the Destruction of the Persons and Goodes of Their Neighebouris and other Subjectes of this Realme."

The English Acts were, on paper at least, more lenient than the Scottish, the punishments being graded according to the heinousness of the offence. In practice, however, especially during the authority of the Elizabethan Statute, many persons were put to death for alleged witchcraft practices which did not involve murder or physical damage. (1)

It is clear that in 1563 the English legislators were more credulous concerning the powers of witchcraft than the Scottish. Further than that one cannot go.

1. See G.L. Kittredge, *Witchcraft in Old and New England*, Cambridge, Mass., 1929, *passim*.

In practice the seventeenth century Scots found their Act more than adequate to their purposes. Indeed in 1649 the Act was ratified and confirmed as it stood.⁽¹⁾

The effects of the Scottish Act followed a similar pattern to that of the various regional enactments and proclamations of medieval Europe. Attempts to put a stop to superstition merely had the effect of drawing public attention to it, and making it appear that those in authority took it very seriously; and it served in the end as a stimulus both to practice and to inquisition. The milder penalties and penances of the early medieval church and the ridicule of the eighteenth century did far more to dispel superstition than the solemn censures and fierce punishments of the witch hunt.

The passing of the Act was not in fact a signal for a wild outbreak of persecution. After 1563 there is a slow increase in documented cases,⁽²⁾ but it cannot be certain that this is not closely paralleled by the increase in the number of records which were kept and have survived. Certainly the cases appear to be of the same general type as the earlier ones known to us. Witches appear as fortune-tellers and healers, and as scolds and workers of misfortune. They are regularly

1. *A.P.S.* Vol. VI, p. 152, par. 2.

2. *Cases of Witchcraft*, pp. 21-23.

consulted by the great of the land; or at least prominent persons are frequently accused of having had resort to them. In May 1569 William Stewart, Lyon King of Arms was hanged in St. Andrews "for dyvers pointes of witchcraft and necromancie."⁽¹⁾ The Earl of Gowrie and Sir Robert Gordon of Gordonstoun were supposed to have studied "the black art" in Padua,⁽²⁾ but there is little to support this⁽³⁾ apart from the fact that they travelled widely abroad and would have had opportunities of dabbling had they so desired. Bishop Adamson was another victim of this type of slander and rumour.

But while the pattern of witchcraft practice in the thirty years after the Reformation appeared much the same, the interest of the authorities, both ecclesiastical and secular, certainly increased. It should be borne in mind, however, that this intensification of interest was paralleled in many other criminal and moral concerns. Unfortunately there were no pronouncements which give any details of the current theory of witchcraft; such statements as there were are merely an indication of a continuing attempt to

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1. *Historie and life of King James the Sext.* Edin., 1804, p. 66.
 2. F. Marian McNeill, *The Silver Bough*, Glasgow, 1957, p. 130.
 3. An examination of a catalogue of the library of Sir Robert Gordon showed it to be empty of the standard witchcraft manuals and treatises.

check superstition, exploitation, and malicious spell-binding.

Two years after the Act was passed, witchcraft was included in six articles presented to the Queen by the General Assembly of June, 1565, among a list of "horrible crimes" to be suppressed.⁽¹⁾ In 1567, Parliament was to consider,

"... how witchcraft salbe puneist and Inquisitioun takin therof and that the executioun of death may be usit alsweill aganis thame that consultis with the witche seikis hir support mainteinis or defendis hir as aganis hir self."⁽²⁾

This already sound a slightly more credulous note in that there is no longer any suggestion that all witchcraft is pretended witchcraft.

In February, 1572-1573, witchcraft was exempted from the benefit of pacification,⁽³⁾ and in December, 1573 from the remissions.⁽⁴⁾ The same year an Act of the General Assembly ordained that,

"... all bishops, superintendents, and commissioners for planting of kirks, to call suche persons as sall be suspected to consult with witches, before them, at their particular visitatiouns or otherwise; and to caus them mak publict repentance in sackcloath, upon the Lord's day, in time of preaching, under the paine of excommunicatioun. And if they be disobedient, to proceed to excommunicatioun, due admonitiouns preceeding."⁽⁵⁾

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1. *John Knox, History of the Reformation, ed. cit., II, p. 484.*
 2. *A. P. S., III, p. 44.*
 3. *Register of the Privy Council, Edin. 1881, II, p. 198.*
 4. *R.P.C., II, p. 318.*
 5. *David Calderwood, History of the Kirk of Scotland, Wodrow Society, 1842-49, III, p. 299-300.*

In 1575 another act of the General Assembly set out articles to be presented to the Regent, which included the claim,

"... That the Kirk hath power to cognosce and decerne upon heresies, blasphemie, witchcraft, and violation of the Sabbath day without preudice always of the civill punishment."⁽¹⁾

But this did not apparently have very much effect, for in 1583, among Articles of the General Assembly to be presented to the King, there was the complaint,

"... That there is no punishment for incest, adulterie, witchcraft, murthers, abominable and horrible oaths, in suche sort that daylie sinne increaseth, and provoketh the wrath of God against the whole countrie."⁽²⁾

Such pronouncements as these give little indication of the minds of the men behind them, either lay or clerical; and such accounts of trials that survive give little more. It is clear that the idea of witchcraft was taken for granted by the educated and the influential, but it is less clear what that idea was: to how many people witchcraft was a folly and nuisance, and to how many a reality and a fear. By 1590 there were still no works on witchcraft written in Scotland, and apparently no widespread circulation of continental demonological handbooks. Even occult philosophy seems to have been rare. There was little to prepare either people, Church, or judiciary, for the revelations of the North Berwick witches, whose trials began in the November

1. John Row, *History of the Kirk of Scotland, 1558-1637*,
Wodrow Soc., 1842, p. 57.

2. Calderwood, III, p. 736.

of 1590. To what extent those trials marked the beginning of a new attitude to witchcraft in Scotland; one more akin to that held in other parts of Europe, will be discussed in the fourth chapter.

CHAPTER THREE.

JOHN CALVIN'S ATTITUDE TO MAGIC AND WITCHCRAFT.

By 1590 Scotland had been open for a full thirty years to the influences of Calvin and Genevan protestantism. For this reason alone it would be worth while examining here any theories of witchcraft coming from these sources in order to see in what way and to what extent they may have affected Scottish thought and practice. The fact that Calvin and Calvinism have, apparently without exception, been regarded as the principal cause of the witchcraft persecution in Scotland⁽¹⁾ makes such an examination essential. It is inserted at this point so that the Calvinistic content of the Scottish witchcraft writings discussed in the remainder of this essay may be more fairly assessed.

One thing can be said quite definitely; and that is that nothing done or said in Geneva or by Calvin could possibly have influenced the Scottish clergy or judiciary *against* the persecution of witches. How far there was actually any incitement to persecute is another matter.

1. See e.g., Sir Walter Scott, *Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft*, 2nd ed., London, 1831, pp. 223 ff.; R. Trevor Davies, *Four Centuries of Witch Beliefs*, London, 1947, pp. 5-12; Geoffrey Parrinder, *Witchcraft*, Harmondsworth, 1958, p. 25.

There are two distinct possible sources of influence: the practice of Geneva with regard to witchcraft under Calvin and Beza, and the actual writings of Calvin on the subject. The first will be discussed only briefly, for though it may have had some bearing on the Scottish attitude to witchcraft as a whole, it can have had little on the demonological literature.

In the witchcraft manual of the Jesuit, Martin Del Rio,⁽¹⁾ which was widely used in the seventeenth century on the continent and in Scotland, and, to a lesser extent, in England, it is stated that Calvin once burned over five hundred witches in three months. The assertion is quite unfounded, but may have had some influence.

In actual fact the number of witches executed during the period of Calvin's influence in Geneva, that is to say from about 1541 to his death in 1564, was about forty; but the picture of Calvin as a savage persecutor of witches is not entirely without foundation, for the details of the Genevan trials and executions are as unpleasant as any upon record.

The persecution was stimulated by a serious outbreak of the plague in Geneva, which reached its maximum ferocity in 1545, and which, as in the past,

1. *Disquisitionem Magicarum Libri Sex*, Louvain, 1599., prolog.

was attributed to witchcraft. Certain individuals were accused of spreading the disease by smearing unguents on the doors of dwelling houses, and during the investigations which followed were forced under torture to incriminate others. An atmosphere of panic and distrust spread throughout the city, and accusations were levelled on all sides. By the time the plague and the accompanying terror had subsided, about thirty four people, mostly women, had been executed after torture for making a pact with the devil to spread the infection. Many more had been banished, and others had committed suicide in prison.

Writers on Calvin, with the exception of Professor Mackinnon,⁽¹⁾ can be divided into his attackers and his defenders; and there is some dispute between these two factions as to the extent of Calvin's direct interference in these prosecutions. His part in the proceedings has been glossed over or denied by some of his biographers,⁽²⁾ but the evidence of the City Council Register seems to be clear here.⁽³⁾ It is true that Calvin asked the Council that the death agonies of the victims need not be unduly prolonged, but he gave evidence against

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1. James Mackinnon, *Calvin and the Reformation*, London, 1936.
 2. e.g., Williston Walker, *John Calvin*, N.P., 1898, p. 283, Emil Doumergue, *Jean Calvin*, Lausanne, 1899-1927, VI, p. 49, and James Mackinnon, *Calvin and the Reformation*, p. 91.
 3. As retailed by Oskar Pfister, *Christianity and Fear*, London, 1948, pp. 390 ff.

some of the accused sorcerers, and exhorted the Council to do their duty. In a letter to Myconius he shows that he shared the fears of the citizens over the plague-spreading activities of the witches, and regarded their sufferings as right and just:

"Here God is trying us sorely. A conspiracy of men and women has been discovered, who for the space of three years have spread the plague through the city, by what sorceries I know not (*nescio quibus veneficiis*). Fifteen women have already been burnt. Some of the men have been punished even more severely. Some have committed suicide in prison. Twenty-five are still in custody. Notwithstanding the conspirators do not cease to smear the locks of doors with their ointments. Behold the perils that beset us. Hitherto God has preserved our household uninjured however frequently it has been assailed."⁽¹⁾

Were this the only instance of witch persecution in the Geneva of Calvin it would be possible to dismiss it fairly lightly as a regrettable incident which arose through a dread of the plague, the real causes of which were not at that time understood. However, a few years later, in 1549, six suspected sorcerers were arrested,

1. *The translation given here is that of R. Trevor Davies, Four Centuries of Witch Beliefs, p. 7, who points out that that of H.Y. Reyburn (John Calvin, London, 1914, p. 129) misses the allusion to witchcraft in the phrase "by what means I know not". This is true also of the translation by David Constable, Letters of John Calvin, Edin., 1855, I, p. 428, who renders it, "by what mischievous device I know not." There is of course no necessity to translate *veneficium* by any other word than "poison", but poisoning and sorcery had always been closely connected in the popular imagination, and by this comparatively late date *veneficium* seems to have been a normal term for witchcraft. Certainly in this particular context it seems inherently probable that it was poisoning through sorcery that Calvin intended.*

accused of witchcraft alone. Their principal crime, in other words, was that of compacting with the devil. Two of them, a husband and wife, were burned; the others were horribly tortured and eventually released and banished for life under penalty of death. Some of them consistently refused to confess to having practised black magic.⁽¹⁾

In these proceedings, which began on October 9th and were protracted until December 8th when a sentence of banishment was pronounced upon the last of them, Calvin intervened not once, but several times, to exhort the Council to put to death all those under arrest, to investigate further the accusations which had been laid against several others, and to increase the torture on those they were questioning. He was not successful in this, however. The Council were clearly anxious to close the matter with as little disturbance as possible.

These two series of investigations in 1545 and 1549 appear to be the sum total of witch persecutions in Geneva till Calvin's death. It is worth noting too that Calvin's influence became increasingly strong, especially after the political victory of 1555 when all four of the syndics (the leading oligarchy of magistrates) were of his party. After 1549 there were only a few incidents,

1. The story is told in full, though well wrapped up in his psychological theories by Oskar Pfister, Calvins Eingreifen in der Hexenprozesse, Zurich, 1947, and in less detail in Christianity and Fear, pp. 419-428.

such as the imprisonment in 1556 of some people who had drunk of a famous healing spring; and this was more an attack on superstition than a concession to it. It is impossible to say, however, whether this flagging interest was due to the continued determination of the secular authorities not to prosecute in cases of alleged sorcery, or to Calvin's preoccupation with more pressing matters. There is not the slightest evidence that he changed his opinion towards the end of his life; in fact his *Harmony of the Pentateuch* which contains his relentless commentary upon the text "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live" (Exodus 22. 18), was written in 1563, the year before his death.

Soon after he died, however, Geneva had a series of witch hunts, in 1566, 1568, and again in 1615, and this may well have helped to build up the evil reputation which Calvinism has in witchcraft historiography. In any case the details of the short period of persecution while Calvin was alive are sufficiently macabre to lend colour to the idea that Calvin, like Luther, took over the demonology of the pre-Reformation Church exactly as it stood.⁽¹⁾ It is therefore something of a surprise to turn to Calvin's actual writings of the subject; and in our assessment

1. See e.g., J.T. McNeill, *History and Character of Calvinism*, Oxford, 1954, p. 172.

of these there are two things to be borne in mind. The first is that Calvin never joined the witchcraft debate as such. The whole problem of demonology and witchcraft was clearly not of primary importance to him. Despite the fact that superstition generally was as rife as it had even been, and that theories of natural and demonic magic were occupying the attention of many distinguished minds, the nearest Calvin ever got to devoting a whole work specifically to the problem was a vernacular discourse against astrology later printed as a Latin tract: the *Admonitio Adversus Astrologiam*.⁽¹⁾ In view of the quantity and breadth of his extant writings (fifty six volumes in the *Corpus Reformatorum*) this reticence is unexpected. In order to find out what he thought about witchcraft it is necessary to search for the relevant passages in the *Institutio Christianae Religionis*,⁽²⁾ the biblical commentaries, and the tracts. From these we find that though "diabolical superstitions" is a phrase which he did use in connection with sorcery and witchcraft, most of the times he used it he was referring to the beliefs of the Roman Catholic Church.

The second caveat to be made is that if, in following up these scattered references, an attempt is made to formulate a Calvinist theory of demonology, it

1. Geneva, 1549.

2. Using the third Latin edition, 1559.

is rather more than Calvin attempted to do himself. The idea that Calvin was a ruthlessly logical thinker who set out to do for Protestantism what Aquinas did for Catholicism can be taken too far. His primary purpose was not to write a "Summa",⁽¹⁾ but to expound Scripture. Everything was subordinated to that.

After allowing for all this it is possible to go on to an examination of his demonological views and the important ways in which they differ from the late medieval conceptions. The first and most noticeable feature of all Calvin's references to demons and spirits is that he constantly claims that this is an area of knowledge about which it is not given to us to know everything, and into which we should not probe too far:

"Some complain that his (the Devil's) fall, its cause, manner, time and kind (specimen) is not distinctly related in Scripture; but this is nothing to us - if not wholly to be passed over, certainly to be lightly alluded to, for it was not worthy of the Holy Spirit to feed curiosity with idle histories."⁽²⁾

This was a point well worth making. So often demonology led to the most preposterously detailed theorising on the ways and means of the Devil and his agents - Calvin refers to the "garrulity" of the Pseudo-Dionysius on the subject,⁽³⁾ - and the witchcraft debate was simply used as a peg on

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1. The frequent mistranslation of "Institutio" by the plural "Institutes" is rather misleading on this point. The term "Institutio" was in common use by humanists from about 1500 to indicate a treatise or essay; and Calvin intended the original brief 1536 edition of the Institutio Christianae Religionis as a humanist offering to a humanist king: Francis I of France.
 2. Institutio, Book I, Ch. XIV, 16.
 3. Instit. I, XIV, 4.

which to hang both the popular and esoteric pornography of the day. Calvin had not the slightest interest in adding to this. There is nothing to be found in his works of incubi and succubi, and the "bodies of congealed air" with which they were supposed to copulate with human beings. Nor is there a detailed discussion of the possibility of the witches' Sabbath and the flight through the air. This is all "garrulity".

Another very obvious way in which he differs from his predecessors is that he always refers to the belief in and practice of witchcraft as a superstition and an illusion; though admittedly a diabolical illusion, by which he meant one specifically put there by the Devil. In the commentary on Exodus mentioned earlier, he says that "It has been supposed that the law was directed against women, because their sex is more disposed to superstition".⁽¹⁾ The *Malleus Maleficarum* on the other hand, while making a passing reference to their credulous tendencies, produced page after page and authority after authority to emphasize their greater propensity to *wickedness*.

Calvin's conviction that the belief in the power of witchcraft is a superstition, and a superstition which

1. *Harmony of the Pentateuch*, Geneva, 1563, C.T.S., Edn., 1853, Vol. II, p. 90.

it is idle to investigate too deeply, results in a vagueness which is evident in the following passages from his commentaries. In the commentary on Micah, 5, 12: "*et excidam augures, vel divinos, e manu tua; et praestigiatores non erant tibi*", he says - in a discussion of the Hebrew word behind *augures*:

"Some render the word jugglers, and others, augurs or diviners. We cannot know of a certainty what kind of superstition it was, nor the other which immediately follows: for the prophet mentions here two words which mean nearly the same thing. There is no doubt but that some, in that age, were called augurs or diviners, and others called jugglers or astrologers, who are now called fortune tellers. But on this subject there is no necessity of much labour; for the prophet simply shows here that the people could not be preserved by God, unless they were cleansed from these defilements. These superstitions, we know, were forbidden and condemned by God's law ...⁽¹⁾

And in his commentary on Malachi, 3, 5: "*et appropinquo ad vos in iudicium, et in testis velox contra praestigiatores, vel divinos,*" he says,

"He then mentions several kinds of evils in which he includes the sins in which the Jews implicated themselves. He first names diviners or sorcerers. It is indeed true, that among various kinds of superstitions this was one; but as the word is found here by itself, the prophet no doubt means to include all kinds of diviners, soothsayers, false prophets and all such deceivers ... he includes all those corruptions which are contrary to the true worship of God."⁽²⁾

Calvin's most detailed work on the question of superstition (apart from those directed against the Catholics) is the *Admonitio Adversus Astrologiam*.

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1. *Commentaries on the Twelve Minor Prophets, C.T.S., Edin., 1841, Vol. III, p. 322.*
 2. *Ibid., Vol. V, p. 376.*

Astrology was a subject on which he may have felt deeply, for it was not so much the ignorant and unlettered of the day who consulted the stars before taking action, but the erudite and the sophisticated:

"But in the meantime we must recollect what I have lately glanced at, that they (the Magi) not only led others into error, but were also deceived, because they thought there was some science in the deceptions of their magic, as nowadays we see that the fortune-tellers and other imposters, who call themselves judicial astrologers, so pride themselves in their follies, as to have no hesitation in taking the first rank among the learned."⁽¹⁾

The *Admonitio* does not deal directly with the problem of witchcraft, but it does give some indication of his attitude to magic and superstition generally, and for this reason it is worth discussing here.

Calvin begins by distinguishing between "natural" and "judicial" astrology, and "Natural astrology" like most of his contemporaries he approves on "scientific" grounds, and shows himself quite knowledgeable about the scientific theories of the day:

"We must confess that there is a convenience betwixte the starres or planets and the disposition of man's body ..."⁽²⁾

And again:

"I grant ... that the starres have in deed some concourse to forme the complexions: and specially those that concern the body; but for all that I denie that the principall cause cometh from thence ..."

1. *Commentary on Exodus 8, 18-19 in Harmony of the Pentateuch, Vol. I, pp. 166 ff.*

2. *Quotations are from the English translation: An Admonicion against Astrologye, London, 1554.*

He elaborates on the usefulness of the science, pointing out its limitations, and then inveighs against those who develop the illegitimate branch known as "judiciall astrology" - that area of the subject which deals with fortune-telling, the casting of horoscopes, and so on. He relates the two branches thus:

"If any man would in praising of Wine, allowe dronkenesse: would not all the worlde rise up against him, because he shoulde be a wicked corrupter of God's workes: The same do they which do borrow or rather steal the tytle of a good and approved science, to colour certaine phantasticall imaginations clean contrary to the truth of the science which they do boast of."

In his attack on "judicial astrology" Calvin first makes an appeal to common sense:

"There is nothing more certaine than that the sede of the father and of the mother have an influence and vertue of an hundred folde more power than hath all the starres together, yet notwithstanding a man may see that it faileth often times, and the disposjtion also may be diverse."

He then gives illustrations of the absurdity of fortune telling. Will all the babies born on the same day have similar careers? Were all the soldiers who were killed on one day in a particular battle born under the same star?

After dismissing fortune-telling on these grounds, he then moves on to theological objections. These are, in brief, that God is Lord of the stars, and therefore he alone knows the physical destiny of a man.

Furthermore, that most important part of man, his soul, is no concern of the stars at all. Grace is arbitrary:

"But if we come to the grace that God geveth to his children, at such tyme as he reformeth them by his holy spirite, and changeth them in such sorte that they are worthely named New Creatures: whereto serveth all the aspects and respects of the planets: Is this it whereupon God hath founded his eternal election: If the Byrth tellers and castars of mens nativities wil alledge this that a man may use these things as inferior means. This is a very foolish cavillation. We do see how it hath pleased God of set purpose to draw us back from such considerations."

Calvin is nearly always quite clear on magic. His reply is simply that God is in control. Magic is an illusion and has no real power. It is a fantasy and an invention of the Devil. And given all this it is reasonable to ask what has gone wrong. How was it possible for Calvin to show that he was a sophisticated humanist, contemptuous of past and contemporary superatition, and at the same time give unqualified acceptance and indeed elaboration to the famous text, from Exodus: "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live?"

It could^{be} and has been argued in Calvin's favour on this point, that the whole force of popular superstition was too much for him, that the sixteenth century was the heyday of the persecution, that there were only two vocal opponents of the witch theory during the whole of the century: Weyer, the German, and Reginald Scot, the Englishman; while the exponents of demonology

and witch activity were legion. Calvin would have had to be quite exceptionally far ahead of his time to protest against them. But this is in fact an argument which does much less than justice to Calvin. As a thinker he is in an entirely different class from either Reginald Scot or Weyer, able and clear sighted as both these men undoubtedly are. And had he chosen to take a really strong line against the persecution he undoubtedly could have done so. There is no evidence in his career to suggest that he ever shrank from saying what he really thought on any issue. There still remains the problem of why Calvin, believing, as he asserts, that the power of the witch was an illusion, thought it right and necessary to put the deluded creature to death. It is worth quoting in full his commentary upon the text in Exodus:

"We have lately seen how severely God avenged apostasy from the faith; but now he touches upon certain particular points when religion is not professedly forsaken, but some corruption is introduced, whereby its purity is affected. The first passage pronounces capital punishment upon witches; by which name Moses means enchantresses or sorceresses, who devote themselves to magic arts, either to injure persons by their fascinations, or to seek revelations from the devil; such as she was whom Saul consulted, although she might be called by a different name. Since such illusions carry with them a wicked renunciation of God, no wonder that he would have them punished with death. But since this pestilent crime would be no more tolerable in a man than a woman, it has been supposed that the law was directed against women, because their sex is more disposed

to superstition. Certainly the same enactment is made respecting males in Deuteronomy 18, 2, only the punishment is not there pronounced, but God merely prohibits any of the people from being an enchanter or a witch. Now it is clear that all the kinds which are there recited, are here included under one: so that God would condemn to capital punishment all augurs, and magicians and consultants with familiar spirits and necromancers and followers of magic arts, as well as enchanters. And this will appear more plainly from the second and third passages in which God declares that He "will set His face against all, that shall turn after such as have familiar spirits, and after wizards", so as to cut them off from his people; and then commands that they should be destroyed by stoning. Wherefore since it is not just that men should escape with impunity, when the infirmity of women is not spared, nor that dissimilar sentences should be pronounced in similar cases, the same punishment which was decreed against witches and enchantresses is now extended to either sex and to all magical superstitions".⁽¹⁾

One fundamental reason for Calvin why witches should be exterminated, then, was quite simply that it was the Word of God. Calvin was by no means the believer in the verbal inspiration of Scripture that he is sometimes made out to be, but there could be no escape for him from such a direct and unequivocal command as that. All that remained was to expound just what was involved in the command and who exactly the witches were. Clearly, though, Calvin was not particularly anxious to explain away this command, for in his exposition of the passage he makes its application just about as wide as it could possibly be. To understand his reasons for this we must go right back to his doctrine of the Devil.

1. Harmony of the Pentateuch, Vol. II, p. 90.

Calvin's doctrine of the Devil is the really vulnerable point of his theology - though not perhaps any more so than that of the Schoolmen. In the first place he asserts the independent reality of the person of the Devil:

"The philosophy is idle which asserts that these evil spirits are only the evil impulses and affections. Scripture calls them unclean spirits and apostate angels who degenerated from their original state, and their names sufficiently express that they are not motions and affections of the mind but rather truly what they are called, spirits gifted with sense and intelligence. When Christ and St. John compare the children of God with the children of the Devil would this not be absurd if the name of the Devil imported nothing but evil aspirations?"⁽¹⁾

He then goes on to say that although the Devil is an independent being with an independent power to deceive human beings by working, as it were, temporary diabolical miracles for them and by turning them away from faith in God, this power is only a very limited one delegated to him by God in order to further his purpose, which is the destruction of the wicked and the strengthening of the elect through temptation. The elect of God therefore he cannot ultimately touch though he may be permitted by God to try their strength. The damned are of course especially vulnerable to the tricks of the Devil:

1. *Instit. I. XIV. 19.*

"All men are not bewitched, indeed, with the jugglings of enchanters, neither are there Simons everywhere, which can so seduce and deceive; but my meaning is, that it is no wonder if Satan do mock men diversely in the dark; for they are subject to all errors whosoever are not governed by the Spirit of God" (1)

"And this is the just vengeance of God upon all idolaters, that being delivered up to a reprobate sense they can discern nothing" (2)

"It is objected again, that no man is free from danger when false divinations fly to and fro so fast. For even as well the good as the evil seem to be subject to the cozenage of Satan when the truth is darkened and overcast. The answer is ready, though Satan set snares for all men in general, yet are the godly delivered by the grace of God, lest they be caught together with the wicked. There is also a more manifest distinction set down in the Scripture because the Lord doth by this means try the faith and godliness of his, and doth make blind the reprobate, that they may perish as they be worthy." (3)

Earlier in the same passage he describes the nature of the Devil's power and its relationship to God's omnipotence:

"Why God doth grant Satan so great liberty, as to suffer him to deceive miserable men, and to bewitch them with true divinations?" (By these he means prophecies which turn out to be accurate). "I answer, that Satan hath never so much liberty granted him of God, save only that the unthankful world may be punished, which is so desirous of a lie, that it had rather be deceived than obey the truth." (4)

Satan, in fact, turns out to be the instrument of God for distinguishing the reprobate from the elect and for punishing them. The pastoral intention behind all this,

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1. *Commentary on Acts* (8, 9-11) C.TS. Edin., 1844, (Reprint of a translation by Christopher-Fetherston, 1585) Vol. I, p. 332.
 2. *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 506.
 3. *Commentary on Acts*, (16. 16) Vol. II, p. 109.
 4. *Ibid.*, p. 108.

oddly enough, is that of consolation and reassurance. The elect now know that they cannot be lost. This is evident in the catechism for children brought out on Calvin's return from exile in Strassbourg in 1539:

"Minister: Now what shall we say of wicked men and devils? Shall we say that they too are subject to Him?

Child: Although he does not govern them by his Spirit, yet he checks them by his power, as with a bridle, so that they are unable even to move unless he permits them to do so. Further, he even makes them ministers of his will, so that they are forced, unwilling and against their inclination, to effect what seems good to him.

Minister: What benefit accrues to you from the knowledge of this?

Child: Very much. For it would go ill with us, if anything were permitted wicked men and devils without the will of God; then our minds could never be tranquil, for thinking ourselves exposed to their pleasure. Only then do we safely rest when we know them to be curbed by the will of God and, as it were, held in confinement, so that they cannot do anything but by his permission, especially since God himself undertakes to be our guardian and the captain of our salvation." (1)

For the wicked on the other hand there was no consolation and no possibility of salvation. In practical terms this meant that the battle against evil had to be fought not on behalf of the souls of the wicked but against their physical persons; for though they had shown themselves reprobate in their actions they had still to be forced to give honour to God in this life. This explains the

1. *Trans. J.K.S. Reid, Calvin: Theological Writings, London, 1954, p. 94.*

large-scale attack, in the Geneva of Calvin, (despite the fact that the eternal destinies of all the inhabitants had been finally settled) not only on heresy, but on all forms of immorality from murder and incest down to the most trifling offences against the sumptuary laws. It also accounts for the fact that such sins were to be fought against equally with heresy; indeed Calvin makes a special note of the point that in the Epistle to the Galatians heresies are enumerated among the "works of the flesh".⁽¹⁾

The relationship between witchcraft and heresy has always been very confused, but for Calvin it was quite clear. In the Genevan records witchcraft is frequently referred to as "heresie". The error of the witch lay in imagining that the Devil could effect any miracle which was not also expressly permitted by God. Gross wickedness also was involved in witchcraft since God was expressly renounced; but according to Calvin this was also involved in any form of heresy in which the truth as revealed in Scripture was corrupted or altered.

A real difficulty arises when it is asked what the difference was between an ordinary reprobate person who was already a child of Satan, and a witch who,

1. *Commentary on Galatians and Ephesians*, (Gal. 5, 19-20), C.T.S. Edin., 1854, p. 165.

according to the later medieval demonologists was a child of the devil in a special way by reason of a special pact. For a damned person such a transaction as the bartering of his soul to the Devil was entirely pointless, for it already belonged to him. In fact, for Calvin, this turns out to be less of a difficulty than perhaps it ought to be. It is true that the pact with Satan is a temptation which will not seriously affect the elect, and is to the reprobate actually meaningless; but the reprobate do not know that it is meaningless. Their sorcery is a flagrant act of open hostility to God, and therefore must be ruthlessly put down. Calvin admitted that in general it was by no means evident on this earth just exactly who were the elect and who the reprobate; but once a man had openly renounced God then in such a case it was at once evident that he had been eternally damned from the beginning of time. For Calvin the fire was not purgative but punitive. It was what the sorcerer so richly deserved for opposing the will of God, and a mere foretaste of what was in store for him. Since he was manifestly damned anyway there was no point in prolonging his life further. There was naturally no scope for exorcism in Calvin's scheme. Calvin's lack of precision about the actual crime, except in so far as it is direct opposition to God, is consonant with his general lack of

discrimination on the matter of sin. To him all wickedness was simply an indication of reprobation, and witchcraft only one sin among many. He makes one point, missed by the mainstream of witchcraft writers (many of whom were concerned more in the last resort with the social implications of the crime), which is that the possibility or non-possibility of effective sorcery was irrelevant when it was a question of assessing the guilt of the accused. According to Calvin's theories the death penalty has a certain gruesome logic.

From this survey it will be apparent that Calvin's writings, while they might well provide general support for a writer anxious to maintain that witchcraft should be attacked and suppressed, were not likely to be a particularly fruitful source for demonologists interested in close detail. A lack of actual quotation from Calvin's writings or reference to him, therefore, cannot necessarily be taken to mean a complete lack of influence by him. For most demonologists Calvin's attitude had never been expressed in sufficiently unequivocal^l terms. His own follower Daneus claimed no support from him in his *De beneficiis*.⁽¹⁾ Indeed the most notable demonologist ever to cite Calvin in his support was the English opponent of witch hunting, Reginald Scot.⁽²⁾

1. Geneva, 1574.

2. See below, p. 129.

The main stream of all early protestant thought, however, was to some degree at least affected by Calvin's principal ideas; and theories of witchcraft were not theologically self-contained. An attempt will be made at the conclusion of this essay to estimate how far, and in what way, Calvinism in general as well as Calvin's demonology in particular, may have affected the course of the witch mania in Scotland.

CHAPTER FOUR.

THE EFFECT OF THE NORTH BERWICK WITCH TRIALS.

So far it has been shown that until the end of the sixteenth century Scotland had been free from the main theories of demonic witchcraft which were prevalent on the continent. It has also been seen that the influence of Calvin had not had any direct effect on the acceptance of such theories by Scotland. Until 1590, Scotland was in fact free from any really extensive witch hysteria.

This was changed by the trials of the North Berwick witches which introduced to Scotland all those aspects of witch beliefs which had previously been known on the continent, and, to a lesser extent, in England. The trials are therefore of key importance for the legal and theological formulation of the demonic theory in Scotland.

The evidence concerning the North Berwick witches is in many respects incomplete, and the full truth behind the trials will probably never be known. What actually happened; whether there was a genuine conspiracy, a scare that snowballed, or a government plot to incriminate the King's cousin: the popular and incorrigible Francis Stewart, Earl of Bothwell; it is now

impossible to say.⁽¹⁾ During the course of the trials it was alleged that over three hundred witches had gathered at various times to perform treason against the King. They had raised storms while the King and his bride were at sea; they had attempted to effect his death by melting his effigy in wax, and they had indulged in obscene rituals in the North Berwick kirk in the presence of their master the Devil.

There were both old and new elements in the practices that were supposed to have taken place. Most of the witches were accused of physical harming and healing. This was an ingredient as old as any form of witchcraft, and one which featured in the indictments as long as the prosecutions continued. The political aspect of the North Berwick affair was of course its most important one. The trials were treason trials, and the fact that the witches were believed to have attempted the life of the King was the main reason for the ferocity and tenacity of the interrogations. The fear that Bothwell was involved, or possibly the desire to incriminate him, exacerbated the proceedings. In this sense the trials were the last of the old type of witch trial, when the accusation of witchcraft was used as a means to convict a particular person. The development of the witch hunt

1. See Helen Stafford, *Notes on Scottish Witchcraft Cases in Essays in Honor of Conyers Read*, Chicago, 1953, pp. 96-118.

was similar to that in England and on the continent, where early prosecutions for witchcraft had been for political reasons. Once the persecution of witchcraft became an end in itself, prosecutions were almost exclusively of obscure people.

The feature which was new was the demonic pact; and this became the central feature of most later prosecutions. The witches were supposed to have met with the Devil, pledged their persons, and worshipped him in obscene fashion. And according to the contemporary pamphlet, *News from Scotland*, "it hath lately been found" that the Devil made an insensible mark upon all his disciples by which they might be recognised. There is no evidence to suggest that the insensible mark had been heard of in Scotland before this time.

The idea that 1590 saw the real beginning of a systematic persecution on the continental model was clearly made by F. Legge in 1891 in an article in *The Scottish Review*. Since it has subsequently been ignored by influential writers,⁽¹⁾ it is worth quoting Legge here:

"Up to this period, the "dittays" against the alleged witches are filled with recitals of such simple sorceries

1. For example W.L. Mathieson, *Politics and Religion in Scotland*, Glasgow, 1902, Vol.I, p.194-5. and Montague Summers, *The Geography of Witchcraft*, London, 1927, pp 201-206.

as the medicinal use of herbs and the performance of trivial and meaningless ceremonies. In no case is the efficacy of the cures or enchantments attributed to any more dread agency than that of the "Gude Folk", or fairies. But now a change comes over the indictments which shows that the managers of these trials had not allowed some of the more extraordinary theories of the Continental witch-hunters to escape them. Within a month after Lady Foulis' acquittal, (July, 1590), Janet Grant or Gradoch, and Janet Clark or Spalding, were put to the bar of the High Court, charged with bewitching to death several persons, with killing cattle, with preventing the consummation of marriages, and with raising the devil. They were both found guilty, strangled, and burnt, but the evidence at their trial prepared the people (as it was perhaps intended to do) for the tragedy that was to follow".⁽¹⁾

It might on the face of it seem possible to dispute this theory. Certainly there were earlier cases in which a demonic figure appeared. Bessie Dunlop was burnt on the Castle Hill in Edinburgh in 1576 for having dealing with "Thom Reid", who had been killed at the battle of Pinkie and gone to live in "Elfame", and with the Queen of the Fairies herself.⁽²⁾ There was also Alison Pearson who was *Convicta et combusta* for similar traffic with fairyland.⁽³⁾ These trials certainly show that the old superstitions had much in common with the more sophisticated witch beliefs. Bessie Dunlop's "Thom" is supposed to have attempted to induce her without success to renounce her baptism. Indeed throughout the whole period of the witch persecution in

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1. Witchcraft in Scotland in The Scottish Review, Oct., 1891, Vol. 18, p. 261.
 2. Pitcairn, Vol. I, Part II, pp. 49-58.
 3. Ibid., Vol. I, Part III, pp. 161-165.

Scotland references by the accused to the Queen of the Fairies rather than to the Devil were not uncommon. But these trials do not yet show a judiciary armed with a coherent code and theory of witch practice, or with systematic methods of convicting them. It was simply that there already existed in Scotland the "fairy" mythology typical of the ballads and "folk" witchcraft of the earlier trials. Under the pressure of the treason threat and the revelations of the North Berwick witches, these beliefs were transformed into the uglier, more complicated orthodoxy of demonic theology. These beliefs now came to be accepted not only by the peasantry, but also by the leaders of the country in Church, law, and government, who up to this time had been responsible for keeping the cruder superstitions under control.

In fact, the interest taken by the King, the excitement aroused by the melodramatic revelations of the trials, and the severity of the punishments, make the case of the North Berwick witches the most significant turning point in the development of the witch theory in Scotland.

The interest aroused can be seen very clearly in the first Scottish witch tract: the pamphlet, *News from Scotland*. This work cannot in fact count as part of Scottish demonology, as it is by no means certain that it was ever published, or even indeed written in Scotland.

The copy which is known⁽¹⁾ and which has been several times reprinted⁽²⁾ was published in London in 1591 "according to the Scottish copie". Whether this refers to a published work, or to a manuscript, or to nothing at all, is not clear; but the work belongs to the English type of witch tract: it purports to inform and educate, it titillates, and it tells a hideous story. In this case the tract also serves some political purpose in that it presents King James in the most favourable light, as the greatest enemy that the Devil had on the earth, intending perhaps to help in preparing the English to accept him as their king. The fact that one of the leading figures in the discovery of the witches is called a "deputy bailiffe" instead of the Scottish "bailie depute" also suggests that it may have been concocted in England.

News from Scotland is anonymous, but Sir James Melville in his *Memoirs of His Own Life* refers to,

"The trikis and tragidie that he (the Devil) played them, amang sa many men and wemen in this contre, wald hardly yet credit by the posteritie; whereof Mester James Carmichell minister of Haddintoun has ther history and depositions." (3)

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1. John Ferguson, *Bibliographical Notes on the Witchcraft Literature of Scotland, in Publications of the Edinburgh Bibliographical Society, Vol. III, 1898, pp. 45-49.*
 2. In *Pitcairn, Vol. I, Part III, pp. 213-223; by the Roxburghe Club, Edin., 1816; in A Collection of Rare and Curious Tracts on Witchcraft. Edin., 1820; and also as Bodley Head Quarto, No. 9, N.Y., 1924.*
 3. *Memoirs of His Own Life, Edin., 1827, p. 396.*

It has been suggested⁽¹⁾ that Carmichael was the most probable author, and the fact that he was living in England from 1584 to 1587⁽²⁾ makes this more feasible. Whether in fact this lends weight to Legge's hint that the whole thing was a government plot is another matter. On the face of it it seems unlikely that James was a sufficiently good actor to carry out such a thorough deception as that must have involved. What is more likely is that once the affair had come to light the King's advisers tried to make as much political capital out of it as possible.

It is hardly necessary to emphasize the unusual severity of the punishments. There seems little doubt, however faulty the records may be, that the full effects of the 1563 Act were not felt until these trials. Before this, we have records of accused witches being merely banished or even pardoned.⁽³⁾ Records of such cases were almost to disappear until the period of Cromwell's rule in Scotland. Again, one of the grounds for reprieving Barbara Napier in May, 1591, quite apart from the fact of her alleged pregnancy, was that the clause in the Witchcraft Act awarding the death

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1. By D. Webster in his introduction to an extract from Melville's writings in A Collection of Rare and Curious Tracts on Witchcraft, Edin., 1820.
 2. See Hew Scott, Fasti Ecclesiannae Scoticae. Vol. I, p. 369.
 3. See Cases of Witchcraft, pp. 21-23.

penalty for the mere consultation of witches had never before been enforced, and "therefore it was felt hard to execute her."

The change which came over Scottish beliefs in witchcraft as a result of the North Berwick trials is clearly brought out by considering a sermon delivered in the year before the trial. In November of 1589 Earl Bothwell was up in the High Kirk of St. Giles on the stool of repentance, where he was obliged to listen to a sermon preached at him before doing public penitence. What is revealing in this is the attitude taken by the preacher, the Reverend Robert Bruce, to the idea of the Devil; an attitude typical of pre-1590 thought.

He took as his text on this solemn occasion 2nd Timothy 2, verses 22 to 26, the last verse of which runs, "and that they may come to amendment out of the snare of the Devil which are taken of him at his will!"⁽¹⁾

"Be this gift" (of repentance) said Bruce, "first he shall be delivered from the snare of the Devill, into the quilk he was holden captive to do him service".

So short a time as two years later it would have been quite impossible to use such a phrase without meaning that the person involved had made a physical pact with the Devil, for by this time every one knew that this

1. Robert Bruce, *Sermons in the Kirk of Edinburgh*,
Edin., 1591, unpaginated.

was the manner by which a man was "holden captive to do him service". In the context of the sermon however, it is perfectly clear that throughout Bruce is talking about the Devil in a spiritual sense, and is assuming that the evil that Bothwell had done was the murdering and rebellion which the Devil or spirit of evil drove him to, rather than physical worship of Satan himself. He says, for example,

"Therefore, everie one of zou in the fear of God, examine zour affectiounes, examine zour mindes, and see whereto ze ar addicted; suspect ever zour affections, what ever intisement they have to cloake the selfe with: suspect ever the motioun of them, for the Devill is in them."

And again:

"Into this pairt, ze have onelie this to be awar of: for the Devill is ever readie at thine hand, and this provision is not necessair nather for ane hard heart, bot gif men and women, through the wightnesse of their sinnes, conceive over-deep a sorrow in their hearts, in this caice they wald be helped. For, I say, at that time the Devill is present, and so soon as he perceiveth thee dung down with the consideration of thine owne sinnes, that thou art, as it wer, presentlie in the pit of hell; then he is busie to make thee to doubt, to mak thee to dispair, and to mak thee to think that thy sinnes ar so manie, so vglie, and so great, that the Lord will never forgive them, and casteth in this or that stay before thee, to terrifie thee, that thou come not to seeke grace at the throne of grace: ... swa, when thou art so casten down, & the Devil wald drawe thee to desperation, withdraw rather thine heart to the consideration of the riches of the mercie of God."

Bruce in fact is talking of the Devil in the traditional manner of the early and early medieval Church. The Devil is a corrupter of character and the cause of rifts between

man and his God: not a worker of impious physical miracles. The greatest sin you can commit he says is,

"when a man in his hart wil match the gratuity of his iniquity with the infinit weight of the mercy of God; when the Devil be his suggestioun, maketh thee to beleue, that thy sins ar greater nor the mercie of God."

Bruce ends by adding,

"This is not spoken for this Noble mans cause onelie: It is spoken for everie one of zou that are in inferiour rankes, that ever one of zou may confesse zour awin sins: And seeing this is the craft of the Devill, be halding zou back, that ze may tyne zour souls, be ze als cairfull to win zour soule, be confessing zour sinnes to the world."

This was the manner in which Bruce could preach about the Devil even as late as 1589. Yet on 6th June, 1591, he was admonishing the King from the pulpit "to execute justice upon malefactors", (meaning the witches) "although it sould be with the hazard of his life."⁽¹⁾

It is obvious a change has come. It has become normal in this brief space of time to regard Satan in a far more crude and at the same time more complicated manner than previously.

The means by which the new demonic beliefs arrived in Scotland is still obscure. It is just possible that such conventions as the one at North Berwick had been going on in that form and with those rites for years, whether or not they were the

1. *David Calderwood, History of the Kirk of Scotland. Wodrow Soc., Edin., 1842 - 49, Vol. V, p. 129.*

comparatively innocent fertility rites of the old religion, as Dr. Margaret Murray would have it,⁽¹⁾ or the positive worship of the Evil One himself and the practice of black magic as described by the Reverend Montague Summers.⁽²⁾ If this is so, however, it seems curious that nothing should have been known of it by preachers or judges. They knew witchcraft well enough; but it was a simpler witchcraft than that of North Berwick.

If on the other hand demonic witchcraft did arrive quite suddenly in 1590 there is the problem of the means and agents of its arrival. It is just conceivable that Bothwell, if Bothwell was indeed deeply implicated, taught the North Berwick witches to worship the Devil in the obscene manner reported in the confessions and in *News from Scotland*. Bothwell after all was an educated man much travelled on the continent. He would be likely to be well informed on the subject, and is supposed to have known a necromancer when he was in Italy. But though the idea that Bothwell instructed the witches in continental diabolism is an appealing one, we have no evidence that this was what happened. There is nothing,

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1. *The Devil of North Berwick, S.H.R., Vol. XV, 1918. According to Dr. Murray, "The ancient and primitive religion, which we know as the cult of the witches, underlay the State-religion of Christianity, a large part of the people being in reality 'heathen', though outwardly conforming to Christianity ... The ritual consisted largely of fertility rites ... The religion was essentially a martyrdom."*
 2. *The Geography of Witchcraft, pp. 201-253.*

in fact, to connect him with the alleged conspiracy apart from the obvious desire of the judges to convict him, and the incriminating confession of one Richard Graham in April 1591 under torture. This came some five months after the investigations had begun, and was later retracted.

It seems most probable that the continental beliefs actually reached Scotland deviously through sailors, traders, scholars visiting foreign universities, and lawyers seeking legal advice, and that these influences were exploited and given wider currency in the interest aroused by the trials. But evidence for this infiltration is by its very nature hard to trace. In the absence of any direct information - such as the proved arrival or existence in Scotland of a continental witch manual, or the known interest in the subject of any particular individual before 1590, these suggestions concerning the transmission of demonological theories can only be conjecture.

CHAPTER FIVE.

KING JAMES VI AS DEMONOLOGIST.

In the tragic proceedings of 1590 to 1591 King James VI was a central figure. He was the alleged victim of the conspiracy, and an active participant in the prosecution of the accused conspirators. So far as his attitude to witchcraft is concerned he has been the object of almost uniformly hostile comment, much of it richly deserved. The principal exception to this chorus of condemnation is G.L. Kittredge, who has effectively defended James' behaviour in England, and attempted less successfully to do the same for his speeches and actions in Scotland.⁽¹⁾

The most frequently found view, however, is that James, driven by fear of his own death, macabre curiosity, and pride in his own skill in demonic theology, was from his earliest years a ferocious and neurotic persecutor of witches. If we turn to four biographies of James, all written within the last thirty years and two of them within the last five, we find the following:

Charles Williams: "The pardon which James was often willing to extend to the leaders of earthly treason must not reach to the leaders of those who had denied their God. In this he need not fear the hostility of the Kirk: long

1. *In English Witchcraft and James I, in Studies in the History of Religions, New York, 1912, and again in Witchcraft in Old and New England, Cambridge, Mass., 1929.*

before he had laid any but a baby's hand on sword and sceptre, the witch hunt had been raised in Scotland.⁽¹⁾ Now in his years of discretion the king headed it.⁽²⁾

C. and H. Steeholm: "This sort of belief, then, was the result of the great Buchanan's education, of the Presbyterianism which had been forced down James youthful gullet; and of the fear and credulity of an age when every phenomenon in nature was an awe-inspiring mystery."⁽³⁾

D. Harris Willson: "He also found relief from the drudgery of his studies in a somewhat abnormal interest in the supernatural,⁽⁴⁾ in the horrible and awful, in magic, in witchcraft, and in the freaks and monstrosities of nature."⁽⁵⁾

As evidence of this Harris Willson cites James translation of Du Bartas' poem, *The Furies*, in which,

"Ample scope is offered to the King's interest in the horrible and ghastly. He recounts with gruesome detail and evident enjoyment the terrors of earthquakes ..."⁽⁶⁾

William McElwee: "On the subject of witchcraft he (James) would believe anything, and its terrors continually haunted his mind, fusing and concentrating all his childhood fears and becoming at times almost an obsessional mania."⁽⁷⁾

The main weakness in all the accounts of James' credulity from which these extracts have been taken, is that they assume that James never changed his basic beliefs on witchcraft from the cradle to the grave; they write as though the King had been organising the

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1. Possibly a reference to the passing of the Witchcraft Act three years before James' birth.
 2. *James I*, London, 1934, p. 106.
 3. *James I of England*, London, 1938, p. 142.
 4. The supernatural is not in fact a concept which was much used, or which would have had much meaning before the development of the mechanistic view of the universe characteristic of advanced thinkers in the later seventeenth century. It was normally used in the sixteenth century in the sense of "divine". See *O.E.D.*
 5. *King James VI and I*, London, 1956, p. 26.
 6. *Ibid.*, p. 65.
 7. *The Wisest Fool in Christendom*, London, 1958, p. 71.

material for *Daemonologie* in his childhood, and never to his dying day regretted a word he had written there. From the evidence which will be presented in this chapter it seems far more likely that James' beliefs on the subject fall into three main periods: the first is the period up to 1590 during which, contrary to the views expressed in the preceding extracts, he does not appear to have had any unusual tendencies towards the strange and the occult; the second, the years between 1590 and about 1597 during which witchcraft was a dominant anxiety and interest; and the third, the period from his last years in Scotland to his death in England in 1625, which shows a fairly rapid waning of interest in the problem.

As far as the early period of his life is concerned, in view of the fact that the first recorded instance of James' personal interest in witchcraft - and then only in connection with a visiting prophetess - is as late as July 1590, it would seem that rather more substantial evidence than that given by any of James' biographers, is required for the view that James' early appetite for the gruesome and the horrid was even as great as was normal for the age.

As a child his principal pastimes appear to have been hunting with his friends, writing poetry, and discussing theology, but not so far as we know, demonic

theology in particular. In any case, if the sermons of Robert Bruce from which we have quoted are anything to go by, the Devil was normally regarded as a personalised tempting force rather than as an evil spirit performing physical deeds through his own special human agents. As we have seen, the reformed Church of Scotland was only incidentally concerned with witchcraft when James was growing up: he would have heard far more about it had he been brought up in England, France, or Germany. As for Buchanan, it is very hard to find any evidence that he instructed James in the witch doctrine, or that it would necessarily have had any effect on the King if he had.

All that can be said is that Buchanan had been abroad a good deal and was familiar with current intellectual trends. He *may* have informed the King about the continental beliefs on witchcraft, but there is no evidence that he did, or that he was particularly interested in the subject. . Primarily he was a scholar and a poet.⁽¹⁾ Theological or demonological refinements do not appear to have touched him deeply.

The catalogue of James' youthful library, written

1. *There are no recent biographies of Buchanan. Centenary publications of 1906 such as D. McMillan, George Buchanan, and P. Hume Brown, George Buchanan and His Times, N.P., and his earlier George Buchanan, Humanist and Reformer, Edin., 1890, emphasize these qualities and interests.*

out in the hand of his sub-tutor, Peter Young,⁽¹⁾ is also instructive. Classics, theology, and contemporary poetry abound, but there is an absence both of scientific and semi-magical works, and also of the standard witch manuals and pamphlets. Further, there is no evidence of any of these manuals being current in Scotland at the time, despite the fact that they were available south of the border, ~~and that~~ some of them, such as the treatise by the Calvinist, Lambertus Danaeus, in English translation.⁽²⁾ There is not even any sign of copies of Reginald Scot's *Discoverie of Witchcraft*, against which James directed his *Daemonologie*.

We may then look for signs of an interest in demonological matters in James' early published works. One such work, which is referred to by Professor Harris Willson as an example of James' interest in the horrible,⁽³⁾ is his commentary on a passage from the Book of Revelation⁽⁴⁾ which was written in 1588, two years before the trials began. The text itself is certainly forbidding enough. It refers to the time when the millenium has expired and Satan will rampage about the earth freely, deceiving people,

1. *Miscellany of the Maitland Club, Edin., 1840, Vol. I, pp. 1-23.*

2. *A Dialogue of Witches, London, 1575.*

3. *James I of England, p. 142.*

4. *Ane fruitfull meditation conteining ane plane and facill exposition of ye 7. 8. 9. and 10 versis of the 20 Chapt of the Revelation in forme of ane sermon - set down be ye maist christiane king and synceir professour, and cheif defender of the treuth, JAMES the 6 king of Scottis, Edinburgh, 1588.*

until he is taken up and put into a lake of fire and brimstone for ever more. It is a short work, some ten pages in all; and in modern theological jargon might well be called an essay in "realised eschatology."

The time which is referred to in his text has now come, wrote James. "Satan's instruments" are loosed to trouble the Kirk. But "Satan's instruments" and "Satan and his Congregation" are not the Devil with his congregation of witches and wizards of which he was to write in his *Daemonologie*, but the Roman Church. The Devil has been restrained for a long space by the gospel preaching, but,

"At the last he is loosed out of hell by the raising up of so many new errors and notable evill instruments, especially the Antichrist and his clergie." (1)

The work is written as though James knew of no other regular meaning for the phrase "Satan's instruments" except that one, and as though he were conscious of no special physical power wielded by the Devil; only that over the behaviour of people:

"Sa all that do evill are inspyred by Sathan, and utteris the same in diverse degreis, according as that unclene spirit takis possessioun in them, and be diverse subiectis and meanes alluris them to do his will, sum be ambitioun, sum be invie, sum be malice, and sum be feir, and so furth." (2)

Other agents of the Devil are the "Princes of the Earth":

1. *Op. cit.*, p. 75.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 75.

the Turk, and also the Spaniard:

"And quhait is preparit and cum fordwart against this lle? Do we not daylie heir; and be all appearance shortlie sall see; now may ye judge gif this be not tyme quhair of this place that I have maid chois of doeth meane; and saye dew tyme for the reveiling of this prophecie."⁽¹⁾

He wrote in similar style in a letter of March 1589 to Elizabeth:

"My diligence in the mean tyme, for tryall of this practises, I remit to the daylie report of youre ambassadour heir, (William Ashby) and for the obviating of those and the like assaultes of Sathan against this yle, I have heirwith directed into you my trustie and familiar servant and laird of Veimis."⁽²⁾

Their common danger in the face of the "assaultes of Sathan" was not witchcraft; such an interpretation might even at that time have sounded frivolous in the face of the Spanish Armada.

James had ended his "fruitful meditation" by adding,

"And for instructioun, that ye iustice of God in respect of mannis falling wilfullie from ye treuth (as Paul sayis) iustlie did send to ye world the greit abuser with as great efficacie over ye conscience be heresie, as corporallie over their bodis be ye civill sworde."⁽³⁾

This is a particularly interesting distinction in view of the fact that according to the demonologists the Devil had particular physical power over and a physical relationship with the souls who were bound to him by the pact.

1. *Ibid.*, p. 78.

2. *Letters of Queen Elizabeth and King James VI of Scotland*, ed. John Bruce, Camden Soc., 1849, p. 62.

3. *Ane fruitfull meditatioun*, p. 78.

Moreover, those who suffered through witchcraft could also be said to be "corporally tyrannised" over. But James in 1588 was apparently unaware of this. The only "corporal tyrannising" he knows of is that of war and rebellion by those who are the enemies of God. It seems unlikely that had he known of any other he would have missed an opportunity to impress.

There is nothing of witchcraft, then, in the published writings of the young King, and prior to 1590 it is difficult to detect him taking a close interest in any particular witch trial. On 11th October, 1587, there was a "proclamation of a High Court of Justiciary to be held in his Majesty's own presence, for trial of great crimes all over the realm."⁽¹⁾ The great crimes are a very long list, and they include "witchecraft or seikaris of responssis or help at witcheis". There is no record, however, of any particular case which James came up against on this occasion.

As mentioned earlier, the first recorded instance of James' interest in a particular case, is in the summer of 1590, two months after he had returned with his bride from Denmark. The English ambassador to Scotland, Robert Bowes, in a letter to Burghley dated July 4th wrote that,

1. *Register of the Privy Council of Scotland, Vol. IV, 1585-1592, Edin., 1881, p. 218.*

"The other day a Dutch gentlewoman from Lubech arrived at Leith. She had sought the King of Scots at Elsinore, but coming after his departure took her voyage hither. She brings a Latin letter, declaring that she is sent to the King to discover to him his good fortune. She had conference with the Queen in her own language, 'having no other tounge then the Duche', showing that learned magicians of the east had met and found noble acts to be done by a prince in the north-west of Europe, having a mark in his side, whom they noted to be the King of Scots. (A marginal note by Burghley says "A Mockery"). She would not tell who sent her, but prayed that one having the Dutch tongue and in credit with the king might confer with her in the king's presence. The king and country think her a witch; yet he is purposed to hear her."⁽¹⁾

In a further letter of July 23rd. he writes that,

"The king sent Mr. George Yonge to understand the divination of the gentlewoman of Lubech as to the great honours destined to him; but she desired to see the mark on the king's side before she would fortell anything, and also referred judgement thereof to such wise man as she would open the matter unto. It is found that the inordinate love of one of the Queen's servauntes here hath chefelie drawn her hither; so that her creditt is so cracked as she ronnet abroad at hir pleasure."⁽²⁾

It seems likely that James' determination to hear her in the first place stemmed more from the hope of hearing some pleasing prophecy with regard to himself than from interest in her because she was reputed to be a witch.

Earlier in the same letter of July 23rd, Bowes also wrote,

"It is advertised from Denmark, that the admirall there hathe caused five or six witches to be taken in Coupnahaven, upon suspicion that by their witche craft they had staid the Queen of Scottes voiage into Scotland, and sought to have staid likewise the King's retorne."⁽³⁾

This is interesting, for it may well be the origin of the

1. *Cal. Scot.*, Vol. X, p. 348.

2. *Cal. Scot.*, X, p. 365.

3. *Ibid.*

story that rumours were current in Scotland that the storms encountered by the Queen in her first effort to reach Scotland in September 1589 and by James and the Queen on their voyage home in April 1590, were caused by witches working in both Denmark and Scotland.

It may be also that it was the Danish connection which helped to stimulate witch persecution in Scotland. Certainly many witches had been put to death in Denmark by this time. James himself may perhaps have been influenced during his six month stay in Denmark; certainly he is known to have enjoyed his discussions with Lutheran theologians, and with the astronomer, Tycho Brahe. It was his first encounter with continental thinkers, and he must have been introduced to many new ideas then. James might well have been impressed by the fact that the learned and important in a foreign country took the terrors and menace of witchcraft seriously. Among the Scottish ruling party such ideas may have been spread during the return visit paid by the Danish court in the month of May 1590. But this is all speculation. However the ideas travelled, they were there by the end of 1590, and the King was their principal exponent.

It is just that James should be cleared of the charge of having had an infant and adolescent zest for demonology. It is less easy, though, to exonerate him

from guilt in initiating the great witch hunt of the 1590's; to excuse him in terms of the beliefs of the time. Yet Professor Kittredge attempts to do just this: he argues that the worst period of persecution in Scotland did not come till long after James' reign (i.e. in the early 1660's), that James did not initiate the prosecutions of 1590, and that in any case,

"He did not teach the Scottish nation the witch creed. That creed was the heritage of the human race, and was nowhere less questioned by all classes and all professions than in Scotland, where, indeed, it survived in full vigour for more than a century after James was dead."⁽¹⁾

Furthermore, he adds, with regard to the 1590 prosecutions,

"If ever there was a spontaneous popular panic, this was such an outbreak. James and his council had only to let the forces work."⁽²⁾

They had no power, he suggests, to "stem the current."

But in fact it is quite impossible to acquit James of the charge of having played a full and vigorous part in the prosecutions. It is perfectly true that James did not initiate the proceedings in November, 1590. It is no doubt true also that Scotland in general was an exceedingly superstitious country; but whether in fact what he calls the "witch creed" was fully held in Scotland at this stage is, as has been suggested earlier, very doubtful indeed.

General belief in the "witch creed" seems to have

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1. English witchcraft and James I, p. 3.
 2. English Witchcraft and James I, p. 4.

developed rapidly under the combined influence of the confessions of the witches and the growing interest of James. At any time it would not be difficult to produce strong popular pressure for a "witch hunt", but such a hunt requires official backing and sometimes even official stimulation. There is no indication that James, his leading ministers of State, or the Church, made any attempt whatever to "stem the current" until 1597. At that date when James revoked the general commission for the prosecution of witches then standing, the current was stemmed - at a time when it was running far more strongly than in 1590 - with considerable success. Kittredge himself admits that it was not until 1597 that "James was convinced that matters had gone too far."⁽¹⁾ By this time several hundreds of accused witches had been executed.⁽²⁾

There is no doubt at all that James must bear a large share of the responsibility both for stirring up the witch panic and for keeping the terror at fever pitch. He took an intense interest in all the North Berwick trials, and by the summer of 1591 was apparently one of the principal agents in keeping them alive. He showed particular zeal, for example, in the prosecution of Barbara Napier⁽³⁾ who was arrested for consulting with

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1. *English Witchcraft and James I*, p. 5.
 2. G.F. Black, *Cases of Witchcraft*, pp. 25-30.
 3. Already mentioned in Chapter IV, pp. 95-96.

witches for treasonable purposes, and who was known to be a friend of Bothwell. She claimed to be with child, and James wrote to Maitland in April 1591,

"Trye by the medicinairis aithis gif Barbara Napier be uith bairne or not. Tak na delaying ansour. Gif ye finde sho be not, to the fyre uith her presentlie, and cause bouell her publicclie."⁽¹⁾

Later, Ambassador Bowes wrote to Burghley that the assizes had acquitted her of practising the destruction of the King, but that she was "at the King's pleasure". In a postscript he added,

"By these begynnynge your lordschip may easely see what the end wilbe; and that these are lyk to occupye the king with troubles nott fytt for hym. Yf I had a cypher with your lordship I wold wrytt somethinges more planely."⁽²⁾

(At one time Bowes himself was accused of being implicated with the witches, but was exonerated).

The case of Bothwell - a man whom James undoubtedly feared - was sub judice at the same time that the trouble with Barbara Napier's jurors occurred. Carr in Scotland wrote to William Jenison,

"The Lorde Bothwell of Scoteland is committed to Edenboroughe castell for conspyringe the kinge's death by socerye as they say. He standes upon his truthe and cravs that by combate agaynst his accuser (Richard Grahame)) thoughe never so mean a person, he may defend himselfe. We say that he shall dye: the Scottes would the contrarye; but yf he dye they spare not to speake that to hyme as to others we mayke ther Kinge a boucher to serve our tournes."⁽³⁾

1. *Cal. Scot.*, Vol. X, p. 510.

2. *Cal. Scot.*, X, p. 515.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 514.

And Bowes wrote to Burghley,

"The King's forwardness in these matters persuades many that they shall not fall so suddenly to such end". (i.e. that Bothwell might escape the country).⁽¹⁾

The implication is that the country was not behind the King or the government in their attempt to implicate Bothwell in the witches' conspiracy. It does not sound as though they were wholeheartedly behind the witch scare either when it involved going to the length of incriminating Bothwell's friends. But James was quite determined to see the matter through. He called an enquiry on the jurors who had, as he said, wrongly acquitted Barbara Napier of treason, and addressed a lengthy speech to them himself. Even in the following winter he is still urging Elizabeth to hand over witches who have escaped into England, and begins his instructions to his ambassador:

"Ye shall signifye to our darrest sister that efter deip consideratioun and serche made we have found out the ground and roote of these so cruell enterpryses to come frome the bloodye counsellis of the enemeyis to God, his trew Religion and to all Monarchies proffessing the same, who being allwayes led with one spreit ceases not daylie to stirre up thair suppostis and desperat ministers to essay the taking away of lauffull Princes be all unlauffull meanes, wherein Sathan hes so far prevaled within the compasse of our awin age as of late the same hath bene put in practize and some fearefull examles thairof in recent memorye. And that some of our maist unnaturall subjectis being led be the abhominable authour (who bewryeth him self guyltie of that sorcerye and witchecraft devised against our awin person) have been more easalye entised being of the Spanishe faction, and hes adventured so farre in this lait enterpryse as to be burreaux and executouris of thair cruell desseingis ..."⁽²⁾

1. *Ibid.*, p. 522.

2. From "Instructions to the Ambassador to the English Court, Halirudhous, 3rd January 1591-2", *Warrender Papers*, Edin., 1932, Vol. II, p. 167.

Satan's field of activity has changed for James in the last three years. Instead of simply being the leader of the Catholic party he has taken direct action against God's anointed one. For James this meant he must continue to wage direct war against the Devil's new agents who were now not primarily the Catholics, but the witches. In some cases he equated the two.

The important question, in fact, about this period in James' life is not so much whether he was guilty of fervent persecution of witches, as why he became so obsessed by them. For those who believe James to have been deeply interested in demonology all his life this is not a problem. But other suggestions have been made. One explanation which can probably be fairly safely dismissed is that given in *News from Scotland*. According to this, when James first heard the accounts of the witches' performances at North Berwick, despite the gross flattery of being called the Devil's principal enemy on earth, he was not impressed and accused them all of lying. Agnes Sampson thereupon took him aside and told him,

"The verie wordes which passed between the Kinges Majestie and his Queene at Upslo in Norway the first night of marriage, with the answere each to other, whereat the Kinges Majestie wondered greatly, and swore by the living God, that he believed all the devills in hell could not have discovered the same, acknowledging her words to be most true, and therefore gave the more credit to the rest that is before declared."⁽¹⁾

1. *News from Scotland*, p. 23, in Webster's *Collection of Rare and Curious Tracts*.

It was a familiar feature of witch tracts to have in them some sceptical figure who was later convinced by some "infallible proof" such as that just given.

Another suggestion is that it was when James first heard Bothwell's name mentioned in connection with the conspiracy that he began to take it seriously. This, according to most sources, was in April 1591,⁽¹⁾ but Spottiswode says that Agnes Sampson, who was executed early in the proceedings, also incriminated Bothwell.⁽²⁾ It may well be that James' fear of Bothwell had much to do with the way in which he harried the witches at this time. Certainly the North Berwick trials were to James treason trials before they were sorcery trials. The most appalling aspect of the affair to him was the attempt to take his sacred life; the method was secondary, but once the method had been accepted, it fell easily into place. How entirely natural that the force behind the attempt to kill him should be the Devil himself! Thus it came about in James' mind that any attempt on the part of the judiciary to acquit an accused witch meant a failure on their part to take seriously the treasonable threat to the King's Majesty. It was not the witch theory which James had been incubating during his perilous, presbyterian upbringing; it was the doctrine of the Divine Right of Kings.

1. *Warrender Papers*, Vol. II, p. 161; *Cal. Scot.*, Vol. X, pp. 501-502.

2. *History of the Church of Scotland*, Edin., Bannatyne Club, 1850, Vol. II, pp. 411-412.

This is well illustrated by the speech which James delivered to the recalcitrant jurors on their acquittal of Barbara Napier.⁽¹⁾ This speech has often been quoted as an indication that James already regarded himself as an expert on the subject of witchcraft; one ready to instruct the unenlightened:

"For witchcraft, which is a thing growen very common amongst us, I know it to be a most abhominable synne, and I have beene occupied these three quarters of this yeare for the sifting out of them that are guylty heerein. We are taught by the lawes both of God and man that this synne is most odious, and by Godes law punishable by death; by man's law it is called *maleficium* or *venefictum*, an ill deed, or a poysonable deede, and punishable likewise by death."⁽¹⁾

and later,

"As for them who thinke these witchcraftes to be but fantacyes, I remmyt them to be catechised and instructed in these most evident poyntes".

and,

"Further I do call them witches which doe renounce God and yeld themselves wholly to the devill; but when they have recanted and repented, as these have done, then I accompt them not as witches, and so their testimony sufficient. In this I referre my self to the ministers."

That is in fact all that he has to say in his speech about witchcraft as such. He had by this time some elements of the witch theory well fixed in his mind, but had not yet acquired the erudition of the *Daemonologie*. In this speech taken as a whole, it is quite plain that his primary anxiety is not lest a witch might go free, but lest a King, endeavouring at twenty-four to exercise

1. *Cal. Scot.*, Vol. X, pp. 523-525.

the benevolent paternalism which was his responsibility, might be thwarted. He was deeply mortified by the presumption of this jury in acquitting a woman whom he believed to be guilty of treason. The greater part of the speech is an expression of this paternal grievance. He begins by explaining that the reason why no monarch has ever before interfered in matters criminal was because of the "nonage of my forebears". He goes on to complain that far too many people put friendship before justice; and continues:

"Yet this I say, that - howsoever matters have gone agaynst my will - I am innocent of all injustice in these behalves, and for my parte my conscience doth set me cleare, as did the conscience of Samuall, and I call you to be my judges heerein. And suppose I be your king, yet I submit myselfe to the accusacions of you my subjectes in this behalfe, and let any one saie what I have done. And as I have this begonne, so purpose I to goe forwarde; not because I am James Stuard, and can comaunde so many thousands of men, but because God hath made me a King and judge to judge righteouse judgement."

He emphasized how narrowly he had escaped death through the activities of the witches, and protested that he personally did not fear death, but was only concerned for, "the common good of this country, which enjoyeth peace by my life ... as you may collect by myn absence, for yf such troubles were in breeding whilst I reteyned lyfe what would have been done yf my life had been taken from me."

Also, he says, he took this labour of dealing personally with the witches upon him,

"First, because I see no iustice in inferiour judges,

"they being carried away eyther with feade or favour; secondly because I see the pride of these witches and their freendes which can not be prevented but by mynne owne presence. And for these witches, whatsoever hath been gotten from them hath bene done by me selfe; not because I was more wise than others, but because I was not partiall, and belefte that such a vice did reigne and ought to be repressed. Now then yf in the end I should have let this matter fall it must needs have bene no litle dishonour to me, having so earnestly pursued it in the begynning ... But this I have done, that none may thinke that this but a fantasy wishing that none may be found wiltully ignorant."

By the summer of 1591 the truth of the "witch creed" had become an inextricable part of the myth of kingship which James was using to glamourise his uncouth personality. There was therefore, for the time, to be no looking back; and the development of the theory and the increase of the witch trials followed naturally enough. By the time James ceased to have need of it, it was too late for him to do anything about it - in Scotland at least. He might revoke the standing commissions, but for the ministers the belief in witchcraft and the prosecution of witches was now part of the Gospel, and in 1598 the General Assembly complained bitterly that magistrates were setting free accused witches.⁽¹⁾ Between 1590 and

1. *Because it was reportit in the Assemblie, that albeit sundry persones wer convict of witchcraft, nevertheless, the civill magistrate refusit not only to punische them, conforme to the lawes of the country, but also in contempt of the same, settis the persones at liberty, quhilks were convict of witchcraft; therefore the Assemblie ordaynes that, in all tyme coming, the presbytrie proceed in all severitie with their censures against such magistrats as shall sett at liberty any persone or persones convict of witchcraft hereafter.* Booke of the Universall Kirk of Scotland, Ed. Peterkin, Edin., 1839, p. 468.

1597 witches were burned, possibly in their hundreds,⁽¹⁾ throughout the more civilised areas of Scotland: the towns, the east coast, and the Lothians; and James was collecting material for his treatise.

As in the case of his part in the North Berwick trials Kittredge minimises the responsibility of James for the contents and effects of his witch manual.

"The publication of the *Daemonologie* did not cause the death of any Scottish witches, either directly or indirectly. Nor did it convert a single Scottish sceptic for there were none to convert."⁽²⁾

The first of these statements is quite incapable of proof; the second is very doubtful. The complaint of the General Assembly just mentioned indicated the existence of Scottish scepticism, and certainly James himself believed the sceptics were there. The convolutions of his "Preface to the Reader" begin,

"The fearefull aboundinge at this time in this countrie, of these detestable slaves of the Devill, the Witches or enchanters, hath moved me (beloved reader) to dispatch in post, this following treatise of mine, not in any wise (as I protest) to serve for a shew of my learning & ingine, but only (mooved of conscience) to preasse thereby, so farre as I can, to resolve the doubting harts of many; both that such assultes of Sathan are most certainly practized, & that the instruments thereof, merits most severly to be punished ..."⁽³⁾

Unfortunately the *Daemonologie* tells us no more about Scottish beliefs and practices as such, than we had

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1. See G.F. Black, *Cases of Witchcraft*, pp. 25-29.
 2. *English Witchcraft and James I*, p. 6.
 3. *Daemonologie*, f. 2.

already learned from the *News from Scotland*, James makes oblique reference to the Scottish situation:

"Alwaies for that part, that witchcraft, and Witches have bene, and are, the former part is clearelie proved by the Scriptures, and the last by dailie experience and confessions." (1)

His ostensible aims in writing the treatise were first, to produce a significant contribution to the general European debate, and second, to instruct those of his subjects who were doubtful or ignorant on the witchcraft issue. The underlying reason, though, may well have been to justify his own actions to himself.

So far as the European debate is concerned, *Daemonologie* cannot be said to be in any way an important contribution. Had it been written by an obscure scholar it is doubtful whether it would have attracted much notice. James writes in the Preface that his treatise is directed specifically,

"Against the damnable opinions of two principally in our age, whereof the one called SCOT an Englishman, is not ashamed in publike print to deny, that ther can be such a thing as Witch-craft: and so mainteines the old error of the Sadducees, in denying of spirits. The other WIERVS, a German Phisition, sets out a publick apologie for al these craftes-folkes, whereby, procuring for their impunitie, he plainely bewrayes himselfe to have bene one of that profession." (2)

James mentioned Bodin, though with scant approval. But it is clear that Bodin did not regard James' work as having dealt adequately with Weyer, for the following year

1. *Daemonologie*, p. 2.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 2.

he himself wrote yet another treatise against the unpopular Dutchman.⁽¹⁾ The *Daemonologie* is too brief: some eighty pages as opposed to Scot's six hundred odd, and too unoriginal, to be a real contribution to the subject. James was simply joining in on the side of majority opinion and repeating their old arguments with a twist of his own.

It is difficult to trace his sources exactly for he does not give many references himself;⁽²⁾ in marked contrast to Scot who gives in his first edition an alphabetical bibliography of two hundred and sixteen foreign and twenty four English authors. Since James had clearly read Scot he must have been aware of their existence, and may have read any of these; and the half dozen or so authorities he does mention are all cited by Scot.

In his Preface he refers, as we have seen, to Weyer and to Scot as his opponents, and to Bodin as a source for the more unpleasant details of the Black Mass or "the whole particular rites and secretes of these

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1. *Refutation des opinions de Jean Wier*, Paris, 1598.
 2. D. Harris Willson, *King James VI and I comments on James' writing in general*, "Though the age was one of carelessness in acknowledging authorities, it is clear that the king did not shrink from petty plagiarism", p. 62, and, on the *Basilikon Doron*, that it was the fashion not to give sources, but that the King's habit of quoting from memory introduced many errors, p. 133.

unlawfull artes"⁽¹⁾ which he, very properly, thinks unnecessary for his purpose:

"And who likes to be curious in these thinges, he may reade, if he will here of their practises, BODINVS *Daemonomantie* collected with greater diligence, then written with judgement."⁽²⁾

For particulars of the "opinion of the Auncientes" he refers his readers to

"HYPERIVS, & HEMMINGIVS, two late Germaine writers:⁽³⁾ Besides innumerable other neoterick Theologues, that writes largelie vpon that subject."⁽⁴⁾

For further knowledge of

"The particular rites, & curiosities of these black arts (which is both unnecessarie and perilous) he will find it in the fourth book of CORNELIVS Agrippa, and in WIERVS, whom of I spak."⁽⁵⁾

These are all the references he gives apart from a recommendation in Book I to read Cardanus and Agrippa and the Italian Scoto on the question of Astrology, a reference to Calicute in Book II, and to several notorious scriptural allusions to witchcraft⁽⁶⁾ throughout the treatise.

1. *Daemonologie*, f. 4.

2. *Ibid.*, f. 4.

3. James apparently put down as "German" all those who lived between France and Norway. Weyer was Belgian, Hyperius was Andreas Gerardus, a Calvinist, also a Dutchman; Hemmingius was Niels or Nicolas Hemmingsen, a Dane, author of *Admonitio de Superstitionibus magicis vitandis in gratiam sinceræ religionis amantiam scripta*, 1575.

4. *Daemonologie*, f. 5.

5. *Ibid.*, f. 5.

6. I Sam. 28; I Kings, 22; Exod. 22; Exod. 7 and 8; I Sam. 15; Acts. 8; Acts 16.

The *Daemonologie* is written as a dialogue between one Philomathes who asks sceptical and sometimes highly pertinent questions, and Epistemon who gives him learned, but sometimes unsatisfactory answers which Philomathes always accepts gratefully. There are three books, the first of which deals with magic in general, the second with sorcery and witchcraft, and the third with a description of spirits and ghosts. A large part of it deals with routine matters; he gives fairly accurate etymologies for the various terms used in demonology and sorcery; and in dealing with the demonic pact in the second book he repeats the usual theories about the renunciation of baptism and the bestowal of the devil's mark.⁽¹⁾ He credits the witches with power, as one would expect, to harm or kill by incantations over wax images which they melt over a fire, and adds that they,

"Can rayse stormes and tempestes in the aire, either upon Sea or land, though not universally, but in such a particular place and prescribed boundes, as God will permitte them so to trouble: which likewise is verie easie to be dicerned from anie other naturall tempestes that are natures, in respect of the suddaine and violent raising thereof, together with the short induring of the same. And this is likewise verie possible to their master to do ..."⁽²⁾

James repeats the comfortable theory first suggested by the authors of the *Malleus Maleficarum*, that the witch is unable to harm the righteous magistrate, and discusses

1. *Daemonologie*, p. 33.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 46.

the power which they have in prison to receive visits from the Devil, and to deceive their jailors by their lack of pain under torture, or by their ability to shed tears. The questioning continues,

Philomathes: But I would speere one worde further yet, concerning his appearing to them in prison, which is this. May any other that chances to be present at that time in the prison, see him as well as they.

Epistemon: Sometimes they will, and sometimes not, as it pleases God.⁽¹⁾

James is also on safe ground when discussing the old question of why women were more disposed to witchcraft than men:

"The reason is easie: for as that sexe is frailer then men is, so is it easier to be intrapped in these grosse snares of the Devill, as was over well proved to be true, by the Serpents deceiving of Eva at the beginning, which makes him the homelier with that sexe sensine."⁽²⁾

The point which gives him the most obvious difficulty is that of the relative power of God and Satan. Throughout his treatise he vacillates between a Calvinist and a dualist position, with the emphasis, though rather confused, on the ultimate omnipotence of God. Philomathes argues that "Prophecie procedeth onelie of God; and the Devill hath no knowledge of things to come." Epistemon, quoting 2 Corinthians, 11. 14, replies that Satan can transform himself into an angel of light, but that God will not permit him to deceive his own, but only such as

1. *Daemonologie*, pp. 52-3.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 43-44.

first wilfully deceive themselves. "It is true", he admits, "that the devill cannot foretell all things in the future", but, he does have considerable knowledge, and "he knowes it only as his being worldly wise & taught by an continual experience, ever since the creation", or else, "by God's employing him in a turn".⁽¹⁾ The idea that the Devil's power comes from an excess or worldly wisdom gained by having been around the place for a very long time is unorthodox by any standards, but one which James does not develop.

In the Preface he allows himself to say,

"Not that I touch every particular thing of the Devil's power, for that were infinite".⁽²⁾

It is possible that he is using the word "infinite" in the same loose way that we use it today, but if so, it was an extremely careless adjective to use in a treatise dealing with a subject which turns on this very point.

Later on in Book II he subordinates the power of the Devil in a more orthodox Calvinist manner. On evil spirits he says,

"But the principall part of their fal, consisting in qualitie, by the falling from the grace of God wherein they were created, they continued still thereafter, and shal do while the latter daie, in wandring through the world, as God's hang-men, to execute such turnes as he employes them in. And when anie of them are not occupied in that, returne they must to thar prison in hel (as it is plaine in the miracle that Christ wrought at Gennezareth) therein at the latter daie to be enclosed forever."⁽³⁾

1. *Daemonologie*, p. 5.

2. *Ibid.*, f. 3.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 20.

And of the Devil himself,

"If there were no men nor women to be his instrumentes, he could finde waies inough without anie helpe of others to wracke al mankinde:⁽¹⁾ ... but the limits of his power were set down before the foundations of the world were laid."⁽²⁾

Perhaps the best point he makes in the whole book is on the danger of idle curiosity in leading people to witchcraft. We are led to witchcraft says James,

"even by these three passionnes that are within our selves: Curiositie in great ingines: thrist of revenge, for some tortes deeply apprehended: or greedie appetite of geare, caused through great poverty. As to the first of these, Curiosity, it^s onelie the enticement of Magicians, or Necremanciers - and the other two are the allures of so^ycerers, or witches."⁽³⁾

He did in fact follow his own precept quite carefully on the matter of idle curiosity, rejecting the attractions of occultism and natural magic, and refusing to dwell (unlike the ministers who took up the witch hunt in Scotland after he had left) on the sexual aspects of witchcraft.

He ends with a return to his favourite apocalyptic theme. This time it is prevalence of the witches rather than the Roman Catholics which illustrates the fact that the end of the world is at hand:

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1. "The devil can bring about an effect of magic without the cooperation of any witch ... The devil makes use of a witch, not because he has need of any such agent, but because he is seeking the perdition of the witch." *Malleus Maleficarum*, p. 12.
 2. *Daemonologie*, p. 30.
 3. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

"Philomathes: And to conclude then, since I am to take my leave of you. I pray to God to purge this Cuntry of these Divellishe practises: for they were never so rife in these partes, as they are now.

Epistemon: I pray God that so be to. But the causes are over manifest that makes them to be so rife. For the great wickednesse of the people on the one parte, procures this horrible defection, whereby God justlie punisheth sinne, by a greater iniquitie. And on the other part, the consummation of the worlde, and our deliverance drawing neare, makes Sathan to rage the more in his instrumentes, knowing his kingdome to be so neare an end. And so fare-well for this time."⁽¹⁾

James' treatise, and its place in the witchcraft argument, illustrates very well the way in which this issue cut right across the wider theological debate between Catholicism and Protestantism. James himself quotes no Catholic writers, either to praise or to blame. The principal objects of his attack were fellow-Protestants, and both he and they litter their pages with anti-Roman remarks. James, for example, refers to charming and incanting as,

"Long praiers, and much muttring and murmuring of the conjurers; like a Papist priest dispatching a hunting Masse."⁽²⁾

Moreover while some general Calvinist theology can be seen in the *Daemonologie*, James never cites Calvin directly, not even when he writes about astrology. It is his

1. *Daemonologie*, p. 80.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 18.

opponent Reginald Scot who makes constant appeal to Calvin, quoting with exact reference from his *Institutio Christianae Religionis*, in support of his thesis;

"For it is there said that Christ met a man which had a divell, and he commanded the fowle spirit to come forth of the man ... But Calvine saith; where Sathan or the divell is named in the singular number, thereby is meant that power of wickednesse that standeth against the Kingdome of iustice ..."(1)

and

"(Calvine in Genesis. Cap. 3. 1) Trulie Calvines opinion is to be like and revered, and his example to be embraced and followed, in that he offereth to subscribe to them that hold, that the Holie Ghost in that place did of purpose use obscure figures, that the cleare light thereof might be deferred, till Christs comming." (2)

What was the effect in Scotland of James' contribution to this controversy? It seems likely that the witch mania would have developed without James' help; but the publication of his treatise must have assisted it. It was after all, the first work of its kind to appear in Scotland, and that, combined with the fact that it was written by the King must have ensured a good circulation for it. To set against this there is the fact that there is no pandering in it to the popular taste for the obscene and that the style is distinctly unattractive. Those passages quoted so far are among the clearer ones.

1. *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*, p. 515.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 516. Scot also devotes a whole chapter (xxxj, p. 539) to an exposition of "Iohn Calvines opinion of the divell", and makes many other references to him, all of them favourable. His use of Calvin, however, is more an indication of the extent of his reputation in England than of any liberal views on witch burning.

A good deal of it is like this:

"As to the other part of the argument in case they can, which rather (with reverence of the learned thinking otherwaies) I am induced to beleeve, by reason of the faithfull report that men found of religion, have made according to the fight thereof, I think if so be, I say these may be the respectes, whereupon the Papistes may have that power." (1)

Many have wondered how such a highly educated and learned monarch could possibly have believed in witchcraft at all, and express their astonishment at the contradictions possible within a single character.

The Steeholms, (on the 1590 - 91 trials) state,

"The Prince who six months before had advocated a confederation of powers for peace in Europe now ordered a collection of miserable old women and demented men to be put to torture." (2)

and,

"It seems impossible to believe that a man who had listened to Tycho Brahe's mathematical plotting of the heavens, who had had the stars in their courses explained to him, should have honestly and actually believed that he was beset by evil spirits. It is equally impossible to reconcile this well-educated, worldly young man, who could write fluently in three languages, who could grasp diplomatic situations in the twinkling of an eye, with the superstition-ridden youth who promptly clapped Bothwell into prison as the result of these witches' accusations." (3)

In fact there is no particular contradiction involved. James, in his researches into the subject, was simply catching up with an aspect of European thought which up till 1590 he had missed. According to our

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1. *Daemonologie*, p. 72.
 2. *James I of England*, p. 140.
 3. *Ibid.*, p. 141-2.

standards Tycho Brahe also believed some very strange things.

In fact it is very much to James' credit that so soon after the publication of *Daemonologie* he was able to put the whole problem of witchcraft into perspective: a feat which many greater minds than his were at that time unable to perform.

As already suggested the achievement may have been due, in part, to a guilty conscience; in part, to the fact that in *Daemonologie* he had done all the self-justifying he needed; in part, to his increasing absorption in the problems of his own succession to Elizabeth's more glorious throne. Certainly he had other matters to occupy him, both in his last years in Scotland and after his arrival in England.

The older view⁽¹⁾ was that James came to England as a triumphant witch-hunter ready to root out the pestilence of sorcery there as well; also that his arrival gave new impetus to the persecution in England and marked the beginning of a reign of terror. This picture was based on false assumptions. It was believed

1. Expressed by Sir Walter Scott, *Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft*, London, 2nd ed., 1831, p. 239; by Thomas Wright, *Narratives of Sorcery and Magic*, London, 1851, Vol. II, p. 119; by Robert Steel, in *Social England* (ed. H.D. Traill, London, 1903 (Illustrated edition), Vol. IV., p. 120; and by G.M. Trevelyan, *England under the Stuarts*, London, 1904, pp. 27-28 in 19th ed., 1946.

that the English Witchcraft Act of 1604 was much more severe than the Elizabethan Act of 1563, and that it was necessarily followed by more severe proceedings. In 1912, Professor G.L. Kittredge effectively disproved these theories.⁽¹⁾ From his study of the records of the Home Circuit (the most complete collection of records existing for the period) he showed that there had been more persecution of witches in England under Elizabeth than in the whole of the seventeenth century. He compared the Elizabethan Witchcraft Act clause by clause with that of 1604, and showed that the later Act was more severe in one clause only: that ordaining death for the first conviction of raising up evil spirits. This clause, he showed, was not in fact put into execution until the panic in Essex of 1645 caused by the witch-finder, Matthew Hopkins. In the whole of James' reign there were fewer than forty executions for witchcraft in England; and this figure should be compared with an average of seventy a year for felonies generally in the county of Middlesex alone.

It was also thought that James took a vigorous and interested part - similar to that played by him during the

1. In English Witchcraft and James I, and Witchcraft in Old and New England.

North Berwick investigations - in the trials of the Lancashire witches of 1612; but the only source for this seems to be Harrison Ainsworth's novel, *The Lancashire Witches*.⁽¹⁾ Another story: that James ordered all copies of Reginald Scot's treatise to be publicly burned by the common hangman, seems to be based only upon the scarcity of the first edition.⁽²⁾

James in fact relaxed his views on witchcraft shortly after the publication of his own contribution to the subject in 1597. He continued to take an interest in witch cases, but had more pleasure in discrediting frauds than in encouraging prosecutions.⁽³⁾ It seems unlikely that he ever abandoned entirely his views on witchcraft, but he became increasingly sceptical about each particular case which was brought to his notice. His writings show less interest in the theoretical aspect of the demonic. In his *Meditation on the Lords Prayer*, published in 1619, he makes no attempt to use the "deliver us from evil" phrase as a starting point for a long discourse on Satan. This phrase, he wrote, follows on from "lead us not into temptation", and refers to the evil of temptation and

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1. *The Lancashire Witches*, London, 1899, Book III, Chap. VI.
 2. It is frequently repeated as, for example, by Geoffrey Parrinder, *Witchcraft*, Harmondsworth, 1958, p. 28.
 3. The findings of Kittredge are now generally accepted by all those who are aware of them. They have been more widely publicised by R. Trevor Davies, *Four Centuries of Witch Beliefs*, London, 1947, pp. 58-75, but they are still sometimes ignored in more general works, as for example in David Mathew, *Scotland under Charles I*, London, 1955, pp. 55-58.

punishment: an explanation which could have come as easily from the pen of a Victorian liberal theologian. "The Greek hath it", he admits, "from the evill one; and these words put us in minde what need we have of continuall prayer to God, to be preserved from that old traiterous and restlesseemie - *qui circundet terram*". The Latin, *a malo*, can mean "any evill thing or the evill one - whether by the means of Satan or otherwise." (1)

In fact it would appear that King James at fifty three had lost sight of demonology; his interest in the subject was one of the intellectual adventures of a young man, stimulated by fear for his own life and crown. Once in England, where his personal safety was relatively assured, and where many new interests and problems occupied his attention, it is scarcely surprising that his preoccupation with witchcraft should lapse.

1. Meditation on the Lords Prayer, London, 1619.

CHAPTER SIX.

LEGAL OPINION: SIR GEORGE MACKENZIE.

When James took the high road to England, the witch persecution in Scotland had only just begun. There were fewer prosecutions in the years immediately following 1597, but the witch fever mounted again in the early years of the seventeenth century, and by the early 1620's had reached the dimensions of a panic. It has been estimated that between 1590 and 1680 over 4,000 witches were burnt in Scotland.⁽¹⁾

Many reasons have been instanced for the extent and ferocity of the persecution here, and none are completely satisfactory. The attitude of the clergy is one most frequently suggested. Yet if we look at the mechanism of arrest, it can be seen that the blame must be more evenly spread throughout the population. In the first place the neighbours would complain that they or their cows had been bewitched, and would bring the local troublemaker to the attention of the elders. (In many cases these elders would also be magistrates). In the preliminary questioning and admonishing the minister might well play some part, and he might also help in procuring a commission for the trial of the witch. After that she became the responsibility of the commissioners, the

1. G.F. Black, Cases of Witchcraft, pp. 17-18.

bailies, the lords of regality, or the High Court of Justiciary. It was Scotland as a whole that persecuted the witch.

In this persecution, the legal profession clearly played a prominent part. Yet the Witchcraft Act had no commentators until Sir George Mackenzie published his *Pleadings in Some Remarkable Cases* in 1672. Sir James Balfour in his *Practicks*⁽¹⁾ merely mentions the Act in passing: "Witchcraftis, sorcerie, and necromancie forbidden."⁽²⁾ Sir Thomas Hope, writing in the first half of the seventeenth century makes no mention of witchcraft at all, either in his *Minor Practicks*⁽³⁾ or his *Major Practicks*⁽⁴⁾ or in his journal. This is a little curious in view of the fact that he refers in the *Major Practicks* to the Act of 1591:

"finding that infamous persones, weomen, bairns, or *consci criminis*, in cause of *lese majestie* and heresie may be admitted wittnesses,"⁽⁵⁾

for this was passed in order to simplify the proceedings

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1. or *A System of the more ancient Law of Scotland*, 1575, first published Edin., 1754.
 2. *Op. cit.*, p. 537.
 3. First published Edin., 1726.
 4. 1608-1633, *Stair Soc. Vol. IV.*
 5. *Loc. cit.*, p. 304.

at the North Berwick witch trials. Sir John Skene, too, only mentions briefly the existence of an act against witchcraft.⁽¹⁾

The first Scottish lawyer to write on the legal issues involved was Sir George Mackenzie (1636-1691), known to history as "Bloody Mackenzie" for his part in the prosecution and condemnation of the Covenanters. His reflections on the subject display at least some degree of intelligence and humanity, which makes them stand out in the bulk of European witchcraft literature. Whether from conviction or policy, he accepted the findings of the demonologists, but concentrated on attempts to modify the rigour of the 1563 Act in practice.

In his "Defence of Maevia",⁽²⁾ Mackenzie gave a detailed account of his defence of a particular woman indicted for witchcraft. In this case the woman was accused of flying in the shape of a dove with two other witches to their meeting place, and of putting on and then removing a disease with a charm. Mackenzie begins his defence with a theological argument to prove the

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1. in *The Laws and Acts of Parliament*, Edin., 1597, p. 156, and in *De Verborum Significatione*, Edin., 1597, f. R.2, in which he misquotes the Act as 8 Mar. C. 78, instead of 9 Mar. c. 73, and in his appendix to his translation of the *Regiam Majestatem: The Auld Laws and Constitutions of Scotland*, Edin., 1609, *Capital Crimes*, Tit. 2, Chap. 10.
 2. In *Pleadings in some Remarkable Cases*, Edin., 1672. Hereinafter referred to as Remarkable Cases.

existence of witchcraft, probably to undercut any attempts to discredit his defence on the grounds of "atheism" or "saduceedism";

"I am not of their opinion, who deny that there are Witches, though I think them not numerous; and though I believe that some are suffer'd by providence, to the end that the being of Spirits may not be deny'd; Yet I cannot think, that our Saviour, who came to dispossesse the devil, who wrought more Miracles in his own time, upon possess persons, then upon any else, at whose first appearances the oracles grew dumb, and all the devils forsook their temples; and who promised (John 12) that the Prince of this World was now to be cast out, would yet suffer him to reign like a Sovereign, as our fabulous representations would now persuade us." (1)

He then turns to the charge of laying on a disease by charming and appeals for caution in the face of our ignorance of the ways of nature:

"As to the imposing or taking off diseases by Charmes, I conceive it is undeniable, that there are many diseases whereof the Cures, as well as the Causes, are unknown to us: Nature is very subtile in its operations, and we very ignorant in our iniquities; from the conjunction of which two, arises the many errors and mistakes, we commit in our reflections upon the productions of nature: to differ then from one another, because of these errors, is sufferable, though to be regreted; but to kill one another, because we cannot comprehend the reason of what each other do, is the effect of a terrible distraction; and if this were allow'd, the most Learned should still be in greatest danger, because they do oftentimes find mysteries which astonish the ignorant; and this should give occasion to the Learned to forbear deep searches into natural mysteries, lest they should lose their life in gaining knowledge, and to persecute one another: for every Physitian or Mathematician, who is emulous of another, but cannot comprehend what his rival doth, would immediately make him passe for a Wizard. It is natural for men to think that to be above the reach of Nature, which is above theirs. If this principle had taken place amongst our predecessors, who durst have us'd the Adamant? For certainly, nothing looks liker a Charm,

1. Remarkable Cases, p. 185.

or Spell, then to see a Stone draw Iron; and men are become now so wise as to laugh at these who burnt a Bishop, for alledging the World was round, so blind and cruel a thing is ignorance: And if this principle, of believing nothing whereof we do not see a cause, were admitted, we may come to doubt, whether the curing of the Kings Evil by the touch of a Monarch, may not be likewise called charming."⁽¹⁾

This is followed by a discussion about whether the mere fact of a threat by the alleged witch followed by some calamity could be held a proof of witchcraft, in which Mackenzie concluded that,

"It is required that the threatenings were specifick, as if she had promised that she should cause her distract, and the distraction accordingly followed: but it were too lax, to ascribe every accident to a general threatening ..."⁽²⁾

After quoting Canon Lawyers and the Jesuit demonologist Del Rio in his support, he argues

"In law, when I am said to have produced any effect, there must be a necessary contingency shewed betwixt what I did and what followed ..."⁽³⁾

He also argues, quoting the English Puritan theologian William Parkins, that,

"No 'malefice' alone can be sufficient ground to condemn a witch, except she either confess, or that it be proven by two famous Witnesses, that she used means that might have produc'd that effect."⁽⁴⁾

Further,

"If it were otherwise, Judges might condemn upon guessing or malice, and so more would be in danger to die by injustice, then by Witchcraft."⁽⁵⁾

1. Remarkable Cases, p. 186.

2. Ibid., p. 187.

3. Ibid., p. 187.

4. Ibid., p. 188.

5. Ibid., p. 189.

In dealing with the next point; that the accused witch had cured the person she had "distracted" (by which some kind of hysteria is no doubt meant) by applying a 'Plantane' leaf to the left side of her head and binding a paper to her wrist on which was written the name of Jesus, Mackenzie suggests, perhaps a little weakly, that,

"there is nothing so cold as a Plantane leaf, and so it might have been very fit for curing a distraction, which is the most malignant and burning of all feverish distempers." (1)

He also suggests that the sufferer and his client were quite simply reconciled, and that the 'distraction' had been caused in the first place by their quarrel. The use of the name of Jesus he was well aware was dangerous ground, but he argues boldly,

"It is not probable, that the Devil, who is a constant enemy to mankind, would employ himself for their advantage; and the Name of Jesus being used, so much respect ought to be had to it, that the user should not be punished with death, except it could be clearly proved otherwise, that she had received this Charm from the Devil." (2)

That such a use of the name of Jesus was improper he admitted,

"but to burn a poor ignorant woman, who knew not that to be evil which she used were to make ignorance become Witchcraft, and ourselves more criminal, then the person we would condemn." (3)

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1. *Remarkable Cases*, p. 190.
 2. *Ibid.*, p. 191.
 3. *Ibid.* p. 191.

And after citing several cases of misplaced and ignorant devotion, which were clearly not criminal nor, in intention, blasphemous, he adds,

"I might likewise allege here, that it is against the confest principles of all Criminalists, that *una venefica non potest esse ligans & solvens in eodem morbo*, cannot both put on and take off a disease; for, it seems that the Devil thinks, that it were too much to bestow such favours upon one of his favourites."⁽¹⁾

In his refutation of the charge that his client flew like a dove with the witches to their meeting place he clearly feels far more confident:

"This article seems to me very ridiculous: for I might debate, that the Devil cannot carry Witches bodily, as Luther, Melanchthon, Alciat, Vairus, and others assert, because it is not probable, that God would allow him the permission constantly to work this miracle, in carrying persons to a publick place, where they join in blaspheming His Name, and scorning His Church."⁽²⁾

And,

"I may confidently assert, that he cannot transform a woman into the Shape of a Dove, that being impossible; for how can the Soul of a Woman inform and actuate the body of a Dove, these requiring diverse Organs, and administration; and to believe such transmutations, is expressly declared Heresie by the Canon Law, and to deserve excommunication, cap. Episcopi 26 quest. 5., and is condemned by St. Augustine, lib. 18, de civit. Dei, Delrio lib. 2, Questio 18, Ghirland 7, and though the Scripture tells us, that Nebuchadnazar was transform'd from a man to a beast by God, yet it follows not that the Devil hath that power ... We must then conclude, that these confessions of Witches she affirm, that they have been transformed into beasts, is but an illusion of the fancy wrought by the Devil upon their melancholy brains, whilst they sleep ... nor is this illusion impossible to be affectuated by the Devil, who can imitate nature and corrupt the humours, since melancholly doth ordinarily persuade men that they are Wolves (licanthropi) Dogs, and other beasts."⁽³⁾

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1. *Remarkable Cases*, p. 193.
 2. *Ibid.*, pp. 193-4.
 3. *Ibid.*, p. 194.

Mackenzie suggests that the two witches whose confessions had incriminated his client had simply dreamed that she was with them: "and were it not a horrid thing, to condemn innocent persons upon meer dreams!"⁽¹⁾ He admits that such confessions might be good ground for condemning the confessors, since it suggested that they had a desire to be there, but rejects their evidence, and would have the judge reject it, on the ground that they are "socii criminis" and "such ought not to be believed".⁽²⁾

He ends by arguing that even if the woman is in fact a witch, the civil law has traditionally not always punished everything that Divines condemn. Sometimes it is more tolerant, for lawyers "having so much more power than divines should be careful how they punish". So he appeals to their professional pride:

"Consider how much fancy does influence ordinary Judges in the trials of this crime, for none now labour under any extraordinary Disease, but it is instantly said to come by witchcraft, and then the next old deform'd or envyed woman is presently charged with it; from this ariseth a confused noise of her guilt, called *diffamatio* by Lawyers, who make it a ground for seizure, upon which she being apprehended is imprisond, starved, kept from sleep, and oft times tortured .. Judges allow themselves too much liberty, in condemning such as are accused of this crime because they conclude they cannot be severe enough to the enemies of God; and Assisers are afraid to suffer such to escape as are remitted to them, lest they let loose an enraged Wizard in their neighbour-hood. And thus poor Innocents die in multitudes by an unworthy Martyredom, and Burning comes in fashion ..."⁽³⁾

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1. *Remarkable Cases*, p. 195.
 2. *Ibid.*, p. 195.
 3. *Ibid.*, p. 196.

We should not omit Mackenzie's theological reason for keeping the ministers in their place:

"For, though this woman were guilty, yet if she be so, she will suffer by the sting of conscience here, and will be reserved for a greater fire hereafter, then you can ordain for her; whereas if she be innocent, your sentence cannot be reformed. And why should you take pain to augment the number of the Devil's servants in the eyes of the world." (1)

Throughout his argument he makes constant appeal to the actual terms of the 1563 Act. He suggests that by this Act only arts for abusing the people are condemned, and since no such art was used in the case of his client therefore "this Article" (that accusing the woman of having caused her neighbour to fall into a 'distraction') "cannot be said to fall under the prohibition of the Act of Parliament." (2) Further,

"though our Act of Parliament punished such as seek help by unlawfull meanes of Sorcerers, or Necromancers, yet they must first be prov'd to be Sorcerers, or Necromancers, who make a trade of abusing the people, as that Statute sayes, which cannot be drawn at all to a dubious Cure used in one case, and by the application of natural means ... " (3)

Mackenzie's chapter on witchcraft in *The Laws and Customs of Scotland in Matters Criminal* which was published six years after in 1678, repeats some of these arguments for treating the whole question of witchcraft with great circumspection, though they are set out there in a more formal manner; and he includes general material on the

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1. *Remarkable Cases*, p. 195.
 2. *Ibid.*, p. 189.
 3. *Ibid.*, p. 192.

law of witchcraft not relevant to the particular case he was dealing with before.

The chapter is set out under twenty-six heads, and Mackenzie begins, as he did in his defence of the witch whom he refers to as "Maevia"⁽¹⁾ with a declaration of his belief in witchcraft over against the opinions of Weyer (or Wierus in Mackenzie's spelling), who was a hundred years later still apparently the most notorious of the sceptics. In support of the belief Mackenzie cites Scripture, and also gives numerous classical allusions to the existence of witchcraft. He warns again against too ready a belief in particular cases of witchcraft, and notes that "in the duller ages of the world" all sorts of true mathematicians passed for magicians. He adds though that he is "still very jealous of those Sages (Porphiry, Jamblicus, and Plotinus) who were frequented by Familiar Spirits", and "pretended to be so spiritual ... The Fathers testified against them as mere magicians."⁽²⁾

Lawyers should be especially careful in cases of witchcraft that the guilt of the accused be fully established, for since the crime is so great the punishment is correspondingly severe:

"And I condemn next to the Witches themselves, those cruel and too forward Judges, who burn persons by thousands as guilty of this crime."⁽³⁾

1. *Remarkable Cases*, p. 185.

2. *Laws and Customs*, p. 44. Using the 2nd edition, Edin., 1699.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 45.

Those who are accused are more often than not innocent.

They are normally poor ignorant creatures,

"and oft-times Women who understand not the nature of what they are accused of; and many mistake their own fears and apprehensions for Witchcraft; of which I shall give you two instances, one of a poor Weaver, who after he had confessed Witchcraft, being asked how he saw the Devil, he answered, Like Flies dancing about the Candle. Another of a Woman, who asked seriously, when she was accused, if a Woman might be a Witch and not know it? And it is dangerous that these who are of all others the most simple, should be tried for a Crime which of all others is most mysterious."⁽¹⁾

Others, he suggested, were overcome by some spirit of melancholy, some confessed only because they were tortured, and yet others because their life would not be worth living once they had been accused of witchcraft:

"I went when I was a Justice Deput to examine some Women, who had confest judicially, and one of them, who was a silly Creature, told me under Secresie, that she had not confest because she was Guilty, but being a poor Creature, who wrought for her Meat, and being defamed for a Witch she knew she would Starve, for no person thereafter would either give her Meat or Lodging, and that all men would Beat her, and hound Dogs at her, and that therefore she desired to be out of the World; whereupon she wept most bitterly and upon her knees call'd God to witness to what she said."⁽²⁾

Mackenzie then argues, attacking the theologians on their own ground, that many of the witches confess things which "Divines conclude impossible"⁽³⁾ such as transmutation into animals and the penetration of closed doors; and urges that the present practice in Scotland of arresting on the slightest suspicion is contrary to the opinions of all

1. *Laws and Customs*, p. 45.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 45-46.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 46.

lawyers and demonologists. Those who are tried before a country assize of neighbours never escape, and in fact a special warrant should be required for the arrest of any suspected witch. In support of this assertion he cites Canon Law and the Jesuit Del Rio, and gives a somewhat loose interpretation of the Scottish Witchcraft Act:

"By Q.M. 9. Parl. 73 Act., All Sherriffs, Lords of Regalities, and their Deputs, and all other Judges having power to execute the same, are ordained to execute that Act against Witchcraft: which can import no more, but that they should concur to the Punishment of the Crime by apprehending or imprisoning the Party suspect: But it doth not follow, that because they may concur, that therefore they are judges competent to the cognition of the crime .. This is the province of the Justice Court solely".⁽¹⁾

He gives an orthodox account of the demonic pact. This, he says, is divided by lawyers into *expressum* and *tacitum* and for the express or explicit pact "the formula set down by Del Rio is, I deny God, Creator of Heaven and Earth, and I adhere to thee, and believe in thee".⁽²⁾ The tacit pact is assumed when the Devil's tools such as charms and invocations are used to effect any end. Mackenzie does not mention the extension of this doctrine, sometimes made in Scotland, in which the child of a witch is also assumed to have been dedicated to the Devil, in the same way that the child of a Christian is assumed to have been dedicated to God.

Mackenzie accepts the theory of the Devil's mark,

1. Laws and Customs, p. 47.

2. Ibid., p. 47.

but with so many reservations that this does not amount to very much:

"The Devil's Mark useth to be a great Article with us, but it is not *per se* found relevant, except it be confest by them, that they got that mark with their own consent; *quo casu*, it is equivalent to a Paction".⁽¹⁾

The mark is according to Del Rio, he tells us, like a Hare's foot or rat's foot, and

"it is dicovered amongst us by a Pricker, whoe trade it is and who learns it as other Trades; but this is a horrid Cheat."⁽²⁾

He mentions the case of a "villain" setting up as a professional Pricker, who, in 1666 confessed it all to be a cheat.⁽³⁾

Section by section Mackenzie prunes away the number of signs which can be accepted *on their own* as proofs of witchcraft. But despite the fact that he thought condemnations were frequently made on far too flimsy evidence he asserts that "superstitious usages designed to hurt should be punished"⁽⁴⁾ thus restating the essence of witchcraft in its most primitive, social (or non-theological) form.

From this he moves on to a consideration of the difference between black magic (superstitious usages intended to harm) and white magic (superstitious usages

1. *Laws and Customs*, p. 48.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 48.

3. A reference to John KinKaid who practised in East Lothian.

4. *Laws and Customs*, p. 49.

intended to cure) and accepts the ruling of the Canon Law over against that of the Civil Law in condemning the latter along with the former. It is perfectly correct, he concludes, to burn "without malefice" when charms and invocations have undoubtedly been used;⁽¹⁾ and in the same class as this he puts the practice of the consultation of witches as a "relevant dittay". On very rare occasions this may be excused by ignorance or "if done as a jest".⁽²⁾

The fact that the accused is a notorious witch in his or her neighbourhood, what the "doctors call *diffamatio*, and we common bruit and open fame ... are never sustained as relevant *per se*: only when joined with other things."

A confession has some relevance, but

"it should be certain that the persons who emitted it is not weary of life, or apprest with melancholy".

Further, the things which are confessed should not be accepted if they are impossible.

"And to know what things are of themselves impossible for the Devil to do, or at least what is believed to be impossible, may be seen very fully treated of in Delrio's second Book, where it is condescended that *succubi et incubi sunt possibilis, id est*, that the Devil may ly in the shape of a man with a woman or in the shape of a woman with a man having first found to himself a body of condensed Air; and upon such confession as this, Margaret Lawdor and other were convict ..."

Here, there are perhaps signs that Mackenzie is using his authorities in order to avoid expressing his own opinion,

1. *Laws and Customs*, p. 50.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 51.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 51.

rather than in order to support it. Rather surprisingly though, he used all his resources to condemn those who claim to have been transported whether in imagination or in fact:

"Sometimes though the Devil works upon the imagination of the witches making them think they have been there"(at the witches meeting).

Dreams are equally punishable because the dreamers desire them:

"nor have any these Dreams but such as have entered into a preceding paction. I know that the Canon Episcopi in the Council of Anacir, (or the Aquilean Council, as others call it) does condemn these transportations, as false and meer delusions, which are imprest upon the fancy of poor Creatures by the Devil, & *cum solus spiritus haec patitur, nec non in animo sed in corpore inveniri opinantur*, but that Act of that Council does not declare all transportations to be imaginary, and Dreams, but only declares those who thought they follow'd Diana and Herodias to these publick meetings, to be altogether seduced, for Herodias being dead long since could not be at their meetings. But from that it is unjustly concluded that there are no transportations."⁽²⁾

This shows a slight change from his earlier attitude as shown in the defence of *Maevia* where Mackenzie declared, in the face of "Luther, Malanchthon, Alciat, Wairus, and others," that,

"it is not probable that God would allow him (the Devil) the permission constantly to work this miracle, in carrying persons to a publick place, where they join in blaspheming His Name, and scorning His Church."⁽³⁾

On the question of demonic possession, Mackenzie

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1. *Laws and Customs*, p. 51.
 2. *Ibid.*, p. 52.
 3. *Remarkable Cases*, pp. 193-4.

admits that there is good evidence for it: it is testified to, he explains, by St. Jerome, but, on the other hand, he suggests,

"it is not to be imagined that Devils would obey mortal Creatures or that God would leave so great a power to any of them to torment poor mortals: And the Devil, who is a liar from the beginning, is not to be believed, in saying that he is put there by enchantments ..."(1)

Mackenzie denies that witches can penetrate walls⁽²⁾ or that the Devil can transform one species into another. He will allow no precedents here, and quotes Del Rio with disfavour instead of as a supporting authority.⁽³⁾ He is prepared to admit, however, that the Devil may "make Bruits to speak, or at least speak out of them", and that the Devil can also raise storms and calm them.⁽⁴⁾ This was one of the characteristics of demonic behaviour always well to the fore in Scottish demonology ever since James VI's misfortunes on the North Sea.

The Devil may inflict diseases, and cure them when he has laid them on. And he can even cure natural diseases,

"better than Physicians can, who are not present when Diseases are contracted, and who being younger than he, must have less experience." (5)

This is an echo of King James' theory that the power of

1. *Laws and Customs*, p. 52.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 52.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 52.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 53.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 53.

the Devil lies in his accumulations of worldly wisdom which are more considerable than the most wicked or knowledgeable of ordinary worldly men.⁽¹⁾

The problem of the removal of diseases caused by the activity of a witch - of exorcism, in fact, though Mackenzie does not use that term - is a complicated one, but Mackenzie solves it by saying that,

"Since all commerce with Devils is unlawful, this practice (of getting one witch to cure a disease imposed by another) is justly rebrobated by D. Autun. p. 2. discourse 48.⁽²⁾ but you may appeal to the bewitcher *if a new application to the Devil is not involved.* Autun. pag. 825." (3)

He agrees that witches could kill by their looks ("and why may not Witches poison in this way as the Basilisk does?")⁽⁴⁾ but doubts whether witches have the power to induce love. He admits that the Civil Law ("l. 4. c. de Malef. & Math.") says that they have, but considers that "this law speaks only of lust and not of love as I conceive it."⁽⁵⁾

On the question of who should be admitted as witnesses, he says that the confession of one witch should not be able to secure the conviction of another without additional evidence, but that it is difficult to obtain this additional evidence without admitting the legitimacy

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1. Daemonologie, p. 5.
 2. "D. Autun" is an authority I have not yet traced. According to Remarkable Cases, he is the author of an 800 page Discourse of Witchcraft.
 3. Laws and Customs, p. 53.
 4. Laws and Customs, p. 53.
 5. Ibid., p. 54.

as witnesses of an injured person, of women, and of *socii criminis*. None of these in fact would normally be admitted in a criminal case except those covered by the act of 1591 already referred to,⁽¹⁾ In admitting the legitimacy of the evidence of *socii criminis* Mackenzie goes against his own previous argument in his defence of *Maevia*.⁽²⁾

Another frequently accepted "mark and presumption" of witchcraft, according to Mackenzie, is the inability of a witch to shed tears; for such inability is a sign of impenitence, and also several convicted witches had confessed that they could not weep;

"But the being accused of so horrid a Crime may occasion a deep Melancholy, and Melancholy being cold and dry, hinders the shedding of tears; and great griefs do rather astonish than make one weep."⁽³⁾

He ends with a discussion of the penalty:

"The punishment of this Crime is with us death by the foresaid Act of Parliament, to be execute as well against the user as the seeker of any response or consultation, & *de practice*, the Doom bears, to be worried at the Stake, and burnt."⁽⁴⁾

He notes that some commentators on the Civil Law think that where no person is injured the death penalty should not be inflicted,

"but with us no such distinction can be allowed by the Justices, who must find all Libels relevant which bear consulting with Witches, and that Ditty being proved, they must condemn the Panel to die ..."⁽⁵⁾

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1. *See above*, pp. 136-137.
 2. *Remarkable Cases*, p. 195.
 3. *Laws and Customs*, p. 55.
 4. *Ibid.*, p. 55.
 5. *Ibid.*, p. 56.

There is a marked difference in the way in which Mackenzie uses his sources in the Defence of "Maevia" and in *The Laws and Customs of Scotland*. In the defence of his client he uses them as authorities, as precedents or views which support the points he wishes to make, as though the mere fact of having recited some earlier writer in his support made his point good. In *The Laws and Customs of Scotland* he freely gives all the opinions on each issue, and accepts or rejects their authority as it pleases him. In his own preface he makes it clear that he is attempting to present Scottish criminal law in its European context showing where and why it agrees or differs from the laws of other countries:

"I Collationed all with our Statutory Law, the Civil Law, and the Customs of other Countries, and the opinions of the Doctors. And .. I may without vanity say, that few valuable Authors treat of Crimes, whom I have not read ..." (1)

This is true. Mackenzie is the principal source for our knowledge of the legal and demonological works which were available in Scotland in the mid-seventeenth century, and which were regarded as having the greatest authority.

It is interesting to see that Mackenzie quotes no Scottish sources at all, apart from the Witchcraft Act itself. He makes no mention of King James' *Daemonologie* either to praise or blame. It seems certain then that

1. *Laws and Customs*, "The Authors Design", p. 2.

there was no local matter to draw on. His only other references to Scottish sources are to actual trials, and he does cite a good many of them.⁽¹⁾

An important source for his writings on witchcraft as well as for his legal writings generally is the Civil and the Canon Law and the commentators thereon, a fact which bears out the thesis of the present essay that the sources of the witch theories held in seventeenth century Scotland by the educated, were continental and Catholic rather than native and Calvinist. We have the testimony of the lawyer Sir Thomas Craig, writing in 1605, that,

"In Scotland, notwithstanding that we have thrown off the papal yoke, the authority of the Canon Law endures ..."⁽²⁾

As has been suggested, there was no clear standard at this time as to what was meant by an "authority". Mackenzie bears out this contention of Sir Thomas Craig's in that he makes frequent reference to the Canon Law and that he prefers on the whole to have its support, even when this involves him in collision with the Civil Law to which he also makes reference.

Witchcraft does not occupy a particularly large place in either of the two Codes⁽³⁾ - though the commentators

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1. e.g. *Laws and Customs*, pp. 53 and 55.
 2. *Ius Feudale*, (trans. Lord Clyde) p. 47, 1.3.(24)
 3. In the *Corpus Iuris Canonici* witchcraft is to be found under *Titulum de sortilegiis* (most important is the *cap. Episcopi* of the Council of Anacir), canon 26, quastio 5, Paris, 1618, pp. 319-321; in the *Corpus Iuris Civilis* in vol. 2. under *Codex* 9, *titulum* 18, *De Maleficiis et Mathematicis*.

are extensive - but there is enough to show a marked difference in attitude between them. The Civil Law simply reflects what has been called the basic social attitude to witchcraft. That is to say it is credulous: witches *can* do harm. Yet it distinguishes between black and white magic and is concerned to punish only *maleficium*: the black magic which has positive social effects in its intent to physical damage and notorious success in this field. For *maleficium* the punishment is death. The Canon Law is more sceptical. It dismisses belief in the powers of witchcraft as superstitious. At the same time it is extremely severe on those who attempt to practice it, threatening them with excommunication. It ~~also~~ repudiates the distinction between black and white magic: to the theologian all magic is an attempt to substitute some other power for that of God's. The theologian's concern is with all beliefs and practices which corrupt the soul; the civil lawyers, only with those which disrupt the body politic.

One might therefore expect Mackenzie, as a good layman, to follow the Civil Law more closely. But in fact the interest of the Scottish authorities in the persecution of witchcraft, except in two or three notorious cases of treason, appears generally to have been governed, ostensibly at least, by theological rather than by social

reasons - or rather, by the theological emphasis in all social questions - and so Mackenzie in his greater deference to the Canon Law was reflecting the theologically conscious society in which he lived and thought. In the *Laws and Customs of Scotland* he cites Canon Law four times, in three cases favourably, and Civil Law three times, every time unfavourably. In *Pleadings in Some Remarkable Cases* he cites Canon Law twice and Civil Law once; all of them favourable references, for, as suggested earlier, in this kind of writing he only mentions supporting material.

It is also apparent that in his more general discussion of witchcraft in the *Laws and Customs of Scotland* he is more prepared to take the side of theology, and less insistent on the sceptical reason which he displays in defence of "Maevia". This is clearly illustrated by his contradictory interpretations of both Canon and Civil Law in the two different works.

In the first instance, in his defence of the accused witch, he was extremely anxious to deny the possibility of the transportation of a witch through the air to the witches meeting-place: one of the accusations which had been levelled at his client. On this point he invokes the Canon Law in his support:

"... but I may confidently assert, that he (the Devil) cannot transform a woman into the Shape of a Dove, that being impossible; for how can the Soul of a Woman inform and actuat the body of a Dove, these requiring diverse Organs

and administration; and to believe such transmutations, is expressly declared Heresie by the Canon Law, and to deserve excommunication, cap. Episcopi 26. quaest. 5."⁽¹⁾

Here he is only pointing out that it is impossible that the woman could have been transported in the form of an animal, but he clearly intends to imply that the Canon Law also condemns belief in transportation in general - which in fact it does. In the *Laws and Customs* he asserts that the transportation of witches through the air to their meeting place *is* a possibility, and does his best to interpret the *Cap. Episcopi* to this effect:

"I know that the Canon Episcopi in the Council of Anacir .. does condemn these transportations, as false and meer delusions, which are imprest upon the fancy of poor Creatures by the Devil, & *cum solus spiritus haec patitur, nec non in animo sed in corpore inventri opinantur*, but that Act of that Council does not assert all transportations to be imaginary, and Dreams, but only declares those who thought they follow'd Diana and Herodias to these publick meetings, to be altogether seduced, for these indeed were seduced; for Herodias being dead long since, could not be at their meetings. But from that it is unjustly concluded, that there are no real transportations, there being so many instances of these transportations given, both in Sacred and prophane story; and persons having been found wounded and have really committed Murders and other insolencies, during these transportations."⁽²⁾

An even more flagrant example is his enlistment of the Civil Law in his support when he wishes to assert the distinction between black and white magic in his *Pleadings in Some Remarkable Cases*, and his dismissal of it in the *Laws and Customs* in which he supports the theologians in their refusal to acknowledge such a distinction.

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1. *Remarkable Cases*, p. 194.
 2. *Laws and Customs*, 1st pp. 98-99.
ed.

In *Remarkable Cases* he wrote,

"The law Per i. 4. Cod. de Malef. & Math. punished only such enchantments as kill men or incites them to unlawful lusts ... A statute made by Constantine and insert by Justinian amongst his own Laws cannot but be a law very fit to be observed in a Christian commonwealth. It is alleged that this was abrogated by Leo. nov. 65, yet this constitution by Leo is not insert in the Basilicks so that it seems it has not been abrogated." (1)

In the *Laws and Customs of Scotland*, he wrote,

"Albeit per leg. 4, Cod. de mal. & Math. these Magick Arts are only condemned, which tend to the destruction of mankind, but not these whereby men are cured, or the fruits of the ground preserved; yet I have oftimes imputed this constitution to Tribonian, who was a Pagan, and a severe enemy of Christians, or else that it behoved to be so interpret, or that thereby remedies, assisted by Godly prayers were allowed, else what mean these words, *suffragia innocenter adhibita*. But since I am informed from the ecclesiastick Historians, as Zozim, lib s. that Constantine was not yet turn'd Christian when he passed that constitution; but however this constitution is omitted in the Basilicks: and the Gloss sayes, that ... it was not thought fit to be mentioned in the repurgation of the Law; And that constitution was very well reprobated by Leo's 65 Novel. And by the Canon Law, tit. de sortilegiis: And the general Sanction of the former Act of Parliament leaves no place for this distinction." (2)

It is of course possible that Mackenzie changed his opinion on these two points in the six years interval between the publication of *Remarkable Cases* and that of *Laws and Customs*, but on the face of it it seems more likely that in the first instance he was merely arguing in a lawyer's fashion to his brief.

The lawyer to whom Mackenzie has most frequent recourse (not only in his demonological writings but

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1. *Remarkable Cases*, pp. 190-191.
 2. *Laws and Customs*, pp. 95-96.

throughout his legal works) is the Italian, Prosper Farinaccius,⁽¹⁾ whom he cites twice in each work. Only one of these citations is traceable, his other references being either incorrect or incomplete, but this one citation is a perfectly legitimate one, used in this case for comparison rather than support. He is referring again to secular leniency on the question of white magic:

"Farin. and others thinks, that where no person is injured death should not be inflicted; and that imprisonment and banishment is now practised by all nations in that case, Lib. I. Tom. 3. quest. 20. Num. 89 ...⁽²⁾ but with us no such distinction can be allowed by the judges, who must find all libels relevant, which bear consulting with Witches, and that Dittay being proved, they must condemn the Pannel to die"⁽³⁾

1. 1554 - 1613.

2. Prosper Farinaccius, *Opera Omnia*, 9 Tom. Francofurti, N.D., pp. 288 ff., (in fact in Lib. I. Tit. III, q. 20): "*Tertia sit conclusio, quod quicquid sit de iure, de consuetudine haec rigorosa poena mortis naturalis & confiscationis bonorum non servatur, sed sortilegi conficientes sortilegia non haereticalia vel justigantur, ut attestatur Numius delos corregidores, fol 259, nu.2, vel mittuntur in publico, & deinde banniuntur, ut attestatur Berber, in suo viatoris iur. rub. de sortileg. in fin. prout eas refert & sequitur Olar. in pract. haeresis, vers. fin. in fin. vel alia arbitraria poena plectuntur, prout in Vrbe apud nos septus servatum vidi in diversis superstitionis sortilegis, qui vel justigati fuerunt, vel banniti, vel ad triremes transmissi, vel pecunialiter mulctati, iuxta sortilegi & sortilegorum qualitates. Et iuxta Platonis sententiam, & leges XII tabularum hanc poenam pariter arbitrariam esse testatur D. Menoch. d. casu 388. nu. 1 & seq. Et particulariter ni iis, qui superstitione numinis alios terrent, prout faciunt illi, qui mittunt praecepta Vallis Josaphet, quod extra ordinem arbitraria poena puniantur, tradit Iul Clar. in pract. fin. qu. 83. vers. punientur etiam, & Clarum refert & sequitur D. Menoch, d. casu 388, nu 19 in fin. Et quod etiam de iure canonico sortilegorum poena fit arbitraria, dicam infra, in 8. conclus. nu. 94."*

3. *Laws and Customs*, p. 107.

His other references are nearly all to specifically demonological works: to the *De Sortilegiis* of Paulus Girlandus⁽¹⁾ to which he gives two references, to the *Subtilis ac Utilis Tractatus de Lamis* of Franciscus Ponzinibius to which he gives one reference,⁽²⁾ to the untraced *Discourse of Witchcraft* by D. Autun: four references; and most frequently of all to the *Disquisitionem Magicarum Libri Sex* by the Jesuit, Del Rio, to which he makes nineteen references.

Del Rio was a theologian, canon Lawyer, and demonologist, born at Antwerp in 1551, and died in Louvain in 1608. He became a Jesuit in 1580 at Valladolid, and was subsequently professor of theology at Douai. In 1593 he published his manual of demonology and magic, and it rapidly replaced the *Malleus Maleficarum* as a standard text book for magistrates and inquisitors, where all matters of sorcery and witchcraft were concerned. His *Disquisitionem Magicarum* was reprinted frequently throughout the seventeenth

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1. in *Tractatus Universi Iuris*, Tom. XI, Venice, 1584, Pars. 2. p. 382. Girlandus is brought into the argument in *Pleadings in some Remarkable Cases against the belief in transmutation*, (p. 194), though in this case Girlandus is writing about transportation, a fact which emphasises rather than minimises the contradiction between Mackenzie's two manipulations of the *Cap. Episcopi*. Girlandus text runs: "Dæmones deferre homines corporaliter de loco ad locum, mortuæ loci est impossibile, quod si verum esset, non modica, nec pauca sequerentur inconvenientia." *T. U. I.*, pp. 388-9.
 2. *Tractatus de Lamis*, in Tom., XI, Pars 2, pp. 350-354. Mackenzie's reference to this work is either inaccurate or inadequate.

century, and the last edition was published in 1746.⁽¹⁾ It is of some importance that, as on the continent, it became the principal work of reference for witchcraft trials in Scotland. These trials undoubtedly owed much in their atmosphere to the peculiarities of traditional Scottish folk magic, and were strongly affected by the neo-Calvinist Dutch theology common to all the participants, but the form of the inquiry, and the basic ideas, come from the work of the Jesuit Canonist.

Mackenzie, in his use of Del Rio, shows again his arbitrary and inadequate method of citation, and only some of his references can be traced. In some cases, too, where he actually quotes from Del Rio and does not merely give a reference, he seems to be working from memory, his version being a telegraphic one of the original.⁽²⁾

1. Dictionnaire de Theologie Catholique.
2. e.g. in Laws and Customs, p. 89, Mackenzie wrote, "according to Delrio's opinion, lib 5. Sect. 2. ad assumendas informationes; sufficient levia iudicia, sed gravia requiruntur ad hoc ut citetur reus, et ut iudex specialiter inquiret." There is nothing to that effect under that reference in Disquisitionem Magicarum, but in Lib. 5. Sect. 3 (p. 752 in the 5th edition, Colon: Agrippinae, 1658) we find, "ad assumendas ex officio informationes super delicto sufficiunt iudicia levia; sed ad transmittendam reo inquisitionem, sive ad eum citandum pro delicto, necessaria sunt iudicia gravia." If this were the edition Mackenzie used, there might have been some excuse for the inaccuracy of that particular reference since in this edition the heading over the passage is misprinted as Section II.

Only two non-Roman Catholic authors are referred to by Mackenzie: Jean Bodin, author of *De Magorum Daemonomania Libri Quattuor*,⁽¹⁾ and William Perkins, the Puritan Fellow of Christ's College, Cambridge, and author of a *Discourse of the Damned Art of Witchcraft*.⁽²⁾ Bodin and Perkins have three references each. The references to Bodin which also included detailed quotation, are ~~also~~ taken from memory. The references to Perkins' *Discourse* are all there, but not in Chapter six as Mackenzie says,⁽³⁾ but in Chapter seven, Section II.

As might be expected, there are several quotations from the Bible in *Laws and Customs*. Along with the Scottish Witchcraft Act they are the only citations which Mackenzie gives as having any absolute authority, and requiring only to be interpreted. He uses the biblical quotations chiefly to prove the existence of witchcraft, and this use of the Bible is ~~almost~~ the main indication we have of the theological atmosphere in which Mackenzie was working. He also gives some classical references to show that witchcraft existed in "pagan" times. In his inability to distinguish between the pagan and Christian

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1. 1st edition, 1579. The edition used here is that of Basel, 1581, which includes the *Opinionum Ioannis Wieri Confutatio*.
 2. Cambridge, 1608, also in *Works*, Cambridge, 1612.
 3. E.g. *Laws and Customs*, p. 94: "Perkins, cap 6, asserts that neither defamation nor mala fama can infer this crime ... but only the pannels own confession."

concepts of a witch, he shows the characteristic lack of historical intuition of his age.

The only other Scottish lawyer to write on witchcraft within the period during which it was a capital crime was William Forbes, Professor of Law in the University of Aberdeen, who published *The Institutes of the Law of Scotland* in 1730, and included in his volume on criminal law a section on witchcraft.⁽¹⁾ Forbes published only five years before the Act on which he was commenting was repealed, and either three or eight years⁽²⁾ after the last judicial burning for witchcraft had taken place in Scotland; but he shows few signs in his book that he is conscious that what he says is liable to become obsolete, apart from his rather curious appendix in which he more or less refuses to accept responsibility for his own views. He is merely explaining the law.

He is uninformative with regard to his sources, but it is clear that his principal authority for his witchcraft chapter was Mackenzie. Sometime he quotes him almost word for word without acknowledgement.

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1. *The Institutes of the Law of Scotland*, Edin., 1730, vol., II, Book II, Part I, chap. 3, pp. 32-41. Hereinafter cited as *Institutes*.
 2. The date is uncertain: either 1722 or 1727.

His definition of witchcraft is,

"... that black Art, whereby strange and wonderful Things are wrought by a Power derived from the Devil."⁽¹⁾

It is "wrought by Covenant with the Devil, express or tacite", and the mark is chiefly bestowed on "those of low rank". Like Mackenzie he refused to recognise the difference between good and bad witches: "this Term of a good witch is very improper, for all who have Commerce with Satan are certainly bad".

Further,

"Witches are chiefly employed in plain Mischief by hurting Persons or their goods ... But they sometimes work Mischief under a pretence or colour of doing Good; as when they cure diseases, loose enchantments and discover other witches. All their designs are brought about by Charms or ceremonious Rites instituted by the Devil, which are in themselves of no Efficacy, and serve only as Signals and Watchwords, to admonish Satan, as it were, when, where, and upon whom to do Mischief or perform Cures, according to his Compact with the Witches."⁽²⁾

Forbes, acting on precedent, is more ready than Mackenzie to accept as proof of witchcraft the fact that a threat by a witch was apparently followed by a misfortune without any other obvious cause;

"It hath been sustained, to bring in a Woman guilty of Witchcraft, that she threatened to do some Mischief to a Person, who immediately or not long after suffered a grievous Harm in his Body or Goods by Sorcery or Witchcraft, without any apparent or natural Cause, tho' the Manner,

1. *Institutes*, p. 32.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 35.

or Inchantment used to work such Mischief, was not particularly expressed, and the threat was only general and did not specify the ill Turn to be done."⁽¹⁾

"Injuries done by witches are not occasioned by any inherent Virtue or Efficacy in the Means used by them but only by the Devil's influence; and that there is no natural Cause of the Mischief done is the Reason of ascribing it to Witchcraft."⁽²⁾

Proofs of witchcraft, according to Forbes, are the general "bad fame" of being a witch, the fact of being the child, familiar friend, or servant, of a convicted witch, being unable to shed tears, inability to say the Lords Prayer, and possession of the Devil's mark. These "presumptions of witchcraft," however, he admits to be slender, and suggests that other "presumptions of witchcraft" are in fact unlawful; those of pricking the witch, swimming the witch, and that of bringing the accused in to the bewitched person in order to see how that person will react. Ordinary proof of witchcraft according to Forbes is by the confession of the accused or the testimony of witnesses. About confessions he says,

"Many Persons have been convicted of Witchcraft upon their own Confession. But such Confession ought (1) To be free and voluntary and no way extorted. Nor should it contain anything impossible or improbable. (2) Care must be taken to notice, that the Confessor is not opprest with Melancholy, or hath taken Guilt upon him or her purely from being weary of life."⁽³⁾

1. *Institutes*, p. 35.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 36.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 40.

Here he is quoting almost directly from Mackenzie.⁽¹⁾

Forbes is a most interesting example of the conservatism of lawyers; of their tendency to follow their predecessors even where they may feel rather uneasy about it, in order to preserve the authority of a given system of law. In an appendix, however, he expresses his uneasiness about his own chapter in a manner which seems rather weak and absurd:

"Nothing seems plainer to me, than that there may be and have been Witches, and that perhaps such are now actually existing; which I intend, God willing, to clear in a larger Work concerning the Criminal Law - tho' at the same Time I cannot account for the Way and Manner of performing their hellish operations ... However I chused ... to make an abstract to serve to the Reader for a piece of Entertainment about the former practice ... Only one Thing is sure, that such Matters of Fact have been laid in Indictments, and given in Evidence; which is all my Business with them; and if any Man, upon reading what I have said of Witchcraft be of opinion, that I am no Witch myself, I shall be satisfied."⁽²⁾

1. *Laws and Customs*, p. 51.

2. *Institutes*, p. 371.

CHAPTER SEVEN.

PROFESSOR GEORGE SINCLAIR.

The first of the Scottish demonologists was a political philosopher; the second was a lawyer; the third a scientist. As has already been pointed out ⁽¹⁾ there was nothing particularly incongruous in a scientist believing in the power of demons and witches, although by 1685, when Sinclair first published *Satan's Invisible World Discovered*, ⁽²⁾ scepticism in scientific circles was becoming more common.

Nearly all demonological works from the *Malleus Maleficarum* on, were specifically directed against the sceptics: King James inveighed against them, ⁽³⁾ and Mackenzie was careful to guard himself against any imputation of favouring them. ⁽⁴⁾ From the middle of the seventeenth century onwards, however, the wickedness and folly of the incredulous play in increasingly large part in the witchcraft literature. The increase in the volume of such

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1. See above pp. 130-131.
 2. Full title: *Satan's Invisible World Discovered; or, A choice collection of Modern Relations, proving evidently against the Saducees and Atheists of this present Age, that there are Devils, Spirits, Witches, and Apparitions, from Authentick Records, Attestations of Famous Witnesses, and undoubted Verity. To all which is added, That Marvellous History of Major Weir, and his Sister: With two Relations of Apparitions at Edinburgh. By Mr. George Sinclair, late Professor of Philosophy in the College of Glasgow. Edinburgh, 1685. Hereinafter referred to as Satan's Invisible World.*
 3. *Daemonologie*, f.2.
 4. *Laws and Customs*, p. 44.

time may possibly have been caused by a sense of urgency over these failing beliefs, but is more likely to have been caused by the general increase in printing, the expanding reading public, and the growing publication of non-essential books.⁽¹⁾

Professor George Sinclair was not one of the greatest scientists of his day; but he was distinguished and original. In 1654, after some years at St. Andrews, he was appointed Professor of Philosophy (i.e. natural philosophy) at Glasgow, and he was one of the first Scottish scientists to specialize in physics. Besides *Satan's Invisible World* he published three scientific works (one of which was translated into Latin and published abroad) and one theological work which he translated from a colleague's Latin but published under his own name. It is from the anonymous, hagiographical introduction to this work⁽²⁾ - possibly written by himself - that we learn that he visited London in 1662 to meet members of the Royal Society, and that he was kindly received at Gresham College where he was advised to translate his *Natural Philosophy Improven by New Experiments* into Latin. This version, we are told, was "a book in great esteem abroad, both for the matter and the form."

1. See below, pp. 234-236.

2. *Truth's Victory over Error*, London, 1688, (plagiarised from David Dickson).

In 1666 he lost his Chair at Glasgow when he refused to take the Oath of Allegiance which was made compulsory in that year for all Masters of the College. Sinclair then moved to Leith where he spent nine years as a schoolmaster; he also lectured in mathematics in the College at Edinburgh during that time. He continued his scientific experiments, and in 1680 traced the famous 'great blazing star,' presenting his observations, together with a new weather-glass, to the king, who was at that time staying in Holyrood. After the Revolution Sinclair again became a professor at Glasgow - this time in the Chair of Mathematics - and retained his post till his death in 1696.

At no point in what we know of his life do we hear of Sinclair being directly connected with any witchcraft case. His principal concerns seem always to have been mathematical and scientific. His knowledge of witchcraft was probably drawn mainly from hearsay and reading; but he was certainly interested in the subject fairly early on in his career. His *Natural Philosophy Improven by New Experiments*⁽¹⁾ which consists of careful descriptions of scientific experiments illustrated by diagrams, includes as one of the numbered items an account of the Devil of Glenluce. This

1. *The earliest edition I have found catalogued is Edinburgh, 1683. But according to the preface to Truth's Victory it had been published before his visit to London in 1662.*

story of a man harried by poltergeist activity was repeated with greater detail in *Satan's Invisible World*.

It seems most likely that he wrote the book in order to make money. A book by Joseph Glanvil: *Sadducismus Triumphatus*,⁽¹⁾ had been selling very well in England, and Sinclair may well have thought that a similar book would be successful in Scotland. In February 1685 - the year of its publication - he petitioned the Privy Council successfully for the sole rights of publication of *Satan's Invisible World* for the next eleven years.⁽²⁾ His optimism was not justified for he was said to have died poor,⁽³⁾ and there was no other edition of the book until 1746. From then onwards, however, it was reprinted frequently in both Edinburgh and London.

The preface to *Truth's Victory* suggests a worthier reason:

"... finding the Sadducean Principles & Atheism were prevailing among many, he wrote a book proving evidently the existence of Devils; Spirits, Witches, and Apparitions, which was not very acceptable to some, men not loving to hear such stories, or to be reminded of a life to come."

Certainly the little theorising which is contained in *Satan's Invisible World* is devoted to the reasons why there was so much disbelief. The stories, or "relations," were there to prove the necessity of belief. In this, *Satan's Invisible World*,

1. *London*, 1681.

2. *R.P.C.*, Vol. X., *Third Series*, p. 161.

3. *D.N.B.*

consisting as it does of a series of macabre stories to illustrate the reality of the spirit world and the power of the Devil and his agents, is similar in form to English treatises. It derives little from continental thought, and owes more to English tracts than the writings of either King James or Sir George Mackenzie. In fact it is hardly comparable with them. Besides his predecessors Sinclair was an amateur in the field of demonology. Many of his stories were borrowed from *Sadducismus Triumphatus*, to which he acknowledges an indebtedness, and from a manuscript work by the Reverend James Fraser of Wardlaw.⁽¹⁾ Sinclair refers to Fraser as a reliable witness, though not by name. The stories which he copied he took more or less verbatim; his method was to vary the words of the opening paragraph just a little. After that he took the tale as it stood.

His own account of the prevailing scepticism - though here too the main ideas come from Glanvil - goes as follows:

Firstly there is ... "an affected humour in many to Droll, Scoff, and Mock at all such Relations, and are rather willing to believe in a World in the Moon, than the truth of such a Narrative, and so conclude by their Frolick and Wanton Fancy that whatever is spoken by sober men, anent the reality of witches and spirits, are but ridiculous and inconsistent

1. Fraser was a much-travelled episcopalian minister, who was the author of thousands of pages of manuscripts, few of which were ever published, on a wide variety of subjects. His *Divine Providence Plainlie Discerned in humane Affaires. A Collection of Providential Passage Antient and Modern Forreign and Domestick*, written in 1670, fell into Sinclair's hands at some point. The manuscript is now in the National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh.

with reason. And to this purpose the Drolling Wagge actuating and elevating his Scoffing Vein, especially with a Glass of good Claret, quibbles luckily, and by making others laugh, they think him, and he thinks himself, a third Cato fallen from heaven. And though at first, he only intended to play the Wanton, yet by such frequent Merriments ... his reason becomes an obedient slave to his fancy and concludes in seriousness, there are neither Devils nor witches."⁽¹⁾

Another reason for disbelief, according to Sinclair, is Atheism:

"... Tis probable that the Saducees in Christ's time, were as great patrons and Advocates of Witches, as either Scot the Englishman; the Father of the Witch Patrons, whome King James mentions in his Demonology, or Webster, Wagstaff, or the Author of the Nameless Pamphlet: 1659. It is believed that many innocent have suffered especially such as have been tortured. But does it follow that all suffer after that manner? Though the cat and hare⁽²⁾ business is absurd the giving of themselves to the devil and receiving his mark and renouncing Baptism is not so. If Satan tried to make bargains with Christ, why not much more so with men or women?"⁽³⁾

A third reason for the common disbelief is because, of "Hobbsianism" -

"whereof they think that all contained in the Universe comes under the notion of things material, and bodies only; and consequently, no God, no Devil, no Spirits, no witch. Hobbs the Englishman is too well known by his Atheistical writings. Benedictus (Maledictus) Spinoza will have all those devils which Christ cast out to be but diseases."⁽⁴⁾

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1. Satan's Invisible World, f. A2.
 2. *The belief that witches can change into animals at will, and normally meet together in such guises.*
 3. Satan's Invisible World, f. A3.
 4. Ibid., f. A3.

This is all the original contribution Sinclair had to make. All the great sceptics are mentioned except for Weyer, but none of the principal protagonists of the witch belief. The stories themselves were for Sinclair the proof of witchcraft.

It is easier, in fact, to account for the book's immediate failure than for its ultimate success. Sinclair was wrong in judging the time to be ripe for a work of this sort. Despite the fact that in the Scotland of the 1680's only the very sophisticated, and not all of them, were sceptical concerning witchcraft, there was not a sufficient number of people anxious to read and able to spend money on books of this sort. There were other accounts of witches and hauntings published in Scotland later in the century⁽¹⁾ but by English standards none of them seem to have been a great commercial success.

In the following century, however, in 1746, *Satan's Invisible World* was published again, and from then until the end of the nineteenth century it was frequently republished both in Edinburgh and London.⁽²⁾ It was not in fact until witchcraft had ceased to be a live legal issue that the book became popular.

1. See below p. 238.

2. *Satan's Invisible World* was republished, Edin., 1746, 1764, 1769, 1779, 1789, 1808; London, 1814 and 1815; Edin., 1831 and 1871. There may well have been other editions.

It seems almost certain that it was the story of Major Weir which sold the work. Major Weir, became, as it were, Scotland's premier wizard, despite the fact that it was not for wizardry as such that he was executed; for this reason it seems worth while to outline his history here. ⁽¹⁾

Weir belonged to a strict covenanting sect, and remained an adherent of it after the Restoration. He was Captain of the Guard at the Castle at Edinburgh for some time, and is said to have brutally handled the Marquis of Montrose while he had him prisoner there. ^{in the Tolbooth.} He lived an outwardly, even ostentatiously, devout and virtuous life. He was renowned for his gifts of extempore prayer and generally regarded as a pillar of the covenanting circle which continued in Edinburgh under the episcopate. Under the pressure of an illness this facade cracked and Weir confessed to an astounding variety of sexual vagaries, some of which are still offences against the common law in Scotland. At first he was not believed, but eventually the Provost was forced to order an enquiry. It was assumed that such appalling sins, and such successful hypocrisy could only be the result of a compact with the

1. See Appendix III for a transcript of Fraser's contemporary account of Weir, which Sinclair prints very nearly verbatim.

Devil; and in the enquiries and the trial the whole paraphernalia of demonic addiction was revealed. His sister with whom he lived in their house in the Grassmarket said that her mother was a witch and had passed on the magic arts to her children, that she had the Devil's mark on her forehead, and that the Devil had helped her with her spinning so that she was superior to all other spinners. She also told the magistrates to take her brother's staff which she said had magic properties. Major Weir himself, about whom it was afterwards said that he could never pray unless he was standing and holding his staff, refused any kind of spiritual help to the last. This confirmed the general belief that his powers and his way of life were caused by witchcraft and the demonic pact. Legend immediately sprang up about his name; many people were found ready to testify to curious sights and incidents in the neighbourhood of Major Weir's house. Fraser's account, written the same years as Weir's execution: 1670, includes some of these. The story was first published in *Revaillac Redivivus*,⁽¹⁾ but with less detail than Fraser's version.

1. London, 1678. The author was the Reverend George Hikes, D.D., Dean of Worcester.

It seems likely that it was the double life, surpassing all ordinary hypocrisy, which Major Weir appeared to have led, and not the witchcraft nor the sexual offences alone, that captured the imagination of the eighteenth and nineteenth century reading public and made Weir the archetypal Scottish villain. There is this strand, running through later Scottish history and literature, of secret viciousness performed behind an outward display of conformity. It seems as though the pressure of respectability was such that mere eccentricity was not enough to counter-balance it. Anti-social expressions had to be extreme, and they had to be secret. Major Weir, Deacon Brodie, and Dr. Jekyll, fit, with a frightening naturalness, into the Scottish scene; and so again, does Hogg's Robert Wriham:⁽¹⁾ that nightmarish, Calvinist, split personality.

The severity of the Calvinist form of Christianity, which dominated social life for over two hundred and fifty years, may well have been necessary in controlling the lawlessness of the Scottish people; but however that may be, it created a situation in which extremes of hypocrisy were a natural growth. Major Weir, as he is presented by Fraser and Sinclair, is a more purely Scottish figure than any other in the witchcraft literature; yet he is slightly out of the main stream of witchcraft history, for he belongs more to his successors in hypocrisy and hidden crime than he does to the history of demonic devotion.

1. James Hogg, *The Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, London, 1824.

CHAPTER EIGHT.

THE DEMONOLOGY OF THE BARGARRON CASE: I.

In June, 1697, five witches and two warlocks were executed in Paisley for bewitching an eleven year old girl named Christian Shaw of Bargarron. Two of the witches were girls of only seventeen; the warlocks were brothers, a little older. A third warlock had already committed suicide in prison. This is one of the most well-documented and notorious of the Scottish witchcraft cases. The story has been retold many times, and only the bare outline will be given here.

In August, 1696, Christian Shaw, previously an intelligent and well-behaved child, spoke rudely to two women, the first a young servant whom she had seen stealing a drink of milk, and the other an old woman who was already of "ill fame." Both cursed her roundly. The night after her scene with the older woman Christian Shaw was seized with the first of a series of fits during which she vomited up many curious objects: pins, egg shells, lumps of candlegrease, gravel stones (all of which she herself could easily have obtained). She cried out accusations, first against those two women, and then against various other people. She frequently claimed that her tormentors were present, and urged them to repent of their sins. The

onlookers could see no one, but on one occasion the child exclaimed that she had got hold of a warlock's jerkin. The tearing of material was heard, and she exhibited two pieces of red cloth in her hands. These fits continued into the following February, when the authorities took notice and began examining (i.e. torturing) more than twenty people accused by the girl. Some of them confessed. In April, seven of the accused were convicted of witchcraft, and ~~six~~ were burnt the following June probably after hanging. If Christian Shaw was not an hysteric nor an epileptic - one of the examining doctors suggested "hypochondriac melancholy" until he was persuaded otherwise,⁽¹⁾ then she was certainly one of the most evil little girls who have ever lived.⁽²⁾

The affair produced a number of contemporary tracts, and English publishers were first in the field. *A Relation of the diabolical practice of above Twenty Wizards and Witches of the Sherifffdom of Renfrew*, was published in London in 1697. The following year *A True Narration of the Sufferings and Relief of a*

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1. "Subscribed attestation of Dr. M. Brisbane" printed in *A History of the Witches of Renfrewshire*, Paisley, 1809., p. 118.
 2. There were, of course, many other cases in which children were involved, both as accusers and accused. Two of the more notorious were the Swedish witches of 1669-1670, and the outbreak in Salem, Massachusetts, in 1692. Christian Shaw, incidentally, never had another fit (which makes epilepsy an unlikely explanation), and survived her experiences to achieve fame in another way by importing machines from Holland and initiating Paisley's thread-spinning industry. *S.H.R.* Vol. 7, 1910, pp. 390-391.

Young Girl was published in Edinburgh. This contained an abstract of the *Relation of the diabolical Practise. Sadducismus Debellatus*, which was almost identical to the *True Narration* was published in London the same year, 1698.

One possible reason why the trial attracted so much attention, and resulted in immediate pamphleteering on both sides of the border, was that the number of witch trials had been decreasing in Scotland in previous years,⁽¹⁾ and in England the last execution had already taken place.⁽²⁾ Certainly this was the first case for ten years or more that was worth a pamphlet, and the market was hungry for material. It was a long time, too, since such a large number had been accused together, and the fact that the afflicted was a child would also have aroused widespread interest and ghoulish sympathy. It is also worth mentioning that there was a general increase in pamphleteering in Scotland throughout the seventeenth century, and an interesting case coming at the end of the century stood a better chance of being well publicised than if it had occurred twenty or thirty years before.

A considerable amount of other material connected with the trials was published by John Millar in 1809 in his

1. See *Cases of Witchcraft*, pp. 79-80.

2. Probably in Exeter in 1682.

collection of documents called *A History of the Witches of Renfrewshire*. The most interesting of these documents from the point of view of demonology are the address by the counsel for the prosecution, and a sermon preached before the seven surviving convicts the day before their execution. From these, and from another sermon preached to the magistrates before they passed judgement,⁽¹⁾ it is possible to get some picture of the state of demonology in Scotland among both lawyers and clergy exactly one hundred years after the publication of King James' *Daemonologie*. An anonymous pamphlet entitled, *Witchcraft Proven, Arreign'd and Condemn'd*, which was published in Glasgow this same year, will be considered with this material.⁽²⁾

It would be reasonable to expect that at this late date, on the eve of the eighteenth century and only fourteen years before the birth of Hume, some scepticism at least would have been shown in Scotland concerning the alleged activities of the witches. Yet there is no sign of a single voice having been raised in protest at the Bargarron, or indeed at any other case. The only evidence of any opposition to the current demonology is the imaginary straw figures who are instanced and then attacked by the principal exponents of the official view. If they did exist, they must have lacked

1. Printed in *S.H.R.* Vol. 7, 1910, pp. 391-399.

2. This pamphlet was attributed by Professor John Ferguson of Glasgow to John Bell of Gladsmuir, and it appears under his name in the catalogue of Glasgow University Library. Some reasons for doubting this ascription, and for including the pamphlet in the Bargarron witch literature are given in Appendix IV of this essay.

either the courage or the interest to expound their opinions in public.

It might also be reasonable to expect that the lawyers, who were after all among the more educated and civilised in the land, might be among the first to show signs of such scepticism. Yet, as we have seen, the legal profession was very far from leading the way. It was a conservative class, bound to the interpretation of the law as it stood. There was not a single Scottish lawyer who opposed the death penalty for witchcraft until after the Witchcraft Act was actually repealed.

The prosecuting advocate's speech to the Inquest,⁽¹⁾ in the Bargarron case shows the way in which one lawyer approached the problem. This, together with legal answers to some objections,⁽²⁾ were summarised in two 'letters' which are reproduced with their original preface in Millar's *Witches of Renfrewshire*.⁽³⁾ This preface also remarks ambiguously that, 'accordingly an advocate compeared for them and managed their defence with all the accuracy that could be expected.'⁽⁴⁾

1. *Witches of Renfrewshire*, p. 132.

2. *Ibid.* p. 144.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 129.

4. *Ibid.* p. 130.

Unfortunately we do not know the manner in which this defence was conducted, but there were in fact more than seven accused, so possibly the defending advocate had something to do with their acquittal. The preface went on to explain that,

'The crimes libelled and found proven against them, were not mere spectral imaginations, but open and obvious facts, viz. The murders of some children and persons of age; and the torturing of several persons, particularly Bargarrons's daughter; and both these, not at a distance, but contiguously by natural means of cords, pins, and the like; besides the other ordinary works of Witchcraft, such as renouncing baptism, entering in contract with, and adoring the devil under a corporeal shape, &c which could not but be sustained relevant in Scotland, since there is an express statute, Parl⁽¹⁾ 9th Act 73. Queen Mary, appointing the pain of death to such.'

The most obviously fraudulent aspect of the case: the trickery with pins and candlegrease, was regarded as legal proof of witchcraft. According to the writer, there were three different classes of witnesses who proved the guilt of the seven who were convicted. There were witnesses whose testimony made their witchcraft extremely probable; there were others who 'proved facts': that is, they had seen Christian Bargarron's performance. The third group "did comprehend six positive testimonies of these who did see and hear these Witches committing the malefices libelled."⁽²⁾ This last group consisted of Christian herself and five of the accused. According to this writer the only valuable subject

1. *Witches of Renfrewshire*, p. 130.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 130.

of debate in the trial concerned the validity of these testimonies, since there was normally some legal difficulty about accepting the evidence of minors and convicted or suspected criminals. Such scrupulousness, according to this writer,⁽¹⁾ was hardly necessary:

'The judges upon a long debate did sustain four of these six only *cum nota*, and two of them to be examined without oath, so nice were they in favours of the pannels lives, since some of these witnesses might have been admitted in such a crime without any quality by the most scrupulous judicatory in Europe. But all things were carried on in this procudeure with tenderness and moderation: for even the advocates, who were sent to prosecute the indictment by his majesty's council and advocate, did not act with the bias of parties: but on the contrary shewed an equal concern to have the pannels assoilized, if it could be found compatible with justice.'⁽²⁾

But the fact that only seven of the twenty accused were convicted is an indication that the hysterical fear of witchcraft was dying down, and juries therefore more prepared to admit to an accused person's possible innocence.

The first of these 'letters' is an account of the advocate's speech to the 'inquest' or jury.⁽³⁾ It contains very little of legal or demonological interest; most of it is concerned with a recapitulation of the afflictions of the child and the impossibility of those being by natural means. For the rest the advocate recounts the particular accusations

1. Possibly Francis Grant, advocate, afterwards Lord Cullen.

2. *Witches of Renfrewshire*, p. 131.

3. *Ibid.*, pp. 132 - 144

against each of the pannels. Some of them, he said, were reputed witches, having been delated ten years previously by a confessing witch. This reputation of ill fame was very often the most damning evidence against a witch so far as a jury was concerned. It would be very hard for them to miss an opportunity of getting rid of an old local menace. As further evidence against them the inquest were reminded that the 'mark' had been found on them all, and that none of them had shed tears since their arrest. ⁽¹⁾ He contradicts this a few pages later, however, when he says,

'James Lindsay (the younger of the two boy warlocks), it is true, is of less import; yet by his weeping when he came in and was admonished of the greatness of his guilt, it appears that he had a sense of it: he hath a natural precipitancy in what he speaks, yet that is commonly the concomitant of ingenuity, as importing his expressions not to be forethought. He concurs in most things with the others, and yet he had declared that he saw not Margaret Fulton at Dumbarton. Which implies that he does not file the pannels all at random, but tells what occurred to his senses, &c.' (2)

He then discusses the value of the testimony of the other witnesses, and concludes that although in some cases the witnesses are to be taken *cum nota*, there was sufficient agreement among them to constitute conclusive proof of the

1. Witches of Renfrewshire, p. 138.

2. Ibid., p. 141.

pannels' guilt.⁽¹⁾ He concludes his summary,

'... that as you ought to beware of condemning the innocent, and ought to incline to the safest side: so, if these pannels be proven legally guilty; then *quod* bygones, your eye ought not to spare them, nor ought you to suffer a Witch to live; and as to the future, you in doing otherwise, would be accessory to all the blasphemies, apostasies, murders, torture, and seductions, &c. whereof these enemies of heaven and earth shall thereafter be guilty, when they have got out. So that the question seems simply to come to this, whether upon your oath *de fidei*, you can swear, that the pannels, notwithstanding of all that is proven against them, are not guilty of witchcraft; in the determination whereof, we pray God may direct you to the right course.'⁽²⁾

In this, the advocate gives exactly the opposite argument to Sir George Mackenzie (whom he cited earlier in his speech⁽³⁾), for Mackenzie said that in fact you ought to suffer a witch to live, and allow God to deal with him in his own good time: 'She will be reserved for a greater fire hereafter than you can ordain for her.'⁽⁴⁾

The second of these legal letters⁽⁵⁾ is a summary of the legal arguments about the admission of minors and persons of evil reputation as witnesses. It contains a good many more references to other witchcraft literature than the first letter, for it discusses a matter which came up at numerous witch trials. It was in fact one of the central legal problems in the conviction of witches. In normal criminal

1. Witches of Renfrewshire, p. 142.

2. Ibid., p. 144.

3. Ibid., p. 143, on the value of 'presumptions' as opposed to witnesses in proving the guilt of an accused person, for 'presumptions,' unlike witnesses, cannot be bribed.

4. Remarkable Cases, p. 195.

5. Witches of Renfrewshire, pp. 144-163.

proceedings of this period the testimony of convicted or suspected persons was not admitted in evidence. But, it was argued, the secret meetings of witches with the devil, the gatherings on the hills and in the churchyards, could only be attested by other witches; and therefore the evidence of those accused or convicted of witchcraft must be accepted. (This legal quandary highlights one of the most pressing reasons for rejecting the theory put forward by Dr. Margaret Murray and followed by a number of writers: ⁽¹⁾ that there was an organised 'witch cult' which was a form of ancient fertility religion. In Scotland no person, who was not actually accused of witchcraft, ever testified that he had witnessed a witch sabbath. It can hardly have been fear or diffidence that prevented the average godly citizen or villager from making such a testimony, for he was ready enough to say that such and such a wife had in their presence cursed, muttered, or incanted.)

In the present case it was as necessary as ever to prove the validity of witnesses normally not admitted. The accuser was a child; as usual only the accused could give evidence of witches' meetings. The lawyer put it:

"The cases is not, whether these witnesses would be habile in an ordinary crime, which commonly falls to be exposed to other witnesses, than those concerned in it; but whether they can be received in this extraordinary, occult and excepted crime of Witchcraft, wherein there are two special

~~1. Witches of Renfrewshire, pp. 144-163.~~

1. See below, pp. 252-256.

cases to be noticed, viz. sometimes the acts thereof are open and admit the choice of witnesses; such as charms used in the day time, when the actor is visible. But that part of witchcraft, whereby Witches meet in the night time, adore their lord, contrive their malefices, and accordingly thereafter execute them when other witnesses are asleep, or the witches themselves are covered from sight; we say, that this can be no otherwise proven than by these that are intimate to it, joined to the positive proof and adminicles before mentioned." (1)

'Or the witches themselves covered from sight': once it was accepted that the witch had power to conceal herself or to become invisible, or even to be transported in spirit while she remained asleep at home in body, almost anything could be 'proven.'

'It is part of the Witches purchase from the devil, that they cannot be seen at some occasions: so that the abominations committed then would remain unpublished, if such witnesses were not admitted.' (2)

It would be a remarkable jury to resist such arguments in Paisley in 1697.

The first authority the lawyer cites in support of this view is King James. This is in fact one of the very few references to the *Daemonologie* that we have come across in Scottish witchcraft writings, though it seems probable that it was referred to in the course of many trials. In this

1. Witches of Renfrewshire, pp. 145 - 146.

2. Ibid., pp. 146 - 147.

particular context it is given the greatest possible weight:

'We have the testimony of our famous K. J. 6th, Demon. lib 2. G. ult.⁽¹⁾ telling us, that it is our law, that boys, girls, infamous persons, &c. are not to be rejected any more in witchcraft, than in human lese majesty, even though they assert others to have been present at imaginary meetings: because this supposes their having entered into a precontract ... This was not a common author, but a man who as curious, was exact; as prudent did not publish such things without the approbation of the best divines and lawyers; as a prince is to be credited anent the law of his own country: and as a king has determined any dubiety that might have remained in this point, as far as the law of our government will permit.⁽²⁾

1. *'Epi. Iudges ought indeede to beware whome they condemne: For it is as great a crime (as Salomon sayeth,) To condemn the innocent, as to let the guiltie escape free; neither ought the report of any one infamous person, be admitted for a sufficient prooffe, which can stand of no law.*

Phi. And what may a number then of guiltie persons confessions, work against one that is accused?

Epi. The assise must serve for interpretour of our law in that respect. But in my opinion, since in a mater of treason against the Prince, barnes or wives, or never so diffamed persons, may of our law serve for suffiecient witnesses and proofes. I think surely that by a far greater reason, such witnesses may be sufficient in matters of high treason against God: For who, but Witches can be proover, and so witnesses of the doings of Witches.

Phi. Indeed, I trow they wil be loath to put any honest man upon their counsell. But what if they accuse folke to have bene present at their Imaginar conuentiones in the spirite, when their bodies lyes sencelesse, as ye have said?

Epi. I think they are not a haire the less guiltie: For the Devill durst never have borrowed their shaddow or similitude to that turne, if their consent had not bene at it: And the consent in these turnes is death of the law.' Daemonologie, Book III, Chap. VI, pp. 78 - 79.

2. Witches of Renfrewshire, pp. 147 - 148.

(1)
 He then quotes Sir George Mackenzie as admitting women and minors as witnesses; (2) though he omits to mention that Mackenzie specifies that such testimony should never be accepted on its own. Then, when he has gathered the support of virtually the only writers on the subject among his own countrymen, he goes on to discuss the particular problems of the present case; to this end he brings in continental demonologists to strengthen his case. He gives two accurate references to Del Rio and mentions without precise reference stories of witches told by Mejerus and Grilandus. He also mentions an account of a witch ^{who was able to make things invisible, (3)} given by John of Salisbury, ~~who was able to make things invisible. (4)~~ Unfortunately we cannot tell whether John of Salisbury was relating this in a sceptical, credulous, or indifferent manner, for our lawyer, perhaps intentionally, gives no reference.

The lawyer's approach to authorities is, as one might expect, in sharp contrast to the attitude of the ministers whose sermons and writings are discussed in the following chapter. In general he follows Mackenzie, but unlike Mackenzie he does not trouble to cite Scripture to his purpose. It may be that enough had already been cited from local pulpits during the preliminary proceedings.

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1. Witches of Renfrewshire, p. 148.
 2. Laws and Customs, pp. 54 - 55.
 3. Witches of Renfrewshire, p. 156.

CHAPTER NINE.

THE DEMONOLOGY OF THE BARGARRON CASE: II.

Up to this date we have found scarcely any clerical demonology in Scotland - unless James himself is to be counted among the theologians. We know of the beliefs of the Scottish clergy only through the frequent pronouncements of the General Assembly to the effect that stronger action should be taken against the witches,⁽¹⁾ and through the leading part played by ministers in many of the actual recorded cases of witch prosecution.

However, two sermons and a pamphlet concerned with the Bargarron case, give more detailed evidence of the kind of thinking which lay behind ecclesiastical beliefs. The first sermon was that preached by the Rev. James Hutchison of Kilellan⁽²⁾ before the Commissioners of Justiciary on the 13th April, 1697, and the second, that preached by the Rev. David Brown⁽³⁾ to the convicted witches on the 9th June of that year: the day before

1. *Acts of the General Assembly, 1638-1842.*

2. *James Hutchison was born in 1626 and died in 1706 at the age of eighty. He was deprived of his living in 1662, reinstated in 1688, and retired to Killellan in 1680.*

3. *David Brown was ordained in 1688 to Neilston where he was still minister in 1697.*

their execution. The pamphlet: *Witchcraft Proven, Arreign'd and Condemn'd*,⁽¹⁾ which was published during 1697 almost certainly because of the trial, is of doubtful authorship.⁽²⁾

The text of Hutchison's sermon⁽³⁾ was from Exodus, 22, 18: Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live; its purpose was to exhort the Commissioners to do their duty and convict. Hutchison began by asserting that this precept was given to the judges of the people of Israel, as the representatives of a "national church" and as the possessors of "the power of the sword". The implication was that the Commissioners now filled the role of the judges of Israel. He insisted that the particular kind of evildoer referred to in this text is well translated "witch", and added a great show of erudition with reference to Hebrew, Greek, and Latin words to show that this was indeed so. He also defined what was meant by a witch:

"By a witch is understood a person that hath Immediat converse with the Devil, That one way or another is under a compact with him acted and influenced by him in reference to the producing such effects as cannot be produced by others without this compact".⁽⁴⁾

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1. Full title: *Witchcraft Proven, Arreign'd, and Condemn'd in its Professors, Professions and Marks, by diverse pungent, and convincing Arguments, excerpted forth of the most Authentick Authors, Divine and humane, Ancient and Modern, by a Lover of the Truth, Glasgow, 1697.*
 2. See Appendix IV.
 3. Transcribed by George Neilson from a manuscript in the Mitchell Library, Glasgow, in 1910, pp. 391-399.
 4. S.H.R. Vol. 7, p. 391.

The translation also implies, he learnedly notes;

(a) that there are witches, and (b) that they must die.

Hutchison then went on to discuss the nature of the demonic compact, and compared it with Christian baptism. The external sign of baptism, he said, was a seal whereby a Christian child was to be counted as a visible professor of Christ, and,

"No less doth Satan require of them that will follow in his way then either personal covenanting with his and receiving his mark upon their flesh, or that the parent give their children to him and they receive his mark, and where this is, I doubt not such a person is really a witch or a warlock, and even suppose it be a child it will be found afterwards (If the Lords powerfully converting of the soul to himself prevent it not) That such persons will be as really in covenant with Satan, as the children of professing parents receiving baptism will be found to be in covenant with God." (1)

This compact, he elaborates, is that

"... they shall worship him as their God, that they shall follow him as their guide, that they shall be acted and influenced by him in his sinful ways and actings ..."(2)

He then distinguished between the kind of sinner who did wicked things because the devil had blinded him to goodness, and those who sinned directly because of the compact and were therefore guilty of witchcraft. He went on to elaborate the importance of the witch's mark in distinguishing between witches and the ordinary kinds of wicked person, and suggested that some doctors had

1. *Loc. cit.* p. 393.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 393.

attempted to deflate the importance of the mark - "to say such and such things of it, we know not upon what ground" - because they had been bribed to do so.⁽¹⁾

Hutchison's next point was an explanation of how it could be possible for members of the visible church to become witches. He attributed it, in the traditional manner of almost all demonologists, to the Fall of Man, and added,

"And if God had not more to do with Adam's posterity it had been easy for Satan to have made Adam and Eve both witches But that God had his Elect to bring out of their Loins and had a covenant of grace to transact with Adam and Eve."⁽²⁾

He then drew certain inferences from what he had already said. "I do not draw them from the very words of the doctrine" he said, "but from the doctrine complexly delivered from this text", and in fact some of these repeat points already made. These inferences were, briefly: (1) that children of witches might be justly regarded as being under a real compact with Satan; (2) that those who joined witches in murder by wax image were not only murderers but partakers in devilry; (3) that those who confessed to having been with witches were to be counted witches; (4) that the compact was to the effect that they were guided and influenced by Satan;

1. *Loc. cit.*, p. 394.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 394.

(5) that 'carnal dealing' with Satan was witchcraft; (6) that when a person was thrown into a fit by another person touching them and only by that other, then it was owing to witchcraft; and (7) that those that could 'tell secrets' or 'prophesie' were either guilty of witchcraft or else 'privie to the enchanter's deeds and 'socii criminis'.

Hutchison wound up by emphasising that it was the express command of God that such people should be put to death. He reminded the judges that they were as gods themselves in this act of judgement, and exhorted them to convict. He ended:

"Let this humble us all & let us bewaill it as a great evil that such a place as the west of Scotland where the gospell of Christ has been purely preacht should have so many in it under suspicion of the crime of Witchcraft. Ye that are free, Bless God that hath kept you from the wicked one, and pray out of zeall to God and his Glory that he would bring thir works of darkness to light that marrs your solemnities & are fearfull spotts in your feasts. I go no furdur. Amen." (1)

The first point to be made in commenting upon this sermon, is that Hutchison, unlike the lawyers, laid claim to no authorities other than the Bible:

"I have not had any help in this matter. I give yow my (2) thoughts what I find may be said of it from the Scripture."

He made in fact only a few general references to biblical passages which deal with evil spirits or divination, and none at all to anything else. We have no direct evidence

1. *Loc. cit.*, p. 399.

2. *Ibid.* p. 393.

of the sources of his thoughts and information; we can only infer them. It was of course essential to the theory and practice of presbyterian preaching that the whole discourse should be derived directly from a biblical text or texts and from nowhere else, and Hutchison was fortunate indeed in having this famous citation to hand. But there his fortune ended, for the Bible elaborates really very little upon the subject, and for substantiation of the main witch theories which Hutchison rehearses it would have been necessary to do what was for him the impossible and turn to the early fathers, the canonists, and the demonologists.

We can in fact trace at least three sources other than scriptural for his discourse. The principal strand is the tradition stemming from the *Malleus Maleficarum* and reinforced in Scotland through the *Daemonologie* and other writings and events already mentioned in this essay. The demonic compact and the witch's mark on which Hutchison laid such stress find no place in the Bible and none in Scottish tradition before the sixteenth century. By 1697 though, these ideas were common currency in Scotland, and it would be impossible to diagnose a single source for Hutchison's expression of them.

Another important element in the sermon is its

generally Calvinist setting. This is noticeable - firstly in the emphasis which Hutchison laid on the biblical source of all that he said, and secondly in the interpretation he gave to some aspects of witch theory. In his remarks on baptism, for example, he integrated the doctrine of God's omnipotence by adding the caveat that God can rescue the child dedicated by his parents to the devil.⁽¹⁾ Further, as we have seen, in his discussion of the Fall of Man he explained the fact that Adam and Eve were not guilty of witchcraft despite their converse with Satan because God specifically required their services in begetting the elect.⁽²⁾

The third element which can be discerned in this sermon is that of old Scottish superstition - again impossible to trace precisely - but such ideas as the power of a witch's touch existed in Scottish folklore long before the era of witch persecution.

So far as sources go this is all that may be justifiably said in comment on this sermon, but it is worthwhile mentioning the way in which any treatment of demonological problems may differ according to the temperament and political intentions of the interpreter. This sermon shows a cold vindictiveness. It contains no macabre details of the actual case under consideration and no descriptions of hell-fire to curdle the blood,

1. *Loc. cit.* p. 393.

2. *Ibid.* p. 393.

but it is a cold, carefully prepared, relentlessly learned attempt to persuade his audience that it was their divine duty to see that the enemies of God did not escape their just reward. The points on which the preacher laid particular stress - such as the guilt of children and the possibility of their being servants of the devil - are specially directed to the case under consideration - where some of the accused were young adolescents.

It is probably worthwhile to remember that the preacher was an old man of seventy-one who had no doubt grown sour in the long struggle between Calvinist standards and human weakness. Hutchison laid bitter emphasis on the 'prevelancy of unmortified lust and corruption' and on the 'love of gain' in the west of Scotland as an explanation of the easy entrance of witchcraft at this time. Further, witchcraft was a means whereby 'others of the poorer sort could get their malice and envy satisfied.' Hutchison had his opinions formed at a time when the reality and danger of witchcraft was widely believed in throughout the civilised world, and he does not appear in his old age to have heard of the growing scepticism of learned men. There is not a trace in his sermon of any self-doubt or questioning; only his belief in his own election and

absolute rectitude show through. If this mentality were shared by many of the people he taught it is not surprising that witchcraft was still Scotland's principal capital crime at this date.

In contrast is the other sermon:⁽¹⁾ that preached by the Rev. David Brown, a local minister in his early thirties, to the victims themselves on the day before they died. He took his text from 1st Timothy, 1, 16:

"Howbeit, for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all long suffering for a pattern to them that should hereafter believe in him to life everlasting".

The sermon opens with a discussion of the doctrine of salvation. Brown shows with the aid of numerous citations from scripture that Christ came not primarily to judge, but to save sinners, and he directly criticises Luther's view that Christ came as a judgement on sinful humanity. Brown shows by elaborate arguments, carefully divided and subdivided in the idiom of the time, the truth of his position as it seemed to him. He then moved on to explain that even the most wicked of all sinners could avail themselves of salvation and gives some examples as an encouragement to his pathetic congregation:

' (an) ... instance you have in Acts xix. 18, 19. Ye see there that many of them that believed came and confessed their deeds, and many of these were such as used curious arts, devilish magical arts, and yet the grace of God

1. pp. 165-181 in *The Witches of Renfrewshire*. The editor says that he transcribed it from a manuscript book lent to him by a John Stewart, near Neilston. He has expanded and modernised contractions.

brake in upon them. There is a great instance of the grace of God.' (1)

"Ye have the instance of Manasseh which is very suitable to the case of these I am now speaking to, 2 Chron.xxxiii. 2, where ye find he did evil in the sight of the Lord, like the abominations of the heathen, whom the Lord cast out before the children of Israel. Ye will find he built high places, made graves, and set up altars in the house of the Lord, and caused his children to pass through the fire to Moloch, and used enchantments, and consulted with them that had familiar spirits, and yet behold an instance of the sovereign grace of God, that he that made Israel to sin above the abomination of the heathen that he greatly humbled himself, and the Lord pardoned him, and was intreated of him. Here is a great instance of the grace of God, which is a great encouragement for all such sinners to close with Christ in order to life everlasting."

"I tell you", he says, "the Lord hath set up such instances, for the encouragement of the worst of sinners to believe on Christ to life everlasting." (2)

Having established the mercy of God, he goes on to ask what inferences may be drawn from this position. He points out that this mercy does not derive from the merit of the sinner nor from any claim of reason, for

"If it had been intrinsic worth, would he ever have forgiven them that crucified him? would he ever have forgiven Paul or Manasseh? what excellency or worth was in them?" (3)

Forgiveness comes simply because God acts like himself.

Brown suggests reasons why God is pleased to act in this merciful spirit and concludes that one need never question "God's good will to pardon". True belief in Christ, then, will bring a conviction of Christ's mercy.

1. *Witches of Renfrewshire*, p. 169.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 170.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 170.

The preacher now turns to consider what this belief in Christ is. It consists first in knowledge. The sinner must know of Christ, and he must know his own sin. But knowledge is not enough for "the devils believe and tremble." Thus as well as knowledge of the gospels there must be assent to their truths. This point he takes further: there must be consent to Christ: we must take his law for our rule. Finally, and following from this, we must lean upon Christ. There must be a "recumbency and resting upon him". One must rest in the righteousness of Christ and trust in him. Belief in its full expression as he has defined it, Brown asserts, will lead to life everlasting, and freedom from everlasting death.

Full belief, then, ensures divine mercy. But this doctrine does not imply that one is at liberty to sin in expectation of a late repentance. It is rather a stimulus, being assured of God's goodness in his mercy to lead in gratitude a good life. How terrible on the other hand will be the fate of those who, when offered this mercy, yet refuse it.

Having thus exposed his theological argument in general terms, Brown turned to apply it in this particular instance. First he pointed out "the greatness of your sin", in order that the condemned might see the great need they had for belief in Christ. "It is the highest act

of rebellion against the God of heaven and earth".

In contracting with the devil they have shown, "that you care not for Christ ... there is your sin!" In waging war against Christ and against "children, ministers, and others", they have been guilty of war upon the whole creation "except the devil".

He went on to point out their danger:

"Will it not be sad, that your heart should be hardened now, when ye are come to your extremity, and when it might be expected that messengers of grace should be acceptable to you. We are come to you, when ye are within a few hours of eternity, to intreat you, before ye perish for ever, to embrace the offers of Christ. For, first, ye go aback from the remedy, if ye close not with Christ. Again, you lay a foundation for a great many challenges through eternity, if ye close not with Christ; for though now conscience be secure, yet it will rise like a roaring lion at the last, and though ministers would weep over you, as if we were seeking from you some great thing for ourselves, yet ye will stand it out. What will conscience say, when the devil will be at the gallows foot, ready to harle you down to hell? and no sooner in hell, but conscience will say, when God sent his ministers to you, ye believed the devil, and would not yield to Jesus Christ, and what will ye say to conscience then? when conscience will say, Now this is your lodging for ever; now eternity! eternity! what will ye do through eternity? ye are laying a foundation of challenges through eternity. Another thing that makes your case dangerous, ye declare you will not be in Christ's reverence for mercy. I will tell how so, if you will be in his reverence, why will ye not confess your sin, and renounce the deed of gift to the devil? ye declared your denial in the face of the courts, and frequently since ye have done. O how dreadful will your condition be if you die in such a case!"(1)

By a natural transition the preacher develops the theme that faced with the possibility of this judgement they must repent: "as long as ye are impenitent

1. Witches of Renfrewshire, pp. 176-177.

I can but threaten heavy judgements to you but if you will confess and repent, and come unto Christ, I come to you with the best news ever were heard." Christ is merciful, "his name is Saviour". He continued by suggesting means by which they may "close with Christ". They must tell themselves that they are guilty of blood, that they have murdered their own souls, and that: "your time is nigh a close, your glass is nigh run". They must confess their sin: "I say that you ought to confess your sin - Acts xix. 18." "Many of them that had used magical arts came and confessed their deeds. It cannot be believed that they are repentant if they do not confess. If they say to themselves "we will but loose our name and put a stain upon posterity and friends" they are reasoning falsely for their sins will ultimately be revealed before angels and men. "Ye should confess therefore that God's people may pray for you. If ye would be out of the claws of the devil it will take all the prayers you can get".

Again, they must be humble for their sins, and they must pray frequently: "and if ye ask what should we pray for? I answer a discovery of the sinfulness of this sin of witchcraft." Then again they must renounce their "deed of gift to the devil", and sincerely cast themselves upon Christ. The sermon ends by stressing

the need for the swift performance of this repentance, and a justification in almost Pilate-like terms of the sentence to be executed upon them: "and now we take God to record that we have offered to you Jesus Christ and if ye will not take him we are free of your blood."

Brown had some fundamental beliefs in common with Hutchison: both men were clearly completely convinced of the evil power of witchcraft; both were certain of the guilt of the accused prisoners; both were sure that their continued existence endangered the moral and spiritual life and indeed the immortal souls of their parishioners. Brown followed Hutchison too in his citations: he gave biblical references only, and plenty of them. But here the similarities end, for while Hutchison stretched his texts up to and beyond their possible interpretations, Brown never strayed far from them. All his points sprang out of and returned to scriptural allusion and reference.

One is immediately struck by the most obvious difference between the two: the cold relentlessness of Hutchison on the one hand, and the compassion and warm anxiety of Brown on the other. It may be that this difference stemmed from their personalities, but it is possible that had Hutchison had to preach to the accused, and Brown to the Commissioners, their sermons would have had a completely different emotional colouring.

A much more important difference between the two sermons is that Hutchison's is about demonology; Brown's about Christianity. This is why Brown's is the more naturally scriptural of the two. No excuse is needed for giving such a full account of the general theological material not specifically devoted to the problem of witchcraft in his sermon. It was entirely relevant to his purpose, and it is relevant to ours in showing just how closely bound up with basic theological beliefs the witch theory was.

Brown's sermon is centred on the doctrines of atonement and salvation. His discourse and his appeals for repentance and conversion begin and end at this point. He addressed the victims in fact on one of the most fundamental themes of the Christian faith, and most of his main points could be made again today by a village priest in Ireland or an evangelist in Haringay Arena. Brown shows, in this sermon at least, none of the Calvinism of his fellow minister. There is no mention of election, no stress on the omnipotence of God, no suggestion that the convicts were predestinately reprobate or that their deaths would be to the greater glory of God. The Lutheran position is also quite specifically rejected: faith alone is *not* enough; there must be a desire for repentance, and a positive

act of will to accept the freely offered grace of God. The completely free will of the individual soul before God is suggested and implied throughout. It would indeed be interesting to know how representative Brown was of his colleagues.

In one sense, therefore, this sermon is not about demonology at all: substantially the same address could have been given with as much relevance if the condemned persons had been about to be executed for murder or any other of the more heinous crimes. Only the biblical examples of such sinners having been reconciled to God need have been changed. Brown gives us nothing of the details of the behaviour of the devil's own; he speaks of witchcraft in its most purely religious aspect, seeing it less as a social menace than as a terrible sin against God. But as sin against God, as the most defiant act not of unbelief, but of enmity, Brown puts witchcraft firmly in the centre of Christian dogma. His sources, again, apart from the Bible, are unknown to us: they were in his upbringing; they were all around him; but he shows us more clearly than any professional demonologist that demonic belief was not a strange aberration superstitiously added on to orthodox Christian faith. Witchcraft had a natural, dominant place in the hierarchy of sin, second only to

the always mysterious "sin against the Holy Ghost" to which Brown makes a reference. This central place of demonology in the faith of seventeenth century Christians was at least as logical as many an *esse* of modern Christian sects and churches; a fact which adds intensity to, rather than diminishes, the horror of the witch hunt.

The situation of the Bargarron witches and warlocks on the day before their execution mirrors the whole tragedy of the witch persecution in Scotland. They were in fact among the last to be prosecuted for the offence; cases in the early eighteenth century became increasingly rare and isolated. These convicts were almost certainly innocent of any attempt to bewitch the hysterical child on whose performance they were convicted; maintaining their guiltlessness to the last, they were obliged to listen for at least three-quarters of an hour to an honest man pouring his heart out in compassion that they might repent of their non-existent crime and save their souls:

"Pray for brokenness of heart, and that these hard and rocky hearts of yours may be made hearts of flesh ... Pray that ye may not go to the grave with a lie in your right hand ... O be serious! God hath exercised a great deal of long-suffering towards you, and ye have hardened your hearts, and now we are come to you in your adversity at last, to desire you to take Jesus Christ ... " (1)

Such was the suffering stirred up by the words and actions of an eleven year old child.

1. *Witches of Renfrewshire*, pp. 180-181

The pamphlet, *Witchcraft Proven, Arreign'd and Condemn'd*, is a small, badly printed, sixteen-page volume. The first four pages are devoted to proofs of the existence of evil spirits:

"For if there be no Spirits, then (not to speak of a multitude of vile absurdities, and gross horrid Blasphemies, that would natively follow therupon) there is no Eternal Death, Life nor Resurrection to be expected, nor any Locall place of Punishment for the Damned to be Tormented in, by the instruments of His Wrath, in the execution of Justice upon unrepenting Sinners, nor any Heavenly Joy and Solace to be expected by the truly Godly after this Life; which were manifestly to Raze two of the most Glorious and Divine Attributes of God both at once." (1)

This passage shows clearly why it was so firmly held that disbelief in witchcraft amounted to disbelief in God. The author argues that so many people cannot be wrong on this point, and cites historical examples of witchcraft. Next he describes the witches' sabbath, combining in his account the fantasies of popular belief and theological speculation:

"... nor is any place so piacular or sacred, but that the Devil and his Creatures (by permission) may meet therein, nay even the verie Churches themselves, where he makes bold to mount the Pulpit, black candles with a blew Low, burning all the while, both about the Pulpit, and Binch, and in several other parts and quarters throughout, and in all places wherever they meet. He gives his Hellish advice to his miserable Catives, and they confess to him what horrible villanie they have perpetrated since their last meeting, receiving his praise and applause accordingly, the most profligate and notorious wretches be always by him had in the highest esteem, and when they by thus met, they be often richly feasted (tho' but in show) with meat, drink, and musick

1. *Witchcraft Proven*, pp. 2-3.

of the best, or with whatever else may ravish & captivat the senses, the Incubusses also serve to satisfie the lust of the Witches, and the Sucubusses the lust of the Wizzards: at their meeting and departing they pay their accustomed reverence to Lucifer, and perform all worship to him, and by anointing themselves with certain oyntment, compounded at the command of the Devil, they are carried in Spirit through the Air, hither or thither, by one mean or another: and when any be to be entred, they be recommended, and presented by the Society, whereupon giving their right hand to Satan, and renouncing the Christian Faith and Sacraments, and upon transferring the Dominion of themselves, Soul and Bodie to him for ever, with a promise to worship Him as their Lord, they are sworn and solemnly admitted, and they have given them on Hellish imp or moe, for their Titular and Gardian, (by way of Spirit Familiar) to direct and guide them throughout all the passages of their time, whereby they perform afterwards all their lewd and wicked deeds."⁽¹⁾

This is an extremely interesting passage: the author, while giving an account of the demonic pact, is trying to reconcile this with his uneasiness over the physical possibility of the traditional ritual. They are "richly feasted (*tho' but in show*)";⁽²⁾ they are carried "*in spirit*"⁽²⁾ through the air"; their "Hellish Imp" is "*by way of Spirit*"⁽²⁾ Familiar". He is in fact at least as unhappy about physical witchcraft as Sir George Mackenzie who equivocated on demonic transportation some twenty years earlier.⁽³⁾ He also makes a passing reference to "certain oyntment, compounded at the command of the Devil", which a modern chemical investigation showed, could have given hallucinations of flying.⁽⁴⁾

1. *Witchcraft Proven*, pp. 4-5.

2. *My italics*.

3. See above, pp. 156-157.

4. See Margaret Murray, *The Witch Cult in Western Europe*, Oxford, 1921, Appendix I, *passim*.

It is interesting to speculate on the kind of effect which the picture of an elaborate ritual, and especially the fascinating and ubiquitous black candles with their blue flames, might have had on a people denied almost all forms of visual aids to worship.

Pages five to ten are occupied by a description of the different kinds of witchcraft, (mostly, in fact, of different kinds of fortune-telling) with frequent biblical references and recourse to Hebrew words. He then goes on to describe "the several Parts and Species of Witchcraft", why witchcraft is not worthwhile, and "Why Satan so far unmasks himself at this present, as to present to the tormented (*by a sort of corporeal representation*)⁽¹⁾ the persons of their tormentors in their various habits."⁽²⁾

This, the writer says, may flow from the multitudes of witches, it may flow from "some whited Professors of the truth being engaged in his (the Devil's) service", or it may be one of "Satan's special stratagems to cut off the innocent with the nocent."

The reason why witchcraft is not worth while is because,

"... the momentary pleasure here, is never able to counterbalance the loss hereafter, the Devil seldom gratifies the man but with the destruction of the Soul, hence is it that the truly Godly never trace these stops, for that they be ranked among the works of the flesh ... and all such be severely threatned by God, that he will judge them."⁽³⁾

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1. *My italics.*
 2. *Witchcraft Proven*, p. 10.
 3. *Ibid.*, p. 11.

Seven marks of witchcraft are given. Four of these are more or less standard: the insensible mark, and the inability to drown when thrown bound into water:

"Perhaps whither for that they be distinat for another Element, or els for that they having renuned Baptism, the external Sacramental sign whereof is water, they be rejected and spurned again by this Element, by a Divine Destination and a secret sence and Arreist of a supream overruling Providence ..."

This was an unusual ordeal for witchcraft in Scotland, however, and is more likely to have been gathered from his general reading than from experience. The third mark is the familiar one of inability to shed tears, and the fifth the inability to repeat "the heads of the Christian religion, as they be summarily comprehended in the Decalogue, Lords Prayer, and Belief". The fourth, sixth, and seventh are more curious and local, and worth quoting here in full. The fourth, which is found, though infrequently, in continental manuals, is, "the Basilisk, or Serpentine sight, wherewith they be endued to kill pyson, and destroy, what, and whensoever they please, were it not that a Divine overruling providence doth often restrain and curb the, which sight is in them above all other men and women in the world most remarkable, for while as in the Aple of the Eye there is to be seen in all and every one, the Image of a man (commonly called the babe in the eye) with the head up and the feet down: the quite contrair is to be seen in them, to wit, the feet up, and the head down; God as it were hereby making open show to the World, that He who keepeth His own as the Apple of the eye, taketh no such thought for the Slaves of Satan, but suffers the Devil whose Image they bear thus (by inversion) as an external Sign, to portray his Image in them, upon which account a Witch whither Man or Woman will not look on fixedly or steadfastly in the face. namely, if they be adverting".(1)

1. *Witchcraft Proven*, p. 15-16.

"The Sixth Mark is, That if you put any great or gross Salt in the Pipe of a Kye, and put all into the Fire, upon hearing the crackling, and seeing the blewish Low thereof, which is like that of Brimstone, instantly they shall let go their Urine; but whither this flows from an inward passion and stupifaction of mind, that upon hearing the crackling and seeing the Blewish Low foresaid they be brought to remember the horrible noise and Sulphurious burning that is abiding them in Hell, at the Judgement of the great Day, when Soul and Body shall be joyned together in one, and for ever and ever made lyable to the Wrath of the Everliving God, or on what other account as yet I know not, however as I am duely informed the mark is no less true than strange.

Seventhly, There are not wanting some who be bold to averr, that a Witch may be known from a peculiar sent or smell which is to be found in them, beside all other People in the World, and which neither flows from the nestiness of Cloaths, Vermine, or the like, but a contradistinct smell from any such thing, which may seem the more probable for that the five Senses being the Doors of the Soul whereby what is within is ordinarily disclosed, and the Devil being in Full Possession of their Soul, must needs emitte his own sent even that of the Pit."⁽¹⁾

The work ends with an injunction to put on all Spiritual Armour "whereby we shall be enabled to quench all the fiery Dares of the Devil". In general, the author reveals himself as one anxious to prove the existence of witchcraft by mentioning more or less everything he has ever heard about it, without much distinction between the probable and the absurd. He makes more use than an earlier generation would have done of the distinction between body and soul as a means of explaining some of the more improbable activities of the witches, and reflects his Calvinist background chiefly in his vivid mythology of heaven and hell, his

1. *Witchcraft Proven*, p. 16.

constant biblical references, and his efforts to maintain the ultimate supremacy of God over all the activities of the Devil. The Devil and the witches are able to do many remarkable things, but it is always "by permission". (1)

So far as direct sources go, there are very few references in *Witchcraft Proven* to any authorities other than the Bible. The author does say tantalisingly that he,

"will give some vive and shrewd Marks, and some unquestionable tokens, as they be recorded in the most approvan Authors, how and by what means a Witch (in League, and Covenant with the Devil) may be decerned to be so, that the innocent may not be condemned with the nocent ...". (2)

but he gives no further indication who these "approven Authors" might be.

He gives some historical as well as biblical examples as proof of the existence of witchcraft. Those from the Bible he calls "pregnant instances ... from Divine Story", and compares them with,

"Zoroaster, Michael Scot, Faustus, Major Weir, St. Giels of Brittain High Constable to Charles The Seventh King of France, Bladud Son of Lud King of England, our own McBaith and Natholicus Kings of Scotland with Lodor that famous Sicilian Wizard, and innumerable others beside recorded for confirmation of the Truth hereof, in Humane Story." (3)

1. *Witchcraft Proven*, p. 4.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 11.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 4.

This astonishingly a-chronological list shows how the author, like almost all other demonologists, made no discrimination at all between the forms and manifestations of their contemporary witchcraft and those of the immediate or distant past.

The only other references he makes are to a Latin oracle about which he gives no details;⁽¹⁾ and, somewhat surprisingly, to the twelfth century Spanish Rabbi Moses Maimonides (1131-1204), who was a prolific author on all branches of knowledge, and the compiler and commentator on a complete code of Jewish law. The writer introduces him into a further discussion of the meaning of some biblical words:

"... the original word *ob* signifies a bottle (Job 32. 19)⁽²⁾ and is applied to such a being inspired with a Familiar Spirit spoke with hollow voices forth of their belly, the manner whereof the Prophet Isaiah showeth to be with a hollow, slow voice (Isa. 29. 4) which *Maimonie* in his *Treatise of Idolatrie* cap. 6. sect. 1. Explaineth thus, that he that had this Familiar Spirit, or Spirit of *Python*, stood and burned Incense, and holding a rod of Mirtle-tree in his hand, waved it, and spoke certain words in

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1. "Satan either suggested to them, that which was desired to be known, or otherwayes by crafty and ambiguous answers concealed his ignorance of that he could not reveal as by these following Oracles appear *Aio te AEacide, Romanos vincere posse, Craesus Chalim penetrans magnum pervertet opum vim.*"
Witchcraft Proven, p. 7.
 2. "Behold my heart is like wine that has no vent;
Like new wineskins, it is ready to burst."
 3. "Then deep from the earth you shall speak,
from low in the dust your words shall come;
your voice shall come from the ground like the voice of a ghost,
and your speech shall whisper out of the dust." *R.S.V.*

secret untill he that enquired did hear one speak unto him, and answer him, touching that which he enquired, with words from under the Earth, and with a slow voice: Or else he took a dead mans skull, and burned Incense thereto and used enchanting and charming words, till he heard a low and slow voice which was Sauls sin, for which the Lord slew him and hath threatned to cut of all from among his people who do enquire of any such ..."(1)

1. Witchcraft Provan, p. 13. The passage from which he took this runs, "I, Qui Pythonis, aut arioli opera, sciens volensque facti, excindi meretur. Quod si testes adsuerint, monitusque sit, lapidibus obruitur. Sin errore (id factum) fixum, sive determinatum adducet sacrificium. II. Cujusmodi est illud opus Pythonis? Est qui consistit, ut offerat certum suffitus genus: is manu sua virgam vibrat myrteam: ac recepta quaedam incantationis verba profert: mox consulti alium, quasi loquantem secum, & interrogatis reponentem e terra voce submissa admodum: quam auribus percipere non valeat, sed cogitatione tantum assequatur. Similiter est, qui cranis mortui arrepto illud suffitu imbuat & incantet, donec prae euntem audiat vocem, quae exeat axillis: & respondeatur ei. Huiusmodi omnia sunt Pythonica: quique aliquid eorum fecit, lapidatur." R. Moses Maimonidae de Idololatria Liber. cum interpretatione Latina & Notis Dionysii Vossii. Amsterdami, 1641, Cap. VI, sect. 1, p. 74. There may have been an English edition current in the seventeenth century, since the author refers to the work in English, but I have not been able to trace one. It seems likely, however, that he used the Hebrew and Latin edition from which the above passage is taken, since (a) copies of this and the 1668 edition were available in Scotland at the time, and (b) the reference to Saul is to be found not in Maimonides himself, but in the Latin commentary in the edition by Dionysius Vossius. ed. cit. p. 75.

It can be seen that in his use of sources the author of this pamphlet stands very much with the theologians. His most frequent reference is to the Bible. But his little treatise owes less to the Bible than Hutchison's sermon, and far less than does Brown's sermon. The "Lover of the Truth" dwells with evident pleasure on traditional and spectacular forms of witchcraft, and hints at the obscene. More than the rest of the Bargarron witch literature, *Witchcraft Proven*, reveals the fascination which witchcraft had for the godly as well as for the ungodly, reveals the excitement which the trial injected into the otherwise drab and monotonous lives of the local inhabitants. The weekly sermon may always have been a potentially interesting event. How much more so it must have been in the west of Scotland in 1697!

CHAPTER TEN.

"THE TRYAL OF WITCHCRAFT".⁽¹⁾

The Tryal of Witchcraft appears to be the only other work of serious demonology - as opposed to horror stories, which were increasing in number at the end of the seventeenth century - to be produced in Scotland before the death penalty for witchcraft was abolished in 1736. It was published anonymously, probably in Glasgow in 1705, and the most likely author is John Bell,⁽²⁾ who was at that time minister of Gladsmuir in East Lothian.

The Tryal of Witchcraft opens with a "Letter from a Friend", asking for illumination on three points: how you can be certain that a particular disease has been inflicted by witchcraft, how to cure the bewitched, and, how in general witchcraft can be proved. John Bell thought this a hard task. His work lacks the supreme confidence noted in ^{the} 1697 sermons and tracts.

He divides his twenty-three page tract into three sections. In the first he discusses how one can

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1. *The Tryal of Witchcraft: or, Witchcraft Arraign'd and Condemn'd, In Some Answers to a few Questions anent Witches and Witchcraft, Wherein is shewed, how to know if one be a Witch, as also when one is bewitched: with some Observations upon the Witches Mark, their compact with the Devil, the White Witches, &c., N.P., N.D., probably Glasgow, 1705.*
 2. See Appendix IV.

know that one is bewitched, and warns, as Mackenzie did, against attributing to witchcraft what may have some natural cause. He points out that a great many very strange diseases which the unenlightened might wish to attribute to witchcraft, do in fact have natural explanations, and cites some examples. In order to be quite certain that the disease has been inflicted by witchcraft it must be shown to be one which can have no natural explanation. Examples of these are diseases for which renowned physicians can find no ordinary cause, such as sudden swellings, fits, vomitings of strange objects, and paralysis. His attitude was then an empirical one. He accepted the findings of scientists so far as he knew them, which, as we shall see, was only up to about fifty years before his own birth. Part of the difficulty, however, was that neither he nor his contemporaries knew much about the phenomenon we now call hysteria, and certainly nothing about its physical manifestations. Bell also gives a little less weight than seems reasonable to the possibility of deception in the supposed victim of witchcraft.

The second section is devoted to the problem of how the bewitched can be helped out of their bewitched state. This was always an acute problem in Scotland, especially for ministers, since the old remedy of

exorcism was not allowed. As we saw in Sir George Mackenzie's defence of an accused witch, the original spell-binder was often appealed to to remove the spell. This, it was conceded, was legitimate provided that a new application to the devil was not involved. John Bell, as a convinced Protestant, boldly rejects all these traditional devices out of hand, and goes to some length to explain the futility of using the touch of the witch as a cure. In the same terms as the early Fathers, he says that,

"... the best means is fasting and prayer, for God only can best free us from Divels, and in the use of his means alone it is, that we are to expect a blessing: So that if we would prevent Witches, and whatever else the Devil can do, let us always rely on God, who hath promised to such, that he will cover them under his wings ..."(1)

In the third and longest section of his works Bell deals with the real proofs and presumptions of witchcraft. This part he begins dramatically, with his habitually curious grammar:

"Great is the Mystery of iniquity, and its hard to discover the Members of that Kingdom of darkness, where the king is Satan, the fiery Dragon, the roaring Lyon, and deceiver of the Nations; and where the subjects are faggots of hell, Deceivers and deceived ..."(2)

The following, he says, are not proofs, but only presumptions of witchcraft: cursings and maledictions with evil following to those who were cursed, unsolicited

1. *Tryal of Witchcraft*, p. 9.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 10.

visitations on the bewitched by a suspected person, and the naming of the witch by the bewitched. Such things may be mere coincidences, and "the devil may lie".

When he calls these but presumptions,

"in so doing, I say no other than what pious and learned Writers on this head have spoken, who withal are of opinion (as I also am) that such pregnant and shrewd presumptions sufficiently witnessed are just cause of imprisonment, and are worthy (after tryal) of most severe and condign punishment, but ere the life can be taken away from them, it will perhaps be found needful, that a league with the Devil be once proven ..."(1)

On the diabolic pact, which he thus establishes as the central feature of witchcraft, he makes some comments. In the first place, the Devil only seeks out for his followers those whom he finds,

"... some way prepar'd either by impenitency and obduredness, distemperedness of passion, prophaness, and the like: for he will not willingly ataque and surprize, where he thinks not to gain ground."(2)

In the second place he appears to his intended victims in a guise which will impress them according to their station in life - a rather less cogent argument.

Thirdly, Satan promises great things to his witches, and then deserts them when they need help, and fourthly, the covenant once made,

"... he proceeds to confirm it, which (some say) must be done by blood: therefore, some offer him a Sacrifice; perhaps of a cat, dog, &c."(3)

1. Tryal of Witchcraft, p. 14.

2. Ibid., p. 14.

3. Ibid., p. 17.

The sucking of blood is followed by the bestowal of the Devil's mark and,

"Thus the Devil & they becoming familiar, they get from his Familiar Spirits, some one some moe, with whom they consult, and act, and over which Spirits he makes them believe they have all power, and can command them at pleasure: and in this they assume to themselves a kind of Glory to think that they have spirits at their nodd, to send forth for the torment of others; and herein they rejoyce, that they can keep others in awe by such thoughts of them, or words to them whereupon follows hurt and mischief."⁽¹⁾

This last part is probably a very good description of one of the motives likely to drive a person to witchcraft.

The methods of actually proving the demonic pact are the discovery of the Devil's mark, the witches' own boasting and confessions, "as also, their speaking of transportation from home to forraign places", witches deeds,

"... as their feeding creatures secretly, which some say they send on their errands; their making of pictures (i.e. wax images), giving anything to any Man which causes pains or death ..."⁽²⁾

and also the confession of fellow witches "especially if appearing penitent."

The confession of a "white witch" will also count against them. The white witches are known as "Healers" or "Blessers", but are themselves witches and in league with the Devil. A further proof of witchcraft is what Bell calls a "Divine witness": this occurs when the

1. *Tryal of Witchcraft*, p. 17.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 20.

accused witches

"pray for a token from God of displeasure against them if they be guilty; and it accordingly falls out".⁽¹⁾

This is a rather uncommon variant on the trial by ordeal. The last and most important proof of witchcraft is the confession of the witch herself.

He ends with a plea that there be not bestowed on him the dangerous stigma of originality:

"But now Sir, after all that is said, I desire not to be so understood, as if hereby I design'd to force any onto a compliance with the Conclusions already laid down, further then the reasons brought by grave Authors already hinted will perswade ..."⁽²⁾

In fact Bell is assiduous in his references to authorities, and gives a wider range of sources than was normal for a clerical writer. There are the usual biblical allusions, and the Faust story is again referred to,⁽³⁾ (this time in connection with his transportation through the air by the Devil),⁽⁴⁾ but the other references are nearly all to various Scottish and English (mostly English) divines. It is significant, however, that none of the English works are contemporary, or even near-contemporary, except for a back number of *The Athenian Mercury* for 1690. Apart from this, they range from an English witch tract of 1593 to Richard Bernard's *Guide to Grand Jury Men* of 1627; and it would have been hard to find

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1. Tryal of Witchcraft, P. 21.
 2. Ibid., p. 22.
 3. Faust was mentioned in Witchcraft Proven.
 4. Tryal of Witchcraft, p. 5.

an intelligent man in England in 1705 to accept the substance of any of these works. The English had hanged their last witch when Bell was six years old.

Nearly all demonologists made routine complaints about the prevalence of scepticism, but Bell seems less worried about this than most. One result of the lack of historical sense which runs through this work - as through all the others discussed in this essay - is that the author is, or seems to be, totally unaware of the intellectual isolation of his position. Bell does not seem to realise that his authorities, though many of them were non-Scottish, would no longer be regarded as authorities anywhere outside Scotland, except possibly in some non-conformist groups in England. Bell was still convinced that examples and references from any period of history would prove his points in 1705:

"... many ... things concur to render the undertaking (that of describing the signs and effects of witchcraft) hard; yet I think it needs not be ill look't upon if an essay be made of this nature; considering especially how much light may be borrowed from the writings of learned men both of old and of late, (and) the direful experience of former ages, as well of this ..."(1)

His first references are given when he is discussing the list of diseases which, though curious, cannot be said to have been caused by witchcraft:

"... famous writers instancing in their books many strange and wonderful diseases, yet no work of witchcraft, as are the Apoplexy, Carum, Catalepis, Cramp, with many more

1. Tryal of Witchcraft, p. 5.

mentioned by Dr. Cotta in his *Empericks* and Dr. Mason in his *practice of philosophy* and R. Bernard in his *Guide to Grand Jury Men*. All which authors do yet still affirm these to proceed from natural causes, and yet to be curable by natural remedies; tho scarce would a common person look on the party thus distempered, without concluding witchcraft to be there."⁽¹⁾

Dr. John Cotta (1575? - 1650?) was the author of *A True Discovery of the Empericke with the Fugitive Physition and Quicksalver, who Display their banner upon Posts; whereby His Majestie's Subjects are not only deceived, but greatly endangered in the Health of their Bodies.*⁽²⁾ He also published a year earlier, in 1616, *The Triall of Witchcraft, showing the true Methode of the Discovery with A Confutation of Erroneous Ways*, which ran to a second edition in 1625 under the title of *The Infallible, True, and Assured Witch*. It seems unlikely that Bell did not know of the existence of this work, which was certainly that by which Cotta made his name in England. It is just conceivable that he did not mention it in order to avoid drawing attention to the fact that the title of his own work was not original; but this is not very likely since, as has been emphasized

1. *Tryal of Witchcraft*, p. 6.

2. This was published in London in 1617, but was in fact simply the remaindered copies (with a new title-page) of an unsuccessful work of 1612: *A Short Discoverie of the Unobserved Dangers of Severall Sorts of Ignorant and Unconsiderate Practisers of Physicke in England, profitable not only for the Deceivd Multitude and Easie for their Meane Capacities, but raising Reformed and More Advised Thoughts in the Best Understandings: with Directions for the Safest Election of a Physition in necessitie.* D.N.B.

already, Bell laid no claim to originality, and in fact took pains to deny it.

"Dr. Mason in his *practice of philosophy*," is untraced at the time of writing. Richard Bernard's *Guide to Grand Jury Men*,⁽¹⁾ is, however, one of the English witchcraft classics. Bernard, who lived from 1568 to 1641, was a Puritan who conformed. There was a pamphlet warfare between him and the Separatists over this, but in fact he remained Puritan in doctrine, and in his parish of Batcome he was indulged by his diocesan in his objection to "ceremonies" in public worship. He was involved from time to time in various cases of attempted exorcism.⁽²⁾

Bell cites him four times in *The Tryal of Witchcraft*. A second instance is in his consideration of the question whether the witch can take off a spell by her own touch.

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1. *A Guide to Grand Jury Men, divided into two books. In the First, is the Authors best advice to them what to doe, before they bring in a Billa vera in cases of Witchcraft, with a Christian Direction to such as are too much given up on every crosse to think themselves bewitched, In the Second, is a Treatise touching Witches good and bad, how they may bee knowne, evicted and condemnd with many particulars tending thereunto, second edition (from which the quotations are taken), London, 1630. The date of the first edition was 1627. This particular reference was to Book I, Chap. II, "That strange diseases may happen from onely naturall causes and neither be wrought by Divels nor Witches, and how to be discerned."* p. 11.
 2. *D.N.B.*

He concludes that:

"Their touching is an uncertain thing, because (as writers on this head have sufficiently instructed) by Touching they even sometimes bewitch the afflicted party. Thus Daneaus in *Dialogis suis de Sortiariis*, witnesseth, that a Witch touched but the breasts of a woman that gave suck, and her milk dried up: and the forcited Rector of Batcomb, R. Bernard reports of one Mary Sutton a Bedfordshire Witch, that having but touched the neck of one Mr Engers servants, with her finger, he was presently after her departure miserable vexed, how then can their touch cure the diseased?" (1)

What Bernard wrote was,

"A witch touched but the brests of a woman that gave sucke, and dryed up her milke: this Daneus witnesseth. Mary Sutton, a Bedfordshire Witch did but touche the necke of one Mr. Engars servants only with her finger, and he was presently after her departure miserably vexed ..."(2)

In view of the relative position of the reference to Daneus in these passages, and since this is the only mention Bell makes of Daneus, it seems probable that he was being slightly dishonest, and had not actually read Daneus' tract.⁽³⁾

1. *Tryal of Witchcraft*, p. 9.

2. *Guide to Grand Jury Men*, Book II, Chap. XIII, pp. 174-5.

3. *De Veneficis quos olim Sortilegos, nunc autem vulgo Sortiarios vocant Dialogus*, Geneva, 1574. The relevant passage is,

"Antonius: Earum vero rerum exempla mihi aliq̄ue proferti, Theophile.

Theophilus: Faciam. Ac primum eos in homines quasdam certo certius est. Id enim quotidie fieri cernimus. Quosdam enim venenis suis interficiunt: alios lauquentes & tabidos reddunt. Vidi qui nutricium mammas veneo & solo manus attactu lacte exhausissent & exsicca sunt." Caput III, p. 51.

Bell also refers to the *Guide to Grand Jury Men* in a description of the "Grand Witch Lewis Gaufridus, a rich and learn'd Priest, as Bernard call's him",⁽¹⁾ and again in giving examples of the way in which the Devil maltreats his followers;

"... the Devil ... designs violence unto them, upon their refusing to do as he bids them, as Bernard reports he did to old Dembdike, whom he pusht into a Ditch, because she would not go help Chattox, another witch, (whom she could not abide) to make Pictures. The same Author says, the Devil came sometimes to Witch Chattox gaping upon her in the Form of a Beare, with open mouth as if he would have worried her ..."⁽²⁾

Bell's next reference is to the "Holy and learnd Mr. Durham" who is said to have observed that,

"the Devil cannot create any inward species of representation, this being a work of omnipotence."

1. *Trial of Witchcraft*, p. 20.

"to Gaufredy, a Priest, one of some learning and wealth, hee appeareth in some human shape". *Guide to Grand Jury Men*, Book II, Chap. IV, p. 104.

2. *Trial of Witchcraft*, p. 19. Bernard's account runs, "He wil threaten the Witch, and offer some wiolence unto her, if she will not doe what he would have her, as the spirit did old Dembdike, who shoved and pushed her into a ditch, because she would not goe and help Chattox the witch (whom Dembdike could not abide) to make pictures. So Chattox spirit threw her down, because when he appeard, shee would not speake unto him." *Guide to Grand Jury Men*, Book II, Chap. XI, p. 161.

and,

"He will among them, as he did Mother Samuel, tormenting her in her body grievously: as he did Chattox, taking her eyesight from her, yea,, and would sometimes come gaping upon her in the forme of a Beare, with open mouth, as if he would have worried her, as shee confessed." *Ibid.*, Book II, Chap. XI, pp. 161-2.

Despite this, wrote Bell,

"God permitting him; he working upon what is already within the person may misrepresent objects, by disturbing inwardlie the faculties." (1)

"Mr. Durham, who is also quoted on the title page, was James Durham (1622-1658) a Covenanting preacher famous for his piety and preaching. His many volumes of sermons were mostly published posthumously, and had a considerable vogue." (2)

Bell also gives one reference to William Perkins, whose works he claimed (3) to have studied at University, and who, as we learnt from Sir George Mackenzie, was known in Scotland. Bell says that,

"Mr. Perkins, in his discourse of Witchcraft, chap 2, Explains this while he says that when a person desires in heart to have such or such a thing effected by superstitious forms, &c. And the Devil consents thereunto, if he then do the business, there is a Secret compact." (4)

An early English witch tract of the popular type (as opposed to the more formal demonological treatise) also provided Bell with material. Among infallible signs of witchcraft he lists,

"A Divine witness, where God condescends to give it, as, when they pray for a token from God of displeasure

1. Tryal of Witchcraft, p. 13.

2. D.N.B.

3. In his autobiography. See Appendix IV.

4. Tryal of Witchcraft, p. 15. In Chapter II of his Discourse of the Damned Art of Witchcraft, Perkins deals in detail with the whole question of "compact" explicit and implicit.

against them, of they be guilty; and it accordingly falls out. As it is reported⁽¹⁾ to have been with one Mother Samual the Warboys Witch that tormented Mr. Throgmortons children, who by bitter curses on herself if she were guilty: presently her Chin did bleed, the place (as afterwards she confest) where the Spirits did Suck Blood."⁽²⁾

1. In The most strange and admirable discoverie of the three Witches of Warboys arraigned, convicted and executed at the last Assises at Huntingto for the bewitching of the five daughters of Robert Throckmorton Esquier, and divers other persons, with sundrie Diuelish and grivous torments And also for the bewitching to death of the Lady Crumwell, the like hath not bene heard of in this age, London, 1593.

2. Tryall of Witchcraft, p. 21. The story is as follows:

Shee most vehemently denied it, with many bitter words and curses upon herselfe, desiring the Lord, to shew some present token from heaven upon her, that all the world might knowe, that she was such a kind of woman, as they suspected her for, if she used any such thing, or rewarded them any such way, or had any spirits, or knew what they were.

Presently after, Maister Throckmorton, and Maister Henry Pickering, uncle to the said children, who was then with him, hearing her use such protestations, being half terrified in their harts, (because they alway vehemently suspected her guiltinesse) that she should thus violently with her owne handes (as it were) pull downe the iudgements of God upon her head, went out of the doores, and before they were gone ten paces from the house, another young Gentlemen, Maister John Lawrence (cozen to the sayd children) that stayed behind in the Parlor, came to Maister Throckmorton, and Ma: Henry Pickering, & saide that mother Samules chin did bleede: whereupon they returned into the Parlor agayn where she was, and sawe the napkin where with she had wiped away the blood from her chin, to be bloody to the quantitie of eight or ten drops. Then Ma. Throckmorton, with the rest looked uppon her Chinne, and there was no more to be seene than upon the back of a cleane hande, only there appeared some fewe little red spots, as if they had beene flea-bytings. Then Maister Throckmorton demaunded of her whether her chin used to bleed so or not: She sayd, that it did very often. He asked her, who could witness it but her selfe: She sayd no bodie, for it did always bleed when she was alone, and she never told anybody of it.

This her bleeding at the chinne, she did confesse to the sayde Maister Henry Pickering, after shee was condemend, that the spirites were then sucking at her chinne, when shee made that protestation to Maister Throckmorton and him, and that when she wyped them of with her hand, her chinne bled, which sometimes it had done before, after their sucking, but not often, and never so much as then, nay scarcely the quantities of one drop at any time before. The Witches of Warboys, p. G.II.

Being asked whether a dun chicken did ever suck on her chin, and how often the said Examinat (Alice Samuell) sayeth, that it sucked twice and no more since Christmas evens even last. Being asked whether it was a natural chicken, She saith it was not, she knoweth it was no natural chicken, because when it came to her chin she did scarce feele it, but when she wiped it off with her hand, her chin did bleed. The Witches of Warboys, p. J.I.

The most recent work to which Bell refers is *The Athenian Mercury*⁽¹⁾ a magazine which consisted mainly of miscellaneous information, and discussion of assorted topics. Bell enlists its support:

"... some define a witch to be such as do act beyond the ordinary power of Nature, by the help of wicked Spirits. Athen. Merc. V. 1. N.3. Q.6."⁽²⁾

This then is the "scholarship" which went into *The Tryal of Witchcraft*. The majority of the references are to English Puritan writers. The interesting fact is that although Bell seldom swerves from his allegiance to writers of his own theological party, he ends up by producing a doctrine of witchcraft which, in its essentials, is that formulated by the pre-Reformation churchmen.

According to Bell:

"...three things concur to the bewitching of a Person; viz. a Divine permission, a Devilish operation or the evil Spirits working: and lastly, the Witches consent; so that the Devil does all, and they consent to all,

1. *The Athenian Mercury: Resolving WEEKLY all the most Nice and Curious Questions Propos'd by the INGENIOUS. Number 3., Tuesday March 31st., 1690. "Question 6: Whether there be Witches? and what good books have been written on that Subject? Answer: I answer, there are Witches, unless we can suppose both God and Man would conspire to deceive us; the Good Books written on that Subject, are the Holy Bible and the Histories of all Nations. To be more explicite: by witches we mean such as act beyond the ordinary Power of Nature, by the help of Wicked Spirits: The Proof whereof being matter of Fact, must rely wholly on the Credibility of the Evidence: God's authority is unquestionable; Thou shalt not suffer a Witch to live ..."*
2. *Tryal of Witchcraft, p. 18.*

which to wit, is done in their behalf, for no doubt Satan can go of, and for himself, where he hath no league with the Witch ..."(1)

According to the *Malleus Maleficarum*:

"The three necessary concomitants of witchcraft are the Devil, a witch, and the permission of Almighty God." (2)

It is not clear just how Bell came by this formulation, but it is unmistakable: here in the eighteenth century, at the birth of the age of reason, we find a clear echo of fifteenth-century scholasticism.

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1. *Trial of Witchcraft*, p. 18.
 2. *Malleus Maleficarum*, p. 1.

CHAPTER ELEVEN.

THEOLOGIANS AND HISTORIANS OF SCOTTISH WITCHCRAFT.

In the preceding chapters we have discussed the principal demonological literature during the era of the witchcraft persecutions. In this chapter will be considered the works of lesser importance written during this period, and the story of Scottish witchcraft writings after the passing of the Act of 1735.

There is no sharp dividing line between the witchcraft theology written during the witch hunt, and the histories of witchcraft written in the following centuries. The sources are much the same; the complexion which is put upon them, and the amount of credence given to the confessions of the witches, still depended, as it did before, upon previous theological or anti-theological convictions. The natural successors to the earlier theologians in their writings on standard Christian dogmas are the theologians of today; but there is little serious demonology written by contemporary theologians, and therefore in this field the successors to the witch hunt demonologists are, for the most part, the historians.

The historian finds himself in a particular difficulty when dealing with witchcraft, which he can

avoid more easily when he writes on religion in general. The history of the Christian Church provides enough material: social, political, and economic, to occupy the historian, without his necessarily feeling the urge to obtrude any personal convictions about her as an agency of salvation; about whether in fact the Church fulfils her own self-avowed primary function. It is relatively easy, indeed, to discuss the Christian Church without discussing God. It is far more difficult to discuss the history of witchcraft without discussing demonology, for - in the case of European witchcraft ~~at least~~ - the problem of the Devil, or at least, of conscious dedication to evil, is inseparable from the problem of witchcraft itself. When faced with this as the unavoidable core of European witchcraft, the historian finds it hard to suppress his own views on the probability or improbability of a "personal" Devil, and on superstition in general. It is this merging of the tasks of historian and theologian or anti-theologian, which makes the historiography of witchcraft especially revealing concerning climates of thought in any given epoch.

Scottish witchcraft writing can be divided roughly into three groups. The first contains those books or pamphlets written before the passing of the Witchcraft Act, 1735, most of which have already been

discussed in this essay. The second consists of tracts against the belief in witchcraft, legal works, and histories of witchcraft written first under the influence of rationalism, and later, after Sir Walter Scott, of rationalism modified by romanticism. The last group contains the writings of this century, which have a range of explanations and expositions of the meaning and influence of witchcraft wider and more bizarre than the demonology of any preceding age.

In the first two categories we are confining ourselves for convenience to works written by Scotsmen on Scottish witchcraft. In the last we will make a wider survey, for there have been very few works specifically on Scottish witchcraft written since 1900; but a great many on witchcraft in general, which devote space to Scotland.

In 1899, Professor John Ferguson of Glasgow published his *Bibliographical Notes on the Witchcraft Literature of Scotland*. This is a descriptive list of one hundred and seventy-four titles, but in fact only thirty-four of these were published before 1735, (that is to say, during the period when the law recognised the existence of witchcraft), and of these, only sixteen were published in Scotland. No other known work can properly be added to this list, and three or four of those he lists deal with

witchcraft only as one problem among many.⁽¹⁾ Ferguson suggests that this scarcity (compared with England and the continent) was

"due to the manner in which the subject has been dealt with in the two countries respectively. In Scotland the reports of the trials were written down in the Kirk-session's minutes, or in the justiciary records, and after the victims were disposed of, their 'malefices' were forgotten, and a fresh crop of witches sprang up to absorb the attention of the people. Nobody cared to have the trials to read. In England, on the other hand, the trials and narratives were printed as they occurred, in separate pamphlets or volumes."⁽²⁾

Ferguson does not offer any real explanation for this difference which he notes between the English and Scottish methods of recording their respective proceedings against witches, but the reason is no doubt to be found in the general absence of what might be called frivolous or leisure reading matter in Scotland. The considerable English witchcraft literature of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries does not contain very much in the way of serious theological discussion. There are some learned works such as the *Treatise of Witchcraft*, written by Alexander Roberts, the vicar of Kings Lynn in Norfolk, in 1616, but the majority of English witch tracts belong to the light literature of the seventeenth century, along with the chapbooks, popular ballads, and collections of

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1. For example, the legal works, such as Mackenzie's Laws and Customs of Scotland in Matters Criminal.
 2. Bibliographical Notes, p. 118.

curious happenings. In fact, much of what Ferguson has called "the witchcraft literature of Scotland" was written for the titillation of the English. A great many of the English tracts on witchcraft contain at least one example of Scottish sorcery. English witchcraft was apparently a more routine matter; the really bizarre cases were to be found in Scotland, and so the English demonologists turned to them for their more colourful illustrations.

One tract, at least, was published in the English manner during the early period. It was called *Trial, Confession, and Execution of Isobel Inch, John Stewart, Margaret Barclay, and Isobel Crawford for Witchcraft at Irvine, Anno 1618.*⁽¹⁾ This was simply a horror story of Ayrshire witches who raised storms.

Apart from this tract, and those works already discussed, there appears to be nothing extant until the last ten years of the seventeenth century, when there was a considerable increase in the number of witch pamphlets. The ostensible reason for these tracts, from Sinclair onwards, is to convince the evidently increasing number of sceptics of the existence and peril of witchcraft. We hear much of the lingering credulity of the Scots at a comparatively late date, but there is scarcely a writer

1. *Ardrossan, N.D. There is a nineteenth century reprint: Ardrossan, N.D. ? 1855.*

in Scotland, as elsewhere, who does not complain of the incredulous. As we have seen Sinclair himself devotes some pages to this. There is no sign of these sceptics turning to print; most probably such people were either not sufficiently interested, or did not want to make a fool of themselves by joining in such a debate.

The most likely explanation of the increased number of witch tracts at the end of the century, is simply that a larger number of books were being published and that there was a wider reading public to absorb them. The kind of reading matter which had been available to the English for over a century was a luxury to the Scots. The books which were published in Scotland during the sixteenth and first half of the seventeenth century were mainly restricted to essential texts and learned works;⁽¹⁾ even then it was necessary to import theological textbooks from Holland for students. Witchcraft may have been to the forefront as a social problem; but witchcraft as an entertainment, or demonology as an intellectual diversion, had to wait for a rather more leisured reading class.

1. See H.G. Aldis, List of Books Printed in Scotland before 1700. Edinburgh Bibliographical Society, 1904.

In 1691 was written, and possibly published,⁽¹⁾ one of the most astonishing and improbable works to come out of seventeenth-century Scotland: *The Secret Commonwealth, or Essay of Elves, Faunes, and Fairies*, by the Reverend Robert Kirk, minister of Aberfoyle. It is an astonishing work, because the fact that a seventeenth-century Scottish minister could have written such a treatise on natural magic does not fit in with our general picture of the climate of Scottish thought at this time. Kirk appears to have been a neoplatonist of some sort. His university philosophy notebook⁽²⁾ is covered with cabalistic drawings, and it is difficult to discover how he could have had access to such knowledge. Reading of that sort could hardly have been encouraged.

Kirk's treatise is unique in Scottish magical writings. It has not been discussed in detail in this essay, partly because it is not, properly speaking about demonology, partly because his writings have already been subjected to and still are under detailed examination.⁽³⁾

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1. *The first known edition is that of 1815, produced by Sir Walter Scott. Scott refers in it to an edition of 1691, and also to a manuscript in the National Library of Scotland. No edition of 1691 is known.*
 2. *The manuscript is in Edinburgh University Library.*
 3. *By Dr. Mario Rossi and others.*

In 1696 the Reverend Alexander Telfair, as part of the war against the sceptics, published the *True Relation of an Apparition, Expressions and Actings of a Spirit, which infested the House of Andrew Mackie, in Ring-Croft of Stocking, in the Paroch of Rerrick, in the Stewartry of Kirkcudbright, in Scotland.* This was essentially an account of what we would now call "poltergeist" activity, and was ostensibly written to vindicate the character of the afflicted Andrew Mackie and to prove to the world at large the existence of evil spirits. This version was published in Edinburgh, and a suitably adapted English version entitled *A New Confutation of Sadduicism* was published the same year in London.

After the Bargarron affair, the next pamphlets of interest were those produced as a result of the very gruesome case of the witches of Pittenweem. Here an unfortunate woman was actually lynched by the enraged mob when the authorities refused to prosecute. The first of these pamphlets was the *True and full relation of the Witches of Pittenweem*, published in Edinburgh in 1704. In 1705 two more tracts were published as letters, one defending, one attacking the behaviour of the minister of Pittenweem and the bailies.⁽¹⁾

1. See Collection of Rare and Curious Tracts on Witchcraft, for reprints of these pamphlets.

After the publication of *The Tryal of Witchcraft* there seems to have been a complete lapse of interest in Scotland. No Scottish writer joined in the dispute between Bishop Francis Hutchinson, who wrote a sceptical work on witchcraft in 1715,⁽¹⁾ and Richard Boulton, who replied in the traditional manner.⁽²⁾ The only Scottish work to be published between 1705 and 1736 appears to have been *The Tincklarian Doctor Mitchel's Strange and Wonderful Discourse to the Witches and Warlocks in Calder*. This has no place, date, or printer, but Ferguson assigns it to Edinburgh in 1720.

The passing of the Witchcraft Act of 1736 provoked almost as little stir in Scotland as it did in England. One writer goes so far as to say:

"The Parliamentary proceedings of this session, relating to domestic affairs, were, in general, of little importance. The only subjects which it may be necessary to particularise, were the Gin Act; the repeal of the Test Act, and the bill for giving relief to Quakers."⁽³⁾

The press at that time made a few, mostly jocular references to the Act, but they were largely absorbed in the riots following the Gin Act. Reaction in the Scottish press was similar; indeed, large portions

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1. *An Historical Essay concerning Witchcraft*, London, 1718.
 2. *Compleat History of Magick*, London, 1715 and 1716, and *The Possibility and Reality of Magick, Sorcery, and Witchcraft*, London, 1722.
 3. William Coxe, *Memoirs of the life and administration of Sir Robert Walpole*, London, 1798, Vol. I, p. 475.

were reprinted from London journals.

We know, however, although we have no details of the debate, that one Scottish nobleman made a speech against the passing of the Act:

James Erskine, Lord Grange, "chose to make his maiden speech on the Witches Bill, as it was called; and being learned in *daemonologia*, with books on which subject his library was filled, he made a long, canting speech that set the House in a titter of laughter ..."(1)

Apart from Lord Grange, however, only the Seceders appear to have objected. In 1743 there was passed an act of the Associate Presbytery to the effect that:

The penal statutes against witches have been repealed by the Parliament, contrary to the express law of God; by which a holy God may be provoked in a way of righteous judgement, to leave those who are already ensnared to be hardened more and more, and to permit Satan to tempt and seduce others to the same wicked and dangerous snares."(2)

Once freed of the trammels of the 1563 Witchcraft Act the Scottish lawyers could be as outspokenly rationalist as they liked. Three distinguished such, all writing in the latter part of the eighteenth century: John Erskine of Carnock,⁽³⁾ Hugo Arnot,⁽⁴⁾ and David Hume,⁽⁵⁾ all naturally express

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1. *Alexander Carlyle of Inveresk, Autobiography, Edin., 1910, p.10.*
 2. *Ibid., p. 11. See also, The Scots Magazine, March, 1744, pp. 130-132.*
 3. *The Principles of the Law of Scotland, 3rd. ed. Edin., 1764. and An Institute of the Law of Scotland, Edin., 1773.*
 4. *A Collection and Abridgement of Celebrated Criminal Trials in Scotland from 1536 - 1784, Edin., 1785.*
 5. *Commentaries on the Law of Scotland, 2nd. ed., Edin., 1819.*

extreme horror at the record of Scotland where witch prosecutions were concerned. They reveal a certain amount of ignorance about the details of legal demonology, for by then it was part of the history of law rather than law itself, and both Arnot and Hume attempt, probably unfairly, to lay the blame more upon the clergy than upon the legal profession for the absurdities of some aspects of the belief and the cruelty of the persecution.

Erskine skims over the whole matter as quickly as possible. For him it is best forgotten. He gives an outline of the Witchcraft Act, 1735 in *The Principles of the Law of Scotland*,⁽¹⁾ and expands a little more on the Scottish Act in *An Institute of the Law of Scotland*:

"Corresponding with evil spirits, and the practising of witchcraft by their aid, and under their influence, falls properly under this class of crimes; (i.e. those against God), and as our legislature in former ages was of opinion, that those diabolical arts did not cease upon our Saviour's death, it was enacted by 1563 c. 73. that all who used witchcraft, sorcery, necromancy, or pretended skill therein, and all consulters of witches, should be punished capitally; upon which statute, numberless innocent persons were tried, and burnt to death, upon evidence which, in place of affording reasonable conviction to the judge, was fraught with absurdity and superstition." (2)

1. 3rd ed., p. 473.

2. *An Institute of the Law of Scotland*, p. 706.

Here again we have an echo of the early theology of the Church. Erskine, though, seems to have forgotten that in fact very few convicted witches indeed were "burnt to death". They were nearly always strangled and their dead or unconscious bodies burnt.

Hugo Arnot is more indignant than Erskine, and even more anxious to lay the blame on the clergy:

"Witchcraft first made its appearance in our criminal code, at a time when the broaching of a new set of religious notions excited a passionate desire for the attainment of extraordinary purity and strictness in doctrine and in morals. Shortly before the Reformation was established by law, an act was passed, annexing a capital punishment to the practice of sorcery, or consulting with witches. From the words of this act, which are not a little ambiguous, there is reason to suspect that the Legislature did not believe in sorcery; and that the punishment provided by the statute was annexed not to the crime of witchcraft, but to the impiety and blasphemy of pretending to, or believing in such supernatural powers."⁽¹⁾

Arnot admits however the existence of a horror peculiarly legal:

"The celebrated Sir Thomas Hope who was counsel for the Prosecution, replied that these defences ought to be repelled, and no proof allowed of them, because *contrary to the libel*; that is to say, in other words, because what was urged *by the prisoner in her defences contradicted what was charged by the public prosecutor in his indictment*. The defences for the prisoner were over-ruled ... This most incredibly absurd and iniquitous doctrine, of repelling defences because contrary to the libel; this system of legal murder, was till the present century a received maxim of criminal jurisprudence in Scotland."⁽²⁾

1. Celebrated Criminal Trials, p. 347.

2. Loc. cit., *The same could have been said, of course, about English criminal law.*

Arnot sums up in a manner characteristic of eighteenth-century rationalism:

"Locke had written upon government, Fletcher had been a patriotic statesman, Bolingbroke had been a minister in the Augustan Age of Queen Anne, ere this system of legal murder and torture was abolished ..."⁽¹⁾

and,

"These pages ... give a melancholy display of human nature; if they present us with the outrageous crimes of the prisoners, they also exhibit what is much more shocking, the legal murders of the Court. Let us inquire whence proceeded a system of penal law, so repugnant to justice, humanity, and policy: and draw the important conclusion ... The want of science and of Civil Liberty, is the fundamental source of those proceedings, where Tyranny and Superstition, marked in the solemn garb of Law and Justice, stride horrible with all their ghastly train, of confiscation, torture, and murder."⁽²⁾

And he ends by referring to his countrymen of a previous generation as "that deluded and barbarous people". The distance between the generations at this date was so great that such an attitude is understandable.

David Hume, in his *Commentaries on the Law of Scotland*, goes into the matter in more detail, and is the last Scottish lawyer to do so. He gives witchcraft a whole chapter in a catalogue of offences against God and religion, and begins by saying that believers in it appealed to the example of Roman law,

1. *Loc. cit.*, p. 369.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 371.

and Carpzorius, he says, has six different classes of wizards and necromancers. As far as Scotland goes,

"There is but one statue on the subject 1563 c. 73, which appoints the pain of death to be executed as well on the seeker or employer, as the user of sorcery; and seems to have been equally calculated for the case of one who was really an adept in the craft, and of one who falsely pretended to possess it. There seems however to have been little need of any provision conceived in such extensive terms. For among the many trials for witchcraft which fill the record, there is not one, so far as I have observed, which proceeds on the notion of a vain or cheating art, falsely used by an imposter, to deceive the weak and credulous. In all of them there is either a charge of preternatural powers, acquired by the seeker of sorcery; or at least a charge of actual communion with Satan and other evil spirits."⁽¹⁾

Hume says that there is little need to enter into detail, for,

"Mackenzie, in that chapter of his treatise which relates to witchcraft, has given us sufficient information of the miserable consequences of this strange delusion; and of the vain and ineffectual precautions, by which our Judges attempted to guard themselves against error or precipitancy, in a matter where even they, believing as they did in the reality of the crime, saw, however, that they had to tread upon so foul and treacherous a bottom."⁽²⁾

In fact, though Hume does give quite a lot of detail as to what constitutes the "Articles of Dittay":

"To enter into a paction with the devil to serve him, to call him up and confer with him; to be baptised by him, or receive his gifts; as also, which was often charge, and sometimes found proven, to join with him in carnal copulation."⁽³⁾

1. *2nd ed.*, Vol. I, pp. 578-579.

2. *Commentaries on the Law of Scotland*, Vol. I, p. 579.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 580.

He also shows some professional pride:

"The taking of inquisition concerning witchcraft was not confined to Magistrates and Judges, who might be supposed somewhat more competent to such investigations: It was given, at least was permitted, almost to all persons in any sort of authority, and especially to clergymen and kirk sessions who seem to have proceeded on common fame, or other the like loose ground; and before them, more especially, most of the many fatal confessions seem to have been obtained."⁽¹⁾

On some points he is inaccurate. He does not appear to know, for example, the significance of the Devil's mark, and the fact that pricking was used specifically to find the insensible spot rather than as a general means of torture:

"Torture, of one kind or another, seems to have been freely made use of. The most common mode was the thrusting of pins into the body, and the denial of sleep for many days and nights; ... The art of conducting this sort of *question* was indeed so common a thing, and in such request, that the knowledge of it even became a trade ..."⁽²⁾

Hume either does not know, or will not explain, that the "trade" in question was only incidentally that of professional torturer. (Professional torturers were not needed, for all in authority seemed to be capable of doing that for themselves.) The usefulness of the "pricker" was that he acquired particular anatomical knowledge of places where it would be reasonable to expect a pin to fail to draw blood, and thus provide proof of the insensible mark.

1. *Commentaries on the Law of Scotland*, Vol. I, p. 580.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 581.

The most Hume is prepared to admit, and it is a good deal for the time, is that,

"In those times, when every person, even the most intelligent was thoroughly persuaded of the truth of witchcraft, and of the possibility of acquiring supernatural powers, it is nowise unlikely that individuals would sometimes be found, who, either seeking to indulge malice, or stimulated by curiosity and an irregular imagination, did actually court and solicit a communication with evil spirits, by the means which in those days were reputed to be effectual for such a purpose ... I will not enlarge further on so disagreeable a subject." (1)

We have to wait till the nineteenth century to find a whole book specifically devoted to the subject. In the year 1815 two works were published in Scotland: the Rev. J. Paterson's *The Belief in Witchcraft unsupported by Scripture*,⁽²⁾ and Sir Walter Scott's edition of Robert Kirk's *Secret Commonwealth*. Paterson laments the fact that the belief is still generally held in Scotland to be part of the Christian faith and begins his *Preface* with an almost endearing consciousness of superiority:

"One necessitated, by official duties, frequently to converse with men in the ordinary ranks of life, and to gain an acquaintance with their sentiments, must observe how generally a belief in Witchcraft prevails among them, and the strong conviction they feel of its truth." (3)

He follows this up with ten chapters of considerable learning in which he demonstrates that a rational

1. *Commentaries on the Law of Scotland*, Vol. I, p. 581.

2. *Aberdeen*, 1815.

3. *Op. cit.*, p.i.

belief in Christianity does not necessitate a belief in witchcraft and demonology, and shows that biblical references to magicians and wizards are always to poisoners or to fortunetellers.

This solemn work is something of an oddity, and at this period would have been a complete anachronism almost anywhere other than Scotland. The time for convincing the educated by a display of learning, of the non-existence of witchcraft had long since passed. A living fear of witchcraft was now to be found only among illiterates, peasants, and those on the religious borderlands; and they were beyond this kind of appeal. Such works were frequent on the continent from the seventeenth century and throughout the eighteenth, and in England from Reginald Scot's *Discoverie of Witchcraft* to about the end of the seventeenth century, but Scotland, at the relevant time, produced none at all, and Paterson's work came long after it was needed.⁽¹⁾ One or two unambiguous sermons to his parishioners might have served Paterson's purpose better, and he may indeed have provided them.

1. *A Belief in Witchcraft Unsupported by Scripture* does not appear to have been reprinted, and is now a very scarce book. There is a copy in Sir Walter Scott's Library at Abbotsford, and there are three copies in New College Library, Edinburgh.

The Secret Commonwealth, with its curious mixture of neo-platonic science, Highland mythology, and fantasy, was in one sense even more of an anachronism at the beginning of the nineteenth century. But *The Secret Commonwealth* had a future, where *A Belief in Witchcraft Unsupported by Scripture* had not, for *The Secret Commonwealth* was published by Scott as part of the crime he perpetrated against Scotland (from which it has never yet fully recovered): the exploitation of what is loosely termed romanticism. The part played by witchcraft in the romantic attitude to Scottish history is an important one, for it was employed to emphasize the gulf between the barbaric past and the cultivated, sophisticated present. The earlier type of anti-superstitious work, of which Paterson's is the only Scottish example, was written to convince. In the nineteenth-century romantic works on witchcraft, the horrors of the witch persecution in seventeenth-century Scotland are deplored, but the whole question of witchcraft is regarded as essentially one of the past. It is completely finished with; and therefore the expressions of rationalist horror, though frequent and genuine throughout these writings, are in the last resort only a matter of form. They are automatic and taken

for granted. In the nineteenth century Scotland's witches were a part of the general picture of a past of sternness, mountains, puritanism, and gloom.

The principal works of this kind were Charles Kirkpatrick Sharpe's edition of Robert Law's *Memorials* ⁽¹⁾ with his own introductory history of witchcraft in Scotland; ⁽²⁾ Sir Walter Scott's own *Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft*; ⁽³⁾ *The Darker Superstitions of Scotland* by J.G. Dalyell; ⁽⁴⁾ *The Philosophy of Witchcraft*, by J. Mitchell and John Dickie; ⁽⁵⁾ Mrs. Lynn Linton's *Witch Stories*; ⁽⁶⁾ and lastly, the long article in *The Scottish Review* for 1891: "Witchcraft in Scotland" by F. Legge. ⁽⁷⁾

The superstitions of the past are a constant theme-song of all of them. Dalyell wrote:

"Inconsistency unhinged the mind, which, in its disturbance, invested contemptible products with miraculous virtues; and yielded to the most extravagant ceremonies, in the vain confidence of deriving infallible efficacy from their practice. Dreams and visions originating in a morbid constitution, were accepted as divine inspirations; oracles emanated from inebriety; angelic concerts floated on the moaning of the winds; atmospheric coruscations

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1. *Memorials: or, The memorable things that fell out within this island of Brittain from 1638 to 1684, Edin., 1818.*
 2. *Published as a work on its own as A Historical Account of the belief in witchcraft in Scotland, London, 1884.*
 3. London, 1830.
 4. Edinburgh, 1834.
 5. Paisley, 1839.
 6. London, 1861.
 7. *The Scottish Review, October, 1891, Vol. 18.*

announced spiritual presence; destiny was read in the stars."⁽¹⁾

and Scott began the *Letters on Demonology*:

"You have asked of me, my dear friend, that I should assist the Family Library, with the history of a dark chapter in human nature, which the increasing civilisation of all well-instructed countries has now almost blotted out, though the subject attracted no ordinary degree of consideration in the older times of their history. Among much reading of my early days it is no doubt true that I travelled a good deal in the twilight regions of superstitious disquisitions ..."⁽²⁾

A further contribution to the subject was made by writers of more general works both within and without Scotland. They give the same kind of opinions, though they tend to be even more severe upon the original Scottish reformers. Of such works the two most influential were probably Charles Mackay's *Memoirs of Extraordinary Popular Delusions*,⁽³⁾ and William Lecky's *History of the Development of Rationalism in Europe*.⁽⁴⁾ Buckle, in his *History of Civilization in England*,⁽⁵⁾ is also very severe on the Scottish witch mania.

The work of all these writers was helped and encouraged by the steady publication throughout the nineteenth century of a great deal of source material, beginning with David Webster's *Collection of Rare and Curious Tracts on Witchcraft*,⁽⁶⁾ now itself very scarce, and

1. Dalryell, *op. cit.*, p. 2.
2. 2nd ed., 1831, p. 2.
3. London, 1841.
4. London, 186 .
5. London, 1861.
6. Edinburgh, 1820.

Robert Pitcairn's *Criminal Trials in Scotland*,⁽¹⁾ and continuing with the publications of the various Scottish Historical Clubs. The last important contribution of the nineteenth century, apart from Ferguson's *Bibliographical Notes*, was Legge's essay, *Witchcraft in Scotland*. In this he made full use of all this new material, criticising some of the particular conclusions of his predecessors with regard to the culpability of the first Reformers, the relative guilt of presbyterian and episcopalian, and the worst periods of the persecution. His basic attitude, however, is much the same as theirs, though he distinguishes science and reason and gives priority to the former in assessing credit for the cessation of the persecution:

"It was not that Science, as a great part of the Scottish clergy then taught, was sapping the foundations on which the belief in the supernatural rested; but that she was every day reducing the area within which the action of the supernatural was (I do not say possible, but) necessary. It was clearly impossible for any educated Scottish man to believe that disease could be caused or cured by a witch, when Sydenham was working out the true principles upon which the treatment of disease would be based. Nor could he longer believe that a dozen old women assembled in a church could bring on a thunderstorm to sink their neighbour's ships, when Franklin had proved that the lightning was but the discharge of a fluid whose action could be brought under human control. It was then Science, rather than rationalism or humanity, which brought about the downfall of the belief in witchcraft, and it is well

1. *Edinburgh, 1833.*

that it was so. For science never gives back the territory she has gained, and although many old superstitions may from time to time be revived among us, we may be quite sure that the belief in witchcraft will not be one of them."

On the whole we are less certain about it all today. The division between nineteenth and twentieth century writers on witchcraft is less arbitrary than might appear at first sight. The basically simple approach of the nineteenth century to the history of witchcraft suffered along with other illusions, such as the belief in progress, under the influence of world war, political witchhunting, and, in this case, under the new insights, albeit often carried to extremes, of psychology, psychical research, and anthropology.

As we have said, the twentieth century has produced no important books on Scottish witchcraft as such, but a very large number indeed on witchcraft in general which deal with Scotland in the light of their new theories and interpretations. Probably the two best known names in modern witchcraft writing are those of Dr. Margaret Murray and the Reverend Montague Summers.

Margaret Murray has written several articles on the subject of witchcraft and three books: *The Witch cult in Western Europe*,⁽¹⁾ *The God of the Witches*,⁽²⁾ and

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1. Oxford, 1921.
 2. London, 1933.

The Divine King in England,⁽¹⁾ Her theory, based upon anthropological ideas of primitive religion, is that the "witches" were the adherents of a pre-Christian fertility religion which survived the introduction of Christianity to Europe, and continued to flourish underground until well into the eighteenth century. According to Dr. Murray, most of the distinguished names of the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries were members of covens of the "old religion", and only nominally Christian. The theory is ingeniously worked out, but in the face of overwhelming disabilities, which, though repeatedly pointed out by historians,⁽²⁾ are still ignored rather than answered by those who favour it.

The most outstanding of these difficulties are, that there is a considerable gap in time - over a thousand years, between the introduction of Christianity and the appearance of the witches in any numbers,⁽³⁾ that the witch persecutors of the Renaissance apparently had no idea at all that they were persecuting a fertility religion, and that the accused witches

1. London, 1954.

2. e.g. G.L. Burr in the *American Historical Review*, No. 40, p. 491 - 492; and C. L'Estrange Ewan, *Some Witchcraft Criticisms*, pp. London, 1938.

3. The usual explanation given for this is that the Church was not yet sufficiently sure of its ground to start a thorough attack on paganism.

themselves, though frequently protesting their innocence, usually knew what was intended by witchcraft, what it was they were accused of, and occasionally gloried in their dedication to evil.

In her accounts of Scottish witchcraft Dr. Murray cites the case of the fertility dance of the priest of Inverkeithing in 1282⁽¹⁾ as an example of the continuing cult of the "old religion", and the North Berwick witches of 1591 as an example of addiction to the cult by the highest in the land. In this she takes for granted both the truth of the confessions and the involvement of Lord Bothwell, and ignores the fact that both this and the Inverkeithing case were, so far as our records go, quite untypical. Indeed since the Scottish witches were nearly all old, poor, women, Dr. Murray has less opportunity for imposing on Scottish history some of the very extraordinary interpretations she gives to English history, in which nearly all the English kings up to and including Charles II are presented as conscious members of the witch cult. The general outline of her theory, however, despite its lack of supporting evidence, has been followed by several writers, on Scottish witch trials. D. Harris Willson, writing on the North

1. See above, pp. 38-39.

Berwick trials of 1590 explains:

"These beliefs were possible because the witch cult in Scotland was derived in part from ancient heathen practice in which devotees worshipped an incarnate god that appeared before them and in which the ritual consisted largely of fertility rites."⁽¹⁾

F. Marian McNeill follows her almost unquestioningly:

"In recent years, a dispassionate investigation of the copious records of the witch trials all over Europe has revealed the witch cult as a debased survival of an indigenous European form of nature-worship of great antiquity ..."

She agrees that, "It is improbable that witchcraft as practised in Scotland derived directly from Druidism", and suggests:

"More likely it was a debased form of the still older Iberian magic which Druidism superseded but did not entirely suppress."

In order to explain the diabolical character of Renaissance witchcraft she says that,

"Although the medieval witch-cult of Western Europe derived from a primitive, non-self conscious nature-religion, with sophistication it had become corrupt ... and developed into a pathological cult in which the doctrine and rites of the Christian Church were deliberately parodied, and evil instincts and desires were sanctioned and encouraged."⁽²⁾

The most astounding of all the books which owe a debt to Dr. Murray is *The Personnel of the Aberdeenshire Witchcraft Covens in the years 1596-7*, by Alexander Keiller.⁽³⁾ It professes to be a criticism of Dr. Murray's choice of names for these covens. He juggles

1. *King James VI and I*, London, 1956, p. 104.

2. *The Silver Bough*, Glasgow, 1957, Vol. I, p. 130.

3. *Privately printed*, London, 1922.

with the various names which came up at the trials, and tries to arrange them in groups of thirteen according to their localities with at least one man in each group for the fertility god or "devil". Despite this slight disagreement as to detail, the whole work is based upon unquestioning acceptance of the witch cult theory. In a footnote he explains, "To those unaware of the probable organisation of what might be termed the Witch Sect in Europe, in at any rate the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, it may be explained that the Administrative and Executive unit of witchcraft customarily consisted of thirteen persons and was usually termed a coven or coeven."⁽¹⁾

He ends with a paragraph which produces a certain amount of doubt whether the whole book was not intended as a rather elaborate joke:

"Would not Mr. Thomas Leslie, Sheriff-Depute of Aberdeen in 1597, have been in a better position to adjudicate upon a charge of witchcraft, to examine and cross-examine accused and witnesses, had he been able to study the few volumes (among the infinite number which have been written on this subject even within the last century), which have advanced the scientific study of the absorbing but many branched question of witchcraft; had he read, for example, the work, a minor item in which at the commencement of this essay I took upon myself to criticise - Miss Margaret Murray's *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe?*"⁽²⁾

The Reverend Montague Summers made his name in the field of witch studies through his great erudition, his voluminous writings, and his translations. The largest proportion of his publications are

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1. *Aberdeenshire Witchcraft Covens*, p. 3.
 2. *Ibid.*, p. 47.

translations or modern re-prints of sixteenth and seventeenth century witch tracts and handbooks, prefaced by laudatory introductions as to the wit and wisdom of each demonologist. It can hardly be said that he has done the world a great service. Most of these works, read without the background of a living demonic theology, unsatisfactory though that may have been in itself, are of interest only to the historian of thought and to the collector of the curious or pornographic. While Summers' editions are of undoubted assistance to the former, they must still turn to the originals. And the expensive, limited editions in which the Summers translations are published make their intended market quite clear.

The only real justification for most of these publications is that Summers himself believed almost exactly the same as the writers he was translating and editing. He argues in his *Introduction* to his translations of the *Malleus Maleficarum*, (1)

"The profoundest thinkers, the acutest and most liberal minds of their day, such men as Cardan; Trithemius; the encyclopaedic Delrio; Bishop Binsfeld; the learned physician, Caspar Peucer; Jean Bodin; Sir Edward Coke, "father of the English law"; Francis Bacon; Malebranche; Bayle; Glanvil; Sir Thomas Browne; Cotton Mather; all these, and scores besides, were convinced of the dark reality of witchcraft, of the witch organisation. Such a

1. London, 1928.

consensus of opinion throughout the years cannot be lightly dismissed."⁽¹⁾

In *Witchcraft and Black Magic* ⁽²⁾ he states that, "witchcraft is not merely an historical fact, it is a present menace",⁽³⁾ and suggests that,

"If what is whispered be true, and there seems strong confirmation enough, the shedding of blood is not unknown among the devil worshippers today in London, in Brighton and in Birmingham; in Oxford and Cambridge, in Edinburgh and Glasgow, and in a hundred cities more of the British Isles."⁽⁴⁾

It appears that despite his wide public he has in print no followers at all. He has written little on Scottish witchcraft apart from a chapter on Scotland in his book *The Geography of Witchcraft*.⁽⁵⁾

In dealing with Scotland he found himself in difficulty, because he had to reconcile his passionate hatred of witchcraft and his equally passionate hatred of Scotland with his even intenser hatred (as, variously, Anglo-Catholic and Roman Catholic priest) of the Reformed ministers who persecuted witchcraft there. He did this by saying that Scotland was peculiarly prone to witchcraft anyway, and that there was a great increase in witchcraft after the Reformation because of the failure of Puritanism

1. *Op. cit.*, p. xiii.

2. *London*, 1946.

3. *Witchcraft and Black Magic*, p. 116.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 222.

5. *London*, 1927, pp. 201-253.

to bring the people happiness, and - a rather curious accusation to level against seventeenth-century neo-Calvinism - because of the vagueness of the Reformed Church on ultimate issues.

Another modern development in the witchcraft discussion is the theory of C. L'Estrange Ewen⁽¹⁾ whose interest in psychic phenomena leads him to the view that the majority of witches were in fact "mediums". He even suggests that,

"If, as often observed, an hereditary tendency to active psychic powers exists, as is recognised with mental and physical abilities and disabilities, the tremendous slaughter of young 'witches' will explain in considerable measure why 'physical mediums' are scarce at the present day."⁽²⁾

Other general works of this century make use of these new insights and attitudes, usually in a more tentative way than their originators, in their re-assessments of the witchcraft era. The best of these are the works of Charles Williams⁽³⁾ and Pennethorne Hughes.⁽⁴⁾ Other writers, such as R. Trevor Davies,⁽⁵⁾ and Geoffrey Parrinder⁽⁶⁾ have followed the nineteenth century pattern in assuming the innocence of the majority of accused witches of anything worse than eccentricity.

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1. *Principal works: Witchcraft and Demonianism, London, 1933; Witch Hunting and Witch Trials, London, 1929.*
 2. *Psychic Phenomena in the Witchcraft Cases, Paignton 1947, p. 29.*
 3. *Witchcraft, London, 1941.*
 4. *Witchcraft, London, 1952.*
 5. *Four Centuries of Witch Beliefs, London, 1947.*
 6. *Witchcraft, Harmondsworth, 1958.*

The only works on Scottish witchcraft are the volume by F. Marian McNeill already mentioned, a collection of witch stories by Thomas Davidson; *Rowan Tree and Red Thread*⁽¹⁾ with an introduction which repeats many of the factual errors already corrected by Legge in 1891, and an unpublished thesis by John Gilmore: *Witchcraft and the Church in Scotland subsequent to the Reformation.*⁽²⁾ This thesis covers in close detail the mechanism of witch prosecution in seventeenth century Scotland, and cites innumerable actual cases. It is almost impossible however, to discover what he thinks about the witchcraft problem generally, for he quotes rival theories with equal approval, and disapproves automatically of the persecution while at the same time talking of the minister "toiling in his corner of the vineyard" in the face of the "machinations of the Devil."

The results of his researches in the end bear out Ferguson's view in 1898 that although,

"There is possibly a good deal relating to witchcraft still in manuscript which may be printed in course of time, judging from the examples of such previously unprinted documents as have recently appeared, it is unlikely that any new feature will be revealed. The charges, the tortures, the confessions, and the executions will be of the same kind as those in the trials with which one is already familiar."⁽³⁾

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1. *Edinburgh, 1949.*
 2. *Glasgow University Library, 1948.*
 3. *Bibliographical Notes, pp. 118-9.*

Of these later writers, only Legge regarded the Scottish witchcraft persecution as the direct result of imported continental ideas, except in so far as the Reformation was the result of such an importation. The romantic writers especially blame Calvin, it is true. Even more, and with some justification, they blame the Scottish temperament, Scottish gloom, and even Scottish scenery. And those writers who hold to the fertility cult theory tend to exclude the late sixteenth-century transference of ideas as a cause of the persecution. In this essay we have tried to concentrate less on the exclusively Scottish aspects of the persecution, and illustrate the way in which Scotland took hold of and used ideas which were current all over Europe.

CONCLUSION.

What general conclusions may be drawn from this study of continental influences upon Scottish demonological literature? We have seen that the first witchcraft work, the treatise of James VI, drew principally on continental Protestant authors, and mentions no Catholic demonologists at all. His secular successors in Scotland, represented principally by the legal profession, drew nearly all their citations from European Catholic lawyers; his theological successors took their demonology at second-hand from their Puritan brethren in England. All Scottish writers included some ingredients of ancient popular superstition. The remarkable feature of their work is that there is so little difference between their beliefs, arguments, and conclusions. The Scottish theologian learned from the Cambridge puritan the same intellectual inanities that the Scottish lawyer derived from the continental canonist.

The rise and fall of demonological belief reflects fairly accurately the rate of intellectual development in Scotland. Sixteenth century Scotland was slow to receive new ideas: reformed theology came late; intellectual demonology arrived a hundred years old. Scepticism, on the other hand, was absorbed relatively quickly, for France and Germany were still

burning witches after Scotland had ceased. At the time when the new Witchcraft Act was passed, Scotland was entering that century of intellectual dominance in Europe which she has never approached either before or since.

APPENDIX I. THE LEGISLATION AGAINST WITCHCRAFT
IN ENGLAND AND SCOTLAND.

The full text of all the legislation against witchcraft in England and Scotland is set out below, in illustration of the comparative scepticism of the Scottish legislature at the time of the passing of their Act.

33 Henry VIII. c. 8. The Bill agenst conjuracions and wichecraftes and sorcery and enchantments, 1542.

Where dyvers and sundrie persones unlawfully have devised and practised Invocacions and conjuracions of Sprites, pretending by suche meanes to understande and get Knowlege for their owne lucre in what place treasure of golde and Silver shulde or mought be founde or had in the earthe or other secrete places, and also have used and occupied wichecraftes inchauntementes and sorceries to the distruccion of their neighbours persones and goodes, And for execucion of their saide falce devyses and practises have made or caused to be made dyvers Images and pictures of men women childrene Angelles or develles beastes or fowles, and also have made Crownes Septures Swordes rynges glasses and other thinges, and gyving faithe and credit to such fantasticall practises have dygged up and pulled downe an infinite nombre of Crosses within this Realme, and taken upon them to declare and tell where thinges lost or stollen shulde be become; which thinges cannot be uses and excersised but to the great Offence of Godes lawe, hurt and damage of the Kinges Subjectes, and losse of the sowles of such Offenders, to the great dishonour of God, Infamy and disquyetnes of the Realme: For REFORMATION wherof be it enacted by the Kyng oure Sovereaigne Lorde with thassent of the Lordes spirituall and temporall and the Comons in this present Parliament assembled and by auctorities of the same, that yf any persone or persones, after the first daye of Maye next comyng, use devise practise or exercise, or cause to be used devysed practised or exercised, and Invocacions or conjuracions of Sprites wichecraftes enchauntementes or sorceries, to thentent to get or fynde money or treasure, or to waste consume or destroy any persone in his bodie membres or goodes,

or to provoke any persone to unlawfull love, or for any other unlawfull intente or purpose, or by occasion or colour of suche thinges or any of them, or for dispite of Cryste, or for lucre of money, dygge up or pull downe any Crosse or Crosses, or by suche Invocacions or conjuracions of Sprites wichecraftes enchaumentes or sorcerie or any of them take upon them to tell or declare there goodes stollen or lost shall become, That then all and every suche Offence and Offences, frome the saide first day of Maye next comyng, shalbe demyde accepted and adjudged Felonye; And that all and every persone and persones offenyng as is above saide their Councillors Abettours and Procurours and every of them from the saide first day of Maye shalbe demyded accepted and adjudged a Felon and Felones; And thoffender and Offenders contrarie to this Acte, being therof lawfullie convicte before suche as shall have power and auctoritie to here and determyn felonyes, shall have and suffre suche paynes of death losse and forfaytures of their lands tentes goodes and Catalles as in cases of felonie by the course of the Comon lawes of this Realme, And also shall lose privilege of Clergie and Sayntuarie.⁽¹⁾

The Act 33 Henry VIII, c. 8, which was passed was repealed by 1 Ed. VII, c. 12: *An Act for the repeal of certain statutes concerning treasons and felonies*, in 1548.

5 Eliz. c. 16. *An Act agaynst Conjuracions Inchantmentes and Witchecraftes*, 1562-3.

Where at this present, there ys no ordinarye ne condigne Punishment provided agaynst the Practisers of the wicked Offences of Conjuracions and Invocacions of evill Spirites, and of Sorceries Enchaumentes Charmes and Witchecraftes, the which Offences by force of a Statute made in the xxxiiij yere of the Reigne of the late king Henry the Eyghthe were made to bee Felonye, and so continued untill the sayd Statute was repealed by Thacte and Statute of Repeale made in the first yere of the Reigne of the late King Edwarde the vjth; sythens the Repeale whereof many fantastical and devilishe persons have devised and practised Invocacons and Conjuracons of evill and wicked Spirites, and have used and practised Wytchecraftes Enchaumentes Charmes and Sorceries, to the Destruction of the Persons and Goodes of their Neighebour and other

(1) *Statutes of the Realm*, (London) 1818, Vol. III, p.837.

Subjectes of this Realme, and for other lewde Intenttes and Purposes contrarye to the Lawes of Almighty God, to the Perill of theyr owne Soules, and to the great Infamy and Disquietnes of this Realme: For REFORMATION wherof bee it enacted by the Quenes Majestie with thassent of the Lordes Spirituall and Temporall and the Commons in this presente Parliament assembled, and the thauctoritee of the same, That yf any person or persons after the first daye of June nexte coming, use practise or exercise any Invocacions or Conjuracions of evill and wicked Spirites, to or for any Intent or Purpose; or els if any person or persons after the said first daye of June shall use practise or exercise any Witchecraftte Enchantment Charme or Sorcerie, wherby any person shall happen to bee killed or destroyed, that then aswell every such Offender or Offendours in Invocacions or Conjuracions as ys aforesayd, their Concellours and Aidours, as also every suche Offendour or Offendours in Witchecraftts Enchantment Charme or Sorcerie wherby the Deathe of anny person dothe ensue, their Aidours and Concellours, being of either of the said Offences lafully convicted and attainted, shall suffer paynes of Deathe as a Felon or Felons, and shall lose the Priviledg and Benefite of Sanctuarie and Clerfie: Saving to the Wief of such parsone her Title of Dower, and also to the Heyre and Successour of suche person his or theyr Tytles of Inheritaunce Succession and other Rightes, as though no suche Attayndour of the Auncestour or Predecessour had been hadd or made.

II. And further bee yt enacted by thauctoritee aforesayd. That if any person or persons, after the saide first daye of June nexte comyng, shall use practise or exercyse any Wytchecraftte Enchauntement Charme or Sorcerie, wherby any person shall happen to bee wasted consumed or lamed in his or her Bodye or Member, or wherby any Goodes or Cattelles of any person shalbee destroyed wasted or impayred, then every suche Offendour or Offendours their Councellores and Aydores, being ther of lafully convicted, shall for his or their first Offence or Offences, suffer Imprisonement by the space of one whole Yere, without Bayle or Mayneprise, and once in every Quarter of the said Yere, shall in some Market Towne, upon the Market Daye or at suche tyme as any Fayer shalbee kepte there, stande openly upon the Pillorie by the Space of Syxe Houres, and there shall openly confesse his or her Errour and Offence; and for the second Offence, being as ys aforesayd lawfully convicted or attaynted, shall suffer Deathe as a Felon, and shall lose the Privilege of Clergie and Sanctuarie: Saving to the Wief

of suche person her Title of Dower, and also to Their and Successour of such person his or their Titles of Inheritance Succession and other Rightes, as though no such Attaindour of Thancestour or Predecessour had bene hadde or made.

III. Proveded alwaies, That yf the Offendour, in any of the Cases aforesayd for whiche the paynes of Deathe shall ensue, shall happen to bee a Peere of this Realme, then his Triall thereyn to be hadd by hys Peeres, as yt ys used in cases of Felonye or Treason and not otherwyse.

IV. And further to thintent that all maner of practise use or exercise of Witchecrafte Enchaument Charme or Sorcerye shoulde bee from hensforthe utterly avoyded abolished and taken awaye; Bee it enacted by thauthoritee of this presente Parliament, That yf any person or persons shall from and after the sayd first daye of June nexte coming, take upon him or them, by Witchecrafte Enchaument Charme or Sorcerie, to tell or declare in what Place any Treasure of Golde or Sylver shoulde or might bee founde or had in the Earthe or other secret Places, or where Goodes or Thinges lost or stollen should bee founde or becume, or shall use or practise anye Sorcery Enchaument Charme or Witchecrafte, to thintent to provoke any person to unlauffull love, or to hurte or destroye any person in his or her Body, Member of Goodes; that then every suche person or persons so offending, and being therof lauffully convicted, shall of the said Offence suffer Imprysonement by the space of One whole yere without Bayle or Mayneprise, and once in every Quarter of the said yere shall in some Market Towne, upon the Marcket day or at suche tyme as any Fayer shall bee kept there, stande openly upon the Pillorie by the space of Sixe Houres, and there shall openly confesse his or her Errour and Offence; And yf any person or persons, beyng once convicted of the same Offences as ys aforesayd, that then every suche Offendour beyng thereof the second tyme convicted as ys afore said, shall forfaitte unto the Quenes Majestie her heires and successoures, all his Goodes and Catteltes and suffer Imprysonement during Lyef.⁽¹⁾

16 Mary, c. 73 from *Acta Parliamentorum Mariae, A.D.1563.*⁽²⁾

ITEM Foresamekeill as the Quenis Maeistie and thre Estatis in this present Parliament being informit that

(1) *Statutes of the Realm, Vol. IV, p.446-7.*

(2) *This Parliament was held at Edinburgh on 3rd June, 1563.*

the hauy and abominabill superatition vsit be divers of the liegis of this Realme be vsing of Witchcraftis Sorsarie and Necromancie and credence geuin thairto in tymes bygane aganis the Law of God And for avoyding and away putting of all sic vane superstition in tymes tocum It is statute and ordanit be the Quenis Maiestie and the thre Estatis foirsaidis that na maner of persoun nor persounis of guhatsumeuer estate degre or condition they be of tak vpone hand in ony tymes heir efter to vse ony maner of Witchcraftis Sorsarie or Necromancie nor gif thame selfis furth to have ony sic craft of knowlege thairof thairthrow abusand the pepill Nor that na persoun seik ony help response or consultatioun at ony sic vsaris or abusaris foirsaidis of Witchcraftis Sorsarieis or Necromancie vnder the pane of deid alsweill to be execute aganis the vsar abusar as the seikar of the response or consultatioun. And this to be put to executioun be the Justice Schereffis Stewartis Baillies Lordis of Regaliteis and Rialteis thair Deputis and vthers Ordinar Jugeis competent within this Realme with all rigour hauing power to execute the samin⁽¹⁾

I Jac. I c. 12., 1604.

Be it enacted by the King our Sovereigne Lorde the Lordes Spirituall and Temporall and the Comons in the present Parliament assembled, and by the authoritie of the same, That the Statue made in the fifte yeere of the Raigne of our late Sovereigne Ladie of most famous and happie memorie Queene Elizabeth, intituled An Acte againste Conjurations Inchantmentis and Witchcrafts, be from the Feaste of St. Michaell the Archangell nexte cominge, for and concerninge all offences to be committed after the Same Feaste, utterlie repealed.

II. And for the better restrayninge the saide Offenses, and more severe punishinge the same, be it further enacted by the authoritie aforesaide, That if any person or persons after the saide Feaste of Sainte Michaell the Archangell next cominge, shall use, practise, or exercise any Invocation or Conjuratioun of any evill and wicked Spirit, or shall consult covenant with entertaine employ feede or rewards any evill or wicked Spirit to or for any intent or purpose; or take up any dead man woman or child out of his her or their grave, or any other place where the dead bodie resteth, or the skin bone or any other parte of any dead person, to be employed or used

(1) *A.P.S. Vol. II, p.539.*

in any manner of Witchcrafte Sorcerie Charme or Inchantment; or shall use practise or exercise any Witchcrafte Inchantment Charme or Sorcerie wherebie any person shalbe killed destroyed wasted consumed pined or lamed in his or her bodie or any part thereof; that then everie such Offendor or Offendors, their Aydes, Abettors and Counsellors, being of any the saide Offences duellie and lawfullie convicted and attainted, shall suffer pains of deathe as a Felon or Felons, and shall loose the priviledge and benefit of Cleargie and Sanctuarie.

III. And further, to the intent that all manner of practise use or exercise of Witchcrafte Inchantment Charme or Sorcerie should be from henceforth utterlie avoyded abolished and taken away, Be it enacted by the authoritie of this present Parliament, That if any person or persons shall from and after the saide Feaste of Saint Michael the Archangell next cominge, take upon him or them by Witchcrafte Inchantment Charme or Sorcerie to tell or declare in what place any treasure of Golde or Silver should or might be founed or had in the Earth, or other secret places, Or where Goods or other things lost, or stolen, are become: Or wherebie any Cattell or Goods of any person in his, or her bodie although the same be not effected and done; that then all and everie such person and persons so offendinge, and beinge thereof lawfullie convicted shall for the said Offence suffer Imprisonment by the space of one whole yeere, without baile or mainepriise, and once everie quarter of the saide yere shall in some Markett Towne, upon the Markett Day, or at such Tyme as any Faire shalbe kepte there, stande openlie upon the Pillorie by the space of sixe houres, and there shall openlie confesse his or her error and offence; And if any person or persons beinge once convicted of the same offences as is aforesaide, doe eftsoones perpetrate and comit the like offence, that then everie such offender, beinge of any the saide offences the second tyme lawfullie and duellie convicted and attainted as is aforesaide, shall suffer pained of death as a Felon or Felons, and shall loose the benefitt and priviledge of Clergie and Sanctuarie: Savinge to the wife of such person as shall offend in any thinge contrarie to this Acte, her title of dower; and also to the heire and successour of everie such person his or their titles of Inheritance Succession and other Rights, as though no such Attaindor of the Ancestor or Predecessor had bene made: Provided alwaies, That if the offendor in any the Cases aforesaide shall happen to be a Peere of

(1) *Statutes of the Realm*, Vol. IV, pp. 1028-9.

this Realme, then his Trial therein to be had by his Peeres, as it is used in cases of Felonie or Treason, and not otherwise.⁽¹⁾

9 Geo. II c. 5.⁽²⁾ An act to repeal the statute made in the first year of the reign of King James the First, intituled, An act against conjuration, witchcraft, and dealing with evil and wicked spirits, except so much thereof as repeals an act of the fifth year of the reign of Queen Elizabeth, Against conjurations, inchantments, and witchcrafts, and to repeal an act passed in the Parliament of Scotland in the ninth parliament of Queen Mary, intituled, Anentis witchcraftis, and for punishing such persons as pretend to exercise or use any kind of witchcraft, sorcery, inchantment, or conjuration.

Be it enacted by the king's most excellent majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the lords spiritual and temporal, and commons, in this present parliament assembled, and by the authority of the same, That the statute made in the first year of the reign of King James the First, intituled, *An Act against conjuration, witchcraft, and dealing with evil and wicked spirits*, shall, from the twenty fourth day of June next, be repealed and utterly void and of none effect (except so much thereof as repeals the statute made in the fifth year of the reign of Queen Elizabeth, intituled, *An act against conjurations, inchantments, and witchcrafts*).

II. And be it further enacted by the authority aforesaid, That from and after the said twenty fourth day of June, the act passed in the parliament of Scotland in the ninth parliament of Queen Mary, intituled, *Anentis witchcrafts*, shall be and is hereby repealed.

(1) *Statutes of the Realm*, Vol. IV, pp. 1028-9.

(2) The session 9. Geo. II began in 1735 and finished in 1736. The Act 9. Geo. II c. 5. received the Royal Assent on 24th March, 1735-6.

III. And be it further enacted, That from and after the said twenty fourth day of June, no prosecution, suit, or proceeding, shall be commenced or carried on against any person or persons for witchcraft, sorcery, inchantment, or conjuration, or for charging another with any such offence, in any court whatsoever in Great Britain,

IV. And for the more effectual preventing and punishing any pretences to such arts or powers as are before-mentioned, whereby ignorant persons are frequently deluded and defrauded; be it further enacted by the authority aforesaid, That if any person shall, from and after the twenty fourth day of June, pretend to exercise or use any kind of witchcraft, sorcery, inchantment, or conjuration, or undertake to tell fortunes, or pretend from his or her skill or knowledge in any occult or crafty science, to discover where or in what manner any goods or chattles, supposed to have been stolen or lost, may be found; every person so offending, being therof lawfully convicted on indictment or information in that part of Great Britain called England, or on indictment or libel in that part of Great Britain called Scotland, shall for every such offence suffer imprisonment by the space of one whole year without bail or mainprize, and once in every quarter of the said year in some market town of the proper county upon the market day there stand openly on the pillory by the space of one hour, and also shall (if the court by which such judgement shall be given shall think fit) be obliged to give sureties for his or her good behaviour, in such sum, and for such time, as the said court shall judge proper according to the circumstances of the offence, and in such case shall be further imprisoned until such sureties be given.⁽¹⁾

9 Geo. II c. 5. was repealed in 1951, by the *Fraudulent Mediums Act*.

(1) *The Statutes at Large, London 1764, Vol. VI, pp. 206-7.*

APPENDIX II. AN EXAMPLE OF "MALEFICIUM".

The following transcription is made from a manuscript found among the miscellaneous papers of the Boyds of Trochrigg, in the University Library, Glasgow. It is a good example of the kind of evidence which was most frequently offered in Scottish witch trials, and out of which the magistrate had to construct the demonic pact. The three witches, Margaret Provost, Margaret Bezok, and Mary Nicinnarich were all accused by their neighbours of simple "maleficium", and were all independent practitioners. The comparatively late date is not surprising, for it is towards the end of the persecution that we find many cases north or west of Aberdeenshire. It is also worth noting that the witnesses against the witches included the local gentry, that the minister was the only one to express any doubt at all on the matter, and that one of the witches, Margaret Bezok, gave apparently voluntary evidence, with pride, against herself.

The places mentioned are all in the Black Isle. "ffortross" is Fortrose; "Balmaduthy" the modern Belmaduthy; "Miuren" and "Miurtown" are Muirton; "Killern" and "Kilearnan" both probably represent Killearnan. "Suddy" and "Suddie" are the modern Suddie.

The contractions have been silently expanded

throughout.

Precognition takin of the persones after named by warrand from the Kings advocat; at ffortross 6th october 1699.

1. The said day The Laird of Suddie adduced as witness against Margaret Provost declared that he heard her badlie reputed and bruted as a witch, and therefore he went with his servants and pulled down the house about her ears and within a day or two thereafter his gardener who was one of the servants in his company swelled as bigg as two men, and in some days more got such a voracious stomach that he would eat as much as six upon all which she being Challenged the gardener became better, and her son came to him and told him that if he would prevail with his master to give her a house again, he should be well.

Mr Thomas ffrazer minister of Suddy declared That Captain McKenzie of Suddy finding ane inconveniencie to have quearns upon his ground, which encouraged the indwellers to abstract their corns from his miln did upon a Certain day case break all the saidis quearns among which he brake that of Margaret Provost within a short time thereafter, the said Captain leaping a little brook not above two foot broad fell down and wrested his legg and thigh, which did so enable him that though there was niether breach nor dislocation his thigh and legg became so extraordinarily small that for eighteen moneths time he was confyned to his bed, which being repute a supernatural advent Many did conclude the same was effectuate by the said Margaret Provost her sinistrous means and malefices but for his part he could not be positive.

James Ked in Killern Informed against the said Margaret and her daughter That the said Margaret's daughter being Challenged be the said James wife for the skaith done to her by the said Margaret's hens Did tell she would kill them and if she were wronged be the daughters skill she should Challenge her as the Instrument therof To which the daughter replied that if she had skill the said James wife should share therof and that thereafter the next morning his best cow failed in his plough and after that the said cow and one of his best horse dyed by ane unknown disease and that himself within a few days fell very unwell and continued so till she was publilie Challenged and thereafter she began to amend.

2. Margaret Bezok alias Kyle spouse to David Stewart in Balmaduthy declared she threatened John Sinclair using a phrase that she would quicklie overturn his cart and within a week thereafter his wife fell ill, and that she was brought to see the seek wife and touched and handled her and heard that thereafter she convalesced.

John Sinclair in Miuren declared that the said Margaret did threaten ut supra and that thereafter his wife distracted within less than a week and continued in that distemper till the said Margaret was brought to see her, and that she handled and felt his wife who thereafter grew better but continues something weak still and that it is eight weeks since the first threatening.

Katherin Davidson in Balmaduthy declared that upon a day keepin her cows from the said Margaret's hens, she was threatened be the said Margaret That she should have neither sock⁽¹⁾ nor coulter⁽²⁾ goeing upon that ground, and that thereafter she lost ane ox that dyed suddenly and another ox that fell and brake his bones and that thereafter she challenged her son and found no more prejudice Agnes Davidson and Jannet Urquhart concurr in this declaration.

3. Alexander Maclay in Kilearnan did upon a certain day in September ninetie four Challenge Murrock Nickinairich her herd, for suffering her beasts to eat his fathers corns, Quairupon the wife appearing threatened him at a high rate and told him that that Challenge should be repented of by him, In a short time upon the morrow thereafter The said Alexander haveing fallen in ane extrairdinary and unnatural sickness he continued therein for fyve weeks time, but within a day thereafter having gote a drink of milk from the said Murrock did immediately upon drinking therof recover his perfect health And further declared that he heard her flyte with two of her neigh-bour-wives, and threatened them that none of them should be upon that hill before that day twelve moneth and both the wives accordingly dyed as he saw. And at another time heard her flyte with Donald Maclady and that she threatened that before eight days she should make him repent his carryage, and accordingly within the eight days his best horse dyed of a strange sickness viz: by his tongue chafts and mouth being cult in twall (?) parts.

(1). *Ploughshare.*

(2). *Iron cutter in front of ploughshare.*

John Maclay in Redcastle Informed likewise
against the said Mary Nicinnarich that upon his
Challenging her for being the occasion of his brothers
sickness he fell himself immediately unwell and
continued so still till the minute The Lady Redcastle
and Kenneth Mackenzie brother to Muirtown Called for
her and Challenged her and thereafter he convalesced,
besides she is still repute a rank witch.

Hugh: Baillie ilk B.

APPENDIX III. THE FRASER MANUSCRIPT.

The following is a transcript of pages 307-312 of James Fraser's manuscript notebook in the National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh: *"A Collection of Providential Passages Antient and Modern Forreign and Domestick dated 1670. George Sinclair took his account of Weir almost verbatim from this notebook. An exact transcription does not appear to have been published, although a small part of it appeared, with many errors, in Chambers' Edinburgh Journal, (Vol. 1, London, 1835, pp. 18-19).*

The contractions have been silently expanded throughout, but the punctuation and spelling have been left unaltered.

Major Weir's birth, Life & death - known to the Author.

One Thomas Weir, whom I saw at Edinburgh, Anno 1660, comonly called Captain Weir, he was born in Clydsdeal, neare to Lanerk anno 1607, the sone of one John Weir first a plough maker and afterwards a farmer. about the yeare of the Massacre of the Kingdom, was made sariant, and, about the 45 turned lieutenant. In the 48 he came to Scotland; and Edinburgh being ye Metra politan and Center of the Kingdom. Thomas Weir made acquaintance with many, & not the worst, personating a deale of gravity & mortification; frequented sermons frequently till in end he went under the notice & got the repute of a singular professor. at Length, he got a Charge over the waiters att ye ports of the City, being a check to them, about the year 1650. he got ye place of Major in the town guard and so was ever after called Maior Weir; his garb was still a cleck & somequhat dark, & never went without his staffe. he was a tall black man; & ordinarily looked down to the ground

a grim Countenance and a bigg nose. at lenght he became so Notarly regarded among the presbyterian strict sect . that iff 4 mett together. be sure maior Weir was one, and at privat meetings prayed to admiration which made many of that stamp to Court his Converse; he never married But lived in a privat Lodging with his Sister Grisel Weir. many resorted to his house to heare him pray & ioin with him, but it was observed that he could not officiat in any holy duty without the black staff or rod in his hand and leaning upon it, which made those who heard him pray admire his flood in prayer. his ready extemporary expression. his heavenly gesture; so that he was thought more Angell than Man. and was tearmed by some the holy Sisters ordinarily Angelicall Thomas. and yet how amazing is it this vile Counterfit was a Divil and varlot. and was in Compact with the Divil, upwards of 50 year in his service. From whom he had got the gift of utterance, and this inchantet staffe, for by it he was inabled to pray, to Comit filthinesse not to be named, for no woman (when he pleased) with whom he spoke or touched her cloeathes or skin but would yeld to act whordom with. even women of singular reputation & chaste, & have not been mistresses of themselves in Major Weir's Company. by the use of this staff, he was enabled to conciliate the favour of any, to reconcile nighbours, even husband & wife when at variance, which purchased him veneration with all. & brought him vast gain & profit and yet he lived and cohabited in Incest with his own Sister & also in Bestiality, On a Session day he went out of Edinburgh to a place called New mills to a solemn meeting and by the way he lighted of his mare & in to a buish where he committed bestiality with her. a Country maid from an obscure place espied him & came trembling to the Minister & declared it to him in Secret. the Minister told it was Calumny upon a saint, that had such a gossell life as Ma. Tho. Weir did who was a prominent man. he had so charmed the Clergy as well as the laity. But the poor women was whipt for affirming the truth because there were no wittnesses. In short this villan lived all his time in horrid wickednesse, especially the yeares that he abode at Edinburgh. at length like the wild ass was found in his mouth. Coming one day as his custom was to view the waiters he found some of them in a Cellar drinking and neglecting their charge. after a gentle reproach one of them replied, that some of their number being upon duty, the rest had retired to drink with their old friend and acquaintance Mr. Burn, at which word Maior Weir started back, and casting an eye upon him repeated his the word Burn 4 or 5 times & going home

came not abroad for a long time after. It was observed by some that going to Liberton sometimes, he shunned to step over that water brook which is ordinarily called Liberton Burn but went about to Shun it, but this men have coniectured & not a Miss that he had been advised to beware of a Burn or some other thing which the equivocall word might signify - as Burn in a fire,⁽¹⁾ if so he hath forseen his day approach nigh. a year before he discovered his imposture he took a sore sickness during which time he spake to all the visited him like an angel and Came frequently abroad again. A while after this, he tooke some dreadfull tortours of Conscience, & the terrours of the Almighty being upon his Spirit, Called In several Nighboures to his house to whom he confessed and that most willingly his particular sins, which he was guilty of with sad aggravations which bred amaxement to all persons, they Coming from a man of so high repute of Religion and piety. he ended with this remarkable expression, byfore God sayes he I have not told the hundred part of that I can Say more & am guilty of these same very abohminations he confessed before the Judges likeways, but after this, he would never to his dying hour confesse any more which might have been for the glorifying of God & the edification of others, but remained stupit, having no Confidence to looke any man in the face, or to open his eyes. When two of the Magistrates of Edinburgh Came to his house in the night time, to Carry him to prison, they asked if he had any mony to secure, he said. None. His sister said there was; whereupon there was found in panells here and there, to the value of five dollars in parcels, which they tooke up. His sister advised the Magistrates to secure his staffe especially, which they did. Thereafter he and his Sister both were carried away & secured in the Tolebouth, and The Balioses returning home went into a Tavern at the west bow neare to Weir's house, they mony was put into a bag & the Clouts thrown into the fire, which after an unusual manner made a Circling and dancing in the fire, There was another Clout found with some hard thing in it, which also they threw into the fire, it looked like a root which Circlled and sparkled like gunpowder & Passing up the funnell of the chimney it gave a crak like a little Cannon to the amazement of all that were present; The foresaid mony was taken by one of the two Balioses to his own house & laid by in his Closet, during which time his wife & the rest of the family were affrighted with a terrible noise within the study, like the falling of a house, three times successively, his wife knocking gave a fearfull Cry, saying my deare are you alive, the Baliofe

(1) *It seems curious that Fraser should not be aware of the superstition that a witch or a wizard cannot cross running water.*

came out unaffraid & said he heard nothing whether he concealed this upon the account that his wife was with Child or otherways is uncertain. The mony was presently sent away to the other baliofs house where was also heare some terrible disturbance, but in broken expressions. During the time of his imprisonment he was never willing to be spoken to & when the Ministers of the City offered to pray for him, he would Cry out in fury. Torment me no more for I am tormented already. one Minister asking him if he should pray for him he replied not at all. The man in a Zealous Anger said I will pray for you in spite of your teeth & the Divil your master too. so he prayed in his heareing & the wittnesses observed that Weir stared weildly & was senseless as a bruit all the while. Another asked him if he thought there was a God, he said I know not. & the other replied. O man the Argument that moves me to think there is a God, is thyselfe for what else moved thee to inform the world of thy wicked life. But Weir answered Let me alone. When he peremptorily forbad one of his own parish Ministers to pray one demanded if he would have one of the Presbyterian persuasion to pray. He answered Sir you are now all alike to me. then said the Minister to him, I will pray with you, do it not said he upon your peril lockeing up to the beams of the house. but prayer was made so much the more heartily because the Company present expected some vision, It is observable that in things Common he was pertinent enugh but when anything about Almighty God & his Souls Condition Came about he would shrugg & rub his breast saying torment me not before the time; at last he was sentenced to be burnt; And when the account of this was given him, he stood mute and stupid; when he was at the Stake to be burnt, the City. Ministers called to a cunning man there looking on a Presbyterian, which persuasion Weir was formally deemed to be, to speake to him, but no sooner he opened his mouth than the vile wretch made a sign with his hand & his head to be silent. When the roape was about his neck to prepare him for the fire, he was bid say Lord be mercifull to me, but he answered let me alone, I will not I have lived, as a beast & I must die as a beast. the Fire was kindled, he dropped a little after into the flames. a sad spectacle to behold. & shortly after his blaik staff was cast into this fire, with him, whatever Incantation was in it. the persones present, aver that it gave rare turnings & was long a burning as also himself. It is said that he was much troubled in prison, for causeing the poor woman to be scourged for affirming that he Committed bestiality going to Newmills; the same woman was present spectator to his fatall end & glorified

God solemnly. his Incest with his own sister was first when she was a young maid, the place where this abomination was Committed remained Cursed for Contrary to nature it Continued alwas bare without grass; the Reverend Minister to whom Maior Weir Confessed so much declared that the place lay off the rode betwixt Kirkaldy & Kinghorn upon a little hill side which he had the curiosity to go and see & found it so; things neere 40 yeares ago committed Many other horrid things he confessed which Christian eares should not be defiled with One notable remark of him I cannot omit, which I had from two persones of good fame yet liveing, at the foot of the west bow, near Weirs lodging, This gentlewoman a substantial Marchants wife, was very desirous to hear him pray, so much being spoken of his utterance, for the end, spoke to some of her nighboures, that upon he came to their house, shee might be sent for. This was done, but could he never open his mouth before her no not so much as to blisse a cup of ale, he either remaining mute or up with his staff and away. It troubled her then, but her husband and she smiles at it now but doubt Some few daes before he discovered himselfe, this Gentlewoman comeing from the Castle hill where her husbande neicc was lying In of a Child about midnight perceaved about the bow head, 3 women in windowes, shouting laughing & claping their hands, the Gentlewoman went forward till lust at Ma. Weirs doore, there arose as from the street a woman above the length of two ordinary females, and stepped forward, the Gentlewoman not as yet excessively feared, bid her maid step on if by the lantern they could see what she was, but hast what they could this long legged Spectre was still before them, moving her body with a vehement cachinnation and unmeasurable laughter. at this rate, the two strove for plais till the giantess came to a narrow lane in the bow commonly called the Stinking Closs. full of flammy lights and a great multitude of people laughing and gasping with a hissing noise, this sight as so late a time of the night no people being in the windowes; respecting the closs mad herself and her maid hasten home wishing that she might have more wittnesses. But she declared all that she saw to her family but more passionatly to her husband and then sick with feare, yet she went the next morning with her maid, to view the notor plaois of the former night walk and at the closs enquired who lived there it was answered Maior Weir. The honest couple now rejoicing that to Maior Weir's devotion they never said ^{Amen.} Anent those visions and apparitions, in all probability have been a presage of his approaching death and of the manner of it. links and

torches signifying an honourable internment which perhaps has been promised to him. There was one Minister in the City that would never be persuaded to speak with him in prison but no sooner was he head but he was to the Tulebooth and called for his sister who had some remorse, he told her that her Brother Major Weir was burnt and how he died, she believed nothing of it, but after many attestations, she asked where his staff was. for she knew that his strength and life lay therein. he told her it was burnt with him, whereupon notwithstanding of her age, she nibliy and in a furious rage fell on her knees, uttering words horrible to be remembered, and in reseigning as she was desired, her rageing eufony closed with these words, O Sir I know he is with the Divils for with them he lived, she entreated that minister to assist her and attend her to her death, which at her violent Importunity he yeilded unto though it was not his course to wait upon condemned persones. What she said in private to himself he sayes must die with him; she avouched that from her being sixteen years of age to her 56 her brother had the incestuous use of her body and then loathed her for her age she was sixty sex at this time and he when he died was about 70. the Minister asked her if she was ever with child to him? she declared with confidence he hindered that by means abominable, which she beginning to relate the Preacher stopt her. some bystanders were desirious to hear the reste, but says he Gentlemen the speculation of this iniquity is in itselfe to be punished; next she was interogat if she had any hand in her brother's Divilty. She declared but in a passive way and gave this plain instance. a firie chariot of coach as she called it, coming in to his door, at broad day, a stranger invited him and her to goo with a friend at Dalkeith 4 miles from Edinburgh. they bothe entered and went forward in their visit at which time says she one came and whispered in his ears which affected him, they returned after the same manner that they had gone out, and Weir going next day to a visit told them he had strong aoregebsuibs that day the kings Forces were routed at Worcester which within too or three days was confirmed by the post, she affirmed that non saw the Coach but themselves. the Devil, said she hath wrought far greater Farelies in his time than this. She said she knew much of the enchanted staff. which had received from the Divil some yeares agoe, by which he was enable to do what he pleased. She oft hid it from him and because without it he could do nothing, he would threaten and vow to dicover her incest fearing which whe wold deliver it again. Being asked the cause of her much spinning which

she was famous for, she denied any assistance from the Devil, but found that she had an extraordinary facility therein. far above ordinary spinsters. for onward that when she came home after being abroad she found there was more yarn on her wheel than she left and that her weaver could not make cloath thereof for the yarn braking or falling from the whole look. Once there came a stranger to her while she was at her wheele, and proposed a way to her to make her rich, for they both lived upon alms and got anough of it. The way was this stand up and say, all Crosses and Cares goo out of this house, she answered, God forbid I say that, but let them be welcome when God sends them, after two or three visits more she asked this stranger where shed dwelt she replied in the potters Row, a street in the suburbs of that city but finding neither such a house nor such a woman I judged, said she, it was the Devil, one of my Brothers acquaintance, for I knew he had familiarity with the Devil. She was asked anent her parents? and said she was perswaded her mother was a witch, for the secretest things that wither I myselfe or any of the family could do when once a mark appeared on her brow, she could tell it to them though done at a distance, being demanded what sort of a mark it was, she answered I have some such mark myselfe when I please on my forehead, whereupon she offered to uncover her forehead, for visible satisfaction, the minister refusing to behold it, and forbidding any discovery, was earnestly requested by some spectators to allow the freedom, he yeelding she put back her headdress, and seeming to frown there was an exact horse-shoe shaped for nailes in her wrinkles, terrible enough I assure you to the stoutest beholder. In the morning before her execution she told the Minister she resolved to die with all the shame she could to expiat under mercy her shamefull life; this he understood to be an ingenuous confession of her sins, in opposition to her brothers despair and desprat silence, to which he did Incourage her at her parting with him. She gave him hearty thanks for his pains, and shakeing and kissing his hands she repeated the same word which he bade her perform; ascending up the ladder she spake somewhat confusedly of her sins, of her brother and his inchanting staffe and with a ghastly couterance beholding a multitude of spectators, all wondering and some weeping, she spoke aloud. There are many here this day wondering and greeting for me but alais few mourns for a broken ----- (1) at which words many seemed angry. others called to her to mind higher concerns and I have heard it said that the

(1) *Fraser draws a blank line here: Sinclair, in his version, fills in the word Covenant.*

preacher declared he had much ado to keep a composed Countenance. The Executioner falling about his duty she prepared to die stark naked, then and not before were her words relating to shame understood, the hangman struggled with her, to keep on her cloaths. and she struggled with him to have them off; at last he was forced to throw her over open faced, which afterward he Covered, after the usuall manner with a cloath.

I set not his on record to reflect upon men of this or that persuasion. the Divil can counterfeit what Religion he pleases and ordinarily a good one, true Religion can never suffer any prejudice from a hypocrit his wearing a cloak of it, more than the good angels can suffer stain from Satans transforming himselfe into an Angel of light; It is evident there is a Divil that hurries men on into sin. This maior Weir had that oppression to two Ministers that came to see him in prison; There was no temptation which the Divil could propose to him but he was capable to accept of it. It is certain there is either an explicit or implicit Compact between some men and the Divil, horrible sins covered with religion, bring utter dispare at the last and desperation is hell in fiere, some men as well as Divils are tormented before the time: but let us beware that such a man's fall prove not a neck brake to us, let us idolise no man for his profession or that he is of this or that persuasion or of such a party. Let no man rest in a bare profession of Religion men in compact with the Divil may be assisted, both to preach and pray at this, vile Wizard, Weir, a precious person learned (?) of the presbiterian party. all this account I had from an eye and eare witnesse and a man of good credit and repute; Ma. Weir was brought to his dreadfull desperat and yett deserved death April 14 anno 1670 at the gallow Lie bewixt Leith and Edinburgh where he was burnt as aforesaid.

APPENDIX IV. JOHN BELL.

The Reverend John Bell, who was minister of the parish of Gladsmuir in East Lothian from 1701 until his death in 1707 is accredited with four demonological works:

(1) *Witchcraft Proven, Arreigned and Condemn'd in its Professors, Professions and Marks, by diverse pungent, and convincing Arguments, excerpted forth of the most Authentick Authors, Divine and humane, Ancient and Modern, by a Lover of the Truth, Glasgow, 1697.*

This work is catalogued as number 3719 in Aldis' list. Only two copies of it are now known: both are in the Ferguson Collection in Glasgow University Library. The attribution to Bell is made by Professor John Ferguson in his *Bibliographical Notes*.⁽¹⁾

(2) *The Tryal of Witchcraft; or, Witchcraft Arraign'd and Condemned in Some Answers to a few Questions anent Witches and Witchcraft, Wherein is shewed, how to know if one be a Witch, as also when one is bewitched: with some Observations upon Witches Mark, their compact with the Devil, the White Witches, &c.* There is a copy in the National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh, and it is catalogued there under the name of John Bell of Gladsmuir. It is bound up in a collection of Wodrow Tracts,⁽²⁾ and the words "by John Bell" are written in the

1. *Loc. cit.*, p. 61.

2. Vol. XXIV.

hand of Robert Wodrow on the title page. The work has no place or date. David Laing, in some manuscript notes on Bell in Edinburgh University Library suggests, "Edinburgh, 1705"; but Wodrow, in his manuscript index to the volume of tracts, gives "Glasgow" in a hieroglyphic sufficiently unreadable for Laing to be excused for ignoring it.⁽¹⁾

(3) *Discourse of Witchcraft*: a fifty page manuscript of 1705 from which two extracts are given in Charles Kirkpatrick Sharpe's *An Historical Account of the belief in Witchcraft in Scotland*.⁽²⁾

(4) *An Ingenious and scientific Discourse of Witchcraft*, (anon) 1705; ascribed to Bell by Hew Scott in *Fasti Ecclesianae Scoticae*.⁽³⁾

Only copies of the first two of these works are still known.

In addition to these demonological works, Bell is believed to have written:

(5) *Abridgement and Alphabetical Index of the Acts of the General Assemblies of the Church of Scotland from 1638 to 1706 by a Minister of the Gospel*, Edin., 1706.

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1. I have to thank Mr A. Rodger of the National Library of Scotland for deciphering it for me.
 2. Glasgow and London, 1884.
 3. Vol. I, Part I, Edin., 1866, p. 335.

(6) A manuscript autobiography entitled *The Most Memorable passages of the Life and Times of Mr. J.B. written by Himself*, 1706.⁽¹⁾

(7) *The Toleration Gazette*, August 1703 to March 1704. This survives as a single folio sheet.⁽²⁾ It was part of a paper war against the proposed Toleration Act which, it was feared, might involve the reinstatement of episcopacy.

This was, even if we must throw some doubt on the authorship of one or two of these works, a fair literary output for a man who died at the age of thirty-two after having lived a life deeply involved in ecclesiastical politics. However, out of them all, we can only say with absolute certainty that John Bell of Gladsmuir was the author of the manuscript autobiography. From this we learn most of what is known about his life, but unfortunately there is nothing in it at all to indicate an interest in witchcraft or demonology. It consists mainly of a very detailed account of his intrigues, his conversations, and his trips to Edinburgh, over the election of a presbyterian rather than an episcopalian minister to a vacant parish near by; and of the part he played in the negotiations over the establishment of presbyterianism as the legal form of church government in Scotland in the proposed Act of Union.

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1. *Wodrow MSS. LXXXII, National Library of Scotland, (71 pages, 4to)*
 2. *In a collection of tracts in the National Library of Scotland, Miscell. Vol. 4. No. 64.*

The account reveals him as a man of astonishing energy, and as a great lover of power and intrigue.

He was ordained at Broughton in 1697 when he was twenty-one, and translated to Gladsmuir in 1701. Here he found himself,

"... apparently in hard Circumstances having exchanged 200 obedient and submissive people at Broughtone, for 1200 obstinate people in Gladsmure, and a Loving Presbytry in Biggar to Be Collegiate with a set of Brethren to most of whom I was Inwardly a Stranger many of them Lookt on by Superiour Indications as men of Cold Spirits, and who were Jealous of my Strictness."⁽¹⁾

He goes on to relate how he tamed his congregation within ten or twelve weeks, and how in his relations with the Presbytery:

"After a year of conflict all Came to be notably Reformed, and the whole fraternity were in good Terms with me and we lived amicably together."⁽²⁾

By this time he was already, at the age of twenty-six, Moderator of Presbytery.

His naivety, his humourless complacency, his formal humility combined with genuine faith - a combination of characteristics which, rightly or wrongly, we tend to expect from a presbyterian minister of his period, is apparent in his opening words:

"I was born at Glasgou 2 February 1676 of Religious parents who devoted me to the Ministry from the womb, and, aducated (sic) me agreeably. I should Sin against Gods goodness to me in my nonage if I did not remark Two Things Imo. That from the Cradle I was preserved from being

1. p. 34. Citations follow the modern pencilled pagination.

2. Wodrow MSS LXXXII, p. 35.

tainted with the vices incident to Children, 2nd That so far Back as I can draw my life I loved prayer, and would be now and then preaching to the neighbour children Like myself."⁽¹⁾

Further, in his philosophical studies:

"I used a more than ordinary application Here; and all the time I was Learning my Logicks I can say, that Day never past wherein I was not Master of my Lesson, and I never opened my Book to Read without prefacing my Studies, with a short ejaculation to God."⁽²⁾

Turning to the demonological works, we must cast some doubt on his authorship of *Witchcraft Proven*. In the first place, he was only twenty-one in 1697. He was occupied with the completion of his studies in Glasgow, his license to preach, and his ordination to Broughton. He makes no mention in his autobiography of having published a book at that time. He probably did have sufficient talent and vigour to publish his first book in the middle of such an active year, but on the face of it it does not seem likely that he did. In the second place there is some internal evidence. The author of *Witchcraft Proven* frequently introduces and explains Hebrew words and terms. It is not very clear from the way in which he does this whether he knew a good deal of Hebrew, or only a few useful words; but it seems most likely that he knew a fair amount.⁽³⁾ In his autobiography Bell

1. *Wodrow MSS LXXXII*, p. 30.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 31.

3. e.g. "The word *Mecashepha* mentioned before is of the foeminine gender, either for that the woman was by Satan first deceived, or for that that Sex is more readily circumvented. *Witchcraft Proven*, p. 12.

gives a clear account of his studies, including his progress and prowess in Greek, but makes no mention at all of ever having studied Hebrew. Such an omission would have been out of character had he in fact become a Hebrew scholar before the age of twenty-one.

A further reason why it is unlikely that Bell wrote *Witchcraft Proven* is that, as we shall see, he probably did write *The Tryal of Witchcraft*. Internal evidence makes it most improbable that these two works were written by the same person. There are marked differences, as can be seen from the parts of this essay which concern them, both in subject matter and in general approach. In general the earlier work is far more superstitious and credulous than *The Tryal of Witchcraft*. Its author includes among the different marks of witchcraft, in addition to those known to demonologists throughout Europe, two or three particularly absurd local superstitions. The author of *The Tryal of Witchcraft* is a good deal more circumspect. He takes pains to emphasize that most of those signs commonly thought of as sure marks of witchcraft are in fact only "pregnant and shrewd presumptions", and that the death penalty must never be enforced unless the demonic pact is satisfactorily established. The two tracts also have a totally different set of references, apart from a few obvious biblical ones in common, for

there are only two non-biblical allusions in *Witchcraft Proven*, and a fairly wide selection in *The Tryal of Witchcraft*. Further, the author of *The Tryal of Witchcraft* knew, or at least used, no Hebrew.

This internal evidence is not, of course, completely conclusive. The difference in approach could well be accounted for by a change in attitude over a period of eight years. And there are, indeed, certain likenesses. The tracts share a lack of historical perspective; but as we have said, such a lack was typical of demonologists, and indeed of the time. The occurrence of the phrase "witchcraft arreign'd and condemn'd" in the titles of both may possibly be significant, but the author of *The Tryal of Witchcraft* was not above a little petty plagiarism. On the whole the evidence against the two works being by the same hand seems stronger than that in favour.

There is a better case for John Bell's authorship of *The Tryal of Witchcraft*. In the first place Robert Wodrow ascribed it to him, and we may assume that he had some good reason for doing so. In the second place the Gladsmuir district had for long been a notable area for cases of witchcraft,⁽¹⁾ and John Bell must have been very conscious of the problem during his ministry there.

1. See the account by William Wisemen in the Third Statistical Account of Scotland, East Lothian volume, Edin., 1953, p. 229.

An additional factor is that the lost *Discourse of Witchcraft* was noted as number 2908 in David Constable's Sale Catalogue, published in Edinburgh in 1828, where it was bound up with two other unrelated manuscripts and sold for £1. 4s., along with the manuscript of *The Tryal of Witchcraft* which sold for 2s. 6d. Both were said to be by the Rev. John Bell, minister of Gladsmuir, and it seems certain that a disparity in the handwriting of these works would have been noted then. The discovery of these lost manuscripts, and a comparison of the handwriting with that of the autobiographical Wodrow manuscript, would settle the matter at once, but in their absence we have no certain evidence to corroborate the entries in nineteenth-century catalogues to the effect that John Bell of Gladsmuir was their author.

It is worth quoting in full the two extracts from the manuscript which are given by Sharpe, since that too is now a very rare work:

"There have been many found in whom such characters have concurred, as by the observation of all ages and nations, are symptoms of a witch; particularly the witch's marks *mala fama*, inability to shed tears, etc., all of them providential discoveries of so dark a crime, and which, like avenues, lead us to the secret of it. 'Tis true, one man, through the concurrence of corrosive humours, may have an insensible mark, another may be enviously defamed, and a third, through sudden grief or melancholy, not be able to weep. One or other of these may concur in the innocent, but none do attest that all of them have concurred in any one person but a witch; and 'tis reasonable to think that these indicia taking place in witches through all places in the world, do proceed from a common cause, rather than a peculiar humour. 'Tis but rational to think that the

devil, aping God, should imprint a sacrament of his covenant; and it is thought by many, of greatest repute in the learned world, that whatsoever way, whether by accident or otherwise, such insensible marks be in the body, yet no such mark as theirs, every circumstance considered, is to be found with any other but themselves. I need not insist much in describing this mark, which is sometimes like a little teate, sometimes but a blewish spot; and I myself have seen it in the body of a confessing witch, like a little powder-mark, of a blea colour, somewhat hard, and withall insensible, so as it did not bleed when I pricked it." (1)

"Guard against devilish charms for men and beasts, which are the very rudiments of witchcraft, and introductory to a formal and more explicit covenant with the devil. O! do not play upon the brink of the pit, least yow tumble in. There are many sorceries practised in our day, against which I would on this occasion bear my testimony, and do therefore seriously ask you, What is it you mean by your spells, verses, words so often repeated said fasting, or going backward? How mean yow to have success by carrying about with yow certain herbs, plants, and branches of trees? Why is it, that, fearing certain events, yow do use such superstitious means to prevent them, by laying bits of timber at doors, carrying a Bible merely for a charm, without further use of it, What in end ye by opposing witchcraft to witchcraft, in such sort, when ye suppose one to be bewitched, ye endeavour his relief by burnings, bottles, horse-shoes, and such like magical ceremonies? How think ye to have secrets revealed unto yow, and your doubts resolved, and your minds informed, by turning a sieve or a key? Or to discover, by basons and glasses, how yow shall be related before yow die? Or do yow think to escape the guilt or sorcery, who let your Bible fall open, or purpose to determine what the state of your soul is, by the first word ye light upon?" (2)

This last passage is interesting for its account of the way in which superstition showed itself in a non-Catholic context. Bereft of the prayer-spell, the cross, and the relic, the superstitious in Calvinist Scotland had to turn to the Bible.

1. C.K. Sharpe, *Witchcraft in Scotland*, Note 2, pp. 208-209.

2. *Ibid.*, Note 7, pp. 216-217.

The *Ingenious and Scientific Discourse of Witchcraft*, which may or may not be the published version of the *Discourse*, is mentioned by Hew Scott along with the *Abridgement and Alphabetical Index* as his only publications, and also in W.T. Morgan's *Bibliography of British History (1700-1715)*. Morgan personally examined all the material listed, but does not say where he saw them; and no copy of the work is known.

One possible candidate for the authorship of *The Tryal of Witchcraft* should be mentioned. There was another minister called John Bell⁽¹⁾ who was one of the witnesses at the trial of Philip Standsfield for patricide in 1688,⁽²⁾ and is wrongly assumed by Laing⁽³⁾ to be the same John Bell as the minister of Gladsmuir. This older Bell, a minister near Haddington, was about forty years of age at the time of this trial. This would make him only fifty seven in 1705, so there is no reason why he should not have written the tract. He is an appealing candidate, since at the murder trial he spent some time describing his fear of evil spirits, and the way in which he mistook the sounds of murder for the activity of demons.

Without more definite information, however, the most we can say is that *The Tryal of Witchcraft* was probably written by John Bell of Gladsmuir, and *Witchcraft Proven* by some person unknown.

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1. Unfortunately he does not feature in the *Fasti*.
 2. Cobbett's *State Trials*, London, 1811, Vol. XI, p. 1400.
 3. MS notes, Edinburgh University Library.

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