

STUDIES IN ELIZABETHAN WITCHCRAFT; ITS
REFLECTION IN THE DRAMA

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I hereby recommend that the thesis prepared
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PREFACE

During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, there developed a revival of the belief in magic and witchcraft, a heritage from the ages past--from the ancient Greek period down through the Middle Ages. This revival of witchcraft and magic stems largely from two sources. First, science was still confused with the supernatural, and the pioneer scientist was nearly always associated with the wizard and magician in the minds of all but a small number of the most advanced thinkers of the day. Second, the Reformation gave rise to the most extreme doctrines on questions of biblical interpretation and orthodoxy of belief, and was responsible for horrible persecution of religious heresy on the grounds of witchcraft and magic. Although the growth of the spirit of inquiry characteristic of the Renaissance encouraged men to show a curiosity about things hitherto forbidden and to display a questioning attitude toward those natural phenomena which had been considered beyond the power of comprehension, the belief in witchcraft persisted throughout the seventeenth century and long after the active persecution of witches through legal or ecclesiastical channels.

In this study I shall try to show the confusion of magic and science existing in the popular mind, and to trace

the different forms that this belief in the supernatural took. I shall give a brief history of the laws enacted against the practice of witchcraft, and the subsequent witch trials of the period. The views of James I who expressed his belief in the reality of the crime in his Daemonologie will be cited, and of Reginald Scot who sought to disprove the belief in the Discoverie. Finally, I shall show its reflection in the dramatic literature of the age.

Since the drama was the most important of all literary forms in the Elizabethan period, it is but natural that we find the plays of the period dealing with just such material as has been mentioned. The drama of the age took the same place in the life of the people that newspapers and magazines take in the present day. Not only was the theater to entertain its audience but it was to instruct the public as well. For this reason the Elizabethan drama mirrors every phase of the life of the age. Hence we find in the drama of the period the evidence of an almost universal belief in the supernatural, particularly in witchcraft and magic.

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CHAPTER I
THE CONFLICT OF SCIENCE AND MAGIC IN
THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

Throughout the years from the times of ancient Greece to the dawn of the Renaissance there existed in the minds of men such strong belief in the miraculous that rational thought was almost completely disregarded. There was little independent thinking. During these centuries people had been at all times commanded or expected to accept on authority alone doctrines which had not been proved or were not capable of proof.¹ In fact, public opinion, the church, a sacred book, or some similar authority, was so forceful in molding beliefs that there was practically no independent development in the scientific field until the sixteenth century.

The chief obstacle in the path of science during the Middle Ages was the Christian Church, for the church claimed absolute authority for truths revealed by the light of grace. As a result, the light of reason was considered of no consequence.² Any secular thought had to be subordinated to church dogma. Hence, in every important field of scientific research,

¹J. B. Bury, A History of Freedom of Thought (New York: Henry Holt Company, 1913), p. 17.

²A. Wolf, A History of Science, Technology, and Philosophy in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1935), p. 2.

pioneers in the development of science found that the ground was occupied by false views which the church declared to be true on the infallible authority of dogma.¹

As knowledge of the earth was of little interest in comparison with devotion to heaven,² mediaeval thought was characterized by a lack of interest in natural phenomena. The beliefs about nature were based largely on magic. For instance, although fossils had been identified by ancient Greek writers as the remains of plants and animals, during the Middle Ages vogue was given to the idea that fossils were not of organic origin, but were the result of the molding power of nature, which playfully, as it were, shaped inorganic matter to resemble living things.³

In fact, during the centuries preceding the Renaissance, the whole atmosphere was unfavorable to a normal interest in, and conception of, nature. Men regarded all natural phenomena as manifestations of the pleasure or displeasure of the gods. They believed not only that they were surrounded by fiends watching for every opportunity to harm them, but also that pestilences, storms, eclipses, and famines were the work of the Devil. Moreover, there flourished through the Middle Ages a group who believed especially in

¹Bury, op. cit., p. 64.

²Wolf, op. cit., p. 2.

³Ibid., p. 365.

the existence of spirits of nature, representatives of the four elements, sylphs, salamanders, nymphs, and gnomes, beings of far more than human excellence but mortal, although not imbued with human frailty.¹ To rise to intercourse with these elemental spirits of nature was the highest aim of the philosopher. He who would do so must purify his soul by fasting and celibacy. He must learn to see in every natural phenomenon an aspect of a continuous law, a new phase and manifestation of the action of the spirits of nature upon mankind.

When the savage is confronted with the more startling and terrible aspects of nature, he sees in them the action of evil spirits.² To him the supernatural is seen in the darkness of night, in famine, in the earthquake, in the pestilences that kill thousands, and in every form of disease. He lives in continual dread of what he deems the direct and isolated acts of evil spirits.³ This distorted conception was reflected in the beliefs of civilized man during the early centuries, for the ancients believed that the powers of light and darkness were struggling for mastery, and the mediaeval saints taught that all the more remarkable atmospheric changes resulted from the direct intervention of the spirits. The

¹W. E. H. Lecky, History of the Rise and Influence of the Spirit of Rationalism in Europe (New York: D. Appleton Co., 1919), I, 65.

²Ibid., p. 41.

³Ibid., p. 66.

Devil was always spoken of as the Prince of the Air.¹ Various stories were offered as proof by the believers in the powers of the Devil. They cited the story of Job in the Old Testament, maintaining that the Devil, by divine permission, afflicted Job by causing a tempest which destroyed the house in which his sons were eating.² It was deemed only natural that the Prince of Powers of the Air should have manifested his hatred of God by attacking churches. As an example Kittredge states that

. . . . in 1402 at Danbury in Essex the Devil appeared in likeness of a Gray Fryer, who entering the Church, put the people in great fear, and the same hour, with a Tempest of Whirlwinde, and Thunder, the top of the steeple was broken down and half of the chancell scattered abroad. The demon mounted the altar and sprang from side to side thereon. The Church was filled with an intolerable stench. In departing he passed between the legs of one of the congregation, who soon fell sick of a mortal disease, his feet and part of his legs becoming black.³

A demon was also credited with the ability to vomit black storm clouds and cause flood and famine in all the land.⁴ Another story was told of a monstrous serpent that came flying across the Marne during a terrible thunder storm, spouting fire from mouth and nostrils. A monk, with the sacred

¹Ibid., p. 91.

²Ibid.

³Quoted by George Lyman Kittredge, Witchcraft in Old and New England (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1929), p. 156.

⁴Ibid., p. 153.

wafer in hand, advanced against this dragon and forced him to plunge into the river, the crash of which plunge was heard for almost two miles.¹

In addition, bodily ailments were commonly ascribed to occult agencies as the manifestation of the malice of the Devil or of the wrath of God. That fearful epidemic, the Black Death, which devastated Europe in the fourteenth century, seems to have aggravated the haunting terror of the invisible world of demons. The confusion that existed in the minds of men during this period is well exemplified, however, by the fact that despite their sincere belief in demons, they as firmly believed that ecclesiastical rites were capable of coping with these enemies.²

This predisposition to believe in the miraculous was so great during this period, that out of a small germ of reality the vast and complicated system of witchcraft was constructed. Michael Psellus, mediaeval authority on witches, said that since all demons suffered by material fire and brimstone, they must have material bodies; since all demons were by nature cold, they gladly sought a genial warmth by entering the bodies of men and beasts.³ This theory of

¹Ibid., p. 154.

²Bury, op. cit., p. 66.

³A. D. White, The Warfare of Science with Theology (New York: D. Appleton Company, 1910), II, 104.

witchcraft was accepted not only by the masses, but also by the upper classes; and victims were condemned by intelligent judges and church dignitaries, as well as by the common people.¹ In fact, for three hundred years, European civilization was devastated by the destructive persecution of witches,² and trials for witchcraft increased greatly after the visitation of the Black Death.

The conflicting points of view that were prevalent during this period of confusion are well exemplified by Reginald Scot, who, in his Discoverie, answered the charge of many that snow, lightning, rain, and winds did not come from heaven at the command of God, but were raised by the cunning and power of witches and conjurers. He said,

I have read in the Scriptures that God maketh the blustering tempests and whirlwinds. And I find that it is the Lord that altogether dealeth with them, and that they blowe according to his will. But let me see anie of them all [witches] rebuke and still the sea in time of tempest, as Christ did, or raise the stormie wind, as God did with his word; and I will believe them. Hath anie witch or conjurer, or anie creature entred into the treasures of the snowe; or seene the secret places of the haile, which God hath prepared against the daie of trouble, battell and war?³

That this confusion extended well into the sixteenth century is attested by the firm belief of James I that his own life

¹Wolf, op. cit., p. 3.

²Bury, op. cit., p. 67.

³Reginald Scot, The Discoverie of Witchcraft (Pub. John Rodker Bunday; Suffolk: R. Clay and Sons Ltd., 1930), p. 19.

had been endangered by the power of witches over the elements. In 1589 he arranged for his wedding with Princess Anne of Denmark. The marriage was performed by proxy in July; and when the queen sailed for England, she encountered storms. King James was almost shipwrecked when he sailed north to spend the winter with her. Hence, he was convinced that the ocean was unfriendly to his alliance.¹

Though the Reformation and the Renaissance were the chief agents of the freedom of thought, they for a time aggravated the very evils they sought to expel. Confusion of science with magic was still common, not only among the actual enemies of science, but also among the pioneer workers in science. These new movements were somewhat belated, however, the friends of science, since some of the best minds were alienated from the Church and sent in search of truth by the light of reason. Societies founded for the advancement of experimental science such as the Academia del Cimento at Florence, founded in 1657, the Royal Society of London, 1662, and the Paris Academie des Science, 1666,² stem from the pioneer work of Renaissance scientists. The study of science was also advanced immeasurably by the invention of scientific instruments,³ for through their use it was possible to observe

¹Wallace Notestein, A History of Witchcraft in England (Washington: The American Historical Assn., 1911), p. 94.

²Wolf, op. cit., p. 9.

³Ibid.

phenomena which would otherwise have been invisible. They also facilitated the precise measurement of phenomena, and they made it possible to study a phenomenon under conditions so controlled as to justify reliable conclusions about it.¹ As a rule, however, when scientists came to have views differing from those generally held, they were denounced as heretics. Such was the case of John Rey, who was one of the first to set forth a new view on the role of air in the calcination of metals.²

The foundations of modern science were laid in Italy by Galileo and his disciples. He attacked many theories currently held. For example he showed the erroneousness of the view that the velocity of falling bodies varies with their weight.³ The belief of the ordinary learned person is represented in the following excerpt from a letter Galileo wrote to Kepler, one of his disciples.

What do you think of the foremost philosophers of this University? In spite of my oft repeated efforts and invitation they have refused, with the obstinacy of a glutted adder, to look at the planets or the moon or my glass (telescope). . . . Kindest Kepler, what peals of laughter you would give forth if you heard with what arguments the foremost philosophers of the University opposed me, in the presence of the Grand Duke, at Pisa, labouring with his logic-chopping argumentations as though they were magical incantations

¹Ibid.

²Ibid., p. 332.

³Wolf, op. cit., p. 38.

wherewith to banish and spirit away the new planets
[the satellites] of Jupiter out of the sky.¹

Mediaeval thought followed one set of Greek ideas; modern science another. Mediaeval thought followed Aristotle, whose science was mainly qualitative and not quantitative. Kepler and Copernicus of the new school, on the other hand, were imbued with the Pythagorean spirit.² Kepler's great astronomical discoveries were, however, mainly prompted by religious aims. "He set out to seek the ways of God, and found the courses of the planets."³ The ancients had conceived of mankind as the focus of Cosmic economy. The Earth, the stage of man, was naturally looked upon as the center of the universe.⁴ Two theories had existed concerning the geometrical laws governing the planets. There was the theory of the homocentric spheres of Eudoxus, pupil of Plato, which set forth the belief that each planet was embedded in the equator of a uniformly rotating sphere having the earth as its center. The poles of this sphere were fixed in the surface of a second exterior sphere, concentric with the first, and rotating uniformly about an axis constantly inclined to that of the first. This was similarly related to a third, and so on. The theories

¹Quoted by Wolf, op. cit., p. 29.

²Ibid., p. 4.

³Quoted by Wolf, Ibid., p. 3.

⁴Ibid., p. 4.

of the second type employed the conception of a planet uniformly describing a circle with the earth as its center, and then refining upon it by displacing the center of the circle from the earth, referring the uniform motion to an arbitrarily chosen part within the circle regarding the moving point on the circle as merely the center of a smaller circle in which the planet actually revolved.¹ On the other hand, Copernicus offered the theory that the earth rotates on its axis and revolves about the sun as one of the planets.²

In fact, astronomy led the field in the great movement of scientific research with publication of this heliocentric theory of Copernicus in 1543.³ Yet astronomical discoveries were as disturbing in the sixteenth century as Darwinism in the nineteenth century, with much the same disproportionate effect upon religious thought.⁴ The opposition of the Church to the new views is well exemplified by the following edict published by the Holy Office:

The view that the Sun stands motionless at the center of the universe is foolish, philosophically false, and utterly heretical, because contrary to Holy Scripture. The view that the Earth is not the center

¹Ibid., pp. 14-15.

²Ibid., p. 15.

³Ibid., p. 6.

⁴M. C. Bradbrook, The School of Night (Cambridge: University Press, 1936), p. 66.

of the universe, and even has a daily rotation is philosophically false, and at least an erroneous belief.¹

All books teaching this new theory were banned, and Galileo was warned by Pope Paul V not to "hold, teach, or defend the Copernican theory."²

The belief in the controlling power of the stars over human destinies is almost as old as man himself. Hence, the position of the planets in the firmament, their situation among the constellations at the hour of a man's birth were considered by the ancients to be dominant factors and influences throughout his whole life.³ According to the generally accepted doctrine of emanation everything in the universe owed its existence and virtue to an emanation from God that was supposed to descend step by step, through the hierarchies of angels and the stars down to the things of earth.⁴ This faith in the power of the stars was carried over into the sixteenth century despite the rise of science. Since astrologers were thought to possess a knowledge of the future, rulers of this period drew them to Court, banished them from other parts of the country, and thus monopolized their

¹Quoted by Wolf, op. cit., p. 36.

²Charlotte Fell Smith, John Dee (London: Constable and Company, Ltd., 1909), p. 18.

³Stanley Redgrove, Bygone Beliefs (London: William Rider and Son, Ltd., 1920), p. 89.

⁴Lecky, op. cit., p. 44.

services.¹ The confusion in the public mind in relation to the science of astronomy and the power of the heavenly bodies is well illustrated by the attitude toward, and position of, John Dee, one of the foremost mathematicians and astronomers of the time. Dee's contributions to science were many. He wrote upon navigation and history, logic, travel, geometry, astrology, heraldry, genealogy, and many other subjects.² He foreshadowed the telescope; he described a wonderful glass belonging to Sir William P., famous for his skill in mathematics;³ and he pictured accurately a diving chamber supplied with air. He also explained some of the mechanical marvels of the world, such as the brazen head, made by Albertus Magnus, which seemed to speak, a strange "self moving" which he saw at St. Denis in 1551, images seen in the air by means of a perspective glass, Archimedes' sphere, the dove of Archytas, and the wheel of Vulcan spoken of by Aristotle.⁴ He was called to court to name an auspicious day for the coronation of Queen Elizabeth,⁵ who then employed him as her astrologer. After this appointment, he was never far away from her Court; and he was said to have revealed to her the

¹Ibid.

²Smith, op. cit., p. 60.

³Ibid., p. 26.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid., p. 18; also Notestein, op. cit., p. 52.

identity of her enemies at foreign courts. In October, 1575, the Queen and the whole court were thrown into a perturbed state of mind by a strange appearance in the heavens. Kepler, the Swedish astronomer, declared that it predicted the appearance in the north of Europe of a prince who should lay waste all Germany and that it would vanish in 1632. Dee was immediately called to expound the phenomenon.¹ He was also continually in demand for casting horoscopes for men and women of all ranks of life.

To a people reared in superstition, untrained in reasoning, unacquainted with the simple laws of gravitation, the power to raise heavy bodies in the air at will, to see pictures in a simple crystal globe, or converse with projections of the air, to forecast a man's life by geometric or planetary calculations, and to discern the influence of one chemical or mineral substance upon another, seemed diabolically clever and quite beyond human agency.²

As a consequence, Dee was soon regarded, not as a highly trained mathematician, geographer, and astronomer, but as a conjurer and magician of doubtful reputation; in fact, as one who had dealings with the devil.³

Another who did much in the field of astronomy, yet got little credit, because he would not publish his findings,

¹Ibid., p. 45.

²Ibid., p. 61.

³Quoted by Smith, op. cit., p. 26.

was Thomas Harriot, a member of "The School of Night."¹ He was said to have anticipated Galileo in his use of the telescope, and he observed Halley's comet in 1609. He worked at astronomy and the allied study of optics and the transmission of light.²

The work of various other astronomers contributed much to the progress of science during this pioneer stage in spite of the handicap of general backwardness and of persecution. Certain ones made instruments representing the movement of the celestial bodies. As early as the fifteenth century Giovanni Bianchini devised an instrument for measuring the distance and height of inaccessible bodies.³ The compound microscope, consisting of a combination of several convergent lenses, one with a short focal length, was discovered about 1590.⁴ Then, beginning with Copernicus's revolutionary conception of the earth as one of the smaller planets of the solar system, the work of Galileo, Tycho Brahe, and Kepler, led progressively to Newton's great synthesis of the physical world.⁵ The whole physical universe was shown to be subject to the same law of

¹Bradbrook, op. cit., p. 9.

²Ibid.

³Lynn Thorndike, Science and Thought in the Fifteenth Century (New York: Columbia University Press, 1929), p. 20.

⁴Wolf, op. cit., p. 71.

⁵Ibid., p. 145.

gravitation and the same laws of motion, so that all physical objects or events in one part of the universe exercise some influence upon all others, and thus together constitute one cosmic system of interconnected parts.¹ It was in developing the implication of the new dynamics and in applying them to the concrete mechanical problems presented by the solar system that Newton made his greatest contribution to astronomy.² Later he began to wonder whether the force of gravity, which was observed to extend to the top of the highest mountains, might not extend to the moon and influence that body, and perhaps even keep it in its orbit.³ From the supposition that just as a magnet is surrounded by a sort of atmosphere through which its power is diffused, so the earth's magnetic virtue might be imagined to extend into surrounding space, Newton went on to the idea that the heavenly bodies, the sun and the moon in particular, are, like the earth, endowed with magnetism.⁴ His researches in optics also bore upon astronomy; he constructed reflecting telescopes.⁵ Moreover, by discovery of the composite nature of white light, he laid the foundations of modern spectroscopy.⁶

¹Ibid.

²Ibid., p. 148.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid., pp. 295-296.

⁵Ibid., p. 161.

⁶Ibid.

Modern science likewise owes much to William Gilbert, physician to Queen Elizabeth, not only for the development he effected in the science of magnetism and electricity,¹ but also for his attempt to point out the errors of previous work and thus to dispel much of the existing confusion. One theory that he refuted, for example, was that concerning the miraculous and curative powers of the loadstone, which was said to lose its virtue when smeared with garlic but to regain it when bathed in goat's blood.²

The development of the science of medicine during the sixteenth century was likewise characterized by a conflict between new ideas and old notions, the latter, as a general rule, being carry-overs not only from mediaeval, but also from very ancient times. Nothing was more simple and natural in the early stages of civilization than belief in occult, self-conscious powers of evil. Just as primitive man, through his ignorance of physical laws and causes, as has already been pointed out, attributed troubles and calamities which came upon him to the wrath of a good deity or more frequently the malice of an evil one,³ so did he regard the origin and curing of disease.

In Egypt there is evidence that the sick were thought

¹Ibid., p. 293.

²Ibid.

³Ibid., p. 336.

to be afflicted or possessed by demons; the same belief comes constantly before us in the great religions of India and China.¹ Even the Old Testament examples of the leprosy of Miriam and Uzziah, the boils of Job, the dysentery of Jehoram, the withered hand of Asa, and many other ills attributed to the wrath of God or to the malice of Satan were commonly cited as proof by men in olden times.² The early Christians believed that Satan entered the body when the mouth was open to breathe; and early doctors, when treating such patients, took especial care lest the imp might jump into their own mouths from the mouth of the patient.³ Too, they thought he might enter the body during sleep. A King of Spain took precautions to sleep between two monks to keep off the devil.⁴

Likewise, prejudicial to a true development of medical science among the first Christians was their attribution of disease to diabolic influence. As St. Paul had said that the pagan gods were devils, everywhere the early Christians saw in disease the malignant work of these dethroned powers of heaven.⁵ St. Augustine said, "All diseases of Christians are to be ascribed to these demons; chiefly do they torment fresh

¹White, op. cit., p. 2.

²Ibid.

³Ibid., p. 136.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid.

baptized Christians, yea, even the guiltless new born infants."¹ Thus, it was only logical that supernatural remedies should be sought to counteract the effects of supernatural causes.

Consequently, astrology and magic were the close associates of medicine in its early stages. Various astrological beliefs were accepted and acted upon by doctors in the sixteenth century.² Man was considered a small model of the universe, and the several parts of the human body were believed to be correlated with corresponding celestial bodies.³ Diagrams of the "zodiac man" purporting to indicate the connection between the various parts of the human body with the corresponding constellations, or signs of the zodiac, were in common use to determine the best season for administering certain remedies.

A similar theory prevalent during this period was that of the vital spirits. Every part of the body was supposed to have its specific "vital spirits" which had to be regulated somehow in case of illness.⁴ However, the Greek theory of the four "humours" was the theory most commonly held. The four elementary qualities--hot, cold, dry, and moist--and the

¹Quoted by White, op. cit., p. 27.

²Wolf, op. cit., p. 427.

³Ibid., also Redgrove, op. cit., p. 28.

⁴Ibid.

associated doctrine of the four "humours" or bodily juices--blood, phlegm, black bile, and yellow bile--were connected.¹ Health was believed to depend upon a proper proportion of the four, diseases resulted from their disproportion.

There was also no organization of medical practitioners among the Elizabethans. The masses, if they resorted to "professional" help at all, went to the apothecary, who was often an ordinary grocer or spice merchant.² Trained doctors were employed only at court and by the nobility. Surgical operations were performed by common barbers. The study of anatomy was forbidden because of moral scruples, and religious prejudice based on the doctrine of the resurrection of the body.³ Paracelsus, one of the great physicians of the age, said that the best thing he could say about the famous physicians of his time was not that they did much good, but that they did the least harm.⁴

The art of compounding medicines, developed to a high degree by the Elizabethans, was also carried over into the modern period from preceding ages. It is, in fact, an art that is very ancient, for in a papyrus of 1550 B. C., discovered by Ebers, many old remedies, most of which are of a

¹Ibid., also Redgrove, op. cit., p. 27.

²Ibid., p. 426.

³Bury, op. cit., p. 65.

⁴Wolf, op. cit., p. 426.

disgusting nature are given.¹ For example, a favorite remedy called oil of puppies was made by cutting up two newly born puppies and boiling them with one pound of earth worms. Since people rarely distinguish between recovery after a certain treatment, recovery because of it, and recovery in spite of it, a very extensive unofficial collection of alleged remedies accumulated in the course of the ages.² Hence, it is not surprising to find that the London Pharmacopeia of 1618 included such medicines as bile, blood, cox's comb, feathers, fur, hair, perspiration, saliva, scorpions, snake skins, spider web, and wood lice.³ Moreover, practically all medical treatises of the age include mediaeval remedies. To illustrate, one anonymous treatise recommended the use of blood of a goat for stone. The animal should be killed in August, at the beginning of the full moon; it should be three or four years old; and it should not have eaten anything but diuretic and aperient herbs for fifteen days before its death.⁴

The use of iron for medical purposes originated in the confusion of astrology and medicine. As iron was associated with Mars, the martial God of "blood and iron," salts of iron

¹Redgrove, op. cit., p. 26.

²Wolf, op. cit., p. 426.

³Ibid.

⁴Thorndike, op. cit., p. 98.

were prescribed for the anaemic and the weak.¹ In the same way silver and gold came to be used. Silver was associated with the silver moon, and the moon with the brain; therefore, preparations of silver were prescribed for epilepsy and melancholia. Gold was similarly linked with the golden sun and consequently with life.²

We are indebted to Sir Walter Raleigh, who was interested in mathematics, geography, and many other fields of science, for a record of many remedies used during the early days, for on his many voyages he took care to record the remedies he saw in use.³ He attained some success as a chemist and spent much time himself in search of an elixir of life. He also compounded a cordial, probably a compound of quinine, which restored Prince Henry, the son of James I and Raleigh's good friend, to consciousness.⁴

It was customary in Elizabethan times for reputable and even eminent medical men to explain cases of insanity as the result of witchcraft.⁵ That a witch or wizard could drive a man mad, either by spells or by sending a demon to buffet him, was an old article of faith which descended from Anglo-

¹Wolf, op. cit., p. 439.

²Ibid.

³Bradbrook, op. cit., p. 37.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Notestein, op. cit., p. 23.

Saxon times.¹ The following is taken from a mediaeval medical book as a salve against "nocturnal goblin visitors":

Take hop plant, worm wood, bishop wort, lupine, ash-throat, henbane, hare wort, viper's bugloss, heath-berry plant, Cropleek, garlic, grains of hedgerife, githrife, and fennel. Put these worts into a vessel, set them under the altar, sing over them nine masses, boil them in butter and sheep's grease, add much holy salt, strain through a cloth, throw the worts into running water. If any ill tempting occur to a man or an elf or goblin visitor come, smear his [the patient's] body with this salve, and put it on his eyes, and cense him with incense, and sign him frequently with the sign of the cross. His condition will soon be better.²

Innumerable charms and spells were preserved from Anglo-Saxon England. There were charms to heal wounds, to expel or ward off poison and the venom of spiders and serpents, to protect one against wild animals and savage dogs, to cure ailments in man and beast, to enhance the virtue of medicinal herbs, and to help in childbirth.³ Every precious stone was supposed to exercise its own peculiar virtue; for instance, amber was regarded as a good remedy for throat troubles. It was reasoned that the Almighty had set his sign upon various means of curing disease. Hence, it was held that the beet, on account of its red juice, was good for the blood; that liverwort, having a leaf like the liver, cured diseases of that organ. Bear's grease, being taken from an animal thickly

¹Kittredge, op. cit., p. 124.

²Quoted by White, op. cit., p. 39.

³Kittredge, op. cit., p. 32.

covered with hair, was recommended to persons fearing baldness.¹ Too, the theory of the medicinal efficacy of words was popular. The first chapter of St. John's Gospel, written in small letters and hung about one's neck, was believed to cure all diseases and to deliver one from evil.² As red was once supposed to be a color very antagonistic to evil spirits, the use of red flannel for sore throat was advocated, especially since the ills of man were attributed to the operation of these spirits.³ This was also the reason that red cloth was hung in the patient's room as a cure for smallpox. Another remedy used against afflictions caused by witches was powdered skull. People afflicted with fits used to throw money into St. Tecla's well in Denbighshire and then sleep all night under the altar-table in the church, holding a live cock in their arms. When the cock was released the next morning, he was supposed to take off all the fits and die soon after.⁴ Drage informs us in his treatise on sicknesses and diseases from witchcraft and supernatural causes that one possessed may be cured by holding his head over a pot in which herbs are boiled, when a fit approaches.⁵ As it was

¹White, op. cit., p. 38.

²Scot, op. cit., p. 154.

³Redgrove, op. cit., p. 26.

⁴Kittredge, op. cit., p. 94.

⁵Cited by Kittredge, op. cit., p. 35.

thought cruelty to madmen was punishment to the devil residing within, the Elizabethans tried to disgust the demon with the body which he tortured. Hence, the patient was made to swallow or apply to himself various unspeakable ordures, with such medicines as liver of toads, the blood of frogs and rats, fibers of the hangman's rope, and ointment made from the body of gibbeted criminals.¹

Fragments of dead mortality were also used in spells and remedies from ancient times. A dead man's hand, especially if he had been hanged or had met any violent or untimely death, was considered a cure for eczema, wens, tumors, and unsightly birthmarks.² Drinking from a suicide's skull if freshly exhumed, was supposed to cure epilepsy. Wine in which the bones of a saint had been dipped cured lunacy.³ A corn might be cured by cutting it with a razor that had shaved a corpse.

The value of the toad in medicine had long been a tradition. The ashes of burnt toad were good for the dropsy, according to the precepts of folk-medicine in Devonshire.⁴ For whooping cough one might pull a black ribbon three times through the body of a live frog and let the patient wear the

¹White, op. cit., p. 39.

²Kittredge, op. cit., p. 142.

³White, op. cit., p. 40.

⁴Kittredge, op. cit., p. 181.

ribbon around his neck. As the frog wasted away it carried the cough with it.¹

The confusion of religious beliefs and gross superstition brought into existence during the Elizabethan Age many remedies of questionable worth. Throughout the Middle Ages and on into the early modern period great store had continued to be set by the supposed medicinal virtues of saliva. The great example impressed most forcibly upon the mediaeval mind was the use of it ascribed in the Fourth Gospel to Jesus Himself.² In addition the water in which a single hair of a saint had been dipped was used as a purgative; the water of baptism was long regarded as a powerful ingredient in many potions.³ Grease from the church bells was used as an ointment for ring worm and piles; and a single coin from the offertory was thought good for sore eyes and other complaints. If it was carried in the pocket, it kept off rheumatism.⁴ A belief also existed in the efficacy of the royal touch in certain diseases, especially epilepsy and scrofula. Even Henry VIII, the Stuarts, and Charles II attempted to perform many cures in this manner.⁵

¹Ibid., p. 95.

²White, op. cit., p. 42.

³Kittredge, op. cit., p. 150.

⁴Ibid., p. 152.

⁵White, op. cit., p. 46.

At the beginning of the modern period the prevailing tendency was to simplify treatment of the human body and its ailments. Under the influence of the theory of the four humours and similar fancies, remedial treatment usually sought to readjust the proportion of the humours in the body as a whole, but in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries there was a more careful observation and detailed description of individual disease.¹ The study of anatomy also made progress, although throughout the Middle Ages it had been hindered by a dislike or prohibition of dissection.² William Harvey in his book On Movement of the Heart and the Blood said: "I profess to learn and to teach anatomy, not from the position of philosophers but from the fabric of nature."³

The most important discoveries of the modern period, however, were those dealing with the circulation of the blood. Men came to question the view Galen formerly held that blood is formed and endowed with "natural spirits" in the liver, whence it flows through the veins to the various parts of the body and returns again by the same veins to the liver--the movement being like a tidal ebb and flow.⁴ Richard Lower (1631-91) was the first successfully to carry out the operation

¹Wolf, op. cit., p. 445.

²Ibid., p. 403.

³Quoted by Wolf, op. cit., p. 412.

⁴Ibid.

of transferring blood from one animal to another.¹

Belgian Vesalius in his treatise On the Structure of the Human Body passed over the customary fancies about the microcosm and macrocosm, of the futile search for analogies and connections between the parts of the human body and the heavenly bodies, or other parts of the cosmos. Instead he gave a clear-cut account of the actual structure of the body.²

Despite the fact that there was much progress in the field of medicine the belief in spirits and the false conceptions of astronomical phenomena already mentioned were prejudicial to a rapid development of medical science. Evidence is found that great doctors like William Harvey and Sir Thomas Browne took part in the examination of alleged witches,³ thus showing further that well into the modern period, confusion of science with magic still existed in the minds of the people.

¹Ibid., p. 343.

²Ibid., p. 406.

³Ibid., p. 3.

CHAPTER II
REVIVAL OF WITCHCRAFT IN ENGLAND IN THE
SIXTEENTH CENTURY

Belief in witchcraft, magic, and demons had long been the heritage of England, but during the sixteenth century it so dominated the lives of the English people that it was revived in all its forms. Belief in demonology became more prevalent after the Reformation, for one cause of the conflict between the Roman Catholic Church and the Protestant Churches was the dispute over the question of witchcraft. Though some of the learned men in authority in the Catholic Church might not have believed in the art of magic, the more selfish members of the organization might have thought that a belief in the existence of witches should be permitted to remain as a source of power and revenue. They suffered spells to be manufactured, since every friar had the power of reversing them.¹ After the issuance of the bull of Pope Innocent VIII, in which excommunication was directed against sorcerers and heretics, the Calvinists took their usual stand of opposition to the Catholic Church. They regarded the exorcisms, forms, and rites, by which good Catholics believed that incarnate fiends could be expelled and evil spirits of every kind rebuked, as the tools of deliberate quackery and imposture. Wherever the

¹Sir Walter Scott, Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft (2nd. ed.; London: John Murray, 1831), p. 223.

Calvinists' interest became predominant in Britain, a general persecution of sorcerers and witches followed.¹

An illustration of the confusion of thought which characterized the age is seen in the life of Martin Luther. He often described how, in the seclusion of his monastery at Wittenberg, he had passed under the very shadow of death. While oppressed by the keenest sense of moral unworthiness, he was distracted by intellectual doubts. He was subject to strange hallucinations, which he attributed to the work of Satan. He constantly heard the Devil making a noise in the cloister, and he became at last so accustomed to these disturbances that he told how on one occasion, having been awakened by a sound, he realized that it was only the Devil and went to sleep again.² In fact, there is a black stain in the Castle of Wartburg where he flung an ink bottle at the Devil.³

The Elizabethans had very definite ideas about witchcraft, ideas which they received in an unbroken line from their forefathers. Magic, they believed, was divided into three branches, White Magic, Black Magic, and Necromancy. White Magic was concerned with the evocation of angels, blessed spiritual beings supposed to be essentially superior

¹Ibid., p. 225.

²Lecky, op. cit., p. 83.

³Ibid.

to mankind. Black Magic was concerned with the evocation of demons and devils, spirits supposed to be superior to man in certain powers, but utterly depraved. Necromancy was concerned with the evocation of the spirits of the dead.¹ It was, of course, the black witches that were hated and feared by the people at large, for white witches, who healed diseases and undid the spells of malignant sorcery, were regarded as friends of mankind. Scot said,

We read in malleo maleficarum of three sorts of witches, and the same is affirmed by all writers hereupon, new and old. One sort (they say) can hurt and not helpe, the second can helpe and not hurt, the third can both helpe and hurt.²

Of witchcraft in general he says,

Witchcraft is in truth a cousening art, wherein the name of God is abused, profaned and blasphemed, and his power attributed to a vile creature. The matter and instruments, wherewith it is accomplished are words, charmes, signes, images, characters, etc.³

The Devil's agent, the black witch, was visualized as
an

. . . . old weather beaten crane, having her chinne, and her knees meeting for age, walking like a bow leaning on a shaft, hollow-eyed, untoothed, furrowed on her face, having her lips trembling with the palsie, going mumbling in the streets, one that hath forgotten her pater noster, and hath yet a shrewd tongue in her head, to call a drab, drab. . . .⁴

¹Redgrove, op. cit., p. 96.

²Discoverie, p. 5.

³Ibid., p. 274.

⁴Notestein, op. cit., p. 88.

She was given a familiar by the Devil to assist her in her work. The familiar might have been in the form of any insect or animal. In return for services rendered the familiar only asked to suck the blood from his mistress's body at some spot. This left a mark upon the body, which was considered a sure sign of witchcraft when detected.¹ The witch might transform herself into bestial shape, to carry on her work. If, while in the shape of an animal, that animal was wounded, she suffered in like manner. In one instance a witch had transformed herself into a hare, and her business already attended to, she was returning home through the woods, when she was chased by a pack of hounds. She was hard pressed to reach the safety of her home before being overtaken. Reaching home a few seconds ahead of her pursuers, she uttered the magic words, and regained her proper form before the eyes of the astonished hounds!

Many were the powers ascribed to the witch by the Elizabethans. She could tell fortunes by saying Ave Marias and by other verbal charms; she could ease men of the toothache and cure the ague and the pox. She could recover lost property, fetch the devil from hell, milk cows, and draw drink out of a post. She was a good midwife and could charm children so that spirits could not hurt them. She could work wiles in war, keep corn and cattle from thriving, and make the ale in

¹Kittredge, op. cit., p. 174.

the vat lose its head and strength. No man was able to bake or brew successfully if she opposed. She had the power to dry up wells and cause trees and plants to wither. She could also kill poultry by her arts. Headaches she could prevent, and insomnia vanished if one followed her directions.¹

Another belief the Elizabethans shared in common with their forefathers was that of image magic. Image magic depended upon the doctrine of sympathy. An effigy of wax, clay, wood, or metal, was pierced with nails, pins, or thorns, and burned or slowly roasted. The victim was supposed to suffer corresponding torments, to pine away as the puppet melted or crumbled, and to die when the puppet was stabbed to the heart. Often the object was to torture a person or to recall a truant sweetheart. The same general method might be applied to remedial purposes, the image being treated in such a way as to benefit the patient.² On one occasion the whole of Elizabeth's court was thrown into an uproar when a wax image of the Queen was found in Lincoln's Inn Fields. John Dee, Elizabeth's astronomer, was summoned at once. After investigation he assured the court that no plot against the Queen's life was involved, but that it was only a prank of a practical joker.³

Closely akin to the idea of image magic was that of

¹Ibid., p. 34.

²Ibid., p. 73.

³Smith, op. cit., p. 19.

sympathetic magic. Similar things were supposed to affect one another, and a similar relation supposedly held good between different things. It was considered expedient for one to destroy all nail cuttings and hair clippings, since a witch gaining possession of them might work harm with them. Sympathetic magic might be wrought on a person not only through the witch's gaining possession of his clothes and severed parts of his body, but also through the impressions left by his body in sand or earth. By injuring footprints, one was able to injure the person who made them. A common remedy for wounds used in working sympathetic magic was the "powder of sympathy," a compound of iron, sulphur, and oxygen crystallized with seven molecules of water. This was not applied directly to a wound itself; but any article that might contain blood from the wound was either sprinkled with the powder or placed in a basin of water in which the powder had been dissolved and maintained at a temperate heat. Meanwhile, the wound was kept clean and cool.¹ Another advantage of sympathetic magic was that the cure might be performed on the person of the doctor instead of on that of the patient, who was thus relieved of all trouble and inconvenience, while he saw the medical man writhe in anguish before him.² Animals

¹Redgrove, op. cit., p. 48.

²Sir James George Frazer, The Golden Bough (New York: Macmillan Co., 1935), I, 83.

have often been considered to possess qualities or properties which might be useful to man, and sympathetic magic sought to communicate these properties to human beings in various ways. For this reason some people were accustomed to wear a ferret as a charm, because being very tenacious of life the ferret would make the wearer difficult to kill.¹

Since throughout the course of English history vast treasures had been unearthed from time to time, dealers in magic also came to claim the power to find treasures as one of their arts.² The method was closely akin to the still current idea that wells can be located by the use of hazel wands. Treasure seekers went about the country collecting large sums of money from all classes of people. Many of these practitioners had confidence in their art; others were conscious frauds. One so-called witch was very naive in her confession of fraud. When suspected and taken to court, she very frankly recited her charm:

My lofe in my lappe,
My penny in my purse,
You are never the better
I am never the worse.³

During the sixteenth century the rapid rise to power of many men at court suggested to the minds of many Elizabethans that unfair and unlawful practices had been resorted to. Often,

¹Ibid.

²Notestein, op. cit., p. 20.

³Ibid.

these rapid advancements of men were attributed to the powers of magic. Many situations arose in the Royal Court which led Elizabeth and her ministers to believe magic was being practiced. Upon such occasions Elizabeth called upon John Dee to quiet her uneasiness.¹ She kept him near at hand, so that he might be consulted in any crisis.

Another belief Elizabethans inherited from their ancestors was that of the powers of the dead soul. In one instance it was reported that immediately after his burial, a wizard came back for four nights, calling by name many of his former neighbors who instantly fell sick and died within three days, until few of them were left alive. The bishop suggested that the evil angel of this dead villain had perhaps reanimated his body, and he advised a Knight to have the body dug up and beheaded, and then buried again after the grave had been sprinkled with holy water. All of this was done; still the wizard came back. Finally the name of Sir William Landum, the Knight, was called. Seizing his sword, he pursued the demoniac corpse to the churchyard, and, just as it was sinking into its grave, cleft its head to the neck. There was no further trouble.²

Exorcism likewise played a large part in the superstitions of the day. It was believed that if witches could send evil spirits, they could be expelled by divine assistance.³

¹Smith, op. cit., p. 20.

²Kittredge, op. cit., p. 43.

³Notestein, op. cit., p. 73.

If, by prayer to the Devil, demons could be commanded to enter human beings, they could be driven out by prayer to God. The Bible furnished the most convincing proof in the story of the spirit entering the herd of swine and plunging them over the cliff. As pride was thought to be one of the chief characteristics of Satan,¹ the first thing to do then, in driving him out of a lunatic was to hurt his pride, to disgust him. The Elizabethans attempted to do this by using the various concoctions mentioned in Chapter I. They also tried to scare the Devil by using tremendous words imported from the Greek and Hebrew.² Pictures of the devil were spat upon, trampled underfoot, and sprinkled with foul compounds. One of the most notorious practitioners of exorcism was John Darrel, a third-rate Puritan clergyman.³ One of his patients was Katherine Wright, a seventeen year old girl, whose disease in reality called for only simple medical treatment, although he said she was possessed by evil spirits. After he had prayed over her for many hours, she accused a certain woman of having bewitched her. The woman was imprisoned, but finally freed of the charges after John Darrel had confessed to fraud.⁴

While there was evidence of the actual practice of

¹White, op. cit., p. 106.

²Ibid.

³Notestein, op. cit., p. 75.

⁴Ibid.

witchcraft during the age, the evidence cited here is an indication of superstitious belief rather than of a widespread practice of magic.

Witchcraft as purported to have been practiced during the sixteenth century constituted a hierarchy of its members as thoroughly organized as that of the Church, comparable in its local and broader body politic to the well knit Congregational Churches, presided over by a minister who conducted services and by a body of elders who managed affairs.¹ The witches' group of elders was the Coven, consisting of thirteen members. Of course, the devil, with no Miltonic splendor about him,² was the supreme source from whom power and instruction came. Witches went through their ritual with devoutness, and celebrated feast days and holidays corresponding to those of the Christians.

To gain admission to this witch cult involved complicated initiation ceremonies. The candidates had to join of their own free will, and they had to give themselves up wholly to the master. The novice, whom the devil might flatter by calling her "his bonny bird," was scratched with a sign upon certain parts of her body. This was in the way of a marriage ceremony in which, instead of a ring, an iron awl branded the

¹M. J. Moses, "Out of the Witches Cauldron," Book Review of The Witch-Cult in Western Europe by Margaret Alice Murray, New York Times, March 5, 1922.

²Ibid.

troth.¹ In addition, there were certain established gestures, like renouncing baptism by "putting one hand to the crown of the head, and the other to the sole of the foot."² Then followed injunction and instruction, and assumption of new vows, in ceremonies as distinct as the preparations for baptism itself. The persistence of these forms shows that they were not haphazard, but part of an organized cult, a covenant signed in blood.³

This hierarchy had two assemblies--the Sabbath, for all, and the Eshot, for the select. The witches rode to the meeting on horseback, or through the air on a stick which was anointed with oil procured by boiling the human body.⁴ They often assembled on dates coinciding with the Christian calendar, as on May Eve, November Eve, and Candlemas.⁵ At these assemblies there were practices intended to benefit or harm certain people. Successful practices reported to their chief were written down in a book, which became the devil's special property and was the source book for the training of beginners. At these congresses the devil conducted the services. Certain rituals were always observed, such as the burning of

¹Ibid.

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

⁴Kittredge, op. cit., p. 46.

⁵Moses, "Out of the Witches Cauldron."

black candles, and there were ranks and degrees of service as in the Masonic order.¹ The devil might appear in any form at these meetings. The following is a bit of evidence dated 1617:

Isabel Becquet went to Rocquaine Castle, the usual place where the devil kept his Sabbath; no sooner had she arrived than the devil came to her in the form of a dog, with two great horns sticking up, and with one of his paws (which seemed to her like hands) took her by the hand, and calling her by name, told her that she was welcome; then immediately the devil made her kneel down, while he himself stood up on his hind legs; then he made her express detestation to the eternal and then caused her to worship and invoke him.²

With the crowing of the cock, when all unquiet spirits who roamed the earth departed to their dismal abodes, the orgies of the Witches' Sabbath terminated.³

This almost universal belief in witchcraft in the sixteenth century grew out of the heritage of the Middle Ages and the emotional surge of the Reformation. Too, it was a natural result of the backwardness of science and rationalism already discussed.

¹Ibid.

²Ibid.

³Redgrove, op. cit., p. 37.

CHAPTER III
WITCH TRIALS OF THE SIXTEENTH AND THE EARLY
SEVENTEENTH CENTURIES

There was no regular enactment against witchcraft or sorcery in England until 1541 when the nation was convulsed with the first paroxysms of the Reformation. Two statutes were passed in this year, one against false prophecies, the other against conjuration, witchcraft, and sorcery, and at the same time, against breaking and destroying crosses.¹ According to the statutes, for the first convictions, witches who were not shown to have destroyed others by their incantations were only punished by the pillory and by imprisonment. Old offenders who were condemned to death perished by the gallows instead of the stake. The prohibition of the practice of witchcraft might have resulted from the King's jealous doubts pertaining to the succession, while the enactment against breaking crosses was obviously designed to check the ravages of the reformers, who, in England, as well as elsewhere, desired to sweep away Popery by destructive means.²

However, the judicial persecutions might be said to have started in the fifth year of Elizabeth's reign with the enactment of the statutes of 1563. Prior to this time sorcery

¹Scott, op. cit., p. 219.

²Ibid.

had been dealt with in common law courts, occasionally by the privy Council, but more frequently by the Church.¹ With Elizabeth's accession to the throne, men who had been exiled to Switzerland, returned to England and many were given prominent church positions. Since they had witnessed many witch persecutions in Switzerland, they were influential in having the law of 1563 passed.² The enactment decreed that those who "should use, practice, or exercise any witchcrafte, Enchantment, Charme or Sorcerie, whereby any person shall happen to be killed or destroyed, their concellors and Aidours, shall suffer paynes of Deathe as a Felon or Felons."³ The period was characterized by a feeling of unrest. Political intrigue was rife. The claims of Mary, Queen of Scots, to the English throne, together with Catholic and Spanish plots against Elizabeth's life, caused the Queen's ministers much distress. They lived in constant dread of the practice of witchcraft against the Queen's life.⁴

Despite the fact that the laws against the practice of witchcraft had become more severe, the Church still had most of the jurisdiction over the trials of the period, and its punishment was comparatively light. Public confession or

¹Notestein, op. cit., p. 5.

²Ibid., p. 14.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid., p. 15.

penance in one or more specifically designated churches constituted the customary penalty. However, after 1585 the state assumed practically exclusive jurisdiction, and witch trials became more numerous and punishment more severe.

King James considered his crown and life as persistently aimed at by the sworn slaves of Satan.¹ While he was reigning as King of Scotland, several had been executed for attempts to poison him by magical arts, and Francis Stewart, Earl of Bothwell, whose repeated attempts on his person had long been James' terror, had begun his course of rebellion by a consultation with the weird sisters and soothsayers. In 1597 James had written his Daemonologie in which he had shown that sorcerers were the direct enemies of the Deity.² He showed no hesitation in using his royal authority and influence to extend and enforce the laws against a crime which he both hated and feared. After ascending the English throne in 1603, Parliament had been in session but eight days when he had a new law passed, which decreed that not only the killing of people by witchcraft but also the use of evil spirits in any harmful way was to be considered a crime, and those guilty would receive the appointed punishment for such an act.³ Men and women might now be punished for witchcraft, as itself a

¹Scot, op. cit., p. 238.

²Ibid.

³Notestein, op. cit., p. 104.

crime, without necessary reference to the ulterior objects of the perpetrator.¹ After James' coming to the throne, persecutions increased rapidly.

There exist records of numerous trials of the age. No attempt will be made to catalogue all the trials; only the more notable ones will be dealt with in this study. Those selected are considered typical of the period.

From the chapbook, "the extra," brought out before the public lost interest in a sensation, we get much of our information of the witch trials of the age. A pamphlet of 1566 entitled The Examination and Confession of Certaine Wytches at Chelmsforde in the Countie of Essex before the Queenes Maiesties Judges the XXVI daye of July Anno 1566 contains the news of one of the first important trials occurring after the enactment of Elizabeth's new law. This trial, like many others, resulted from childish imagination. Elizabeth Francis, one of those accused, when questioned on the stand confessed to various "vilanies." Among other things she confessed that she had a cat which she had received, when a child, from her grandmother. She kept the cat, named Sathan, for fifteen years. During this time it gave her everything she asked for. After keeping it all this time, she turned it over to a poor old woman, Mother Waterhouse, who was examined next. She testified that she had kept the cat for a long time in a pot

¹Scott, op. cit., p. 239.

on the wall. Then she had turned it into a toad. She had used it to kill geese, hogs, and cattle belonging to her neighbors. At length she had used it to kill a neighbor whom she disliked, and finally, her own husband. When called to the stand her eighteen year old daughter confirmed her mother's testimony. The daughter had one day been refused a piece of bread and cheese by a neighbor's child, and had invoked the toad's help. The toad promised to help if she would surrender her soul to him. The girl did so. Then the toad haunted the girl in the form of a dog with horns. The child, Agnes Brown, who had refused her the bread and cheese, testified, telling a story that was identical in every detail. Mother Waterhouse was convicted and suffered the penalty of the law. Although Elizabeth Francis escaped, her reputation as a dangerous woman was fixed. Thirteen years later she was again brought to trial in the second Chelmsforde case.

The second trial of witches in Chelmsforde in 1579 was somewhat like the first.¹ It, too, was an outgrowth of childish imagination. There were tales of spirits taking animal form just as in the first trial. The young son of Elleine Smith declared that his mother kept three spirits, Great Dick in a wicker bottle, Little Dick in a leather bottle, and Willet in a wool pack. As in the 1566 trial the proof rested mainly upon confession. No evidence was excluded. The

¹Notestein, op. cit., pp. 35-37.

evidence of children from six to nine years of age was accepted. Garrulous women were given free reign to pile up silly accusations against one another. There was even admitted the evidence of a neighbor who professed to have overheard what he deemed an incriminating statement.¹ Likewise the grounds for condemnation were just as irrelevant.

The whole procedure was characteristic of the witch terror of the age. Though a person, when examined on the stand, confessed many false things, if one were true he was condemned. A doubtful answer was likely to incriminate one. Any queer mark found upon the body might be accepted as proof of one's guilt. Likewise a person who was familiar with a witch made himself liable to condemnation. Another test which was considered sure proof of guilt in cases where death was purported to have been caused by witchcraft was the bleeding of the corpse at the presence of the supposed witch.²

Many methods were used to get confessions from those accused of practicing witchcraft. Torture was resorted to in many horrible forms. The finger nails and toe nails of suspects were often pulled off with pincers; pins and needles were stuck into their bodies. In one instance of torture to get a woman to confess to having practiced witchcraft, new shoes were put on her feet and she was put in front of a hot

¹Ibid., p. 45.

²Ibid., p. 112.

fire. Finally she confessed, but when her feet cooled she repudiated her testimony.¹

Another trial resulting from the play of childish imagination, the Warbois case, occurred in the latter years of Elizabeth's reign. The accused, one Samuel, his wife, and daughter were very poor.

At a time when she was not very well, the daughter of a Mr. Throgmorton, seeing poor old Mother Samuel in a black knitted cap, took a whim that the old woman had bewitched her. Soon other children in the same family fell sick, and they, too, cried out that Mother Samuel had bewitched them. The story they concocted was very convincing. They were afflicted by spirits, familiars of Mother Samuel, whose names were Pluck, Hardname, Catch, Blue, and Three Smacks. Mother Samuel was at last worried into a confession of her guilt, by the various vexations which were practiced on her. But her husband and daughter continued to maintain their innocence. These unfortunate Samuels were condemned April 4, 1593, before Mr. Justice Fenner, and suffered the penalty of the law.²

Just as there were many witch trials resulting from imagination, likewise there were many resulting from fraud. One instance was the case of Elizabeth Barton, called the Holy Maid of Kent, who suffered from a nervous derangement which

¹Ibid., p. 77.

²Scott, op. cit., pp. 230-234.

developed into a religious mania. She professed to be in communion with the Virgin Mary and pretended to perform miracles at stated times. After investigation, she confessed her false practices.¹

Still another kind of fraud employed ventriloquism. Mildred Norrington, a girl of seventeen, used ventriloquism so skillfully that she convinced two clergymen and all of her neighbors that she was possessed.² This happened within six miles of Scot's home, and helped him to solve the mystery of the biblical witch who had called up before the frightened Saul the spirit of the dead Samuel and had made him speak. Scot attributed this biblical mystery, as well as that of Mildred Norrington, to the use of ventriloquism.³

At Northampton in 1612 Elizabeth Belcher and her brother, "Master Avery" were the disturbing agents. Mistress Belcher had suffered from an illness that baffled diagnosis. One doctor finally said that the sickness was either the result of worms or the practice of witchcraft. A list of the names of women reputed to be witches was read, and the name of Joan Brown seemed to impress the victim. From that time on she held Joan guilty. In the meantime Mastery Avery began to have fits and seizures, and to aid his sister in the accusations. Soon six women were accused. This brought panic. The

¹Notestein, op. cit., pp. 58-59.

²Ibid., p. 59.

³Ibid., p. 62.

unfortunate women began to involve others; soon fourteen were locked up at Northampton. In the trial Master Avery was the hero. He had seizures; in apparitions he saw the accused. Joan Brown and her mother, with three others, were found guilty and were condemned. They all died declaring their innocence.¹

In addition to the cases resulting from various forms of fraud, there were countless witch trials that had their origin in old family quarrels and grudges. The most famous example is that of the Belvoir witches at Lincoln in 1618-19. The trial, one of the rare instances where any of the wealthier classes were involved, concerned the wealthy Catholic Manners family of which the Earl of Rutland was the head. The effort to account for the mysterious illness of his young heir, and for that which a few years earlier had carried off the boy's elder brother, led to a charge of witchcraft against three humble women of the neighborhood. Joan Flower and her two daughters had been employed as charwomen in Belvoir Castle, the home of the Rutlands. One of the daughters was in charge of the poultry and seemed to have given satisfaction. However, some disagreement arose which involved Mother Flower and the daughter and they were both discharged. Mother Flower left "cursing them all that were the cause of the discontentment." Five years later when the illness occurred this was recalled. The gossip spread so rapidly that soon some of

¹Ibid., pp. 130-132.

her neighbors were accusing her of dealing with spirits and terrifying them all with curses and threats of revenge. As a result, the three were taken into custody. Mother Flower died before she was brought to trial, but the two daughters were tried, convicted, and were hanged.¹

Likewise, the tale of the Blakewell witches, shows how it was possible to avail oneself of superstition in order to repay a grudge. In 1607 a Scotchman became debted to his landlady at Blakewell. Since he could not pay his bill, she retained some of his clothes as security. He went to London, hid in a cellar, and when found by a watchman, professed to be dazed, and declared that he was at Blakewell at three o'clock that morning. He explained his dazed condition by the fact that he had repeated certain words which he purported to have heard his landlady and her daughter say. The man was sent to the justice at Derby where he repeated the story. The landlady and her daughter were brought to trial, they in turn implicated others, and the final results were that several women suffered death.²

On the other hand there were witch trials which resulted from the actual practice of magic. The most notorious example was the Lancashire trial of 1612. In the forest of Pendle lived two hostile families headed by Elizabeth Southernns

¹Ibid., pp. 132-134.

²Ibid., p. 137.

or "Old Demdike," and Anne Chattox. The beginnings of the case went back to 1591 when Old Demdike became a witch. Later she persuaded Anne Chattox, likewise, to yield her soul to the devil. Old Demdike then initiated her daughter, Elizabeth Device, and her grandchildren, Alison and James Device. Old Chattox had brought in her daughter, Anne Redfearn. Various neighbors joined with them. Soon there was a quarrel between the two families of Device and Chattox. The fire house of the Devices had been broken open and clothing and meat stolen. On the Sunday following, Alison Device found Anne Redfearn wearing a band coif which was part of the stolen goods and claimed it. Her father, however, was frightened and agreed to pay blackmail to Anne Chattox, which he did for some time; but later when he neglected it, he quickly died. A feud was to be expected. Then a third family became involved. Mrs. Elizabeth Nutter, wife of old Robert Nutter, who owned the land where the Redfearns lived, asked Old Chattox to do away with Young Robert Nutter in order that the property might pass to cousins. Old Chattox consented, but was dissuaded by her son-in-law. Young Nutter, however, fell foul of the Redfearn family, for he attempted to seduce Anne Redfearn, and being repulsed, swore that "if ever the Ground came to him, she should never dwell vpon his land."¹ In the midsummer of that year Old Demdike, passing by Redfearn's house, noticed

¹G. B. Harrison, The Trial of the Lancaster Witches (London: Peter Davies, 1929), pp. xlii-xliv.

Anne Redfearn and her mother making clay images of Christopher Nutter, Robert Nutter and his wife. Young Nutter soon fell sick and complained that he was bewitched; soon afterward he went away from home. He never came back "but died before Candlemas in Cheshire as he was coming homeward."¹

As the witches grew more active their doings and their meetings at Malking Tower, the home of Old Demdike, became common talk, and complaints were so insistent that in March, 1612, Mr. Robert Nowell, a Justice of the Peace, took action. He caused Old Demdike, Alison Device, old Chattox, and Anne Redfearn, to be brought before him. They admitted their guilt and began to accuse each other with such zeal that they were committed to Lancaster Castle to await their trial at the assizes. This action alarmed the other witches in the neighborhood. A special meeting was called at Malking Tower for Good Friday. After a feast of stolen mutton, the principal business considered was the slaying of Mr. Cowell who kept the Castle, the blowing up of the Castle by gunpowder to release the prisoners, and the murder of Mr. Lister of Westby for having tried to harm Jennet Preston, one of the Company. After this discussion, they parted, agreeing to meet that day twelve months when Jennet Preston promised a great feast. Mr. Lister was dead before the summer was over, and Jennet Preston accused of his murder. This meeting, however, came to the

¹Ibid., p. xlii.

ears of Mr. Nowell who was able to arrest several of those who had been present.

On the twenty-seventh of July, 1612, the assizes were held at York before Sir James Altham and Sir Edward Bromley, and Jennet Preston was condemned to death. Then the Justice passed to Lancaster for the trial of nineteen prisoners who had been apprehended by Mr. Robert Nowell.¹ As a final result, ten were sentenced to death, one condemned to prison for a year, and five were acquitted.

The women connected with the case were, with one exception, of the lower hill country folk, lax in habits and in morals. Many of them had been accused of evil living. They were illiterate, with no sense of honor. In their testimony upon the stand each incriminated the other. In this case, as in all others, the testimony of children was accepted in good faith. The most convincing proof of Elizabeth Device's guilt, for instance, was given by her nine year old daughter:

Vpon her Examination, although Master Nowel was very circumspect, and exceeding careful in dealing with her, yet she would confess nothing, vntil it pleased God to raise vp a young maid, Iennet Device, her owne daughter, about the age of nine yeares (a witnesse vnexpected) to discover all their Practices, Meetings, consultations, Murthers, Charmes, and Villainies: such, and in such sort, as I may iustly say of them as a reverend and learned Iudge of this Kingdome speaketh of the greatest Treason that ever was in this Kingdome.²

¹Ibid.

²Ibid., p. 50.

That this case was typical, too, is again seen in the evidence of Jennet Device that there were far more women involved than men:

Shee saith, that vpon Good-Friday last there was about twentie persons, whereof only two were men, to this Examinate's remembrance, at her said Grand-mother's house, called Malking Tower aforesaid, about twelve of the clock: all of which persons this Examinate's said Mother told her were Witches, and that they came to give a name to Alizon Device Spirit or Familiar, Sister to this Examinee, and now imprisoned in the Castle at Lancaster. . . .¹

That they had absolute faith in their practices may be seen from an examination of the evidence given during the trial. They believed that if any person harmed one of the group, they had only to try one of their many known methods of witchcraft, and the culprit would suffer whatever punishment they willed.

During the latter part of James' reign, there was a gradual decrease in the number of prosecutions. His faith in the veracity of many of the charges made against witches had been shaken. Too, there were many exposures of imposture. The boy of Bilston was the most famous, if not the most successful fraud of all. William Perry, a thirteen year old boy of Bilston in Staffordshire, began to have fits and to accuse a Jane Clarke whose presence invariably made him worse. He "cast out of his mouth rags, thread, straw, and crooked pins."² This was but one of many deceptive tricks he performed

¹Ibid., p. 76.

²Ibid., p. 141.

in his role for which he had been trained by a Catholic priest. However, his deception was soon found out. He was strongly affected by the first verse of St. John's Gospel. He had violent seizures when it was read in his presence. Yet he failed to recognize it when read in Greek. After that he was watched, and his somewhat elaborate preparations for his pretenses were revealed. He was persuaded to confess and to beg forgiveness of the woman whom he had accused.¹

The reign of Charles I resembled the latter years of James. There were only six executions during the period. The only notorious case was the trial of Lancashire witches in 1633, a direct outcome of the activities of Lancashire witches in 1612. Edmund Robinson, whose father, a very poor man, dwelt in Pendle Forest, the scene of the alleged witching, played truant from his cattle herding one day and went plum gathering. When he came back he had to find a plausible excuse to present to his parents. Since he had heard many stories about the witches of Malking Tower, his imagination, in search of an excuse, caught at the witch motive, and elaborated upon it. According to his tale, he had seen two grey hounds running towards him. He set out to hunt with them but the dogs would not run. He tied them to a little bush and beat them. Instead of the black greyhound "one Dickinson's wife"² stood up, and instead of the brown

¹Ibid., p. 142.

²Ibid., p. 147.

greyhound "a little boy whom this reformer knoweth not."¹ After offering the boy a silver coin not to betray her, and being refused, Dickinson's wife pulled out a bridle and put it on the little boy who turned into a white horse. She and Edmund Robinson mounted and rode to a house called Hoarstones where there was a great gathering of alleged witches enjoying a feast. They invited the boy to the feast, but he refused to eat. When questioned about the women present, he named eighteen (later he confessed he had made this list from those already suspected). The boy's story was sufficient to set off the flame of witch hatred in Lancashire. Whether the story was his own concoction, or whether it was a carefully constructed lie taught him by his father, will never be known. Young Robinson was carried from church to church in the neighborhood that he might recognize the faces of any persons he had seen at the witches' feast. The number of the accused is not known, but at least seventeen were found guilty and imprisoned. While the women were being examined for the devil's marks upon their bodies, a long accepted sign of proof, the boy was separated from his father and was made to confess that his story was an invention. Though the women were freed of all the charges, they were kept imprisoned for almost two years.²

¹Ibid.

²Ibid., pp. 147-159.

From this date forward, an element of caution marked the prosecution of witches. A disbelief in witchcraft was becoming fashionable among the upper classes. "Superstition was still a bird of prey, but its wings were being clipped."¹

¹Quoted by Notestein, op. cit., p. 163.

CHAPTER IV

SIXTEENTH CENTURY TREATISES ON WITCHCRAFT

Since nearly all sixteenth century thought was thoroughly imbued with the belief in witchcraft, it is but natural that there should exist a wealth of printed material upon the subject. Innumerable books were written upon witchcraft, revealing full belief in all the secrets of its organization, its practices, and its agents. The Daemonologie of King James, published in 1597, while he was reigning as James VI of Scotland, so thoroughly covers the subject that it might be used as a source book for a study of the full acceptance of witchcraft. James considered himself a personal enemy of Satan, and felt that it was his duty as a sovereign to warn his subjects of the evil practices of the Devil. In addition to the books which expressed a belief in witchcraft, there were many written in a sceptical vein, by people who questioned the reality of the crime. One of the outstanding works exemplifying this view is the Discoverie of Reginald Scot, a lawyer who lived in the region of many of the famous witch trials. He learned by observation to look upon all supernatural manifestations with doubt. His book is full of references which indicate a legal way of thinking, and show a thorough knowledge of theology and of the Scriptures.¹

¹Notestein, op. cit., p. 62.

Since these two books express adequately both views of the subject and since James wrote his treatise as a direct reply to Scot, this study will deal only with these two works.

When he came to the English throne in 1603, King James at once began to exert every influence to make the practice of witchcraft impossible. His greatest influence, except for the passing of new statutes which made the practice of witchcraft in any form prohibitive was exerted through his book, the Daemonologie, which was republished in England immediately after James ascended the throne. In this book, written in the form of a dialogue, Philomathes, the questioner, skilfully draws Epistemon out on every phase of the witch creed and practice. Thus a detailed discussion of the whole superstition is given.

That witches and witchcraft had always existed was one of the first points James set out to prove, citing the Scriptures as authority upon the subject:

. . . . but to proove this my first proposition, that there can be such a thing as witch-craft & witches, there are manie mo places in the Scriptures then this (as I said before.) As first in the law of God, it is plainely prohibited: But certaine it is, that the Law of God speakes nothing in vaine, neither doth it lay curses, or injoyne punishments vpon shaddowes, condemning that to be it, which is not in essence, or being as we call it. Secondlie, it is plaine, where wicked Pharaohs wise-men imitated ane number of Moses miracles, to harden the tyrants heart thereby. Thirdly, said not Samuel to Saul, that disobedience is as the sinne of Witch-craft? Fourthlie, was not Simon Magus a man of that craft?¹

¹King James the First, Daemonologie (ed. G. B. Harrison; New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., 1924), p. 5.

Likewise, he cited the Scriptures to prove that the Devil could oftentimes put himself into the likeness of a Saint:

It is plaine in the Scriptures, where it is said, that Sathan can transforme himselfe into an angell of light and as to divelles foretelling of things to come, it is true that he knowes not all things future, but yet he knowes parte.¹

Scot, on the other hand, said,

But the world is now so bewitched and overrun with this fond error, that even where a man should seeke Comfort and Counsell, there shall he bee sent (in case of necessitie) from God to the divell, and from the Physician to the Coosening witch, who will not sticke to take upon hir, by wordes to heale the lame (which was proper onelie to Christ; and to them whom he assisted with his divine power). Yea, with hir familiar E charmes she will take hir to cure the blind: though in the tenth of S. John's Gospell it will be written, that the divell cannot open the eies of the blind.²

Again using the Scriptures as his authority, James asserted that those who practiced witchcraft were committing a grave sin against the Holy Ghost. He said,

The sin against the holie Ghost hath two branches: The one a falling backe from the whole service of GOD, and a refusall of all his precepts. The other is the doing of the first with knowledge, knowing that they doe wrong against their own Conscience, and the testimonies of the holie Spirit, having once had a taste of the sweetnes of God's mercies. Now in the first of these two, all sorts of Necromancers, Enchanters or Witches ar comprehended.³

It was his opinion that witchcraft was divided into two

¹Ibid.

²Scot, op. cit., p. 3.

³James, op. cit., p. 6.

branches, one, that of Magic or Necromancie, the other, Sorcery or Witchcraft. Since every individual was credited with possessing three inherent qualities, curiosity, thirst of revenge, and greedy appetite, the Devil was thought to take advantage of these innate weaknesses to allure people into his service.¹ Through curiosity he enticed them into Magic; through the other two qualities he secured followers in Witchcraft. James maintained that the difference between witches and necromancers was "that the witches are servants onelie, and slaves to the Devill; but the Necromancers are his maisters and Commanders."² The learned folk as well as the ignorant might be enticed into his service. Having their curiosity aroused, ". . . they are at last enticed, that where lawful artes or sciences failes, to satisfie their restless mindes, even to seeke that black and unlawfull science of Magie."³ On the other hand, the unlearned clung to "his (the devil's) rudimentes, first in generall all that which is vulgarly the vertue of worde, herbe & stone: which is vused by vnlawfull charmes, without naturall causes."⁴ Scot conceded that physicians might make use of herbs and stones to procure sleep, and make one have strange dreams, but he denied

¹Ibid., p. 7.

²Ibid., p. 8.

³Ibid., p. 9.

⁴Ibid., p. 11.

vehemently that witches might use herbs and stones in order to work charms in the minds of men.¹

Just as James held that witchcraft was divided into two branches, with Magic one of its branches, so he conceived that the science of the Heavens which was thought to comprehend one division of natural magic by the Elizabethans was divided into two branches. Astronomy, the study of the course and motions of the planets; and Astrology, "the word and preaching of the starres."² He further maintained that astrology was divided into two parts:

The first by knowing thereby the powers of simples, and sicknesses, the course of the seasons and the weather. . . . The second parte is to truste so much to their (the stars) influences, as thereby to fore-tell what common-weales shall flourish or decay; what persones shall be fortunate or vnfortunate: what side shall winne in anie battell.³

A knowledge of Astrology was very essential to the Devil and his followers, since certain seasons, days, and hours, were more favorable for their activities than others, according to James' theory.⁴ Through a knowledge of Astrology, the Devil's servants purported to predict tempests, hail storms, and violent winds. They even claimed to have the ability to bring about such disturbances. While James was thoroughly convinced

¹Scot, op. cit., p. 103.

²James, op. cit., p. 13.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid., p. 17.

that the Devil could disturb the elements at will, Scot, with his knowledge of the Bible, and his usual ability to weigh the evidence and reach an intelligent decision, said:

I have read in the Scriptures that God maketh the blustering tempests and whirlwinds: and I find that it is the Lord that altogether dealeth with them, and that they blowe according to his will. But let me see anie of them (witches) all rebuke and still the sea in time of tempest, as Christ did, or raise the storme wind, as God did with his word; and I will believe them. Hath anie witch or conjurer, or anie creature entred into the treasures of the snowe; or seene the secret places of the haile, which GOD hath prepared against the daie of trouble, battell, and warre?¹

Just as the learned in an effort to satisfy their curiosity, were enticed into the Devil's services through a study of Astrology, so the unlearned, being ambitious and desirous of gain, turned to the Devil to gain repute in the only path open to them. The Devil craftily promised them the favor of the great, for, according to James:

He will oblish himselfe to teach them artes and sciences, which he may easelie doe, being so learned a knave as he is. . . . Yea, he will make his schollers to creepe in credite with Princes, by fore-telling them manie great thinges; parte true, parte false: For that is the difference betwixt Gods myracles and the Devilles, God is a Creator, what he makes appeare in miracle, it is so in effect.²

After men had enlisted in the service of the Devil, he appeared to them when they called upon him, in many forms. For example, he might appear as a dog, a cow, an ape, or a cat; or he might

¹Scot, op. cit., p. 2.

²James, op. cit., p. 21.

answer by a voice only. At these meetings he instructed them in all his arts and sciences; he showed them how to make potions of all sorts; he instructed them in methods of obtaining revenge upon their enemies; he taught them how to ride through the air at will or how to transform themselves into spirits in order to reach their destination invisible to the human eye. All his secrets were revealed to them. Of course, in order to be eligible for such favors, the initiate was required to sign the Devil's contract. Concerning this ceremony, James said,

One word onlie I omitted concerning the forme of making of this contract which is either written with the Magicians owne bloud: or else being agreed vpon (in terms of his schole-master) touches him in some parte, though preadventure no marke remaine as it doth with all Witches.¹

Should the Devil be able to perform all the works he assumed credit for, Scot maintained he would need no aid:

What an unapt instrument is a toothles, old, impotent, and unweldie woman to flie in the air? Truelie, the divell little needs such instruments to bring his purpose to passe.²

Too, Scot questioned that part of the initiation ceremony wherein the candidate was alleged to fall down and worship the Devil:

That the joining of hands with the divell, the kissing of his bare buttocks, and his scratching and biting of them, are absurd lies; everie one hoving the gift of reason may plainlie perceive: in

¹Ibid., p. 23.

²Scot, op. cit., p. 8.

so much as it is manifest unto us by the word of God that a spirit hath no flesh, bones, nor sinewes, whereof hands, buttocks, claws, teeth, and lips doo consist.¹

Many deeds were purported to be performed at the coven, the meeting of the devil and all his disciples, the witches. These meetings were usually held in remote or ruined churches. The witches reported to their Master any wicked deed they had done, or if there were those towards whom they bore malice, they appealed to him for aid. The Devil gave his servants instruction in the art of concocting potions from dead bodies, or from unbaptized infants. A vivid account of this alleged practice is found in Scot:

So if there be anie children unbaptized, or not garded with the signe of the Crosse, or orizons; then the witches may and doo catch them from their mothers sides in the night, or out of their cradles, or otherwise kill them with their ceremonies; and after buriall steale them out of their graves, and seeth them in a caldron untill their flesh be made potable. Of the thickest whereof they make ointments, thinner potion they put into flaggons, whereof whosoever drinketh, observing certeine ceremonies, immediatlíe becommeth a maister or rather a mistress in that practice and facultie.²

He hastens to assure his reader that he is only citing the belief in order to prove its absurdity, for he says, "let us then cast awaie these profane and old wives fables."³ These potions were purported to have many uses. To some of his followers

¹Ibid., p. 27.

²Ibid., p. 23.

³Ibid.

the Devil gave stones and powders that would cure or cause disease; to others he taught the art of poisoning, at which art he was a master in James' opinion: "for he is farre cunninger then man in the knowledge of all the occult properties of nature."¹ He and his consorts made pictures of clay and wax and roasted them and pierced them with pins in order to harm the individual in whose likeness they were made. To some he gave the ability of making men and women love or hate one another. He and his followers made spirits follow and trouble people in divers ways. People who were troubled by such spirits had no method of combating the evil for they could enter at any passageway through which air could circulate.² One of the most common practices of the Devil and his servants was the raising of storms and tempests already mentioned.

Hurling people into the greatest depths of despondency by making them the victim of melancholy was one of the most frequently practiced arts of the Devil, for he obtained many of his new followers while they were in this depressed state, according to James:

. . . . he prepares the way by feeding them craftely in their humour, and filling them further and further with despaire, while he finde the proper time to discover himself vnto them. At which time either vpon their walking solitarie in the fieldes, or else lying pansing in their bed, but alwaies without the company of any other, he either by a voyce, or in

¹James, op. cit., p. 44.

²Ibid., p. 39.

likenesse of a man inquires of them what troubles them: and promiseth them a suddaine and certaine way of remedie. At which time, before he proceede any further with them, he first perswades them to addict themselves to his service which being easely obtained, he then discovers what he is unto them: makes them to renounce their God and Baptisme directlie, and gives them his marke vpon some secreit place of their bodie, which remains soare vnhealed, while his next meeting with them, and thereafter ever insensible, howsoever it be nipped or pricked any, as is dailie proved, to give them a prooffe thereby that as in that doing, hee could hurte and heale them; so all their ill and well doing thereafter must depend vpon him.¹

With his usual ability to differentiate between good and bad evidence, Scot dismissed all the purported powers of the Devil's helpers, the witches, with the following statement:

If witches could doo anie such miraculous things, as these and others which are imputed to them, they might doo them againe and againe, at anie time or place, or at anie man's desire: for the divell is as strong at one time as at another, as busie by daie as by night, and readie enough to doo all mischeefe, and careth not whom he abuseth.²

In much the same manner that he found explanations for other questions concerning the witch creed James maintained that the fact that women were more frail than men and were characterized by nervousness explained the greater number of that sex in the Devil's service.

The reason is easie, for as that sexe is frailer then man is, so it is easier to be intrapped in these grosse snares of the Deville, as was over well proved to be true by the Serpents deceiving of Eva at the beginning, which makes him the homelier with that sex sensine.³

¹Ibid., pp. 32-33.

²Scot, op. cit., p. 7.

³James, op. cit., p. 43.

Likewise, James found an explanation for the fact that God permitted some people to be troubled by witches. According to James' theory, there were three kinds of people whom God would permit to be so tempted and troubled: the wicked for their horrible sins, the godly that were sleeping in any sin or weakness in faith, and those without fault so that their patience might be tried.

The best remedy to ward off the attack of witches was faith,

. . . . for neither is it able to vse anie false cure vpon a patient, except the patient first beleeve in their powers and so hazard the tinsell of his owne soule, nor yet can they have lesse power to hurte anie, nor such as contemnes their doings, so being it comes of faith, and not of anie arrogancie in themselves.¹

The faith of the godly might be strengthened by copying portions of the New Testament and wearing them about the neck as a charm. The Gospel of St. John was one of the favorites. However, Scot, in his usual fashion, ridiculed this belief: "But me thinkes, if one should hang a whole testament, or rather a bible, he might beguile the diuill terrible."² Those who grew weak in faith were in danger of doubting the existence of God. James thought there was no better way of knowing God than to study the workings of the Devil, for he says,

Doubtleslie who denyeth the power of the Devill, would likewise denie the power of God, if

¹Ibid., p. 49.

²Scot, op. cit., p. 154.

they could for shame. For since the Devill is the verie contrarie opposite to God, there can be no better way to know God, then by the contrarie; as by the ones power (though a creature) to admire the power of the great Creator: by the falsehood of the one to consider the trueth of the other, by the injustice of the one, to consider the justice of the other: and by the crueltie of the one, to consider the mercifulnesse of the other.¹

On the other hand Scot answered this belief with the following statement:

Surelie I cannot see what difference or distinction the witch mongers doo put between the knowledge and power of God and the divell; but that they think, if they praie, or rather talk to God, till their hearts ake, he never heareth them; but that the divell knowe everie thought and imagination of their minds, and both can and also will doo anything for them.²

Since James was convinced of the reality of the Devil, he maintained that devilish spirits and acts might be divided into four classes. Of these four divisions he said:

The first is, where spirites troubles some houses or solitarie places: The second where spirites followes vpon certaine persones, and at divers houres troubles them: The thirde is when they enter within them and possesse them: The fourth is these kinde of spirites that are vulgarlie the Fayre. . . . Of the three former kindes, ye hearde alreadie, how they may artificalle be made by witch-craft to trouble folke.³

It was difficult to deal with these devils because of their alleged ability to assume various forms. They might easily assume the body of the deceased; they could easily open any

¹James, op. cit., p. 54.

²Scot, op. cit., p. 258.

³James, op. cit., pp. 56-57.

window or door. If they took the form of a spirit only, they could go anywhere, for they made their entrances and exits with the air. There were only two successful remedies to rid oneself of these creatures, James was convinced:

By two meanes may onelie the remeide of such things be procured. The one is ardent prayer to God, both of these persones that are troubled with them and of that Church whereof they are. The other is purging of themselves by amendement of life from such sinnes, as have procured that extraordinarie plague.¹

While James was thoroughly convinced of the existence of devils, Scot's knowledge of the Scriptures, and his usual ability to think clearly, led him to disagree:

And if it laie in a witches power to call up a divell yet it lieth not in a witches power to worke such miracles: for God will not give his power and glorie to anie creature.²

As James was certain of the existence of devils, he was just as thoroughly convinced that one could distinguish those troubled by spirits or devils, from those merely suffering from natural illness. He described the symptoms of those afflicted by devils in the following manner:

. . . . such as the raging at holie water, their fleeing a back from Croce, their not abiding the hearing of God named, and innumerable such like vaine thinges that were alike fashious and feckles to recite.³

Since James was so thoroughly convinced of the reality

¹Ibid., p. 60.

²Scot, op. cit., p. 81.

³James, op. cit., p. 70.

of witchcraft, he believed very firmly in the punishment of witches. He was convinced that the law of God called for punishment by death, and it was his belief that the civil and municipal laws of all Christian nations should include the death penalty for the practice of witchcraft. Death by fire was the most common penalty, but it varied in different countries according to custom. Neither age, sex, nor rank, should be considered in dealing with the crime according to James' theory. Yet he believed that judges should be very careful as to whom they condemned:

. . . . for it is as great a crime (as Solomon sayeth) To condemne the innocent, as to let the Guiltie escape free, neither ought the report of any infamous person be admitted for a sufficient prooffe, which can stand of no law.¹

However, he thought that the confessions of persons proved guilty of the practice of witchcraft should be considered in accusing others, for only witches, in his opinion, had proof of the actions of other witches.² The most conclusive proof of guilt, however, was the finding of the Devil's mark, and the water test, which James explained thus:

. . . . and besides that there are two other good helpees that may be vsed for their trial: the one is the finding of their marke and the trying the insensibleness thereof. The other is their fleet-
ing on the water: for as in a secret murther, if the dead carcassee be at any time thereafter handled by the murtherer, it will gush out of bloud, as if

¹Ibid., p. 78.

²Ibid., p. 79.

blud were crying to the heaven for the revenge of the murtherer, God having appoynted that secret supernaturall signe, for tryall of that secrets vnnaturall crime, so it appeares that God hath appoynted (for a super-naturall signe of the monstrous impietie of the Witches) that the water shall refuse to receive them in her bosom, that have shaken off them the sacred Water of Baptisme and wilfullie refused the benefite thereof.¹

The Daemonologie of King James and the Discoverie of Reginald Scot are typical of the treatises written on witchcraft during the sixteenth century. The differences in these two examples in conception and treatment show further the differences in the thought of the Elizabethans and well exemplify the confusion of ideas that has already been discussed.

¹Ibid., p. 80.

CHAPTER V
ROMANTIC PLAYS ON WITCHCRAFT

There exist a number of dramas written in the later part of the sixteenth century and in the early years of the seventeenth century that reveal an intense interest on the part of the theater goers of the age in the widespread belief in the practice of witchcraft. The dramatists, whether they believed wholeheartedly in the popular superstition or not, were quick to take advantage of its interest to the average audience. The plays of the Elizabethan age are full of allusions to these popular superstitions, from the allegorical representation of the practices against Elizabeth's life to the farcical situation depicting characters disguised as wise women.¹ While the later plays that contain witch material are decidedly outgrowths of everyday life, the earlier plays use material that is fanciful, and more literary than real. But it was not until King James ascended the throne and republished his Daemonologie in London in 1603 and gave the popular belief in witchcraft the sanction of the royal opinion that the witch as such enters as a motive into the fabric of English plays.²

¹Felix Schelling, Elizabethan Drama (New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1908), I, 359.

²Ibid.

Romantic comedy abounded from the first in the wise woman and the magician. Both were transferred bodily from Italian drama.¹ Lyly's *Dipsas*, who plots against *Endimion*, and *Mother Bombie*, are representative respectively, in English drama, of the harmful and the innocent magic of this Italian drama. Lyly's treatment of the material is fanciful. His witches are homely shadows of the classical enchantress of the *Circe* category. Since Lyly wrote for the inner court circle, his plays are nearly always characterized by certain features: the story and persons are taken from classical myth or history but are treated with free invention; a love story always forms the basis of the plot; a group of eccentric and humorous personages is set off against lovers and classical deities; the interest lies largely in stylistic display. In such plays one could not expect a realistic portrayal of witchcraft in keeping with Elizabethan conceptions and beliefs.

Endimion, written about 1586, is a drama based on the classical myth of *Endimion's* sleep. Because *Endimion* is in love with *Cynthia*, *Tellus* calls on *Dipsas*, the enchantress, to make him abandon this love and be enamored of her. Since *Dipsas* is no witch in the popular sense of the word, she has to admit that this act lies beyond her power:

. . . . there is nothing that I cannot doe but that
onely which you would have me doe; and I therein I

¹Ibid., p. 386.

differ from the Gods, that I am not able to rule
harts,¹

Since she has no dealings with the devil, Dipsas does not fit the description of the witch according to King James' theory.

Likewise, contrary to James' belief, Dipsas is no real witch in that she has no familiar to aid her in her work. The doctrine of the witch creed maintained that, at the time of the making of the contract, the devil gave his servant, the witch, a familiar. The familiar might be a toad, cat, frog, or any small animal or insect. Just as Dipsas has no familiar to aid her with her work, she has no supernatural means of transportation about the country.

Dipsas is always referred to as an old enchantress, but she professes to have the ability to do many things. Not only can she alter the natural course of the planets, but she can restore youth to the aged. Boastingly she says to Tellus:

Faire Ladie, you may imagin that these horie
heares are not void of experience, nor the great
name that goeth of my cunning to bee without cause.
I can darken the Sunne by my skill, and remoove the
Moone out of her course, I can restore youth to the
aged, and make hils without bottoms,²

Although she did aid Tellus in her request that she win Endimion's love for her (Tellus), by putting Endimion to sleep for forty years, no mention is ever made of the devices used

¹Endimion, The Complete Works of John Lyly, Vol. III, ed. R. Warwick Bond (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1902), I, iv, ll. 22-24.

²Ibid., I, ii, ll. 18-22.

to bring this about. Years later when Bagoa reveals the secret of awakening Endimion, Dipsas is so enraged she turns Bagoa into an aspen tree. Here again the methods used are not disclosed. Neither is the device mentioned whereby she banishes her husband, Geron, to a desert for years. However, she repents in the end, and promises Cynthia: "Madam I renounce both substance and shadow of that most horrible and hatefull trade; vowing to the Gods continuall penance, and to your highnes obedience."¹

Lyly's fanciful treatment of his witch Dipsas is in keeping with the classical vein of his material. Following his models, he deals with his plot and his characters in an allegorical fashion.

His other play dealing with the witch, Mother Bombie, likewise follows classical models. In Mother Bombie the Terentian scheme is amplified so that the plot involves four aged and scheming fathers, their four mischievous pages, three couples of young lovers, exchanged children, a fortune teller, a horse trader, an old nurse, three fiddlers, and Mother Bombie, a "wise woman" who acts as general adviser and counsellor.² It is a clever and well planned comedy of everyday life. The treatment of the witch material in the play is comparable in many ways to that in Endimion, for just as

¹Ibid., V, iii, ll. 263-265.

²Ashley H. Thorndike, English Comedy (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1929), p. 83.

Dipsas was considered an enchantress rather than a witch, Mother Bombie is, in the main, thought of as a fortune teller. Likewise Mother Bombie acts as an independent agent, receiving no supernatural aid. She professes to be nothing but a cunning woman and uses no method of foretelling events to come, other than reading the palms of her clients:

Silena: They saie you are a witch.
 Bom. They lie, I am a cunning woman.
 Sil. Then tell me something.
 Bom. Holde vp thy hande; not so high:--
 Thy father knowes thee not,
 Thy mother bore thee not,
 Falsely bred, truely begot:
 Choice of two husbands, but never
 tyed in bondes,
 Because of love and naturall bondes.¹

Besides foretelling events by reading palms, she professes to be able to expound dreams and to locate lost articles. Lyly is following closely his model, Terence, in the fashion of having a "wise woman," a fortune teller, to add to the interest of his plot.

Too, Mother Bombie is not a real witch, according to James' theory of the witch's always seeking revenge. It was his belief that women became witches in order to revenge themselves on someone who had harmed them, or in a desire to further their own interests. Mother Bombie professes to do no harm, only good. To Dromio's and Risio's query whether she be the good woman of Rochester, she answers: "If never to doo harme, be to do good, I dare saie I am not ill. . . ."²

¹Lyly, op. cit., Mother Bombie, II, iii, ll. 86-94.

²Ibid., III, iv, l. 92.

This is Lyly's sole example of realistic comedy in the tradition of Plautus and Terence. Mother Bombie is an ordinary human being, with nothing of the supernatural about her. The atmosphere is that of everyday life, with no suggestion of the malignant powers of evil lurking about. Since Mother Bombie has had no dealings with the devil, she has no fear of the future. As she has not renounced her God and her baptism, she is in no danger of the fury of God's wrath. No suspense exists as to what will befall her in the end. The only reward she desires is the good will of her customers as may be seen in the following dialogue:

Drom. Gramercie! Mother Bombie, we are all pleased,
 if you were for your paines. (offering
 money)
 Bom. I take no monie, but good wordes. Raile not
 if I tell true; if I do not revenge.
 Farewell.¹

By the time Lyly wrote these plays, the chief witch scares of the court were over. At a time when England was becoming so strong a nation, and when Elizabeth had become idealized as Gloriana, we would expect a romantic treatment of witchcraft from a writer like Lyly.

With the accession to the throne of James I new literary fields were opened to Ben Jonson. Both Jonson and King James were interested in learning for learning's sake. In James, Jonson secured a patron who appreciated his academic style of entertainment, and almost immediately Jonson was

¹Ibid., ll. 180-183, p. 205.

drawn into the court circle. When James' wife and children came to England from Scotland they were entertained at some of the principal houses in the country. At the home of Sir Robert Spencer magnificent entertainment was provided, part of it in the form of a masque written by Ben Jonson. From this time on he became one of the chief writers of court entertainment. Since no man could have been less prone than he to woo the public taste,¹ Jonson's treatment of witchcraft was no doubt used to flatter his sovereign.

Although Jonson's Sad Shepherd, probably produced about 1615, is primarily a pastoral Robin Hood play, the artificial element characteristic of the pastoral drama is minimized; Jonson's characters and scenes are beings of a definite age and country. Instead of the usual gods and goddesses, nymphs and satyrs, the supernatural agents are a witch and her attendant Puck-Hairy. Puck-Hairy is a character who has come down to the sixteenth century as a heritage from the Roman drama. But by this time he has assumed various forms; sometimes he is a fairy, sometimes a familiar of witches, and sometimes a devil.² In Jonson's play Puck-Hairy has some power over Maudlin, but he is not considered a devil. Although the scene of the play is laid in Sherwood Forest, the witch Maudlin and her son and daughter talk Lowland Scotch, Johnson

¹A. W. Ward, A History of English Dramatic Literature (London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1899), II, 313.

²Thorndike, op. cit., pp. 41-42.

probably having had in mind the fact that Scotland was particularly a hotbed of witchcraft.¹

That Maudlin has the power to assume various shapes is evident in the first mention of her. She has transformed herself into a raven so that she may view the hunt:

Mar. Now o'er head sat a raven,
On a bough, a grown great bird, and hoarse!
Who all the while the deer was breaking up,
So croak'd and cried for it, as all the
 huntsmen,
Especially old Scathlock, thought it
 ominous;
Swore it was Mother Maudlin, whom he met
At the day-dawn, just as he raised the deer
Out of his lair:²

Next she transforms herself into the likeness of Marian, and orders Scathlock to deliver the venison to the home of Mother Maudlin. When she is unsuspectingly obeyed, she immediately appears in her own shape at her cottage and boasts to her daughter of her power:

Have I not left them in a brave confusion?
Amazed their expectation, got their venison
Troubled their mirth and meeting, made them
 doubtful
And jealous of each other, all distracted,
And, in the close, uncertain of themselves
This can your mother do, my dainty Douce!
Take any shape upon her, and delude
The senses best acquainted with their
 owners!³

Using the same devices she tortures the shepherd Aeglamour by

¹Ward, op. cit., II, 385.

²The Sad Shepherd, The Complete Plays of Ben Jonson, Vol. II, ed., Ernest Rhys (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., 1910), I, ii, p. 647.

³Ibid., II, ii, p. 649.

appearing before him in the woods in the form of Earine, his lover. He believes his Earine to be drowned, but in reality she is held captive in a tree by Maudlin and her son. When he sees Maudlin in the likeness of Earine, Aeglamour believes her to be Earine's ghost.

In accordance with the prevalent witch creed, Jonson has Maudlin work her wiles through charms. Angered when the venison is returned to Marian, the witch endeavours to make it unsavory by uttering this charm:

The spit stand still, no broches turn
Before the fire, but let it burn
Both sides and hanches, till the whole
Converted be into one coal!¹

Still enraged, she seeks to get further revenge by pronouncing a charm to afflict the cook with pain and disease:

The pain we call St. Anton's fire,
The gout, or what we can desire,
To cramp a cuke, in every limb,
Before they dine, yet, seize on him.²

That the charm worked is seen in the alarm of Friar Tuck:

Hear you how
Poor Tom the cook is taken! all his joints
Do crack, as if his limbs were tied with
points:
His whole frame slackens, and a kind of rack
Runs along the spondils of his back;
A gout or cramp now seizeth on his head,
Then falls into his feet; his knees are lead;
And he can stir his either hand no more
Than a dead stump, to his office, as before.³

¹Ibid., p. 656.

²Ibid.

³Ibid., p. 658.

According to King James' theory, the witches and their master, the Devil, had as their favorite meeting place an old abandoned house or ruined Church. Jonson creates a realistic atmosphere for his witch as Maudlin's home is quite conveniently located near such a possible meeting place:

Alken. Within a gloomy dimble she doth dwell,
 Down in a pit, o'ergrown with brakes
 briars
 Close by the ruins of a shaken abbey
 Torn with an earthquake down unto the
 ground,
 'Mongst graves and grots, near an old
 charnel-house,
 Where you shall find her sitting in her
 fourm,
 As fearful and melancholic as that
 She is about; with caterpillars' kells,
 And knotty cob-webs, rounded in with
 spells.¹

The location of the graveyard, too, was probably a factor in the selection of the site for her home, since dead mortality was one of the choice ingredients of the witches' potions. She is so near to inhabited land, however, that it is an easy matter for her to slip out to do her evil work:

Down to the drowned lands of Lincolnshire,
 To make ewes cast their lambs, swine eat their
 farrow,
 The housewives' tun not work, nor the milk churn!
 Writhe children's wrists, and suck their breath
 in sleep,
 Get vials of their blood! and where the sea
 Casts up his slimy ooze, search for a weed
 To open locks with, and to rivet charms,
 Planted about her in the wicked feat
 Of all her mischiefs, which are manifold.²

¹The Sad Shepherd, II, ii, p. 659.

²Ibid.

The fact that Jonson had Maudlin receive no final punishment for her participation in evil deeds might be an indication of his scepticism of the witch superstition. Had his treatment of the witch in this instance not been fanciful, he would have had her receive punishment. Jonson merely has Maudlin gain the disfavor of Puck-Hairy for the loss of her belt, which seems to possess magical qualities. Puck-Hairy reprimands her sharply saying:

You think your power's infinite as your malice,
And would do all your anger prompts you to;
But you must wait occasions and obey them:
Still in an egg-shell, make a straw your mast,
A cobweb all your cloth, and pass unseen,
Till you 'scaped the rocks that are about you.¹

Yet, while the very nature of the pastoral would indicate that the witch material is fanciful, Jonson, who held up classical comedy as a model to lead his contemporaries away from fantastic romance to realism and satire, would hardly be expected to present an entirely imaginative treatment of the witch.

Jonson set himself to cure the theatrical evils of the time by establishing a comic and a tragic form based on classical example. He criticized writers of the age for their violation of classical proprieties. He was a leader in dramatic practice as well as in criticism. A new type of dramatic literature, the masque, met with its fullest development in Jonson.

Herein fanciful poetry usually of eulogistic kind met

¹Ibid., III, ii, p. 664.

with rich costuming and the spirit of adventurous intrigue.¹ A dance always remained the central point of the masque--the pivot, so to speak, on which the structure turned; but in other respects it proved quite as elastic as the entertainments it largely superseded.² Jonson is the most successful, as he is the most prolific, author of masques. He preferred to seek the material for his devices in classical mythology,³ and this factor combined with his creative ability, gives us a new masque element known as the "antimasque." This anti-masque contributed something of a satyric note to the work and novelty in contrast between gorgeous splendour, and the contorted forms of "anticks."⁴ The Masque of Queenes belongs to this classification.

Acted before Queen Anne and her court February 2, 1609, The Masque of Queenes presents an atmosphere quite in keeping with the popular witch superstition. Jonson, who repudiated and satirized the followers of alchemy and astrology, hesitated to attack the more terrible superstition of witchcraft, but represents his witches in The Masque of Queenes with a circumstantial attention to every coarse and

¹Allardyce Nicoll, British Drama (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1925), p. 211.

²Ward, op. cit., II, 387.

³Ibid., p. 390.

⁴Nicoll, op. cit., p. 211.

unseemly detail and a display of erudition, classic and modern, which must have delighted the grossness and pedantry alike of the royal author of a treatise on demonology.¹ His hags are repulsively realistic. They are described as issuing from Hell. Some with rats on their heads, some with ointment pots at their girdles; carrying an assortment of noise making instruments, they enter to the strains of weird music. In accordance with the popular belief in the magical powers of odd numbers, there were eleven witches in the company. This weird group begin to chant, calling for their Dame to quickly anoint herself with the magic potion and ride into their presence. They entertain themselves while waiting for her with calling out their charms.

These charms depict the horrors of the alleged activities of the witches. Every loathsome ingredient of their disgusting potions is named in their weird incantations. These incantations cover many of their purported activities. One gets an idea of their methods of transportation from this charm:

The weather is fair, the wind is good,
Up, Dame, on your horse of wood: [broomstick]
Or else tuck up your grey frock,
And saddle your goat, or your green cock,
And make his bridle a bottom of thrid,
To roll up how many miles you have rid.
Quickly come away;
For we all stay.²

¹Schelling, op. cit., I, 359.

²The Masque of Queenes, The Works of Ben Jonson, ed. Francis Cunningham (London: Chatts and Windus, 1910), p. 47.

Not only do their charms include mention of their methods of transportation; they also mention the many animals that serve them as familiars. Among these are the owl, bat, cat, ant, mole, frog, and dog.¹ In addition, from their charms we may picture many of the acts they perform. One of the favorites of purported witches was that of image magic whereby they caused their enemies to perish:

With pictures full of wax and of wool:
Their livers I stick with needles quick;
There lacks but the blood, to make up
the flood.²

Amidst the incantations admirable for their grotesque and gruesome horror and suggestiveness, the Dame enters, bare armed, barefooted, her frock tucked, her hair knotted, carrying in her hand a torch made of a dead man's arm, lighted and girded with a snake.³ Her first words to her co-workers in evil show that the meeting of the company is quite realistic in that they are gathered to seek revenge.

Dame. Well done, my Hags! and come we fraught
with spite,
To overthrow the glory of this night?
Holds our great purpose?⁴

The roll is called, the witches responding to such names as

¹Ibid.

²Ibid.

³Ibid., p. 48.

⁴Ibid.

Credulity, Falsehood, Malice,¹ and other abstractions suggestive of the old mediaeval morality plays, and Renaissance literature of The Faerie Queene category. As each name is called, the subject reports to her Dame how she has been spending her time. James believed these actions were recorded by the Devil in a big book which he used afterwards in instructing novices. As the Dame calls for their reports, the hags each tell of different accomplishments. The first hag says:

I have been all day looking after
A raven feeding upon a quarter;
And soon as she turned her beak to the south
I snatched this morsel out of her mouth²

Another witch has collected other ingredients to go with the morsel of the first in concocting their potions:

I have been gathering wolves' hairs,
The mad dog's foam, and the adder's ears;
The spurning of a dead-man's eyes,
And all since the morning star did rise.³

A potion was believed to be more powerful if it were drunk from a skull. This item had been secured by another member of this weird company:

And I ha' been choosing out this skull
From charnel-houses that were full;
From private grots and public pits;
And frightened a sexton out of his wits.⁴

¹Ibid., pp. 48-49.

²Ibid., p. 50.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

Still another reports that she has sucked a child's breath while he slept; another has secured hairs and bits of clothing from a hanged murderer. In fact all the queer ingredients of their various concoctions have been collected, including the body of a young baby:

I had a dagger: what did I with that?
Killed an infant to have his fat.
A piper it got, at a church-ale,
I bade him again blow wind i' the tail.¹

When all the hags have made their reports, the Dame reviews their past accomplishments. They have performed many deeds purported to be part of the witch practice. They have raised tempests and storms, changed the course of the planets, blighted crops, caused fogs to darken all the country side. At the conclusion of the Dame's review, the weird magical music is again heard, and the witches take up their dancing. With the sounding of a loud blast, the witches, as well as the scene, vanish. This scene is replaced by the House of Fame, and the more serious masque material.

In his treatment of the witch material Jonson's chief emphasis was not on witches as such but merely on witches as fantastic creatures suitable for the masque. The witch material admirably lent itself to the tableau effect of the masque. The weird costuming, together with the singing and dancing produced a spectacle which was the center of interest. It has already been pointed out that Jonson was probably

¹Ibid., p. 51.

quite sceptical of witches as such, and that he considered the frauds of the alchemist as much more evil than the practices of alleged witches. Considering Jonson's scepticism, it is believed that he did not use witch material for realistic purposes, but introduced witches for dramatic effect. They are always to be taken as fanciful and imaginative, at least from Jonson's point of view.

CHAPTER VI

REALISTIC PLAYS ON WITCHCRAFT

While during the early years of Elizabeth's reign, the fear of witches was great, due in part to many alleged attempts on the Queen's life, the latter part of her rule was marked by a period of national enthusiasm during which the fear of witches was considerably abated. But as has been mentioned, with the accession of King James to the English throne and with the reprinting of his Daemonologie in London, the witch craze was revived. Too, new laws were passed making punishment for witchcraft more severe. Thus the doctrine of witchcraft was established by law and by fashion. Since the dramatists could now base dramatic treatment of witches and their practices upon legislative and royal discrimination against the crime, they were quick to seize the opportunity of dealing with material that was of vital interest to the peasant as well as to the pedant. Practically all the playwrights of the age wrote at least one play dealing in some way with witches. Shakespeare's Macbeth, Middleton's The Witch, Heywood's Wise Woman of Hogsdon, Dekker, Ford, and Rowley's The Witch of Edmonton, and Heywood and Brome's The Late Lancashire Witches are extant plays dealing with the witch as such. In addition we

have the names of two plays that have been lost, The Witch of Islington (acted in 1597) and The Witch Traveller (licensed in 1623).¹ Undoubtedly there must have been other plays on the theme that have completely disappeared. In the extant plays it is difficult to distinguish between the dramatists' own beliefs and their borrowing from popular superstition for the sake of poetic effect.²

Though the dramatists all made use of the witch idea, each used it in his own individual manner, the one that served his purpose to the best advantage. The chief purpose of Shakespeare in depicting the weird sisters in Macbeth is to heighten the dark, gloomy atmosphere of his play. Their wild and withered appearance amid the thunder, lightning, and rain adds to the feeling of horror that pervades the play. The melancholy atmosphere is emphasized by every action of the witches. Night and tempest hold sway throughout the drama.

The witches in Macbeth and in Middleton's The Witch have caused much controversy because of their similarity in many details. But since Macbeth is believed to have been written and acted by 1606, and while the exact date of The Witch is not known, it is thought that it was not written

¹Ward, op. cit., II, 576.

²Wilhelm Creizenach, The English Drama in the Age of Shakespeare (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1916), p. 185.

until at least 1610, it is much more plausible to think that Middleton modelled his witches after the fashion of Shakespeare's. However, many critics think that the Hecate scenes in Macbeth are the work of Middleton. They base their opinions on the fact that of the two songs which, according to the stage directions, were to be sung during the presentation (III, v and IV, i), only the first line of each is given, songs beginning with the same lines are set out in full in Middleton's play. Critics believe these songs were probably by Middleton, and were interpolated by actors in a stage version of Macbeth after its original production. On the other hand, Shakespeare would have hesitated to imitate a contemporary much younger in experience than he, when he had all the witch motive necessary in the source of his plot. In addition he was well aware of the superstitions of his day, and he was probably familiar with Scot's Discoverie (1584) from which he could get all the material necessary.

Consequently, the witches in Macbeth are just such creatures as Scot described. They are not supernatural beings; they are old women, poor and ragged, skinny and hideous, full of vulgar spite, occupied in killing their neighbors' swine or revenging themselves on sailors' wives who have refused them chestnuts.¹ They have received from evil spirits certain supernatural powers. Among their

¹A. C. Bradley, Shakespearean Tragedy (London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1920), p. 341.

accomplishments are listed many horrible actions. They tell of a bewitched sailor driven tempest tost for nine times nine weary weeks, and never visited by sleep, night or day; of the drop of poisonous foam that forms on the moon, and, falling to the earth, is collected for pernicious ends; of the sweltering venom of the toad; of the finger of the babe killed at birth by its own mother; of the tricklings of the blood from the hanged murderer's gibbet.¹ With our first view of the witches, we know at once that these are no ordinary beings. After setting the hour of their next meeting

When the hurly burly's done,
When the battle's lost and won,

the weird sisters call on their familiars, Graymalkin and Paddock, and disappear.² At their next meeting, we learn more of their activities. It was the practice of witches to destroy cattle of their neighbors, but these witches seem to have been especially suspected of malice toward swine, since Shakespeare has one of them say that she has been killing swine.³ In accordance with the belief that witches can transform themselves into animal form, another says:

¹Ibid., p. 337.

²Macbeth, ed. E. K. Chambers (New York: D. C. Heath and Co., 1915), I, i, l. 4.

³Ibid., iii, l. 2.

But in a sieve I'll thither sail,
And like a rat without a tail,
I'll do, I'll do, I'll do.¹

A third witch has acquired a pilot's thumb, "wreck'd as homeward he did come,"² to be used as a charm. When they hear the drums sounding, and know that Macbeth is coming, Shakespeare, knowing the popular conception of the power of odd numbers, has the hags wind up their charm with odd numbers:

Thrice to thine and thrice to mine
And thrice again, to make up nine.
Peace! the charms wound up.³

With Macbeth's appearance they make their foul prophecies and disappear from the scene.

While the witches are able to perform many vile deeds, they owe allegiance to Hecate, their mistress, who is a superior devil. She is the embodiment of all evil, the queen of all hags. Whether Hecate owes her being to Shakespeare, or to Middleton in a later revision of the play, she fits Scot's conception of the witch of popular belief. From the moment of our first meeting with her, we are made aware of the fact that she is the mistress of the other witches. In one breath she reprimands them for not consulting her in their prophetic words to Macbeth; in another she gives them

¹Ibid., ll. 8-11.

²Ibid., l. 29.

³Ibid., l. 35.

new orders in regard to Macbeth's coming in the morning to know his destiny. For her part she has an important task to perform:

I am for the air; this night I'll spend
Unto a dismal and a fatal end:
Great business must be wrought ere noon:
Upon the corner of the moon
There hangs a vaporous drop profound;
I'll catch it ere it comes to ground:
And that distill'd by magic sleights
Shall raise such artificial sprites
As by the strength of their illusion
Shall draw him on to his confusion:¹

Her ominous words finished, she departs when her spirit calls:

Hark! I am call'd; my little spirit see,
Sits in a foggy cloud, and stays for me.²

When next we see the witches at the meeting Hecate mentioned to her beldams, Shakespeare portrays them in conformance with common opinion and tradition. He has selected all the infernal ceremonies and practices of the witch horror and used them in such a manner as to depict the supreme witch performance. The place of meeting is in a cavern. Thunder is heard without; within the bubbling of the cauldron is heard as the witches gather to carry out their vile performances. Usually spirits were purported to converse with witches in the form of a cat, so Shakespeare has the first witch to say "Thrice the brinded cat hath mew'd."³ Into the boiling cauldron went

¹Ibid., III, vi, ll. 20-29.

²Ibid., ll. 34-35.

³Ibid., IV, i, l. 1.

every gruesome and horrible ingredient as they brewed their pernicious brew poison'd entrails, the venomous toad (always considered as being accessory to witchcraft) "boil thou first i' in charm'd pot, eye of newt, toe of frog, liver of blaspheming Jew, gall of goat, slips of yew silver'd in the moon's eclipse,"¹ the finger of a baby strangled at birth. All these horrible things were added to

Make the gruel thick and slab:
Add thereto a tiger's chaudron
For the ingredients of our cauldron.²

According to popular tradition, unusual events were heralded by pain in some part of the body. Shakespeare has one of the hags foresee the coming of Macbeth through the pricking of her thumbs:

By the pricking of my thumbs,
Something wicked this way comes.
Open locks,
Whoever knocks.³

When Macbeth asks the hags what they are doing, they answer, "a deed without a name."⁴ That Macbeth is acquainted with the purported deeds of witches is seen in his query:

Though you untie the winds and let them
fight
Against the churches: though the yeasty
waves

¹Ibid., ll. 25-28.

²Ibid., ll. 32-34.

³Ibid., ll. 44-47.

⁴Ibid., l. 49.

To what I ask you.

pour more gruesome ingredients into the seething cauldron:

First Witch. Pour in sow's blood, that hath
eaten
Her nine farrow; grease that's
sweaten
From the murderer's gibbet throw
Into the flame.

All. Come, high or low,
Thyself and office deftly show.²

popular belief of the time.³ However, Shakespeare's treatment

¹Ibid., 11. 52-61.

²Ibid., 11. 62-67.

³Schelling, op. cit., I, 360.

of the material in a realistic manner tinged with a romantic vein, may have been an indication that a movement, quite prevalent during the Restoration, had already begun in the Jacobean age. The musical idea in Macbeth begun by Middleton gained impetus until by the Restoration period the play became an opera rather than a tragedy. Pepys saw it eight times between 1664 and 1668. During the Restoration the text of the play was so mutilated and altered that the original idea was all that was recognizable.

Middleton's The Witch, already mentioned because of the similarity to Macbeth in its witch treatment, is likewise a drama based upon the popular witch superstition. Middleton uses the material contained in Scot's Discoverie in many of his witch scenes. His hags, in a less dramatic manner than those of Shakespeare, perform all the vile and loathsome deeds usually attributed to such creatures. They are villainous in their intent, engaging in their vile work for the pure love of evil. They employ familiars named after such spirits in the Discoverie. Hecate, the chief witch, resembling the witch of the same name in Macbeth, and her servants brew their potions in a manner reminiscent of Macbeth. They use the potions to work havoc among the characters in the drama. These hags, as others have done, boil an unbaptized infant in preparing a potion to be used for transportation through the air. While discussing their flight, they say:

When hundred leagues in air, we feast and sing,
Dance, kiss and coll, use everything:

What young man can we wish to pleasure us,
 But we enjoy him in an incubus?
 Thou know'st it, Stadlin?¹

Still another belief these witches portray is that of image magic. In order to get revenge on the farmer and his wife, Hecate has her beldams prepare a waxen image to stick full of magic needles. This will bring about slow death. In addition they prepare a picture of the farmer and his wife, for Hecate wants to be assured that they shall receive their just rewards, since, according to her,

They denied me often flour, barm, and milk
 Goose-grease and tar, when I ne'er hurt their churn-
 ings,
 Their brew-locks, nor their batches, nor forespoke
 Any of their breedings. Now I'll be meet with em:
 Seven of their young pigs I've bewitched already,
 Of the last litter;²

Among the other deeds of which she boasts are making the farmer's ducks, goslings, and hog lame, and sending snakes to milk the farmer's cows so that the milk maids get no milk.

Although Hecate professes to be able to perform many deeds, when Sebastian comes to seek her aid in separating Isabella and Antonio, she informs him that this is not within her power:

No, time must do't: we cannot disjoin
 wedlock;
 'Tis of Heaven's fastening. Well may we
 raise jars,

¹The Witch, The Works of Thomas Middleton, Vol. III, ed. Alexander Dyce (London: Edward Lumley, 1840), I, ii, p. 260.

²Ibid., p. 262.

Jealousies, strifes, and heart-burning disagree-
 ments,
 Like a thick scurf o'er life, as did our master
 Upon that patient miracle; but the work itself
 Our power cannot disjoint.¹

Almachildes is another who comes to Hecate and her hags for aid. His request for a love charm to win the love of Amoretta is granted in the form of a necklace which produces love in the heart of the one wearing it. When she has granted his request, Hecate entertains Almachildes with a feast she secures by conjuration. Later in the drama, the Duchess appeals to Hecate to murder Almachildes to get him out of her way. The Duchess impatiently demands something that will work more quickly, when Hecate tells her that the deed can be done within a month through the use of pictures. However, she shows doubt when the witch says that she has the means to do the deed that very night. But Hecate answers:

. . . . Can you doubt me then, daughter
 That can make mountains tremble, miles of woods
 walk,
 Whole earth's foundations bellow, and the spirits
 Of the entombed to burst out from their marbles,
 Nay, draw yond moon to my involved designs?²

While Middleton's treatment is very realistic, embodying every superstition of the witch creed, he leaves his witches going about their wicked work at the end of the play. There is no witch persecution, no witch trial. The fact that, though many villainous deeds have been performed, everyone's

¹Ibid., p. 267.

²Ibid., V, ii, pp. 187-188.

affairs are straightened out in the end, may explain why Middleton has his witches suffer no severe punishment.

On the other hand, Heywood, in The Wise Woman of Hogsdon, depicts the witch in a different light. While the date of production is unknown, all information available would place it early in the seventeenth century, probably about 1615. Heywood portrays a fraudulent character, who professes to be a fortune teller. She is evidently depicted in such a fashion to disclose the fraud of the usual fortune teller, enchantress or witch. The wise woman admits that she deals in all sorts of deceits; furthermore, she is sceptical of all who profess to be skilled in witchcraft. To Luce, young Chartley's first love, she boasts:

Ay, I warrant you, I think I can see as far into a mill-stone as another. You have heard of Mother Nottingham, who for her time was prettily well skilled in casting of words; and after her, Mother Bomby, and then there is one Hatfield in Pepper Alley, he doth pretty well for a thing that's lost. There's another in Coleharbour, that's skilled in the planets. Mother Surton, in Golden Lane is for fore-speaking; Mother Phillips, of the Bankside, for the weakness of the back; and then there's a very reverend matron on Clerkenwell Green, good at many things. Mistress Mary on the Bankside is for 'recting a figure; and one (what do you call her?) in Westminster, that practiseth the book and the key, and the sieve and the shears: and all do well according to their talent. For myself, let the world speak.¹

Among the deeds which she purports to have performed

¹The Wise Woman of Hogsdon, Thomas Heywood, ed. Havelock Ellis (London: Vizetelly and Co., 1888), II, i, p. 266.

are fortune telling, diagnosing disease, finding lost articles, making love matches and conjuring up spirits. Yet practically the only thing she does do is run a lodging house of questionable reputation. She manages, too, through her scheming to marry the different characters to the people Luce suggests.

That Heywood could have been ridiculing all who believed in witches may be seen in this passage:

Y. Chart. Come, Haringfield, now we have been drinking of Mother Red-Cap's ale, let us now go make some sport with the wise-woman.

Har. We shall be thought very wise men of all such as shall see us go in to the wise woman's.¹

Again when Luce asks her if she be as wise as she pretends, the woman answers: "Why tell the leaves, for to be ignorant and seem ignorant, what greater folly."²

The scepticism Heywood displays in his treatment of the witch material is probably due to the nature of the material itself. He is merely depicting the humorous story of a fraud, who professes to deal in supernatural mysteries.

The Witch of Edmonton written by Dekker, Ford, and Rowley, is based upon the story of the trial and execution of Mother Sawyer of Islington in 1621. For their source they used the account of the trial in a pamphlet written by Henry

¹Ibid., p. 268.

²Ibid., III, i, p. 281.

Goodcole. Elizabeth Sawyer, a poor, old ugly, hunched back hag, makes a pact with the Devil in order to get revenge on the people who have been tormenting her. After she signs the covenant with Satan, her actions become villainous. Although the drama was written at a period when the witch craze was at its height, and the authors' standpoint throughout implies a belief in sorcery, they yet show a certain sympathy in their delineation of the old women, without a friend in the world, driven away with curses and blows by a rough peasant on whose land she is picking up sticks. When to crown all, she is made game of by cruel boys, she ends by wishing that she were really a witch in order to revenge herself on her tormenters. At that instant the devil appears to her in the form of a black dog, and she makes a pact with him.

After Mother Sawyer has made the contract with the devil and sealed it in blood, she calls on him to kill old Banks for her. He answers:

Fool,
 Though we have power, know it is circumscribed
 And tied in limits: though he be curst to thee,
 Yet of himself he's loving to the world,
 And charitable to the poor, now men that,
 As he, love goodness, though in smallest measure,
 Live without compass of our reach.

His cattle
 And corn I'll kill and mildew; but his life--
 Until I take him, as I late found thee,
 Cursing and swearing--I've no power to touch.¹

¹The Witch of Edmonton, ed. Thomas Rhys (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, n.d.), II, i, p. 414.

The devil then proceeds with his instruction of Mother Sawyer. He tells her that she must put her trust in him and him only when she wishes to do harm to others. If she wishes to do evil to corn, man, or beast, he instructs her:

Turn thy back against the sun,
And mumble this short orison:
"If thou to death or shame pursue 'em,
Sanctibicetur nomen twum."¹

After the old woman is fully prepared for her evil tasks, she and her master perform many foul deeds. They trick Cuddy Banks into thinking Katherine loves him, when a spirit appears to him in her form. They play still another trick on him by keeping the fiddle from making a sound as the fiddlers try to play for the morris-dance in which Cuddy wishes to take part. These comparatively harmless tricks are followed by many evil deeds. The dog reports that he has struck the horse lame as she bid him do; he has nipped the sucking child; he has kept the butter from coming; and he has driven Ann Ratcliffe, the wife of one of Mother Sawyer's enemies, mad.

A test for witchcraft, according to the popular superstition, was the burning of thatch from the roof of the house of an alleged witch. The witch would make her appearance to protest. This test was used to prove Mother Sawyer guilty of witchcraft. Dekker and his collaborators have some countrymen pluck a handful of thatch from the old woman's roof and

¹Ibid., p. 414.

set fire to it. When she appears, cursing them, one of the countrymen says, "This thatch is as good as a jury to prove she is a witch."¹ When the old woman is led to her execution, she rails and curses her persecutors. When Carter accuses her of having dealings with the devil, she answers:

Who doubts it? but is every devil mine?
 Would I had one now whom I might command
 To tear you all in pieces? Tom would have
 done't
 Before he left me.²

The authors, as did many other playwrights of the period, take advantage of public interest to present a drama dealing with the witch in a realistic manner. The atmosphere they create with their witch material is not one of weirdness as is that of Macbeth, but is one of everyday life tinged with intrigue and the desire for revenge.

In just the same manner Heywood and Brome took advantage of a sensation to portray a realistic view of witches in The Late Lancashire Witches. The play is based on the famous witch trials of the same name of 1633 in which seventeen women were convicted. The drama is an almost exact reproduction of the case, and since it was produced by 1634, it is believed the authors set to work immediately to capitalize on the sensation caused by such a notorious scandal. The trial, one of the most famous of all times, and one of the

¹Ibid., V, i, p. 443.

²Ibid., V, ii, p. 469.

six occurring during the reign of Charles I, was so notorious and of such vital interest to the public, that even during the Restoration period Shadwell used it in a play based on the witch superstition. There would be no way of ascertaining whether the authors believed wholeheartedly in the witch superstition or whether they were merely presenting something to meet public demand. At least there is nothing to indicate that they did not believe in it. It would be needless to point out examples in the play that represent the popular belief; it is a dramatic representation of the belief itself. From the opening scenes to the close of the drama, one is made aware that witches really exist. If one had no knowledge of the witch superstition whatsoever, he would be able to formulate a clear cut summary of the doctrine of witchcraft by reading The Late Lancashire Witches.

In the plays already considered the witch material served to complicate the plot, and add to the intrigue. In this drama, every action of the plot results from the practice of witchcraft. The first evidence of evil work is seen in the Seely household. The members of this family have been so bewitched that the son rules the father, the daughter rules the mother, and the servants are obeyed instead of obeying. Early in the play a discussion among the witches reveals that it is they who have brought about the mischief:

Meg. Now let us laugh to think upon
 The feat which we have so lately done,
 In the distraction we have set
 In Seelyes house; which shall beget

Wonder and sorrow 'mongst our foes,
Whilst we make laughter of their woes.¹

Likewise from their conversation, it is learned that the witches intend to make sport of the Seely servants, Parnell and Lawrence:

Gil. But to be short,
The wedding must bring on the sport
Betwixt the hare-brayn'd man and mayd,
Master and dame that over-sway'd.²

It was an old article of the witch belief that witches could bring about sexual impotence. That the witches, through their evil work, have worked havoc with the wedding of the servants is seen in Lawrence's alarm:

Law.: Keepe her of o' me, and I shan teln
yeau, and she be by I am no body: But keep her
off and search me, let me be searcht as never witch
was searcht, and finde ony thing mor or lasse upo
me than a sufficient mon shold have, and let me be
honckt by't.³

Because Parnell rails at him, one of the men to whom he has appealed says, "And so is she bewicht too into this immodesty."⁴

An amusing episode in the play is that of Robin, the servant of Mr. Generous, who is sent to Lancaster for wine.

¹The Late Lancashire Witches, The Dramatic Works of Heywood and Brome (London: John Pearson, 1874), Vol. IV, II, i, p. 188.

²Ibid.

³Ibid., IV, i, p. 233.

⁴Ibid.

On the journey he sees his Mall who deals in witchcraft. She demonstrates her art to Robin. She causes a broom to sweep without assistance; to his amazement she calls a pail to come to her, which it does from across the room. When Robin tells her he must make the long journey for wine, she immediately causes a horse to appear before them. When Robin is too astonished to mount, she says:

Yours was too short to carrie double such a journey. Get up, I say, you shall have your owne againe i'th morning.¹

They mount, ride after the wine, secure it, and are back in an incredibly short time.

Another common belief of the period, that witches often transformed themselves into the shape of cats, is used by Heywood and Brome in the play. Mr. Generous' miller, after suffering much torment by the visitation of innumerable cats at night, can endure the punishment no longer. He tells Mr. Generous that he will have to get a new miller. As just the opportune moment a Soldier volunteers to take the miller's place saying,

I was a Miller myselfe before I was a souldier. What one of my own trade should be so poorely spirited frightened with cats?

Sir trust me with the mill that he forsakes.
Here is a blade that hangs upon this belt
That spight of all these Rats, Cats, Wezells, Witches
Or Dogges, or Divels, shall so coniure them
I'le quiet my possession.²

¹Ibid., II, i, p. 202.

²Ibid., p. 195.

A pathetic situation is that of Mr. Generous, an honest, upright citizen whose wife has become a witch. He is not aware of the fact for some time, as she rides one of his prize horses at night to attend her meetings, but is always back in bed by morning. When he finds that she has been riding his horse without his permission, he is jealous of her and tells Robin to see that she rides no more at night. When Robin refuses her the horse the next time she asks for it, angered she bridles Robin, says this charm

Horse, horse, see thou be,
And where I point thee carry me¹

and rides him to a feast the witches obtained by conjuring away the wedding feast prepared for Parnell and Lawrence. When they return the next morning, Robin is able to convince Mr. Generous that his wife is a witch. He is dismayed when she informs him she has made a contract with the Devil, and has promised him her soul. Mr. Generous tells her:

Ten thousand times better thy
Body had bin promis'd to the Stake, I
and mine too,
Then such a compact ever had bin made, oh--²

He believes that she is going to repent, but he knows that, once having signed the Devil's contract, there is no hope of her release.

Still another element that enters into the drama directly from the trial is that of the boy, playing hooky from

¹Ibid., III, i, p. 211.

²Ibid., p. 277.

school, who slips off into the woods to gather Bullies. When he is about to leave the woods, along come some greyhounds, and he goes hunting with them. However, after a time the hounds do not hunt as he desires them to, and when he starts to beat them, before his astonished eyes one becomes a woman, the other a little boy. The truant boy exclaims:

Now blesse me heaven, one of the Greyhounds
turn'd into a woman, the other into a boy. The lad
I never saw before, but her I know well; it is my
gammer Dickison.¹

Angered, Goody Dickison turns the boy (who was a greyhound) into a white horse, and mounting, she takes the other boy up and rides away to the witches' feast. This feast, the wedding feast of Parnell and Lawrence already mentioned, was secured by witchcraft. In addition to the wedding feast, the witches secure other food:

Mrs. Gener. This meat is tedious, now some Farie,
Fetch what belongs unto the Dairie.

Mal. Thats Butter, Milk, Whey, Curds and Cheese,
Wee nothing by the bargaine lesse.

All. Ha, ha, ha.

Goody Dickison. Boy, there's meat for you.²

Later in the evening when the witches become engrossed with their singing and dancing, the boy makes his escape. It is his evidence, chiefly, as to the names of the women present and their actions, that leads to their trial and conviction.

¹Ibid., II, i, p. 199.

²Ibid., III, i, p. 220.

Another bit of evidence which led to their conviction was the hand of Mrs. Generous, cut off by the Soldier when the witches attempted to abuse him in the shape of an infinite number of cats. According to the witch superstition, any severed member returned to its natural form, and when Mr. Generous views the hand, he knows that his wife was one of the company of cats. However, as much as it grieves him, he will see that justice is done. To his wife he says:

My heart hath bled more for thy curst relapse
 Than drops hath issu'd from thy wounded arme.
 But wherefore should I preach to one past hope?
 Or where the divell himselfe claimes right in all,
 Seeke the least part or interest. Leave your Bed,
 Vp, make you ready; I must deliver you
 Into the hand of Iustice.¹

All articles of the witch belief may be found in the play. One can not read the play without almost becoming convinced, against his will, that witches did exist and went about their foul business. Whether or not the authors believed in the reality of the crime is of no consequence. Their witches are endowed with the witch characteristics of all ages. One has only to read the play to view the whole panorama of the witch superstition.

¹Ibid., V, i, pp. 251-252.

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