

Cotton Mather, Robert Calef



THE
WITCHCRAFT
DELUSION
IN NEW
ENGLAND

(Vol. 1-3)

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The Witchcraft Delusion in New England (Vol. 1-3)

**Its Rise, Progress, and Termination (Complete
Edition)**

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PREFATORY.

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THE Object in giving to the Public this new Edition of the *Wonders of the Invisible World*, is mainly to preserve an accurate Reprint of that *wonderful* Book. At the same Time it is intended to show that its Author has unjustly been singled out and held up to everlasting Scorn, as though he had been the Instigator of the whole Mischief; that from his high Standing socially he was more prominent than any other Man, and that this occasioned his being especially held responsible is clearly true. His ready Pen also largely contributed to place him in the front Rank of those whom that woeful Delusion led captive; he having written more largely upon the Subject than any other.

The first Edition of the *Wonders of the Invisible World* was published in Boston early in the Year 1693, at which Time *Witches* had begun to grow scarce; in other Words, Prosecutions had nearly ceased, and People were seriously looking about themselves, and anxiously inquiring what they had been about? The serious Inquirers were those (though few in Number) who had from the Beginning had Doubts as to the Reality of Witchcraft. When this Class began to reason, their Strength began to concentrate, and in due Time it put an End to the Horrors which had so strongly tended to the Ruin of the whole Community. Until this Reaction was brought about, no Person was for a Moment safe. Notwithstanding this frightful State of Things was thus brought to a Stand, a large Portion of the People

retained all their Faith in the Reality of Witchcraft, and many of them exclaimed in Despair, that "the Kingdom of Satan had prevailed," and that they were a "God-forsaken People." In this latter Class was the Author of the *Wonders of the Invisible World*. He never wavered in his Faith to the very End, because his Conviction that he had espoused the Truth was stronger than any Argument which could be brought against it. Some others of the Ministers, and one or two of the Judges were equally sanguine in their own Righteousness. And yet we find the following cautious Piece of Advice given by "several Ministers to his Excellency and the Honourable Council":—"We judge that in the Prosecution of these, and all such Witchcrafts, there is Need of a very critical and exquisite Caution, lest by too much Credulity for Things received only upon the Devil's Authority, there be a Door opened for a long Train of miserable Consequences, and Satan get an Advantage over us, for we should not be ignorant of his Devices." For all this it is not easy to discover the Practice of any of that "exquisite Caution" in the Proceedings against those accused.

No sooner was the Edition of the *Wonders* printed in Boston, than Copies were sent to London and reprinted there with all Dispatch, as will be seen by the "*Imprimatur*" in the Front of the Work. Mr. Deodat Lawson's "*Brief and True Narrative*" of the same Affair was printed in Boston in 1692, by Benj. Harris, and the next Year in London by John Dunton, in Connection with Dr. Increase Mather's "*Further Account of the Tryals of the New England Witches*." A second (in Fact, it was the third) Edition of Mr. Lawson's Work was issued in London in 1704, which, though he calls it a *second Edition* is

quite a different Book from the first Edition. In the first he inserted the Names of the Parties, while in the last, Dashes stand in their Stead. It has two Dedications: one "To the Right Worshipful and truly Honourable, Sir Henry Ashhurst, Barr^t. and to His Truly Honourable and Religious Consort, Lady Diana Ashhurst, Barr^t:" signed Deodat Lawson. The other is "To the Worshipful and Worthily Honoured *Bartholomew Gidney, John Hathorne, and Jonathan Corwin, Esqrs.* Together with the Reverend *Mr. John Higginson, Pastor,* and *Mr. Nicholas Noyes* Teacher of the Church of Christ at Salem." Signed Deodat Lavson. It should be mentioned also that Dr. I. Mather's "*Further Account,*" &c., contains Nothing beyond a Reprint of Lawson's Book, (first Edition) except a "*Letter*" containing "*A further Account of the Tryals of the New England Witches,*" sent "*to a Gentleman in London.*" This Letter was added at the End of the "*Further Account.*" It was probably written by Mr. Mather to John Dunton, his Friend and Publisher, and occupies about three additional Pages.

In this Reprint of the *Wonders* I have followed the second Edition, presuming that to be the most accurate, as the Copy from which it was printed was doubtless furnished by the Author.

Very few Copies of the original Edition are known to be in Existence. I have never owned one, and am indebted to my Friend, George Brinley, Esq., for the Use of his (rather imperfect) Copy. While this Preface was in the Hands of the Printer, my Publisher, Mr. Woodward, has had the rare Fortune to obtain a very good one.

At this Period the Press literally swarmed with Works upon Witchcraft. Dunton printed in rapid Succession all the Works from New England, and other Publishers were equally busy. It would be a Matter of no little Curiosity if some one would collect the Titles of the Works on this Subject, and publish them in Book Form, with, or even without Abstracts of their Contents. In a unique Volume now before me, belonging to Harvard College Library—for the Loan of which I am indebted to the Kindness of Mr. Sibley, the Librarian—there are several Tracts, the Titles of which are quite as singular as any of the Mathers. One or two I will here extract. "The Lancashire Levite Rebuk'd: or, a Vindication of the Dissenters from Popery, Superstition, Ignorance, and Knavery, unjustly Charged on them by Mr. Zachary Taylor in his Book, entitled, "The Surry Impostor." Another runs thus: "The Devil turn'd Casuist or the Cheats of Rome laid open, in the Exorcism of a Despairing Devil, at the House of Thomas Pennington in Orrel in the Parish of Wigan in the County of Lancaster. By Zachary Taylor, M. A. Chaplin to the right reverend Father in God, Nicholas [Strafford] Lord Bishop of Chester, and Rector of Wigan."

Witch Books, as they were called, of the Father Land, must have been common among the People of New England, as will be seen by a Comparison of the Trials of Witches in both Countries. This Comparison shows that the accused in this Country were well acquainted with the ridiculous Nonsense of what had been and was passing at Witch Trials in England. The same Cant and Incoherency are visible at every Step. Insomuch, that the Frivolity, Shallow-mindedness and Falsity were so apparent, that they remind

one of the childish Nursery Tales of Youth, and excite the most profound Wonder how they could have ever been viewed as Matter for serious Consideration by any Persons having any Pretensions to common Sense.

The original Records of the Court Proceedings against those accused of Witchcraft were never fully given to the Public, until about two Years ago, Mr. W. Elliot Woodward, of Roxbury, caused a complete Transcript to be made of the whole, and printed them in two Volumes, small Quarto, uniform with this Undertaking. Those, with the present Volumes, will put the Student of New England History in Possession of nearly all the Materials existing upon this deeply interesting, though humiliating, and in some respects, revolting Subject.

INTRODUCTORY.

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AS a Belief in Witchcraft is not entirely exploded, it may be interesting to examine a few of the early Definitions of it.

One of the earliest Lexicographers, or Expounders of English Words, was Edward Phillips, the Nephew of John Milton. It is said that Phillips made up his Work from Milton's Preparation in the same Line. However that might be, it is quite clear that many of his Definitions have that Clearness and Precision for which Milton is so remarkable. Phillips's third (and I believe his last) Edition of "The New World of Words" was printed in 1671. In that we find Witchcraft thus defined: "A certain evill Art, whereby with the Assistance of the Devil, or evill Spirits, some Wonders may be wrought, which exceed the common Apprehension of Men: It cometh from the Dutch Word *Wiechelen*, that is, to divine, or guesse; it is called in Latin *Veneficium*, in Greek *Pharmaceia*, i.e. the Art of making Poisons."

In 1706, John Kersey published the sixth Edition of Phillips's Work, greatly augmented; though the Definition of *Witchcraft* is cut down to a few Words, thus: "The Black Art, whereby with the Assistance of the Devil, or evil Spirits, some Wonders may be wrought, which exceed the common Apprehensions of Men."

Phillips does not define a *Witch*, but he says a "Wizard is a Witch, a cunning Man, one that telleth where things are that were lost. Some think it comes from the Saxon Word *Witega*, i.e. a Prophet."

Kersey defines a Witch, an old Hag, or Woman that deals with Familiar Spirits; and a Wizard "a Sorceror, or Inchanter; a Cunning Man," &c., as before.

In 1674, Thomas Blount published the fourth Edition of his "Glossographia, or Dictionary of hard Words." He says, "Witch is derived from the Dutch *Witchelen*, or *Wiichelen*, which properly signifies whinnyng and neighing like a Horse; also to foretell or prophecy; and *Wiichelen*, signifies a Soothsayer; for that the Germans (from whom our Ancestors the Saxons usually descended) did principally (as Tacitus tells us) divine and foretel Things to come by the whinnying and neighing of their Horses; *Hinitus* and *Trenitus* are his Words."

Witchcraft is not defined by Blount himself; while under the Article *Witch*, he extracts from Master William Perkins: "Witchcraft is an Art serving for the working of Wonders by the Assistance of the Devil, so far as God will permit." To make the Definition of Witchcraft still more plain, Mr. Blount extracts thus from an old Author named *Delrio*,^[1] who defines Witchcraft to be "An Art, which by the Power of a Contract, entred into with the Devil, some Wonders are wrought, which pass the common Understanding of Men."

As we approach a later Age, Lexicographers are pretty careful in their Definitions of Witchcraft. Bailey, in his folio Dictionary of 1730, says it is "the Art of bewitching, enchanting, divining, &c."

Johnson, though a Believer in Witchcraft, shirks the Definition of it thus: "The Practice of Witches. *Bacon*. Power, more than natural. *Sidney*."

Noah Webster published a Dictionary of the English Language in 1806, in which he says a *Witch* is "a Woman accused of magical Arts, a Hag." Witchcraft, "the Practice of Witches, a Charm." The great Lexicographer must have marvelled at these Definitions in his later Years; if so, he fails to make due Atonement in his incomparable "Unabridged." But the learned Editor of the "Imperial Dictionary,"^[2] Dr. Ogilvie, appears to have taken such Liberty with Dr. Webster's Work as to bring it up to the Standard of the Times, especially in that Class of Words in which *Witchcraft* is prominent. His Definition is so much to the Point, so clear, and so well expressed, that it is, though long, extracted entire: "Witchcraft, the Practice of Witches; Sorcery; Enchantments; Intercourse with the Devil; a supernatural Power, which Persons were formerly supposed to obtain Possession of by entering into Compact with the Devil. Indeed it was fully believed that they gave themselves up to him, Body and Soul, while he engaged that they should want for Nothing and be able to assume whatever Shape they pleased, to visit and torment their Enemies, and accomplish their infernal Purposes. As soon as the Bargain was concluded, the Devil was said to deliver to the Witch an Imp or familiar Spirit, to be ready at call, and to do whatever it was directed. By the Aid of this Imp and the Devil together, the Witch, who was almost always an old Woman, was enabled to transport herself through the Air on a Broom-stick or a Spit, and to transform herself into various Shapes, particularly those of Cats and Hares; to inflict Diseases on whomsoever she pleased, and to punish her Enemies in a Variety of Ways. The Belief of Witchcraft is very

ancient. It was universally believed in Europe till the 16th Century, and even maintained its Ground with tolerable Firmness till the Middle of the 17th Century. Vast Numbers of reputed Witches were condemned to be burned every Year, so that in England alone it is computed that no fewer than 30,000 of them suffered at the Stake."

Dr. Ogilvie closes his Definition with one Extract from Shakespeare:

"He hath a Witchcraft
Over the King in's Tongue."

It cannot be denied that the Existence of Witchcraft is as fully taught in the Bible as Slavery. The Light of Science has extinguished the one, while the other yet struggles against Fate.^[3] To urge the Authority of the Bible, that Slavery is a divine Institution, and therefore should be sustained, is just as reasonable as it would be to urge the Existence of Witches; and were there as many Interests at Stake in keeping alive Witchcraft, it would find as many Advocates, doubtless, as Slavery.

At first, Voices against Witchcraft were faint and few. Such was the Bewilderment of the human Mind in early Ages that Men hardly dared to think in Opposition to the Superstitions of the Multitude. Yet there were always some who doubted the delegated Power of the Devil, though they were not often lavish enough of their own Safety to let their Disbelief be known. Still, there are, no Doubt, some "dark Corners of the Earth" where it would not be entirely safe for one to declare publicly that there is no such Matter as Witchcraft. Nor is this so much to be wondered at, when, at

the present Day, and in a Portion of our own Country, a Man cannot speak against Slavery, but at the Peril of his Life. This is no new Aspect growing out of the present Rebellion, but it has been thus many Years.

Few Men dared to speak boldly against the Existence of Witchcraft before the Year 1700. Though they disbelieved in it they were afraid to attack it. They began by endeavouring to show the Insufficiency of the Evidence relied upon in particular Cases. In this Way, Frauds were detected and exposed, and the Eyes of Judges were opened.

Among the early and successful Combatants of Witchcraft in England was Sir Robert Filmer. This Gentleman, though he out-went Machiavel himself in Arguments to uphold Despotism, yet he entered a pretty effectual Demurrer against the Prerogative of the Devil, as attempted to be manifested in the Persons of aged Matrons. Lancashire was distinguished above all other Counties in England in Sir Robert's Time for its Production of Witches; but when his native County, Kent, was scourged by the imaginary Arts of Satan, he thought it Time to make a public Declaration of his Views in Regard to the Nature of the Evidence made Use of for the Conviction of Witches. He therefore prepared a Treatise which he entitled "An Advertisement to the Jury-men of England, touching Witches," printed in 1680, but whether it was ever printed before does not appear from this Impression. In this Work he criticises the Productions of some of the prominent Authors in Favor of Witchcraft with much Ability.

To the Assertion that Witches act under a Contract with the Devil, Mr. Filmer observes, "That the Agreement

between the Witch and the Devil they call a Covenant, and yet neither of the Parties are any Way bound to perform their Part; and the Devil, without Doubt, notwithstanding all his Craft, hath far the worst Part of the Bargain. The Bargain runs thus in Master Perkins's Work: 'The Witch as a Slave binds herself by Vow to believe in the Devil, and to give him either Body, or Soul, or both, under his Hand-writing, or some Part of his Blood. The Devil promiseth to be ready at his Vassal's Command, to appear in the Likeness of any Creature, to consult and to aid him for the procuring of Pleasure, Honor, Wealth, or Preferment; to go for him, to carry him any whither, and to do any Command.' Whereby we see the Devil is not to have Benefit of his Bargain till the Death of the Witch. In the Meantime, he is to appear always at the Witche's Command, to go for him [or her], to carry him any whither, and to do any Command; which argues the Devil to be the Witche's Slave, and not the Witch the Devil's Slave. And though it be true which Delrio affirmeth, 'That the Devil is at Liberty to perform or break his Compact, for that no Man can compel him to keep his Promise;' yet on the other Side, it is as possible for the Witch to frustrate the Devil's Contract, if he or she have so much Grace as to repent; the which there may be good Cause to do, if the Devil be found not to perform his Promise. Besides, a Witch may many Times require that to be done by the Devil, which God permits not the Devil to do; thus against his Will the Devil may lose his Credit, and give Occasion of Repentance, though he endeavor to the utmost of his Power to bring to pass whatsoever he hath promised; and so fail of the Benefit of his Bargain, though he have the Hand-writing, or some

Part of the Blood of the Witch for his Security, or the Solemnity before Witnesses, as Delrio imagineth."

Thus much is given to show in what Manner the Advocates of Witchcraft were combatted, without denying the actual Existence of it. It was as much as could be safely advanced in the seventeenth Century. To have come out boldly, and denied the Thing altogether, would have been to proclaim a Disbelief of the Teachings of the Bible; and this would have defeated the very Object sought to be attained. It has, beyond Question, occurred to all thinking Men in every Age, that Witches and Devils could not have a Being without God's Permission; that if they did or do exist, it is his Pleasure that they should; that, therefore, if God wished to destroy such Miscreants he would do it by making War on them himself, instead of compelling Mankind to fight them blindfolded for all Eternity, or during the World's Existence.

There are few Readers probably who have not heard of a Book upon Witchcraft by a royal Hand—a King of England. James I wrote a Book to which he gave the Title, *Dæmonologie*. To those who have not studied the State of Society in England for a Century or so before the Emigration of our Fathers to New England, and consequently cannot comprehend the Kind and Degree of Knowledge and Intelligence possessed by the People; it will seem incredible how they were bound down by such childish and utterly puerile Stuff as was put forth by James in his Work on Witchcraft. Nursery Tales of a later Day are quite as easily believed to be realities as the Witch Stories of a former Age, and the Allegories of Bunyan are much easier transformed to Realities. That so weak and absurd a Production as the

Dæmonologie reflects the Understanding and Literature of our Fathers, must be not a little humiliating to their Descendants to the latest Posterity. The *Dæmonologie* was printed at Edinburgh, in Quarto, six Years before James came to the Crown of England, namely, in 1593. His Work corresponded with the Times in which it was written. Here is a Specimen of its Contents: "The Devil teaches Witches how to make Pictures of Wax and Clay, that by the roasting thereof, the Persons that they bear the Name of, may be continually melted or dried away by continual Sickness... not that any of these Means which he teacheth them (except Poisons, which are composed of Things natural) can of themselves help any to these Turns they are employed in.... That Witches can bewitch, and take the Life of Men or Women by roasting of the Pictures [Images] which is very possible to their Master to perform; for although that Instrument of Wax have no Virtue in the Turn doing, yet may he not very well, by that same Measure that his conjured Slave melts that Wax at the Fire, may he not, I say, at these same Times, subtilly as a Spirit, so weaken and scatter the Spirits of Life of the Patient, as may make him on the one Part for Faintness to sweat out the Humours of his Body; and on the other Part, for the not concurring of these Spirits which cause his Digestion, so debilitate his Stomach, that his Humour radical continually sweating out on the one Part, and no new good Suck being put in the Place thereof for Lack of Digestion on the other, he at last shall vanish away even as his Picture will do at the Fire."

The Reader will hardly desire any more from such a royal Source; but even royal Nonsense may sometimes be

Necessary upon historical Points, and we must listen to their incoherent Jargon, however much we hold them in Contempt. It was during the Reign of this King that New England began to be settled, and the Settlers were his Subjects, and with them came the Superstitions common to the People of England.

In James's Book he lays down Rules for determining who were Witches, and great Numbers were executed in Pursuance of those Rules. No sooner was that benighted King seated upon the English Throne, but the following Statute was passed: "If any Person or Persons shall use, practice, or exercise any Invocation, or Conjuraton of any evil and wicked Spirit, or shall consult, covenant with, entertain, employ, feed or reward any evil and wicked Spirit, to or for any Intent and Purpose: or take up any dead Man, Woman or Child, out of his, her or their Grave, or any other Place where the dead Body resteth, or the Skin, Bone or any Part of the dead Person, to be employed or used in any Manner of Witchcraft, Sorcery, Charm, or Inchantment; or shall use, practice or exercise any Witchcraft; or shall use, practice or exercise any Witchcraft, Inchantment, Charm or Sorcery, whereby any Person shall be killed, destroyed, wasted, consumed, pined or lamed in his or her Body, or any Part thereof; that then every such Offender or Offenders, their Aiders, Abettors, and Counsellors, being of any the said Offenders duly and lawfully convicted and attainted, shall suffer Pains of Death as a Felon or Felons."

This Law does not materially differ from that enacted in the fifth Year of Elizabeth; yet there is a Clause in the older one, declaring that, "If any Person shall take upon him by

Witchcraft, Inchantment, Charm or Sorcery, to tell or declare in what Place any Treasure of Gold or Silver should or might be found or hid in the Earth, or other secret Places, or where Goods, or Things lost or stolen should be found or be come: Or to the Intent to provoke any Person to unlawful Love, or whereby any Cattle or Goods of any Person shall be destroyed, wasted or impaired; or to destroy or hurt any Person in his, or her Body, though the same be not effected, &c. a Year's Imprisonment, and Pillory, &c. and the second Conviction, Death."

In the early Laws of Massachusetts, adopted in 1641, Witchcraft is thus briefly dealt with: "If any Man or Woman be a Witch (that is hath or consulteth with a familiar Spirit) they shall be put to Death." These Laws were called *The Body of Liberties*, and were drawn up by the famous Minister of Boston, John Cotton. He made them conform to the Bible, and Passages of Scripture stand against each Law in the Margin. Against this is found, Deut. xiii, 6, 10—xvii, 2, 6. Ex. xxii, 20.

In Plymouth Colony as late as 1671, nearly the same Law was enacted. It differed only by saying, "If any Christian (so called) be a Witch," &c.

If Sir Robert Filmer had seen our Laws, he would, perhaps, have indulged in a few Observations upon them. The Plymouth People seem to have looked a little farther than the learned Minister of Boston, as appears by the Proviso thrown in, that a *Christian* could not be a Witch. Of course the Judges were to determine the Point of Christian or no Christian, assuming that a Christian Judge could not err or be mistaken.

One of the Advocates of Witchcraft having asserted that a Person cannot make the necessary Contract with the Devil to become a Witch, without renouncing God and Baptism, "it will follow," says Filmer, "that none can be Witches but such as have first been Christians. And what shall be said then of all those idolatrous Nations, of Lapland, Finland, and divers Parts of Africa, and many other heathenish Nations, which Travellers report to be full of Witches? And indeed, what Need or Benefit can the Devil gain by contracting with those Idolators, who are surer his own than any Covenant can make them?"

Witchcraft, as formerly believed in, was the Art of working Wonders or Miracles, and some of its Expounders asserted, that the Power of effecting Wonders does not flow from the Skill of the Witch, but is derived wholly from the Devil, whom the Witch has Command over, by Virtue of a Contract. Whereupon Sir Robert Filmer sensibly remarks, "that the Devil is really the Worker of the Wonder, and the Witch but the Counsellor, Persuader or Commander of it, and only accessory before the Fact, and the Devil only Principal. Now the Difficulty will be, how the Accessory can be duly and lawfully convicted and attainted according as the Statute requires, unless the Devil, who is the Principle, be first convicted, or at least, outlawed; which cannot be, because the Devil can never be lawfully summoned according to the Rules of our Common Law."

In this Manner Witchcraft was successfully assailed, because it was a Species of reasoning that did not directly interfere with the Superstitions and Prejudices of the People. But the March of Mind amongst the Masses was slow, and

Trials for Witchcraft continued in England for twenty Years after Sir Robert Filmer wrote.

For one hundred Years, 1580 to 1680, in Germany alone, 1,000 Persons a Year, on an Average, were, upon good Authority, said to have suffered Death for the imaginary Crime of Witchcraft. Executions in that Country began to abate about 1694; the last Execution, being of a poor Nun, in 1749. And it may be remarked in this Connection, that immediately after the miserable James published his Work on Witchcraft, 600 Persons were put to a cruel Death for being Witches.

"Thou shalt not suffer a Witch to live," is a Command, and it was once considered as much to be regarded as any other Command in the Bible. That there were Witches in the World was as plain, and as much to be believed, as that there were Spirits of any Kind whatever. Whoever believed in the Immortality of the Soul, believed in the Immortality of bad Souls as well as good. Soul is another Word for Spirit; hence good Spirits and bad Spirits. Witches were bad Spirits, but whether they originated *in* Mankind, or whether they were sent there to take Possession of the human Body, and to exclude a better Tenant, has not been satisfactorily settled by Psychologists and Metaphysicians. But one Thing seems to be well established, and that is, that quite as many bad Spirits find Habitations in the Sons and Daughters of these Days, as at any former Period. Fortunately it was found out, at length, that destroying the Tenement of a bad Spirit, did not destroy that Spirit. But this was not thought of until Thousands had been put to Death.

It will doubtless be said by many, that if ever there were Witches in the World, there are Witches now. This Point it is not intended to argue. There were always those who denied the Existence of Witches; or, what amounted to the same Thing, they would never allow that there was sufficient Evidence produced to prove that *Craft* against any who were accused of it. Persons who thus question all Court Proceedings, where Witchcraft was attempted to be detected, were regarded as unfit for good Society, and unworthy of its Protection.

Those who were for "ridding the Land" of Witches, thought those who questioned the Legality of their Proceedings, were, at least, Infidels, in the most obnoxious Sense, and they were generally treated as such, and were to be shunned by Society. Thus it fared with Mr. Robert Calef, who, during the Prosecutions and Executions of the People accused in Massachusetts, as will be seen in the Progress of the present Work.

It is scarcely conceivable by even the partially enlightened of the present Age, that only one hundred and fifty Years ago our Ancestors were, in some respects, so slightly removed from Barbarity and heathen Darkness. Superstition will give Way only to mental Culture; but there may be considerable mental Culture, and also much Superstition; for Persons may be educated in many Things when those very Things are founded in Error. Certain Premises are taken for granted, because no Data exist, or at least insufficient Data, to investigate them and the Foundations on which they rest. This is still the Case, but it was more so in Times past.

Barbarous Nations, as the Aborigines of any Country, are Slaves to the same Kind of Superstition as that which caused the Executions for Witchcraft by the Governments of Old and New England. Even many of those who opposed the Prosecutions for that imaginary Crime, were not free from the same Superstitions with the Advocates of it. They believed in Witchcraft, and only argued the Want of Evidence against it. This gave them a decided Disadvantage, because the Evidence was, in many Cases, apparently so overwhelming; insomuch, that "the learned Baxter" wrote to Dr. Increase Mather, declaring, "The Evidence is so convincing, that he must be a very obdurate Sadducee who will not believe it." Hence if there were some Persons who did not believe the strange and unnatural Things alleged to have been performed by Persons charged with Witchcraft they were treated as "obdurate Sadducees," whose Unbelief was only a Pretence. Times have so much changed, that it is not necessary to make the Admissions which the Opposers of Witchcraft formerly made. Then, to deny the Existence of it was precisely the same as to deny that the Bible was a Revelation from God. Therefore, as was before observed, those who opposed the Prosecutions for Witchcraft, labored under a great Disadvantage. The Belief in it being nearly universal, the solitary Individual who dared to stem so popular a Torrent, now looked upon clearly as a Delusion, had nothing to expect on all Hands, but Obloquy, Derision and Contempt.

From all which, Nothing is easier to be discerned than this—wherever Ignorance is the greatest, there Superstition

prevails most; that therefore it follows of course, that Ignorance and Superstition are the Parents of Witchcraft.

It never occurred to Believers in Witchcraft, it would seem, that if Witches really existed, a Prosecution against them could no more reach them than it would the Air in a Bubble or the Breath which they breathed; for if they possessed the Power claimed for them, they also had the Power to abandon the Bodies they possessed the Moment it was decided to punish them in such Bodies; and thus disconcert all Attempts to obstruct their Craft.

The Advocates of Witchcraft affirm that it is by Virtue of a League with the Devil that the Witch is enabled to carry on her Operations; and that the Devil, God's great Enemy, is allowed to commission Witches, that they may also counteract his (God's) Purposes by ensnaring Souls, as though the Devil had not Power enough to do the whole Mischief himself; and thus in a sneakingly indirect Way make a Cats-paw of some demented old Woman, or other simple Person.

In the midst of the Proceedings against the People charged with being Witches, and while several Jails were crowded with those unfortunate Persons, a very serious Question arose, which, of itself, was calculated to cause the most violent of the Prosecutors to stay their bloody Hands, and to ask themselves, what they had been doing? and if, after all, there was not a Possibility that they had been guilty of shedding innocent Blood? The Question was a very simple and natural one, namely, Is it not possible for a Witch to appear in the Shape of an innocent Person? As soon as this Question was started, there was quite a Shock in the

Community, and the Men accounted the wisest in the Land stood still for a Time, and looked inquiringly upon one another. As long as the afflicted Persons accused only the Poor and Friendless, Nothing appears to have been thought of the Possibility that such Persons could be innocent of the Charges preferred against them. But, when at length, Persons considered of unblemished Lives, standing among the first in the Community, came to be accused, then the Case wore a different Aspect; then it was that the before mentioned important Question came up. This Question divided the People, and from that Division Safety resulted. In this Instance, the common Order of Things was reversed; Safety came from a Division, and not from Union. Hence a new Proverb is derived—In Union there may be Error, while Division may elicit the Truth.

The People, thus brought to a Stand, had a little Time for reflection. This, some improved to the Advantage of themselves, while others improved it for the Advantage of the Public. Some had been so strenuous in their Efforts to convict accused Persons, that it was now very difficult for them, even to suspend their Efforts without giving their Opponents an immediate Advantage over them; that even though the Judges of the Courts who tried the accused, had been guided mainly by "Mr. Perkins's Rules for the Discovery of Witches," on a careful Inspection of those Rules at this Day, it is difficult to see how Convictions were forced out of them.

Nevertheless, strong Ground having been taken that Witches existed, and Persons reputed Witches having been prosecuted with the utmost Rigor, and unrelenting

Perseverance for a long Time, the chief Agents in these bloody Proceedings, firm in their Convictions that they had done righteously, deemed it incumbent upon themselves to keep the People to the same Opinions. This was the Origin of this unfortunate Book, "*The Wonders of the Invisible World*;" the chief Part, or perhaps all of which, was composed while above one hundred poor People in and about Salem and Boston were suffering a wretched imprisonment in the filthy and barbarous Jails of those Days, to which Jails and Prisons of our Days are in Comparison, Palaces. It was doubtless no sooner determined that the Proceedings against the Witches should be given to the World, than the Person was designated who should perform that Service. And from the very opening of that Work it is at once discovered, that it was intended as a "Defence" of what had been already done, as well as to urge a Continuance of those Proceedings, "until the Land was fully purged of the Demons which infested it."

For a long Period, the Publication of Books detailing the Doings and Prosecutions of Witches seems to have extended rather than abridged the Belief in Witchcraft. This may be accounted for in Part from the Consideration that the Teachers of the People were themselves groveling in the Mire of Superstition. A more particular Reference to some of the Works best known somewhat more than two Centuries ago shall here follow.

One Thomas Cooper published in 1617, a Work of this Title, "The Mystery of Witchcraft. Discovering, the Truth, Nature, Occasions, Growth and Power thereof. Together with the Detection and Punishment of the same. As also, the

Seuerall Stratagems of Sathan, ensnaring the poore Soule by this desperate Practize of annoying the Bodie: with the seueral Vses thereof to the Church of Christ. Very necessary for the redeeming of these atheisticall and secure Times."

This Author dedicated his Work to the "Maior and Corporation of the Ancient Citie of Chester," &c., in which Dedication we find the following, which, throwing some Light on the reverend Dealer in Darkness, is extracted. He commences, "Diuers, and verie weighty haue been the Motiues (right Worshipfull) to induce mee to the Dedication of these my Labors in this kinde vnto your Worships.

"The first is, because my first Calling from the Vniversitie, to employ my Ministrie for the Edification of the Saints, was by the Gouernors of your famous Citie, to succeed that painefull and profitable Teacher, Maister Harrison, who was thence called by the King's most Excellent Maiestie, to be one of the sixe Teachers to those barren and needfull Places of the Country of Lancashire. And therefore, hauing both kind intertainment among you; and by some of you being furthered to a more settled Pastorall Charge in that Countie, I could not but leave some Memoriall of my Thankfulnessse vnto you herein.

"Secondly, my free Admission to that Pastorall Charge, together with the singular Providence of God, in directing my Ministrie for the informing and reforming of that ignorant People, who never before enjoyed any constant Ministrie, as also his admirable Protection and Deliuerance of me from vnreasonable Men, that vsed all their Force and Cunning to hinder the Proceedings of the Gospel of Christ."

These Extracts are made because they give a Glimpse of the Life and Character of an Author, second only to King James as a Cultivator of Witchcraft. His Book is a small Duodecimo of 368 Pages, in the Close of which he says, "to the wise and humble Reader, I am not ashamed to acknowledge, that which thou canst not but discern; that I have borrowed most of my Grounds from his Maiesties Dæmonologie, Mr. Perkins, Mr. Gifford, and others." And this truly may be added, "the Blind were led by the Blind," in the fullest Sense of the Maxim. Master Cooper further remarks upon the Labors of his royal Predecessor and others in these Words, "they have waded before mee heerein, to confirme the Authoritie thereof, against the Atheisme of these evill Dayes: that so each might have the perfect Honour of their owne Paines."^[4]

In his second Chapter he says, "it is proued that there haue beene, are, and shall be Witches to the World's End: both by sound Testimony, 1st, from the Word; 2d, from Antiquity; 3d, from pregnant Reasons, and so such Obiections answered, as seeme to contradict this Truth."

This most singularly superstitious Writer says there were good Witches as well as bad ones; that these good Witches are called the *unbinding* ones; because they undo what the bad Witch does, and yet is allowed to do good Offices with the Consent of the Devil.^[5]

Good Witches performed wonderful Cures, according to the Belief of those Days. Even Burton^[6] says, "they can effect such Cures, the maine Question is whether it be lawful in a desperate Case, to crave their Help, or ask a Wizard's Advice. 'Tis a common Practice of some Men to go

first to a Witch, and then to a Physitian. If one cannot help the other shall." And Paracelsus declared, "that it mattered not whether a sick Person were helped by God or Devil, so that he were eased." Some, however, demurred to this, and affirmed that it was better to die than be cured by a Witch or a Sorcerer.

Further to illustrate the Subject, I shall have Recourse to Mr. Nathan Drake's *Shakespeare, and his Times*. That chief of Expounders of the "Immortal Bard," having had occasion to review the Subject of Witchcraft, and having made so clear and valuable an Analysis of it in his Examination of the Witches of Shakespeare, as is nowhere else to be found, I am, as will be the Readers of this Introduction, I apprehend, fortunate in being able to avail myself of the Labors of that eminent Scholar and able Antiquary.

The Play of Macbeth is founded on a Species of Superstition that, during the Life-time of Shakespeare, prevailed in England and Scotland, in a Degree until then unknown. In the 33d Year of Henry VIII, was enacted a Statute which adjudged all Witchcraft and Sorcery to be Felony without the Benefit of Clergy; but at the Commencement of the Reign of Elizabeth, the Evil seems to have been greatly on the Increase, for Bishop Jewel, preaching before the Queen, in 1558, tells her, "It may please your Grace to understand that Witches and Sorcerers within these few last Years are marvelously increased within your Grace's Realm. Your Grace's Subjects pine away, even unto the Death, their Colour fadeth, their Flesh rotteth, their Speech is benumbed, their Senses are bereft, I pray God they may never practice further then upon the Subject."^[7]