A BRIEF HISTORY OF WITCHCRAFT

With Especial Reference to

THE WITCHES OF NORTHAMPTONSHIRE.

Collected in great part from Original Sources.

Northampton,

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A great deal of labour has been expended in collecting the materials for the "History of Witchcraft," and many documents and publications, not previously resorted to for the purpose, have been laid under contribution. A glance at the works cited will show that in saying this we are stating but the simple fact. At the same time we are bound to acknowledge that on every hand our enquiries have been met in a spirit of the greatest courtesy and kindness. To John Becke, Esq., we must express our thanks for the loan of his valuable MS. Lectures on "Sorcery and Witchcraft;" to the Clerk of the Peace (H. P. Markham, Esq.) for the perusal of the documents quoted in connection with the Quarter Sessions and others pertaining to the County; to the Rev. W. H. F. Robson and Mr. W. J. Peirce for the free access given to the Parish Registers of St. Giles; to the Rev. H. O. Cox, M.A., for the permission given to examine and copy from the tracts and documents in the Bodleian Library at Oxford; to Mr. John Askham for the Sonnet which heads the Paper; and last, but by no means least, to Thomas Wright, Esq., M.A., F.S.A., for the kindness he has exhibited in allowing us the use of illustrations from his valuable work, "The History of Caricature and Grotesque in Art," and the interest he has manifested in the brochure throughout. The materials were collected by Mr. John Taylor, and the literary work executed by Mr. F. Marshall, B.A., formerly of this town.—*Extract from Preface of Taylor & Son's Northamptonshire Handbook for* 1867.

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Witchcraft in Northamptonshire.

Of witchcraft, witches, and unholy rites
Practised on blasted heath or barren moor,
By lightning's forked flash and thunder's roar;
Of rides on hurdles, and of broomstick flights
By withered hags, on wild tempestuous nights;
Of impious incantations, hellish lore,
Of impish whelps that fiendish amours bore;
Of philters, charms, and strange, uncanny sights:
How ancient grandames in the olden times,
By public laws, or private judgment, found
Guilty of witchcraft (worst of human crimes),
Died at the stake, or in the mill-pond drowned;
Of conjurations dire, forbidden spells,
And lawless orgies, this our history tells.

JOHN ASKHAM.*

RIDING through the air on a broomstick, and playing mischievous pranks with her neighbours' pigs and poultry make up the current idea of a witch's business in these degenerate days; but there was a time when her vocation was more glorious, her arts more insidious, and her power more terrible. When the learned author of the "Counterblast against Tobacco" was metamorphosed from a Scotch into an English king, his wondering subjects had their eyes opened to the fact that not a child could talk incoherently or fall into a fit, not a harvest could fail or a vessel be wrecked at sea, not a black dog or a scarecrow grimalkin could cross one's path after dark, but the devil had some hand in it, with a sorceress for his agent. But, in days before these, the black art, if it had fewer victims, was thought to be still more formidable in its potency. Old women, with "wrinkled faces, hairy lips, gobber teeth, and squint eyes," whom Reginald Scot took for his pattern witches at the end of the sixteenth century, were not the then prevailing type, for the informers of the period flew at much higher game. It is said that one of the charges brought against Thomas à Becket by his irate master, when he was put upon his defence at Northampton Castle, in 1164, was that of sorcery, though his modern biographer, Robertson, makes no mention of the fact.

Even a hundred and fifty years later it was quite the fashion, both in England and Ireland, to seek for vengeance upon persons in high station by accusing them of witchcraft. In the latter country a lady of title, Kyteler by name, was put on her defence, by the Bishop of Ossory, for sacrificing red cocks and peacocks' eyes to the Evil One; and, by means of "certain horrible worms," the nails of dead men, the hair, brains, and clothes of children who had died unbaptized, boiled in the skull of a decapitated robber, having invoked aid from the nether world to do mischief to some of her relatives. The case ended in her exile, and the burning or flagellation of several of her friends. In the same way John of Nottingham and another necromancer were said to have conspired with

* Written expressly for this article.

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the men of Coventry to cause the death of Edward II. and his favourite Despensers by enchantments; and in the reign of Henry VI. a very similar charge was brought against Eleanor Cobham, Duchess of Gloucester; her intended victim, as it was stated, being the King. An unfortunate priest, accused as one of her accomplices, was hanged, drawn, and quartered, and the Duchess had to do penance and suffer a long imprisonment. These were the most remarkable cases of alleged witchcraft up to the middle of the fifteenth century; but an illustration quite as striking of the way in which popular superstition could be made an instrument of private malice or political animosity occurs in the attempt to prosecute the Duchess of Bedford, mother of Edward IV.'s queen. This story has so strong a local bearing that it will be incumbent upon us to give it in fuller detail. The marriage of Edward with Elizabeth Woodville is generally looked upon as one of impulsive affection as against policy—of romance instead of the cold calculation which too generally influences the choice of kings even in their matrimonial alliances. Brought up amid the turbulence of civil war, Edward was distinguished by a rough generosity, a hearty frankness of disposition, and withal an unthinking readiness in yielding to his softer passions, which was often as great a recommendation to his subjects as it proved an embarrassment to his sager councillors. It was while he had yet had little experience of the troubles and difficulties of governing that he "fell in love," as the phrase goes, with Elizabeth Woodville. "You all know," says Mr. Becke, in his excellent Lectures on Witchcraft,* "the romantic story—how, in the shady groves of Whittlebury, there stands an oak, now called the Queen's Oak, and how tradition tells us that, under that oak, the gallant young king, by accident, no doubt, met the fair Elizabeth. If it were not too grave a slander against such august personages, I should be tempted to say that a very crafty mother, with a very pretty, demure, and sly little daughter, had set a trap, and caught there a very green young king." No doubt it was a great "catch" to secure the hand of an English monarch, but still the social position of the Queen was not so low as the exaggerated histories of the day would lead us to believe. "Her birth could not be called mean," says Charles Knight,† "whose mother was a duchess, and whose maternal uncle was a Prince of Luxemburgh, who attended her coronation with a retinue of a hundred knights and gentlemen." On the side of her father, too, the family was at least respectable. It could be traced back to the twelfth century, and its history from that period was one of gradually rising importance. Richard de Widevill served the office of High Sheriff of the county no less than eight times in the reign of Edward III., and was one of its representatives in seven Parliaments. The same distinctions were almost as frequently conferred on his son, John Widevill, and grandson, Thomas Widevill, who became Lord of Grafton.‡ Richard, the grandfather of the Queen, was Constable of the Tower and Lieutenant of Calais—posts of no mean importance. But the shower of honours which Edward subsequently bestowed on her relatives led to the bitterest jealousy among the courtiers—jealousy which showed itself, not only in efforts to depreciate the dignity of her family, but in successful attempts to incite the people to rebellion, and in private persecutions of every imaginable kind. "I'll tell you what," says Shakspere's Gloster—

> "I think it is our way,
> If we will keep in favour with the king,
> To be her men, and wear her livery;
> The jealous o'er-worn widow, and herself,
> Since that our brother dubb'd them gentlewomen,
> Are mighty gossips in this monarchy."

Among the means employed to vent their malice was this of accusing the Queen's mother of having, through the agency of witchcraft, fixed the King's love upon her daughter. The charge appears to have been brought by a certain "Thomas Wake, squier," (of Blisworth) who seized the opportunity of the King's being at Warwick to present before him and his attendant lords "a image of lede made lyke a man of armes, conteynyng the lengthe of a mannes fynger, and broken in the myddes, and made fast with a wyre, sayying it was made by 'the Duchess' to use with wichcraft and sorsory." These images of lead, or, as they were more frequently made, of wax, figured conspicuously in the witch superstitions. The image was held before a slow fire, and, as it melted, so the person

* Two Lectures on Sorcery and Witchcraft, delivered at the Northampton Mechanics' Institute, by John Becke, Esq. January, 1854.

† History of England, vol. ii.

‡ Baker's History, part iv. p. 163.

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whom it was intended to represent was supposed to waste away; or it was pierced with a pin or wire, and in a corresponding part the victim was believed to suffer. The classical reader will remember Horace's allusions to this agency.* It belongs rather to the higher and more perfect development of witchcraft than to the later period of its history. To proceed with the story: the exhibition of the image was not deemed by the King sufficient evidence against his mother-in-law, and she, to strengthen her case, enquired into the circumstances of its manufacture. It turned out (so at least the witness alleges) that a certain John Daunger, parish clerk of Stoke Bruern, had been asked by Squire Wake to say that there were two other images in existence of the Duchess's making, one to represent the King and the other the Queen; but John Daunger could not be persuaded to swear to any such untruths. On the contrary, when he and Mr. Wake were ordered before the Bishop of Carlisle and others for examination, he gave the following testimony:—"That Thomas Wake send unto hym oon Thomas Kymbell, that tyme beyng his bailly, and bad the said John to send hym the ymage of led that he had, and so the said John sent it by the said Thomas Kymbell, att which tyme the same John said that he herd never noo wichecraft of my lady of Bedford. Item, the same John saith, that the said ymage was delyvered unto hym by oon Harry Kyngeston of Stoke; the which Harry fonde it in his owne hous after departyng of soudeours. Item, the same John saith, that the said Thomas Wake, after he cam from London, fro the kyng, send for hym and said that he had excused hymsylf and leyd all the blame to the said John; and therfor he bad the said John say that he durst not kepe the said image, and that he was the cause he send it to the said Thomas Wake. Item, the same John saith, that the said Thomas Wake bad hym say that ther was two othir ymages, oon for the kyng, and anothir for the quene; but the said John denyed to say soo."† Wake's statement was that the image had been "left in Stoke with an honest persone, which delyverid it to the clerk of the chirche, and so shewid it to dyvers neighbours;" but, at any rate, his testimony was so vague, or the evidence of the parish clerk so damning, that the Duchess was "clerid and declared of the noises and disclaundres" against her.

The accusation, however, was revived after Edward's death, when Richard of Gloucester was anxious to make a title to the crown by proving the illegitimacy of his brother's children. His very Act of Settlement declares "howe the seid pretensed mariage betwixt the king and Elizabeth Grey [her name after her first marriage] was made of grete presumption, without the knowyng and assent of the lords of this lond, and also by sorcerie and wichecrafte, committed by the said Elizabeth and her moder Jaquett duchesse of Bedford, as the common opinion of the people and the publique voice and fame is thorough all this land."‡ This may be taken as some evidence that the idea was kept alive in the popular mind, or it may be thought the simple offspring of Richard's malice. That he was very ready to make use of the charge of sorcery we have abundance of proof in the celebrated scene between the King and Hastings, when the former raved about those who did

"Conspire his death with devilish plots
Of damned witchcraft,"

accusing

"Edward's wife, that monstrous witch,
Consorted with that harlot strumpet Shore,"

of having withered an arm which was dried up from his birth, and ordering Hastings' execution on the plea that he was not fierce enough in condemning them.

These occurrences afford us illustrations of the way in which the imputation of familiarity with the black art could be made use of for party purposes, or to gratify individual feelings of vindictiveness. The end of the century gave terrible evidence of its value as an engine for the persecution of heretics. Failing other means of punishment, Pope Innocent VIII. directed a bull, in 1484, against the Waldenses, commanding the inquisitors to summon before them those suspected of commerce with the devil, and giving them power to convict and imprison or otherwise punish them as they thought proper. The effect of this movement was at once to increase the executions of the unfortunate persons who ventured to oppose the Papal authority. In the very next year forty-one women were burnt in a single district on the charge of witchcraft, while a hundred were sacrificed in Piedmont, five hundred in

* Epod. xvii. 76. Sat. i. 8, 43.

† Wright's Introduction to the Proceedings against Dame Alice Kyteler, published by the Camden Society, p. xviii.

‡ Ib. p. xx.

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Geneva, and a thousand in the district of Como a very few years afterwards. The accompanying cut, taken from some stall carvings at Corbeil, near Paris, gives the popular idea of a witch of the period.* She has so far gained the mastery over the demon as to be sawing off his head.

In England the offence was little heard of at this period; and it was unfortunate for the priests, if they had been disposed to make a handle of it, that one of the first conspicuous cases—that of the Maid of Kent—terminated in the supposed bewitched person confessing herself a counterfeit, and being hanged with seven of her accomplices. An Act of Parliament, however,—the necessary encouragement to a series of prosecutions,—was passed in 1541, making the practice of witchcraft a felony, without benefit of clergy. It was repeated six years afterwards; but in 1562, in the reign of Elizabeth, there was a new Act passed, limiting the punishment, for a first offence, to exposure in the pillory. This gave the necessary impetus to the zeal of the witch-finders; and accordingly we find, from this time forward, numerous records of executions in various parts of the country. Among them, no case created so much noise as that of the witches of Warboys. Warboys is a village standing in the lowlands of Huntingdonshire, on the road between the county town and Ramsay. One of its principal inhabitants, in 1589, was Robert Throgmorton, Esq., a man of substance, and an acquaintance of one of the ancestors of Oliver Cromwell. He had a family of five daughters, who at this time were mere children, the eldest being but fifteen. One day, towards the end of that year, one of these children was seized with fits, and in her convulsions she called out that a certain Mother Samwell, a labourer's wife who happened to be near her, looked a great deal like a witch. Shortly afterwards another and then another child were similarly affected, and before 1590 set in all five were subject to these paroxysms. While their limbs were distorted and their minds on the stretch, the name of this Mother Samwell frequently escaped from their lips, they crying out that she had bewitched them. On St. Valentine's eve Mr. Throgmorton was visited by his brother-in-law, Gilbert Pickering, Esq., of Titchmarsh Grove, Northamptonshire, who had heard of the children's condition. Mother Samwell, it seems, had just then been sent for; but she did not come, as she feared that the practice of scratching, which was often used as a remedy for bewitchment, would be employed upon her. "But," says the old record, "both her parents and Mr. Pickering had taken advice of good divines of the unlawfulness of it. Wherefore Mr. Pickering went to Mother Samwell's house, both to see and to persuade her that, if she was any cause of her children's trouble, to amend it." He was unsuccessful in his mission until he had threatened her, and then her daughter Agnes accompanied her to the house. At that moment three of the children were standing by the fire perfectly well; but no sooner had the two women entered than they fell down "strangely tormented, so that, if they had been let alone, they would have leaped and sprung about like a fish newly taken out of the water."† Mr. Pickering took one of the children home with him, but there she

* Given in Wright's History of Caricature and Grotesque in Art, p. 131.

† Wright's Sorcery and Witchcraft, i. 259.

was no better, and took to strange fancies and antics, which no one could interpret. Shortly after her departure, Lady Cromwell saw the unlucky individual who was supposed to be at the bottom of all the mischief. To use Hutchinson's words,* "She sent for the old woman and call'd her witch, and abused her, and pulled off her kercher, and cut off some of her hair, and gave it to Mrs. Throgmorton for a charm. At night this lady, as was very likely she would after such an ill day's work, dreamt of Mother Samwell and a cat, and fell into fits; and about a year and a quarter after she died." This was another offence at the poor wretch's door. The mutterings of the children, in their disordered state, were carefully patched together, and they were found to tell a tale about some imps waiting upon Mother Samwell, their names, according to this version, being Pluck, Smack, Hardname, Catch, and Blew. Long conversations among these interesting little demons were detailed by Jane Throgmorton, according to the evidence of Dr. Dorrington, who had been called in to attend upon her. The daughter, Agnes Samwell, was duly scratched, and she stood the ordeal with a martyr's fortitude. Her mother was induced to utter an exorcism, on promise of forgiveness, and even had some sort of a confession of guilt extorted from her by the same means. But all was of no avail. Not only the old woman, but her husband and daughter, were put on their trial at Huntingdon, and all were condemned without hesitation. To obtain proof against the old man, the judge told him on his trial that "if he would not speak the words of the charm, the Court would hold him guilty of the crimes he was accused of." After some browbeating, he did repeat it, when the child's fit ceased, and the judge exclaimed, "You see, all, she is now well, but not by the music of David's harp." Hanging followed as a matter of course; and, to commemorate the event, Sir Henry Cromwell appropriated the sum of forty pounds as a fund to provide for the preaching of an annual sermon against witchcraft. Mr. Wright says, "I have not ascertained if this sermon is still continued."

But a new impulse was to be given to this crusade against the powers of darkness on the death of Elizabeth. James the First, the great detector of demoniacs and the arch enemy of the devil, had different ideas of kingcraft to many other monarchs, and he signalised his accession to the English throne by a terrific raid upon the agents of his mighty antagonist. In the very first year of his reign an Act was passed quite worthy of the man who had interpreted the Revelation before he was twenty, and who, at twenty-three, was told by a devil, speaking out of a witch's mouth, that he was a man of God whom demons had no power over. It enacted that any person who was convicted of employing sorcery, enchantments, or charms, or digging up dead bodies for this purpose, should be sentenced to death. The clause referring to the business of resurrection was inserted apparently because stewed children formed the proper ointment for smearing on the broomstick, to enable the witch to fly through the air. In Middleton's "Witch" we have the speech—

> "Here, take this unbaptised brat;
> [Giving the dead body of a child]
> Boil it well; preserve the fat;
> You know 'tis precious to transfer
> Our 'nointed flesh into the air,
> In moonlight nights, on steeple tops,
> Mountains and pine-trees, that like pricks or stops
> Seem to our height."

The real history of witch prosecution begins and ends with the seventeenth century. Many cases occur both before and after that period, but this was the time when hounding down a poor old hag to death was most conspicuously a virtue. Northamptonshire was favoured with a strong dose of prosecutions as soon as the fruits of the new Act could fairly appear. It should be stated that the records we possess of the trials, both at this and a later period, are very imperfect, the information obtainable being derived almost exclusively from odd pamphlets accidentally preserved, stray allusions in contemporary authors, or other scattered data. At the end of the narrative of a trial at Northampton, to which we shall immediately refer, it is said that the unfortunate persons executed for witchcraft "left behind them in prison many others tainted with the same corruption, who, without much mercy and repentance, are like to follow them in the same tract of precedencie." But of the fate of these other poor creatures we have no further mention whatever in any work or document that has come down to us, and they do not appear to have been included in subsequent computations of the number charged with this offence. News travelled slowly in

* Historical Essay concerning Witchcraft, p. 132.

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those days; and when executions for witchcraft became common, the chief motive for publishing a detailed account of each prisoner's case—that of gratifying popular curiosity—was taken away. A further illustration of the partial extent to which these occurrences were generally known is afforded in the fact that in books of authority on the subject, the last execution of witches in England is put down to 1682,* while we have well-established cases at least as late as 1705.

To return to the beginning of the seventeenth century, when the mania for witch-hunting was just becoming developed. An old villager of Guilsborough, named Agnes Browne, was one of the first seized in this county. She was, of course, poor—"borne to no good," as the old black-letter pamphlet spitefully says,—"and, for want of grace, neuer in the way to receiue any." She certainly had not the art of conciliating the good-will of her neighbours, though we shall no doubt be going a good deal too far if we take the statement on trust that she was "of an ill nature and wicked disposition, spightfull and malitious." The proverb says, "Give a dog a bad name and hang him;" but the rule with these old pamphleteers was, hang him first, and give him a dreadfully bad name afterwards. Agnes Browne had a daughter named Joan Vaughan or Varnham, "as gratious," we are told, "as the mother, and both of them as farre from grace as heauen from hell." It was through her child that the old woman was reached, and eventually condemned. The tradition everywhere cherished was that witchcraft was to some extent hereditary; so that, where a half-starved, wrinkled hag laboured under suspicion of the crime, her offspring, if she had any, were sure to suffer in the opinion of the neighbours. No doubt this was the case with Joan Vaughan. Her mother had been "long suspected," and so of course the daughter was narrowly watched. She was a girl apparently of loose tongue, and perhaps of doubtful habits. One day she happened to be in the company of a "vertuous and godly gentlewoman" of the village, Mistress Belcher by name, with some others, and her conversation took a turn so "vnfitting and vnseeming the nature of woman-hood," that those who heard her were shocked, and especially did it "touch the modesty" of this very good person. To vindicate her sex, she rose up and struck Miss Joan; not to hurt her, we are assured, but only to make her leave the company, which she accordingly did. "This chicken of her dammes hatching," however, "taking it disdainefully, and being also enraged, at her going out told the gentlewoman that shee would remember this iniury and reuenge it: to whom Mistris Belcher answered that shee neither feared her nor her mother; but bad her doe her worst." After this very pretty squabble, the "company" were smitten with sudden terror, fearing that they had provoked the rage of one potent to do evil; and so, we are told, it turned out. Three or four days afterwards, Mistress Belcher, "being alone in her house, was sodainely taken with such a griping and gnawing in her body, that shee cried out, and could scarce bee held by such as came vnto her. And being carried to her bed, her face was many times so disfigured by beeing drawne awrie that it bred both feare and astonishment to all the beholders, and euer as shee had breath, she cried, 'Heere comes Ioane Vaughan, away with Ioane Vaughan.'" Such an exclamation was not a very unlikely one, considering that she believed herself bewitched, but it was taken as damning evidence against the two luckless women. Mrs. Belcher's illness proved to be lasting, and of course distressed her family. Her brother, a certain Maister Avery, came to visit her, and, like others, became mightily indignant at the supposed cause of the mischief. To avenge his sister, he "ranne sodainly" towards Mrs. Browne's house; but what was his astonishment, when he came to the door, to find that he could not enter, through some infernal agency restraining him. This was conclusive, if the other evidence had not been, especially as he was "a gentleman of a stoute courage." He tried again and again at subsequent visits, but ineffectually. "Belike," says the chronicler, "the deuill stood there centinell, and he kept his station well." Soon after his return home, Mr. Avery was seized with fits like his sister, and the two women were then, without hesitation, apprehended, and sent to Northampton Gaol, the committing magistrate being a certain Sir William Saunders, of Codebrooke.

The only possible remedy for the fits, according to popular opinion, was scratching the witch, as in the Warboys case, and this was therefore resorted to. Mr. Avery and his sister were taken to the gaol, and the witches held until they had drawn blood of them, when the afflicted were "sodainely deliuered of their paine." But the cure was not effectual, for no sooner were the witches out of sight than the visitors "fell againe into their old traunces,

* See Hutchinson, p. 57; Wright ii. 277; Scott, &c. Hutchinson's work was published in 1718.

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and were more violently tormented than before." We can well believe that their sufferings were extreme, for they evidently disordered their senses. On returning home in a coach "there appeared to their view a man and a woman ryding both upon a blacke horse, &c. Auery hauing spyed them afarre off, and noting many strange gestures from them, sodainely spake to them that were by, and (as it were prophetically) cryed out in these words, That either they or their horses should presently miscarry. And imediately the horses fell downe dead." This is a striking illustration of the phantasms conjured up by the distempered imaginations of persons who believed themselves possessed. Black and white horses, as everybody knows, have always figured largely in connection with infernal matters. Witness the well-known "Devil's Ride" of Southey:—

> "An apothecary, on a white horse,
> Rode by on his vocation;
> And the devil thought of his old friend
> Death in the Revelation!"

The rest of the history of Agnes Browne and her daughter is short. They were arraigned at the Assizes on the charge of producing the mischief we have mentioned, and further bewitching a child to death. Of the particulars of this last case against them we are not informed. They of course pleaded not guilty, and, in fact, "stood stiffely vpon their innocence;" but this, according to the doctrine of the day, only showed that the devil had hardened their hearts. After condemnation we are told, "they were neuer heard to pray," nor is it likely they would, poor, ignorant creatures as they were, after receiving this proof of the wilful blindness and cruelty of man, and apparently having no one, even in gaol, to lead their minds to a knowledge of better things. "In this their daungerous and desperate resolution, then, they dyed." The pamphlet containing these details closes with a curious paragraph, given to explain the wood-cut on the title-page, and which we also place at the commencement of this article. It is as follows: "It was credibly reported that some fortnight before their apprehension, this Agnes Browne, one Katherine Gardiner, and one Ione Lucas, all birds of a winge, and all abyding in the towne of Gilsborough, did ride one night to a place (not aboue a mile off) called Rauenstrop, all vpon a sowes backe, to see one Mother Rhoades, an old witch that dwelt there, but before they came to her house the old witch died, and in her last cast cried out that there were three of her old friends comming to see her, but they came too late, howbeit shee would meete with them in another place within a month after." A pig's back was a method of transport unknown to the witchcraft of the middle ages. The idea was of a much more practical turn than the old-fashioned flight on the backs of cats. Of the latter the accompanying is a caricature, taken from the stalls in Winchester Cathedral.* The designer must certainly have had an idea that these beldames led a jovial life.

Arthur Bill, of Raunds, who was the only man sentenced at these bloody assizes, was convicted upon similar evidence. The villagers entertained a suspicion that he had bewitched one Martha Aspine, alias Jeames, to death; and, to obtain a decisive verdict on

* Given in Wright's History of Caricature, p. 120.

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his guilt or innocence, they put him, his father, and mother into the water. This was an old and favourite test. King James, in his "Demonologie," which is quoted in this pamphlet, says witches float on the water by the special appointment of God, in the same way as a dead carcase gushes forth blood on the approach of the murderer. Application was usually made to a justice of the peace, and, on his order, the thumbs and great toes of the suspected person were tied together crosswise, a rope was fastened round the body, and the ends being held up by men standing on the opposite banks, the witch was thrown into the water. In this case all three floated, and they were of course regarded from that moment as irreclaimably abandoned to the Evil One. The son, however, was thought to be "the principall actor in this tragedy," and application was then made to Sir Gilbert Pickering, of Titchmarsh, for his commitment to prison. It is highly probable, if not absolutely certain, that this was the same Gilbert Pickering who figured in the Warboys case; and if so, he must by this time have obtained some local reputation as a witch-hunter.*

After young Bill's commitment, he naturally sent for his mother to come and see him in prison. His accusers immediately said this arose from a wish to close his father's mouth through his mother's agency, as the two were stated to be afraid lest he should reveal their dark doings. Soon afterwards the old man had a swelling in his throat, which is thus interpreted by the annalist:—"They both ioyned together, and bewitched a round ball into the throat of his father, where it continued a great while, his father not beeing able to speake a word. Howbeit the ball was afterwards had out, and his father prooued the principall witnesse against him." The old woman, fearing for the fate of her son, and desperate at the suspicions formed against herself, committed suicide by cutting her throat, and this was of course equally at the instigation of the devil. It was said that she consulted her spirit as to her destiny before she perpetrated the deed; but, as he could give her no better consolation than that she should be hanged, she "fell a rauing, crying out that the irrevocable judgment of her death was giuen, and that shee was damned perpetually, cursing and banning the time wherein shee was borne." Left alone in prison, and having the testimony of his mother's violent death against him, the son became still more agonised in mind, and, to clear himself, stoutly maintained his innocence against all comers. But this was taken as only greater proof of his obduracy. The writer of the tract states that he still feared his father's confession; but we have no explanation beyond the words given above of the part the old man took in support of the prosecution. The report was that the prisoner had three spirits attendant upon him, Grissill, Ball, and Jack; but no evidence appears that the father had any knowledge of the doings of these imps. Their names were not quite so picturesque as some we hear of. One witch, for instance, had two familiars, Vinegar Tom and Sack and Sugar; another four, James, Prick-em, Robin, and Sparrow; a third had a single attendant called Elimanzer, which she fed with milk pottage. None of his sprites were seen attending the prisoner Bill, but his historian does not the less believe in their reality. After lying in prison from the 29th of May till the 22nd of July following, he was arraigned for Martha Aspine's murder, and like the rest, pleaded not guilty. But he was convicted by the jury; "uppon the verdict whereof, his countenance changed, and he cried out that he had now found the law to haue a power aboue justice, for that it had condemned an innocent." At the gallows he persisted in the same declaration, and died proclaiming the injustice of his judges.

There is a dismal likeness between all the cases tried in this terrible year. Agnes Browne was "of poor parentage and poorer education," and Helen Jenkinson, the next on the list, is described with unintentional pathos as having "liued many yeares poore, wretched, scorned, and forsaken of the world." This was the cause of her being suspected of "bewitching of cattle and other mischiefes;" and of her being brought before Sir Thomas Brooke, of "Okely," for bewitching a child to death, and by him being committed to prison. The only circumstance of interest connected with the repulsive story is thus narrated:—"A little before her apprehension, one Mistris Moulsho, of the same towne,

* Gilbert Pickering, of Titchmarsh Grove, was the son of John Pickering, who went to live in the manor-house there about the commencement of Queen Elizabeth's reign. The father died in 1591, when the Warboys mystery was in process of development, and the son then became possessed of the estates. He was afterwards knighted, and in 1605 distinguished himself by his activity in searching for the Guy Fawkes conspirators. He died in 1613, a year after the present events. There was another Gilbert Pickering in the parish in 1590, but he did not live at t Grove.—See *Bridge's Northamptonshire*, ii. 383—5.

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(after she was so strongly suspected) getting her by a wyle into a place conuenient, would needs have her searched, to see if they could find that insencible marke which commonly all witches haue in some priuy place or other of their bodies. And this Mistris Moulsho was one of the chiefe that did search her, and found at the last that which they sought for to their great amazement: at that time this Mistris Moulsho had a bucke of clothes to be washt out. The next morning the mayd, when shee came to hang them forth to dry, spyed the cloathes, but especially Mistris Moulshoes smocke, to be all bespotted with the pictures of toades, snakes, and other ougly creatures, which making her agast, she went presently and told her Mistris, who, looking on them, smild, saying nothing else but this; Heere are fine hobgoblins indeed: And beeing a gentlewoman of a stout courage, went immediately to the house of the sayd Helen Ienkinson, and with an angry countenance told her of this matter, threatning her that if her linnen were not shortly cleered from those foule spots, she would scratch out both her eyes: and so, not staying for any answere, went home, and found her linnen as white as it was at first." Confession of a crime which had not been committed it was found impossible to elicit, so Helen Jenkinson stood in the eyes of the multitude, like her fellow-prisoners, as an obdurate, impenitent sinner, persevering to the last in the statement that she was guiltless, and having no sorrow on the scaffold but that which accompanied the feare of death.

There is but one more to complete this dark catalogue, and of her deeds we have only the most meagre outline. The power of the annalist is consumed in venting strong epithets upon her. "Mary Barber, of Stanwicke," he says, "was one in whom the licentiousnesse of her passions grew to bee the master of her reason, and did so conquer in her strength and power of all vertue, that shee fell to the apostacy of goodnesse, and became diuerted, and abused vnto most vilde actions, cloathing her desperate soule in the most vgly habiliments that either malice, enuy, or cruelty could produce from the blindnesse of her degenerate and deuillish desires." And so he goes on at some length. The special crime with which she was charged was that of bewitching a man to death, though she had the further reputation, as was usual in such cases, of having done mischief to the cattle of her neighbours. She was evidently a wretched old outcast, "monstrous and hideous both in her life and actions." Her commitment is dated the 6th of this same month of May, the magistrate being Sir Thomas Tresham. It seems she showed no more penitence in prison than her fellows. "So," says the last sentence of our chronicle, "without any confession or contrition, like birds of a feather, they all held and hanged together for company, at Abington gallowes, hard by Northampton, the two and twentith day of July last past." Where this gallows stood we have not been able to discover. A century later the executions took place on the north side of the town, where they were continued until within the memory of persons now living. A few lines before this it is incidentally mentioned that the prisoner was conveyed "from the common gaole of Northampton to Northampton Castle, where the Assizes are vsually held." In compiling a report for the county magistrates relating to property purchased for a gaol and house of correction, which was presented in February last year, the Clerk of the Peace (H. P. Markham, Esq.) has been at great pains to ascertain the precise site of the "common gaole" in the 17th century. At this early period, however, he does not find sufficient data for fixing it, though he finds house property acquired in 1634, which was subsequently converted into a gaol and house of correction, and which partly stood on the site of the present County Hall.*

To return to our narrative. From the expression to which we have referred, and other indications, it is pretty certain that these five wretched persons were far from being the only ones who suffered here under the rigorous persecutions of the time. Whether his indignation was aroused by the sights he had witnessed in his own town, or his reason was offended by the trumpery stories accepted as sufficient ground for a sentence of hanging,

* That this latter prison was a truly horrible place may be inferred from the narrative given in a curious old work entitled—"A Brief Account of the Sufferings of the Quakers," published in 1680. In that the case of seven persons is mentioned, who died in the course of a few months from confinement in what was called the "low gaol." They were chiefly villagers from Hardingstone, Bugbrooke, and other places, the offence alleged against them being that of not paying tithes. This "low gaol" was a dungeon "twelve steps below the ground," and it is said that thirty men lay here at one time, "and in the night they had little air, being lockt down betimes, and so kept close until the seventh hour the next morning." The wife of one of the prisoners also died from a pestiferous disease contracted in this loathsome place.

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we cannot say; but in 1616, Dr. John Cotta, an eminent physician of Northampton, published a thoughtful work, decidedly in advance of his age, entitled "The Trial of Witchcraft."* Our account of this work must be mainly derived from Mr. Wright's "History of Sorcery."† "Cotta did not dispute the existence of witches, but he objected to the evidence which was received against them; and the arguments he used to support his suspicions would, if followed out, have led him much further than he would venture then to go. Cotta requires that the evidence against persons accused of witchcraft should be of a direct and practical description. He recommended that, in all cases of supposed witchcraft or possession, skilful physicians should be employed to ascertain if the patient might not be suffering from a natural malady, and he pointed out the fallacy which attended the doctrine of witches' marks. He showed how little faith could generally be placed in the confessions of the witches, both from the manner in which they were obtained and the characters of the individuals who made them. He exposed, in the same rational manner, the uncertainty of such objectionable modes of trying witches as swimming them in the waters, scratching, beating, pinching, or drawing blood from them. He objected also to taking the supernatural revelations in those who were bewitched as evidence against those who were accused of bewitching them." This was not the first book written in the same rational strain, for in 1584 Reginald Scot issued his "Discoverie of Witchcraft," which assails the popular superstition with merciless vigour. Dr. Cotta's work, however, was much too early to produce any appreciable effect upon the multitude, who still howled and yelled round a newly-found sorceress, and offered up their thanksgivings at the bloody shrine where she was sacrificed.

Under the Commonwealth the persecution took its most violent form, while it first began to decline under the Protectorate. Matthew Hopkins, the celebrated witch-finder, commenced his career in 1645; and, in a defence of his conduct published three years afterwards, he boasted that he had been part agent in convicting about two hundred witches in Suffolk, Northamptonshire, Huntingdonshire, Bedfordshire, Norfolk, Cambridgeshire, and the Isle of Ely. Unfortunately for the cause, he was so successful as to inspire disgust; and the Independents shortly afterwards coming to influence in the State, the witches, however abundant and mischievous, began to meet with more lenient treatment.‡ One of Hopkins's peculiar practices deserves mentioning. As an improvement on any of the tests hitherto adopted, he resorted to the system of keeping the accused person fasting and in a state of sleeplessness for four-and-twenty hours, sitting too during the whole time in an uneasy posture, in a room set apart for the purpose. A hole having been made in the door of the chamber, the victim was carefully watched, to see if she was approached by any of her imps. At the end of the time, when she would be exhausted and confused from want of rest, an attempt was often made to extort confession, and any rambling statement she might make was caught up as sufficient for the purpose of conviction.

Glanvil has a queer tale about a bewitched family, living at Welton, near Daventry.§ The prodigies narrated in connection with them are said to have been veritably seen in the year 1658. A certain Widow Stiff had two daughters, the younger of whom one day began vomiting water, and continued doing so till she had brought up three gallons, "to the great admiration" of the spectators. Then she diverged to the dry goods line, and vomited a vast quantity of stones and coals. Some of them weighed a quarter of a pound, and were so big that she could hardly get them out of her mouth. This process lasted about a fortnight; and, while it continued, the articles of furniture in the house exhibited lively propensities. Flax would not burn on the fire; the bed-clothes sprang off the beds of their own accord; a sack of wheat could not be persuaded to stand upright after the door of the room had been shut upon it; the goods in the hall would spin about when no one was

* The Triall of Witch-craft, shewing the Trve and Right Methode of the Discouery: with a Confutation of erroneous wayes. By John Cotta, Doctor in Physicke. London: Printed by George Pvrslowe for Samvel Rand, and are to be solde at his shop neere Holburne-Bridge. 1616. 4to.

The following is the title of the second edition:—The Infallible Trve and Assvred VVitch: or, the Second Edition, of the Tryall of Witch-Craft. Shevving the Right and Trve Methode of the Discoverie: with a Confvtation of Erroneovs Waies, carefvlly Reviewed and more fully cleared and Augmented. By Iohn Cotta, Doctor in Physicke. London: Printed for I. L. for R. H., and are to be solde at the signe of the Grey-hound, in Pauls Church-yard. 1625. 4to.

Dr. Cotta was also the author of several medical works.

† Vol. ii, p. 143. ‡ Sir W. Scott's Demonology, p. 254. § Saducismus Triumphatus, p. 263.

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looking at them; milk was spilt by an unseen hand; pellets of bread were thrown about by an undiscoverable spirit; and divers other tricks were played much more amusing than credible. "At last," says the letter containing the particulars, "some that had been long suspected for witches were examined, and one sent to gaol, where, it is said, she still plays her pranks; but that," it is added, "is of doubtful credit." The imprisoning, at least, had the effect of re-assuring Widow Stiff, who heard or saw very little afterwards.

The end of the century is memorable for the great discouragement given to witch prosecutions by Chief Justice Holt, who had a large number of prisoners brought before him on a circuit of assize in the east and south of England, but who so directed the juries that they were all acquitted. The old trial by swimming, however, continued, and instances occurred in this and some adjoining counties of persons having been drowned in submitting to the ordeal. But by far the most repulsive case of imputed witchcraft of which we have any record in this locality came before the justices of assize in 1705, when the popular feeling was still so strong that the prisoners were not only condemned, but were first half killed by hanging, and then, while their flesh was still quivering with life, were burnt at the stake. The facts would appear incredible if they were not well attested. The prisoners were two women named Ellinor Shaw and Mary Philips, the first born at Cotterstock and the other at Oundle, a "short mile" away. Like the majority of people arraigned on similar charges, they were both poor; and, though working up to the time of womanhood at an honest occupation, they then fell into dissolute habits, and Shaw, at least, became a notoriously bad character. Even the children of the neighbourhood would point at her scoffingly, and greet her with opprobrious epithets. These constant insults "aggravated her passion to such a degree (she being naturally of a chollerick disposition) that she swore she would be revenged on her enemies, tho she pawn'd her soul for the purchase." Her intention was communicated to Phillips, and, as the old tract says, "they resolved to go to the devil together for company; but out of a hellish kind of civility he sav'd them that trouble at present; for, understanding they wanted a chapman, he immediately waited upon 'em to obtain his booty on Saturday, the 12th of February, 1704, about 12 o'clock at night (according to their own confessions) appearing in the shape of a black tall man, at whose approach they were very much startled at first; but, taking Elinor Shaw by the hand, he spoke thus: says he, Be not afraid of me, for I am one of the creation as well as your selves, having power given me to bestow it on whom I please; and do assure you that, if you will pawn your souls to me for only a year and two months, I will for all that time assist you in whatever you desire; upon which he produced a little piece of parchment, on which by their consents (having prick't their finger ends) he wrote the infernal covenant in their own blood, which they signed with their own hands." The compact was further sealed in a way which we can only distantly refer to, and the devil then pronounced them "as substantral witches as any were in the world, and said they had power, by the assistance of the imps he would send them, to do what mischief they pleased." This was all quite in accordance with the traditional creed, the two unfortunates being evidently well skilled in the folk-lore of their native places. The way in which this long string of fables was elicited is sufficiently indicative of their value. William Boss and John Southwel, constables of Oundle, and witnesses against them, said in their evidence that, having the prisoners in charge, they threatened them with death if they would not confess, and promised to let them go if they would; then, says the record, "after some little whineing and hanging about one anothers necks, they both made a confession," including the above details. No wonder if, under these circumstances, they hatched up a tale, which, alas! was more than sufficient to ensure them the penalty they dreaded. At their trial, however, they altogether repudiated the constables' statement. It is added in the narrative from which we quote that they began their mischievous work immediately on the conclusion of the bargain; in two days they had destroyed two horses and a child, and in nine months fifteen children, eight men, six women, forty hogs, a hundred sheep, eighteen horses, and thirty cows.

In this case we have a much greater development of the traditional machinery of witchcraft than in any other connected with Northamptonshire. A solemnly sworn compact with the Evil One is rarely met with in the prosaic sorcery of England at all, and especially at this late period. But the statements and reputed doings of these two women, as we have said, were quite *en règle* with the most famous sort of demonology, though not going to the lengths of Continental witchcraft. Widow Peak, another witness, for instance, swears that, while she with two other women were watching the prisoners at night after their apprehension,

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"there appeared in the room a little white thing, about the bigness of a cat, which sat upon Mary Phillip's lap, at which time she heard her, the said Mary Phillips, say, then pointing to Elinor Shaw, that she was the witch that kill'd Mrs. Wise, by roasting her effiges in wax, sticking it full of pinns, and till it was all wasted, and all this she affirm'd was done the same night Mrs. Wise dyed in a sad and languishing condition." This reminds us at once of Hopkins's system and the charge against the Duchess of Gloucester. The imps and other familiars figured very largely, the prisoners being accused not only of having red, dun, and black imps sent to them, who "nightly sucked a large teat," but of sending others to persons whom they wished to help in doing mischief. "Another evidence," for instance, "made oath that being, one day at her house they told her she was a fool to live so miserable as she did, and therefore if she was willing they would send something that night that would relieve her, and being an ignorant woman she consented, and accordingly the same night two little black things, almost like moles, came to her and sucked her, repeating the same for two or three nights after, till she was almost frighted out of her sences, insomuch that she was forced to send for Mr. Danks, the minister, to pray by her several nights before the said imps would leave her; she also added that she heard the said prisoners say that they would be revenged on Mrs. Wise because she would not give them some buttermilk." This buttermilk business was very humiliating for his Satanic Majesty's agents to have to do with, but it appears that the longer they lived in the world the more did the dignity of their life descend. The popular belief was that the places sucked by the imps became insensible to feeling, and hence the test by pricking a suspected witch. Ellinor Shaw added that "if the imps were not constantly imploy'd to do mischief, they (the witches) had not their healths; but when they were imploy'd they were very healthful and well." This was precisely what Anne Leach, of Mistley, one of Hopkins's victims, had said sixty years before.

Some further evidence was given in court to the effect that a boy taken with fits had described the prisoners as the source of the mischief, though he had never before seen them; and on some water being put into a stone bottle with pins and needles, and buried under the hearth of the house, the prisoners made their appearance, and asked that the bottle might be taken up, but their request was not granted until they had confessed their complicity. The boy, however, was so "violently handled" the next night but one that he died. These and the other matters having been solemnly sworn to, the judge gave a "larned charge to the jury relating to every particular circumstance," and in spite of their protestations they were found guilty of "wilful murther and witchcraft," and on the next day duly sentenced to death.

But the stories of their pranks do not end here. Although they are said to have "made a howling and lamentable noise" on hearing the announcement of their fate, popular rumour gave them credit for being "game" to the last. While they were in prison a Mr. Laxon and his wife one day had the curiosity to look through the grating, and they rashly taunted Shaw with having been left in the lurch by her infernal friend; but the words were no sooner uttered than she was seen to mutter to herself for a minute or two, and then Mrs. Laxon's clothes suddenly took a turn towards the sky, and she found herself in a condition of which she would have the utmost horror. When the witch had enjoyed a good laugh, and called out that she had "proved her lyer," the habiliments returned to their usual place. A similar trick was played on the keeper of the prison, who had threatened them with irons. The strange and awful narrative of the execution we must extract in full:—"They were so hardened in their wickedness that they publicly boasted that their master (meaning the Devil) would not suffer them to be executed, but they found him lyer, for on Saturday morning, being the 17th inst., they were carried to the gallows on the north side of the town, whither numerous crowd's of people went to see them die, and being come to the place of execution the minister repeated his former pious endeavours, to bring them to a sence of their sins, but to as little purpose as before; for instead of calling on God for mercy, nothing was heard from them but damning and cursing; however, a little before they were ty'd up, at the request of the minister, Ellinor Shaw confessed not only the crime for which she dyed, but openly declared before them all how she first became a witch, as did also Mary Phillips; and being desired to say their prayers, they both set up a very loud laughter, calling for the devil to come and help them in such a blasphemous manner as is not fit to mention; so that the sheriff, seeing their presumptious impenitence, caused them to be executed with all the expedition possible, even while they were cursing

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and raving; and as they liv'd the devils true factors, so they resolutely dyed in his service to the terror of all people who were eye witnesses of their dreadful and amazing exits. So that being hang'd till they were almost dead, the fire was put to the straw, faggots, and other combustable matter till they were burnt to ashes." This mode of execution, utterly revolting as it was, seems to have been not uncommon at the period. A shoemaker named John Kurde, of Syresham, was burnt in the stone pits beyond the North Gate for denying transubstantiation; but this was in 1557, and cannot, therefore, be adduced as a parallel case. In 1631, however, Mrs. Lucas, of Moulton, was burnt for poisoning her husband; in 1645 a woman suffered the same punishment near Queen's Cross for the same offence; again in 1655, for the very same crime a woman was burnt at Boughton Green; in 1715 Elizabeth Treslar was hung and then burnt on Northampton Heath; and as late as 1735 husband poisoning led to the similar treatment of a woman named Elizabeth Lawson. Of this last execution we have a detailed account in a broadside printed at the *Mercury* office. The prisoner was drawn in a sledge to the Heath, a place near the town on the Kettering road; "and after she was lifted out of the sledge she privately requested an attending officer that she might be quite dead before the fire was lighted; and being fixed to the stake, and the rope about her neck for some small time, she desired again to be dispatch'd, and accordingly the stool was drawn from under her, and the fire being lighted as directed, in about two or three hours she was entirely consumed."* We refrain from dwelling further upon these repulsive particulars, but the system of punishment cannot but be regarded as strange for the period at which it prevailed.

We have spoken of the discouragement given to prosecutions for witchcraft by the example of Chief Justice Holt. His successor, Parker, put a check on the trial by water by his declaration at the Essex Summer Assizes, in 1712, that if it occasioned the death of the suspected witch, all the parties concerned would be deemed guilty of wilful murder. In spite of the law, however, there were cases in which it was appealed to for the satisfaction of ignorant and spiteful villagers. On the 30th of June, 1735, a poor shoemaker, of Naseby, named John Kinsman, was "conducted to a great pond in Kelmarsh lordship, and underwent the discipline of the ducking stool for being suspected as a wizard, and conspiring with the devil, his master, to prevent the lazy dairy woman's making good butter and cheese, &c."† Upwards of a thousand spectators were present. To prove the criminality of the accused, one Barwick, a spectator, also got into the water, alleging that he would be certain to sink before the wizard. The pity is that he didn't. The annalist says it was stated that "another dipping would have brought many of the undertakers of this political way of trying wizzards and witches to have made but an indifferent figure at the ensuing assizes."

What is here hinted at actually occurred only a few years later. An old woman named Osborne, living at Tring, was suspected of bewitching a neighbour, named Butterfield, because during the rebellion of 1745 he had refused a request of hers for buttermilk. To solve his doubts he sent for a white (or harmless) witch from Northampton, who confirmed him in his belief, and the cottage where Mrs. Osborne lived was watched by rustics, armed with pitchforks and staves, as a security against spirits. No action would have been taken, however, but that some speculators wanted to attract a crowd together for the sake of gain, and accordingly gave notice at the several market towns that there would be a ducking of witches at Longmarston, on the 22nd of April, 1751. A large number of persons collected on that day, and after a vain attempt by the parish officers to keep Mrs. Osborne and her husband out of their hands they were stripped, tied up in orthodox fashion, and put into the water. The old woman died from the effects of the cruelty, and a chimney sweep named Colley, who especially distinguished himself by his brutality towards her, was afterwards executed and hung in chains. This outrage led to the final repeal of James' celebrated Act against witchcraft.

But neither the risk of hanging nor the progress of enlightenment prevented occasional recourse to this favourite test at even later periods. The *Northampton Mercury* of August 1, 1785, records the fact that on "Thursday last a poor woman, named Sarah Bradshaw, of

* To show that a burning actually took place in 1705, it may be important to mention that there is an item of expense entered in the overseers' accounts for St. Giles's parish of the date, for faggots bought for the purpose. There would hardly be a necessity to mention the fact if the occurrence of burnings after 1700 had not been called in question.

† Northampton Mercury of the date.

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Mear's Ashby, in this county, who was accused by some of her neighbours of being a *witch*, in order to prove her innocence, submitted to the ignominy of being dipped, when she immediately sunk to the bottom of the pond, which was deemed an incontestible proof that she was no witch!" Some sixty years ago an old woman named Warden lived in St. John street, Wellingborough, and bore the reputation of being a witch. Some petty mischief happening, which was laid to her account, she was hauled down to what is now known as Butlin's, but was then called Warren's Mill, where, in the presence of a crowd of persons, she was thrown into the water, and it is said she swam. How long she would have continued to float is doubtful, but her son William, who was from home at the time of her abduction, on hearing that his mother had been taken to be ducked for a witch, said, "Witch or devil, she's my mother, and I'll have her," and arrived at the Mill in time to save her. She lived some years after, but was always looked upon as a veritable witch. Mr. Becke, in his lecture, remarks that "there are persons living in this town now who can remember having seen a woman ducked in the river on the charge of having bewitched the butter in the market." The persons who administered the rite took good care, we presume, that nothing serious came of it.

The last execution in this neighbourhood for the employment of the black art would thus appear to have been in 1705. Mr. Sternberg, in his "Folk-lore," mentions another execution on July 22, 1712, but this seems to be a mistake. Gough, in his Collection on the Topography of Northamptonshire, refers to a tract of the date 1712, detailing the punishment of the offenders, similar to those we have so largely quoted from; but no such tract is to be found in the Bodleian Library, and it is incredible that witches were hanged both on the 22nd of July, 1612, and the 22nd of July a century later.*

Hitherto the more tragical aspect of witchcraft has chiefly claimed our attention; but a volume might be written on the lighter fancies associated with the necromantic world, even as revealed in our own local legends. That these are numerous enough is evidenced by Clare's amusing lines, narrating how the old gossip sits by the hob, and—

"From her memory oft repeats
Witches' dread powers and fairy feats:
How one has oft been known to prance
In cow-cribs, like a coach, to France,
And ride on sheep-trays from the fold
A race-horse speed to Burton-hold;
To join the midnight mystery's rout,
Where witches meet the yews about:
And how, when met with unawares,
They turn at once to cats or hares,
And race along with hellish flight,
Now here, now there, now out of sight."

Sternberg has some highly interesting pages on the superstitions of the Northamptonshire peasantry. The profession of exercising a species of supernatural power, it would appear, was not at all uncommon, since the method of acquiring it, according to popular belief, was very simple. "The person desirous of becoming a witch was to sit on the hob of the hearth, and, after cleaning and paring her nails, to give utterance to the words, 'I wish I was as far from God as my nails are free from dirt;' whereupon the experimenter immediately becomes possessed of powers which place at her mercy all those who have had the misfortune to incur her displeasure."† Moreover, the person bit or scratched by a witch immediately becomes one. The belief that witches could easily transform themselves into cats, foxes, and other animals, was very common here, as in other places. They were generally detected by being maimed. "A woodman out working in the forest has his dinner every day stolen by a cat. Exasperated at the continual repetition of the theft, he lies in wait for the aggressor, and succeeds in cutting

* From all the evidence we have before us, the execution in 1705 would seem to have been the last for witchcraft, not only in Northamptonshire but in England. A Mrs. Hicks is said to have been hung with her daughter at Huntingdon, in 1716; but in No. 129 of *Notes and Queries* (2nd series) good evidence is brought forward that the assertion is incorrect. One argument against it, however, we have seen is of no value; that "had there been such a trial and execution it is incredible that Hutchinson should not have alluded to it."

† Sternberg's Glossary and Folk-Lore, p. 147.

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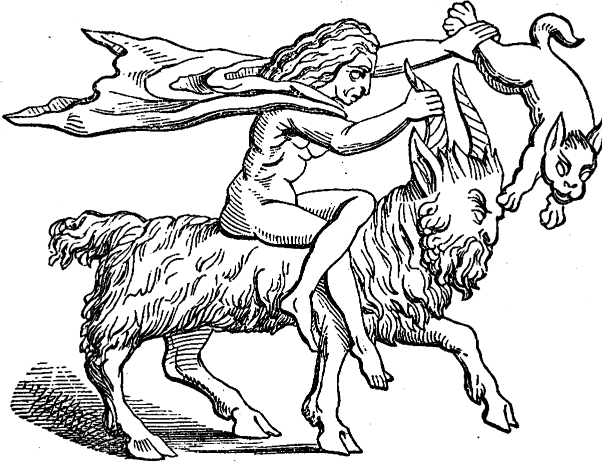
off her paw, when lo, on his return home, he finds his wife minus a hand." On the Continent, these infernal agents were credited with still larger powers. The accompanying cut, copied by Mr. Wright from a carving in Lyons Cathedral, shows a witch seated on a human being, whom she has converted into a goat, and dangling a cat in his face so as to tear him with her claws. The metamorphosis was effected in these cases without any of the

"Τυρόν τε καὶ ἄλφιτα καὶ μέλι χλωρὸν"

which Circe found it necessary to use; and which, in Milton's words,

> "The visage quite transforms of him that drinks,
> And the inglorious likeness of a beast
> Fixes instead."

Sometimes the witch became a fox or hare. "Old huntsmen still tell of the witch of Wilby, and the famous 'chivvies' she used to lead the hounds." Even a tree was now and then selected for the purpose, in a fashion quite Ovidian.



The doctrine that witches attended the periodical meetings known as their "sabbaths" seems not to have obtained any extensive currency in this county, though there are indications that it was not entirely unknown. The universal belief, where people were familiar with the complete canon of sorcery, was that at these midnight meetings the Evil One himself appeared, generally in the form of a goat; and the witches assembled, having kissed him in a very unseemly way and gone through some other rites, sat down to a splendid feast, suddenly spread before them by infernal agency; but that if by accident the name of God should be mentioned, the whole scene of revelry would instantly vanish and all become darkness and silence. "In the Northamptonshire version, a young fellow lets himself to a farmer and his wife, who, from their nightly journeyings on calves, he quickly discovers to be witches. One night he is required to attend them on one of these unhallowed expeditions, the object of which is the stealing of a child, to be used, probably, in the midnight orgies."* He accompanies them, but, while passing through the last keyhole, smitten with a sudden terror of remaining therein, he ejaculates, "God save us!" an exclamation which, as the peasants say, "Geunne he the sack, but saved the babby." We are told the same story, with variations, of a man at Loches, another at Lyons, a young girl at Spoleto, a countrymen of the Vosges, and of persons figuring in the Basque superstitions.†

* Sternberg, p. 150.

† Wright's Sorcery and Magic, i. capp. 15, 17.

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Tam O'Shanter, too,

> "Saw an unco sight!
> Warlocks and witches in a dance;
> Nae cotillion brent new frae France,
> But hornpipes, jigs, strathspeys, and reels,
> Put life and mettle in their heels.
> A winnock bunker in the east,
> There sat auld Nick in shape o' beast;
> A towzie tyke, black, grim, and large,
> To gie their music was his charge.
> As Tammy glowr'd, amazed and curious,
> The mirth and fun grew fast and furious."

But his note of disenchantment is quite different from that of the mediæval fablers.

> "First ae caper, syne anither,
> Tam tint his reason a' thegither,
> And roars out, 'Weel done, Cutty-sark!'
> And in an instant all was dark."

Yet, after all, the notion of witchcraft was no innocent and romantic superstition, no scion of an elegant mythology; but, in its proper guise, altogether vulgar, repulsive, bloody, and loathsome. We may laugh at the absurd creations of a rustic elf-lore, and we shall be charmed with the lightsome tricks of an Ariel; but we can have no sympathy with that dark and ferocious creed which took its rise in an atmosphere of suspicion, and found its proper end only in the most revolting cruelty. That was for centuries a blot on the growing civilization of this and neighbouring countries, a means of revealing the weakness of great minds, an incentive to perjury and the worst of offences, and an engine of persecution among the most effective that sectarian hate could invent. Remnants of the superstition still linger in nooks and corners of the land, and show, by the ignorance they foster and the malignity they sometimes inspire, how really formidable it was when flourishing in meridian vigour.

[An Antediluvian Witch. From Della Bella.]

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