NEW ENGLAND'S PLACE IN THE HISTORY OF WITCHCRAFT

BY GEORGE LINCOLN BURR

It is now more than twenty years since I reached the threshold of this theme. Happily it was to learn in time its perils. I was about to read before the American Historical Association a paper on "The Literature of Witchcraft" and my friend Mr. Justin Winsor naturally guessed that it must touch upon New England's share. "Don't be afraid," he encouraged me, "to say just what you please. If Poole pitches into you, I'll come to your support."

But what I had then to say about New England could give offense not even to Mr. Poole. The Salem panic was dismissed with a single sentence as "but the last bright flicker of the ghastly glare which had so long made hideous the European night," and in apology for ignoring the literature of American witchcraft I pleaded that in such a presence it would be a work of supererogation, if not an impertinence, to treat that literature with the brevity its place in the history of the delusion would demand. Perhaps these words satisfied even Mr. Poole that thus far I was no partisan. At any rate, though more than once it was my privilege to discuss with him New England witchcraft, he remained, like Mr. Winsor, till death my friend.

Till now I have been too wise to skirt the theme again. But age has brought temerity. Much as has been written, and well written, on the New England episode, no student has yet devoted a paper to its place in the history of witchcraft as a whole. Yet perhaps I should

not even now attempt it, had not two studies, both by members of our society and read before its meetings, done much to pave the way. In 1895 Professor Justin Winsor himself, in a paper on "The Literature of Witchcraft in New England,"[1] not only much more than made good what my own essay had lacked, but brought to light many a channel through which the thought of the old England told upon the new; and in 1906 a younger colleague of his and ours, Professor George Lyman Kittredge, in a paper bearing the modest title of "Notes on Witchcraft,"[2] went much further. Alleging the antiquity and the universality of belief in witchcraft, he pointed out more fully than had hitherto been done the relations of New England thought to English, the intelligibility of the superstition, the complexity of the problem on both sides of the sea, the inadequacy of its explanation by Puritanism or by pedantry, the relative slightness and transiency of the Salem episode; and, with the keen eye of the practised critic, he swept away a host of misstatements and exaggerations which have distorted the story. It is a service for which every lover of New England must be grateful; and, though there is much more to say and some things which I could have wished said otherwise, I could hardly, had he stopped with this, have cared to add a word. But when, in the generous zeal of his apology, he proceeded to lay down a body of theses which declare the belief in witchcraft "practically universal in the seventeenth century, even among the educated," and "no more discreditable to a man's head or heart than it was to believe in spontaneous generation or to be ignorant of the germ theory of disease," and which pronounce "the position of the seventeenth-century believers in witchcraft" . . . "logically and theologically stronger" than that of their opponents, and "the impulse to put a witch to death" "no more cruel or otherwise blameworthy, in itself, than the impulse to put a murderer to death,"

[1] Proceedings, N. S., Vol. X, pp. 351-373.
[2] Proceedings, N. S., Vol. XVIII, pp. 148-212.

he reached results so startlingly new, so contradictory of what my own lifelong study in this field has seemed to teach, so unconfirmed by the further research to which his words have stirred, and withal so much more generous to our ancestors than I can find it in my conscience to deem fair, that I should be less than honest did I not seize this earliest opportunity to share with you the reasons for my doubts—aye and to suggest a reading of history which, without undue harshness to the past, may leave it more intelligible how the present could honestly come to be.

If such a protest be anywhere in place, it is surely here. And if even here it seem too frankly polemic, let me plead that to take another's work so seriously is the best tribute to its weight, and to offer one's own in return the best gratitude for its help. In any case I could hardly diverge more widely from my predecessor than did he from his; and, so sweeping are his conclusions, any later study must choose between the disrespect of silence and the frankness of debate.[3]

And if to any here it seem treason to those who made New England to dissent from aught that can be urged in their praise, bear with me while I plead that, despite my birth and home in the wilds beyond the Hudson, there flows in my own veins none but New England blood; that that blood is almost wholly Puritan; that the English county which I believe the home of those who bore my name was that most deeply stained by this superstition; that the first who brought that name across the sea must at Springfield have had some part (though I trust it is only Dr. Holland's imagination that in *The Bay Path* gives him so large part) in the earliest New England witch-trial known to us in its details; that a few years later, at Fairfield, his son John Burr, my forebear, with Abigail his wife, had part unquestion-

[3] Perhaps I should not fail to add that the debate indeed has been opened by himself; for it is to questions involved in what his paper (else over-generous to my own) calls "the error into which Professor Burr has fallen" that the present study is chiefly devoted.

able in such proceedings; and that my other traditions are mainly of like ancestry and of a like ancestral faith.

Yet, to me, to urge in defense of those who in the seventeenth century—in New England or elsewhere—hung women as witches that the belief in witchcraft is universal seems a juggling with words. That belief which in the seventeenth century caused women to be done to death was never universal—in place or time. Let us define our terms. To assert or to deny anything whatever of witchcraft without a definition is to talk in the air: the word has had widely different meanings. When we affirm the universality of witchcraft or of the belief in it, it is in a sense which neither the etymology nor the history of that word suffices to explain. Only by analogy has its meaning gained so wide an application; and, unless I err as to what the anthropologists teach us, it is only in a sense that would make it inclusive of both religion and magic that witchcraft can be demonstrated universal. If, however, we discriminate between religion and magic, understanding by magic the art of winning supernatural aid, not by submission or persuasion, but by human cleverness or lore, and if then witchcraft be identified with magic, as is often done, we shall still, I fear, have fallen short of an excuse for its repression. But if, as is most common of all, we make witchcraft to mean "black magic" alone—and this is clearly what Professor Kittredge does, since he counts *maleficium,* harm to others, its essence—we come up against a difficulty not less grave. For to the devotees of a religion not only the users of black magic, nay not only all the users of magic, be it black or white, seem to employ illicit aid against their fellows; but, so fierce is the struggle for existence, the users of a rival religion are almost sure to be confused with these. And if the religion be monotheistic and claim monopoly, then *presto* all other gods and all other worships are branded with the stigma. Now, from almost or quite the first, this was precisely the attitude of Christianity, both toward all magic and toward all pagan faiths.

She did not deny the existence of gods other than her God. She did not deny them power. She denied them only goodness. They were "fiends," and those who sought their aid, for whatever end, by whatever means, were alike guilty of witchcraft. For now it is that we first meet that word. It belonged alone to our English forefathers, and before they were Christians they seem to have meant by it nothing evil. The word "witch," if scholars are right, is but a worn form of the word "witega," by which the Christian translators of that earliest day rendered into their own English the sacred name of "prophet." It can at first have implied in those who were known by it no graver fault than wisdom. Christianity it was that degraded it to a meaning wholly bad, the awful shadow of her awesome light, including within it not only all she learned to know of English heathendom, but darkening yet more the notion with all she remembered of Hebrew or Greek or Roman superstitions—for to her the Devil, like God, was one.

Yet all this was but the germ of her full-grown idea of witchcraft. A change more fundamental was in store. Thus far there was reality in the things she fought. However she might confuse them or exaggerate, the old superstitions were not dead. But a mass of them she had from the first despised or laughed away; and under her stern teaching their survivals fell ever more and more into neglect. As the danger lessened, her own bearing wisely grew less stern. The growing Canon Law punished now a practice, now the belief in it, and presently forgot to punish at all. However now and then superstition might well up in violence from the masses, it looked for a time as if under the enlightening care of Church and State its most cruel terrors might be outgrown.

Alas, what was swept out at the door crept in at the key-hole. The old ideas had found an anchorage in theology. The old names still lived on. As our fathers brought with them over the sea memories of robin or partridge, and their children, grown familiar with the

word, must somehow find a thing to wear the name, so then the teachers of that docile age worked into the patchwork of their school theology these tatters of the past. The superstitions of the lowly may be met by education; but who shall save us from the superstitions of the learned? The long and complex history through which witchcraft came to mean what it meant to Christian Europe from the fourteenth century to the seventeenth, I must not here rehearse. Suffice it that that meaning had grown definite and fixed—formulated and prescribed by school and court and pulpit—and that none were so strenuous in insisting on that definition, so hot in denying the identity of this their witchcraft with any other, as were the witch-haters themselves. Nor were they wrong; for to write of robin or of partridge and ignore the change which has made the words mean one thing in Old England and another in New would be less misleading than to ignore the change which had come in the meaning of witchcraft—a change from objective to subjective—from the deed of a culprit to the dream of an inquisitor.

I do not mean, of course, that there was no intelligible chain of thought between the older meanings and the new. I do not mean that there were not, then as now, those who confused the two. I do not mean that men and women were not sometimes brought into suspicion of witchcraft in the new sense by some dealing with witchcraft in the old. I mean only that the witchcraft for which during these centuries men and women were punished by church and state was a theological fantasy, and that for any sort of witchcraft known before the advent of this theological conception men and women would no more have been done to death in seventeenth-century Salem than in Salem of to-day. This is what I meant when in that old paper I wrote: "Magic . . . is actual and universal; . . . but witchcraft never was. It was but a shadow, a nightmare: the nightmare of a religion, the shadow of a dogma. Less than five centuries saw its birth, its vigor, its decay."

Later research, at least, has but confirmed these words. Joseph Hansen, the eminent German scholar who has since given the world the most careful book on the rise of this conception,[4] would narrow its period yet more closely than I. And Mr. Lea, from whom, after a lifetime's study of this subject, we hoped the most learned of all books upon it, wrote in 1907 in one of those chapters of his great histories of the Inquisition which may remain our only substitute for that unfinished work: "The culmination of sorcery was witchcraft and yet it was not the same. . . . The witch has abandoned Christianity, has renounced her baptism, has worshipped Satan as her God, has surrendered herself to him, body and soul, and exists only to be his instrument. . . . There are no pages of European history more filled with horror than those which record the witch-madness of three centuries, from the fifteenth to the eighteenth; . . . [and] this witch-madness was essentially a disease of the imagination, created and stimulated by the persecution of witchcraft."[5]

Professor Kittredge, too, counts sound and necessary the distinction between witchcraft and magic; but he thinks it less vital than do I in the history of witchcraft, and less true for England than for the Continent. To this point, therefore, and especially to England I have first addressed my study.[6] I am far yet from being ready to pronounce a final opinion; but I must confess that thus far I have found no reason to adopt his view.[7]

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[4] *Zauberwahn, Inquisition und Hexenprozess im Mittelalter* (Munich and Leipzig, 1900).

[5] *The Inquisition of Spain* (New York, 1906-1907), IV, p. 206. Mr. Lea once wrote me that all his study of the Inquisition grew out of his study of the history of witchcraft.

[6] This has been the more tempting because during these last months there has fallen upon me, as the chairman of a committee of the American Historical Association, the pleasant task of aiding to prepare for the press a prize essay by a young American scholar on the history of English witchcraft (Wallace Notestein, *A History of Witchcraft in England from 1558 to 1718*, Washington, 1911). Alas, though I owe to this a stimulating companionship and many additions to my knowledge, and for both am glad here to express my warm thanks to the author, it has needed from me more time than I foresaw; and to the inopportune demands during these last days of the page proofs of that volume I must ask you to impute in part the crudeness and the incompleteness of the present paper.

[7] He cites (note 2) Hansen as also recognizing "the difference between England and the Continent in the development of the witchcraft idea and in the history of prosecution."

Instead of finding in England popular superstition more continuous than on the Continent I seem to find it less so. Nor does this seem hard to explain. The English were a migrant people, and superstitions do not migrate easily. Germanic beliefs were peculiarly local, and the students of Germanic origins have often pointed out how largely, even on the Continent, they failed to survive the wandering. But the English migrated over sea, lost touch almost wholly with the home land, were long cut off by speech and faith from the superstitions of the land to which they came. For long the migrants were men—less prone than women to the practice or the fear of sorcery. And scarcely were they well settled in the new home when a new faith, Christianity, made them its converts,—and more swiftly and thoroughly than any other Germanic folk till their kinsmen the Normans should under circumstances very similar repeat the story.

How much of superstition that new faith brushed away, how sternly, though so credulously, it fought the remainder, we have already noted. It is in the Penitentials, not the laws, that we first find mention of witchcraft; and what the English Penitentials find to punish is slight compared with what is found by Continental ones—nay, much of even this little seems only borrowed from Continental canons.[8] And while the pre-Christian Germanic laws of the Continent punish witchcraft only when harm to person or to goods is charged, and only later, under church influence, make it penal as a dealing with evil powers,[9] Alfred's law, the earliest English one, is but an echo of the Mosaic "Thou

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I am unable to read so much, however, out of the passage he names (*Zauberwahn*, p. 24, note 1). What Hansen seems to me to say is only that his own book does not deal with England, which "though it shared indeed largely in the witch-trials, reflects only the general course of the development."

[8] It is to be noted that much of what is published by Spelman and by Thorpe as belonging to the Penitential of Theodore, in the seventh century, or to Egbert's, in the eighth, is now known to be later interpolation from Continental sources. See Wasserschleben, *Bussordnungen*, pp. 13-32, 162-219, 251-348; Haddan and Stubbs, *Councils*, iii, pp. 173-186, 179-190, 413-416, 424; Lea, *Auricular Confession and Indulgence*, iii, p. 103-104.

[9] See Hansen, *Zauberwahn*, pp. 61 ff. and authorities cited by him; and especially Brunner, *Deutsche Rechtsgeschichte*, ii, pp. 678-691.

shalt not suffer a witch to live."[10] The laws of Ethelred and Cnut are scarcely less redolent of Scriptural suggestion;[11] and when, with the Norman Conquest, the influence of the Continent and of Rome grows more direct, the English theologians and chroniclers reek with precisely the same witch and devil lore that was popular beyond the Channel.

But in England, as on the Continent, the attitude of Church and State toward what they deemed witchcraft seems for a time to grow milder, not sterner. In England, as on the Continent, it was only in the train of the newly organized repression of heresy that sternness came back. "Indeed," say the historians of English law, "it is probable that but for the persecution of heretics there would have been no persecution of sorcerers."[12] Everybody knows how, when Bishop Stubbs had taught us that even in England the authority of the Canon Law was greater than we had dreamed, Mr. Maitland, layman and skeptic, went much further and showed it greater than Bishop Stubbs had dreamed. Especially did he prove this as to heresy, showing beyond question that heretics were burned, and by the civil authorities at the instance of the Church, before the statute *de haeretico comburendo*.[13] By the Canon Law witchcraft had now been brought into the closest connection with heresy—it was only a higher treason against Heaven—and the Church's pressure for its punishment was not less urgent.[14] As in 1401 the Canon Law was reinforced, as to heresy, by the statute, so in 1406 there was won from the same churchly king, and doubtless by the prelate to whom our extant copy of it is addressed—Philip Repington, Bishop of Lincoln, late the king's chaplain

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[10] See Liebermann, Die Gesetze der Angelsachen (Halle, 1906), i, pp. 38-39.

[11] Same, pp. 248-249, 310-311.

[12] Pollock and Maitland, *History of English Law* (2d ed., Cambridge, 1898), ii, p. 552.

[13] Maitland, *Canon Law in the Church of England* (London, 1898), especially pp. 79-80, 158-179; and the *History of English Law*, ii, pp. 544-552.

[14] See as to this Mr. Lea's chapters on "Sorcery" and "Witchcraft" in his *The Inquisition of the Middle Ages* and Hansen, *Zauberwahn*, ch. iv. Not all the decretals as to witchcraft were to find a place in the authorized *Corpus* of the Canon Law; but this was then only in the making.

and confessor and still his bosom friend, an ex-Lollard now with the zeal of a renegade hunting down his ancient brethren and soon to be rewarded with the cardinal's hat—a royal letter calling for the ferreting out of witches.[15] Nor can I find that in England the theory of witchcraft differed then in any point from that of the rest of Latin Christendom. That, however, there followed in England no such epidemic of witch-persecution[16] as on the Continent I readily admit; but it seems to me more easily explained than by any difference in the development of the witchcraft idea. There was in England no Holy Inquisition; and on the Continent it was, as is well known, to the Holy Inquisition, now left at leisure by its success in the extirpation of heresy, that the new quest of witches was almost wholly due. There was in England no use of torture; and the torture, as is not less well known, was the fruitful source of nearly all witch-epidemics. When in the seventeenth century English procedure, in spite of English law, learned to use torture, England too had her witch-epidemic. I gladly admit, too, that both these causes must have retarded in England the diffusion of the witch-idea. That England had no Holy Inquisition may have been, as has been said, only because she had no need of one; but in its absence she lacked those from whom came all the treatises expounding the new dogma, and whose prestige must have done much to give it vogue. The torture, too, not only wrested, from the innocent, confessions of guilt and the names of accomplices to be tortured into like confession, but through the wild tales it forced from their delirious fancy or enabled the leading questions of bookish in-

[15] The Bishop of Lincoln it was, not the Bishop of Norwich, as say Pollock and Maitland (*History of English Law*, ii. p. 555). The error is borrowed from Thomas Wright (introduction to *Proceedings against Dame Alice Kyteler*, Camden Society, London, 1843), who, however, prints the document in full and with the correct name. It may be found also in Rymer; and see the *Calendar of Patent Rolls, Henry IV, 1405-1408*, p. 112. Mr. Lea assumes (*Inquisition of the Middle Ages*, iii, p. 467), and I think reasonably, that the same letter was sent to all the English bishops.

[16] I am sorry that I must use this word "persecution," so scrupulously avoided by Professor Kittredge. "Prosecution," which he uses instead, does not mean the same thing; and, if it did, I fear it would lose no time in falling under the same stigma.

quisitors to put into their mouths—tales published through the reading of these confessions to the crowds which gathered at sentence and execution or diffused through the no less effective medium of common gossip —was a most potent popularizer of the delusion. And, though from both these sources, through written book and word of mouth, there filtered slowly into England all this teaching, it was not till after the middle of the sixteenth century that it began to tell on public polity.[17] Till that time, as I too believe, the idea of *maleficium*, or actual harm, played a larger part in English action toward witchcraft than on the Continent was now accorded it.

But with the accession of Elizabeth there found entrance into England a Continental influence which was to change all this. The Marian exiles, who so largely manned her bishoprics, were fresh from lands and towns where witch-burning was in full career, and at Geneva, Zurich, Basel, Strasburg, had had ample opportunity to learn its theory; and the law which was now to embody this differing attitude they from the very outset of the new queen's reign demanded at her hands. That law was introduced in her first Parliament, though to be passed only by its successor; and in the interval one of these exiles, Bishop Jewel, who had already reported to his Continental mentor, Peter Martyr, the enormous number of witches his trained eyes now found in England,[18] burst forth, in a sermon before the queen, into an appeal to her for action against them.[19] It is true that he finds a ground for this appeal in the "horrible using" of her poor subjects, whom his eyes have seen to "pine away even unto the death." Nay, he even insinuates some such danger from the witches to the queen herself: "I pray God," he said, "they never prac-

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[17] Of the transient statute under Henry VIII or of its disappearance under Edward, I must not pause to speak. As was long ago pointed out, there is reason to doubt whether it was honestly meant or seriously enforced.

[18] Jewel, *Works* (Parker Soc., 1845-1850), iv, pp. 1216-1217; or (translation only) *Zurich Letters* (Parker Soc., 1842), 44.

[19] As to the date of this sermon see Notestein, p. 16.

tise further than upon the subject." But it must be remembered that the "laws" for whose execution he was then appealing must mean the common law of the realm, which of course took cognizance only of concrete injury as basis for a criminal action in the courts. It is true, too, that the new statute, which early in 1563 became a law, mentions still as a ground for the "condign punishment" of such "devilish persons" their witchcrafts "to the destruction of the persons and goods of their neighbors"; but this is no longer the only ground, nor is any *maleficium* longer needed for their conviction. To "use, practise, or exercise any invocations or conjurations of evil and wicked spirits to or for any intent or purpose" is specified first of all as enough by itself to warrant their death as felons; and to their witchcrafts against their neighbors are now assimilated "other lewd intents and purposes contrary to the laws of Almighty God and to the peril of their own souls."[20]

I venture to think that no student familiar with the Erasmian tone of the leaders of church and state in England during the earlier sixteenth century can read the sermon which offered the text for such an outburst, or the statute which thus assumes the old function of the Canon Law and punishes sin as well as crime, without discerning in both alike a new diction and a new spirit, or without recognizing in that diction and that spirit the stamp of what was later to be known as Calvinism. And from this day forward, however individuals prove exceptions either way, the group, the party, which I seem to find always standing in general for a sterner dealing with witches in England is that whose

[20] Professor Kittredge (see his note 4) seems wholly to have overlooked, both in the statute of Elizabeth and in that of James, this prescription of death for witchcraft without *maleficium*—witchcraft which wrongs only God and harms only self—and this oversight, I fear, is largely responsible for his whole point of view. Were only *maleficium* to be punished, there was indeed, no need for a special statute: the common law punished, and with severity, both harm to person and harm to goods, whether wrought by witchcraft or in any other wise. Nay, even after there was a special statute, the common law might be invoked to punish *maleficium*, and in one case, at least, it took precedence: a woman who bewitched to death her husband, was burned for husband-murder ("petty treason"), not hanged for witchcraft.

bond of unity was Calvinism.[21] It was not that Calvinism was more prone to superstition. I believe it had to do with the precise converse of this. What happened now was singularly like what had happened when Christianity took hold on the Germanic peoples. The rational minds of the Swiss and Genevan reformers, trained in a more critical school than their North German neighbors, discarded at one sweep nearly the whole

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[21] "The remark," says Professor Kittredge (note 42), "that Calvinism was especially responsible for witch-trials is a loose assertion which has to reckon with the fact that the last burning for witchcraft at Geneva took place in 1652." Who may have ventured such a remark I do not know, and I have no wish to defend it. I should be slow to believe that Calvinism could be more responsible for witch-trials than was the Dominican theology in its own time and place, or than Lutheranism in the lands where it was most dominant. That Calvinism was especially responsible for witch-trials *in England* is, however, a verdict so familiar that, so far as I know, Professor Kittredge is the first to question it. Principal Lee, a half-century ago, in his *Lectures on the History of the Church of Scotland* (i, pp. 315-327), undertook to clear the skirts of Scotland and of Presbyterianism, and like Professor Kittredge he refutes many exaggerations; but it is in part at the cost of English Calvinists, and I doubt if, in general, Professor Kittredge would count the case advanced by his sometimes startling arguments. If the ascription of especial responsibility to Calvinism in England has been loosely made, I suspect that it is because it was supposed an admitted fact or seemed too evident for proof. Such grounds for my own faith in it as I have space here to present will be found in the text; but let me hasten to reckon with the date of that last burning at Geneva by asking how many other cities of the importance or the intelligence of Geneva had a witch-burning so late as 1652. Of her neighbors Strasburg and Basel seem to have left off a little earlier, Bern and Zurich a little later. London saw an execution that very year, and perhaps another in the year that followed; but London was then a very Calvinistic London, and knew nothing of this sort after the Restoration. It is, of course, to Geneva's honor that she burned no later, though her witch trials did not cease with her witch-burning; nor will I ask whether we should attribute the escape of the rest from death to the hesitation of her judges, as does her historian, Gautier, or to the protest of her physicians, as does Dr. Ladame, who has edited the documents of that final burning. I am glad to believe it, rather, a civic advance in which these had only their share. In any case, is it not as irrelevant to the question of the influence of Calvinism as it would be to question the influence of the medieval theology because witch-burnings ceased early at Rome? Is it not more pertinent that, while of the one hundred and sixty-two trials whose records are left at Geneva from the fifteenth century but one was for witchcraft (Ladame, *Procès criminel de la dernière sorcière brulée à Genève*, p. vi) and while prior to the advent of the reformers it is said that no death penalty for witchcraft is known to the annals of the city, one hundred and fifty were burned there for that crime during the next sixty years (Henry, *Leben Calvins*, ii, p. 75, quoting Picot, *Histoire de Genève*, ii, 280)? I dare not answer for the exactness of these latter figures, for I do not know on what Picot has based his count; but they gain much probability from the fact that Dr. Ladame finds still in the Genevan archives the documents of two hundred witch-trials from the sixteenth century (*Procès*, p. vii), and that Hansen, who has also sifted these archives, enumerates only a single sixteenth-century trial there prior to 1540 (*Quellen*, p. 513). As this trial, which ended in a condemnation and therefore probably in an execution, took place in 1527, it might seem in so far to throw doubt on Picot's figure; but, as the court was the Holy Inquisition and the witch from an outlying Savoyard village, the case is not strictly a Genevan one. Yet even for Geneva let me not seem to make Calvinism the only cause of persecution.

mass of the superstitions which had become the heritage of Christendom—not only those which had to do with Christian worship, but those as well which clustered about its alleged counterpart, the ritual of Satan. As Calvin's caustic treatise on the need of an inventory of the relics of the saints, with its shrewd sense and taunting mockery, rang through the Christian world, translated and read nowhere more eagerly than in England, so too his contemptuous rejection of a horde of the marvels of witchcraft. Miracles had ceased, he taught, with the apostles. The miracles of the Devil, like those of the Church, are sham. The witch-sabbath is a fantastic fiction, the witch's flight through the air a delusion of Satan. Luther and his followers took over from the Middle Ages a host of superstitions to which Calvin would not listen. Even of exorcism, whether of babes or of demoniacs, he would not hear. And on no side, I think, did Calvinism more appeal to the practical common sense of Englishmen.

But on one point Calvin stood firmly with the past —on the authority of the Bible. It was in its name that he condemned all else. "He that believes more than the Holy Bible teaches," wrote one of his English disciples,[22] "he is superstitious, and the use of the thing is superstition"; and superstition, taught Calvin, is as bad as atheism.[23] And to Calvin the Holy Bible meant Old Testament as well as New. Luther had denied that the Old was binding upon Christians; but Calvin held its legislation still valid and authoritative, and out of it he drew his scheme of church and state. It is the duty of the Christian prince, the Christian magistrate, he taught, to enforce the law of God as well as that of man; and the first four Commandments, which define men's duties to God, should be enforced more zealously than the other six, which govern their duties to each other. "Now the Bible," said Calvin, "teaches that there are witches and that they must be slain." "God

[22] Bishop Pilkington.

[23] See his sermon on Deut. xiii.

expressly commands that all witches and enchantresses be put to death, and this law of God is a universal law," as binding to-day as ever.[24] To deny that magical arts were ever practised, or that they are so still, would be to accuse God of heedlessness, legislating about things which do not exist.[25] This is "impudent blasphemy," and they who utter it should be driven out from Christian communities.[26] Though the Devil's pretended miracles are frauds, "we need not wonder if, by God's permission, he should disturb the elements, or afflict the reprobate with diseases and other evils, or present phantoms to their sight."[27]

Therefore it was that Calvin could take earnest part in the extirpation of those who were charged with spreading the plague at Geneva by anointing with a diabolic unguent the latches of the doors.[28] Therefore it was that he could appear in person before the Council to insist on the extirpation of the witches (this time not pest-spreaders) in the parish of Peney; and it is to be noticed that the records of the Council make him term them "heretics."[29] To him it was not their harm to men that was the gist of their offense. It was that such offenses, however illusory, "carry with them a wicked renunciation of God"; for "God would condemn to

[24] See his sermon on the Witch of Endor (*Opera*, ed. Baum *et al.*, xxx, 631-632).

[25] *Opera*, xxiv, 269.

[26] *Opera*, xxx, 632.

[27] *Opera*, xxiv, 269; cf. Eng. transl. of the Calvin Translation Society (*Commentaries on the Four Last Books of Moses*, i. p. 431).

[28] This was *maleficium* with a vengeance, and, if ever a panic of superstitious and cruel terror could be pardoned, it would be in the face of such a mysterious and deadly scourge. Nay, so circumstantial and so rational are the details given us by contemporaries—as by that good Calvinist, Michel Roset—that one could not only credit the guilt of the accused, but could accept the story of its method, were it not for the merciless torture used to win the confessions, and the preposterous tale of league with the Devil which it proved as easy to win from them by the same means. Those accused of a like crime had been similarly convicted and punished at Geneva a half-dozen years before the coming of Calvin, but in the account we have of it from the good Roset there is this notable difference, that, whereas the first episode is narrated as a case of simple poisoning, without a suggestion of any supernatural influence, in the later he knows that the "more than thirty persons"—thirty-one were put to death—"had leagued together to give themselves body and soul to the Devil in express terms." One catches here both the Calvinist's belief in the guilt of the intent and the Calvinist's doubt as to the reality of the marvel. (See Roset, *Les Chroniques de Genève*, Geneva, 1894, pp. 46-47, 306-308.)

[29] *Opera*, xxi, 365, and A. Roget, *Histoire du Peuple de Genève*, ii, pp. 178-179.

capital punishment all augurs, and magicians, and consulters with familiar spirits, and necromancers and followers of magic arts."[30]

The lawyers, indeed, throughout Europe were not easy to win to such a departure from the concrete. The church herself had long jealously restricted them to non-spiritual offenses, and their own conservatism was now slow to budge. Those who drew up in the first decades of the sixteenth century that great criminal code of Charles V which was promulgated at last in 1532 made the penalty of death for witchcraft depend on such a concrete mischief. But Lutheran influence in time changed all this in Saxony, and in 1572 the new code of the Elector August punished witches with death "regardless of whether they had by witchcraft done anybody harm";[31] and in 1582 the new code of the then Lutheran Palatinate echoed this penalty of death regardless of *maleficium*.[32] But Calvinism had taught this from the first, and the statute of Elizabeth was earlier by nearly a decade than even the Saxon code. And in that same year, 1563, there was enacted in the neighboring Scotland, where, though Mary was on the throne, the Calvinists were in the saddle, a similar but severer statute, punishing with death alike the use of witchcraft and the consulting of a witch, and without the slightest mention of a *maleficium*.

But Calvinistic demonology was soon to flow into England through many other channels than the memory or the correspondence of the exiles. I can take space for the mention of but one or two. In 1575 there appeared in English translation the dialogue on witches of the Genevan professor, Daneau, printed the previous year in French and soon to be had in Latin as well; and by 1586 there was market for a fresh English translation.[33] In 1580, however, had appeared the great *Démonomanie*

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[30] *Opera*, xxiv, 365.

[31] "*Ob sie gleich mit Zauberei niemand Schaden zugefugt*" run the exact words of the Code (pars iv, const. 2).

[32] Titul. ix (p. 9).

[33] See Paul de Félice, *Lambert Daneau*, p. 159.

of Bodin (soon also translated into Latin), whose powerful influence can be traced everywhere in the English thought of the following years. An open Calvinist he was not; but so saturated is his book with Calvinistic thought, and, through Calvinism, with the Old Testament, that he has been suspected not only of crypto-Calvinism, but sometimes of Judaism.[34] Yet it was far less, I think, the influence of any such monograph than that of Calvin's own commentaries, now on every preacher's shelves, of Calvin's own sermons, the model, if not the source, of pulpit eloquence,—it was Daneau's *Ethice Christiana*, the standard treatise of Protestant ethics, and his *Politice Christiana*, the standard manual of Protestant rulers,—that impressed this doctrine on the English conscience.

Not that English demonologic reading was narrow. In a day when every educated Englishman read Latin as easily as English and was likely to have a smattering of French and Italian as well, it should go without saying that the books which shaped in this field the thought of the Continent were known in England also. The bibliography which in 1584 Reginald Scot prefixed to his *Discoverie of Witchcraft* enumerates well nigh the whole literature of the subject; and the defenders of the belief are not chary of displaying a similar learning. It is no truer that it is impossible to study New England thought on witchcraft apart from English than that it is impossible to study English apart from Continental. Nay, New England, too, was far from ignorant of Continental thought. Increase Mather's *Remarkable Providences* shows an amazing acquaintance with the Continental authorities on demonology; and, though it does not follow, even when he cites them, that that acquaintance was always at first hand, a deal of it is clearly so.[35]

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[34] See especially the careful study of Friedrich von Bezold on *Jean Bodin als Okkultist und seine Démonomanie*, in the *Historische Zeitschrift*, Bd. 105 (1910).

[35] Of the books he cites I find only a small proportion listed by Mr. Tuttle in his interesting paper (published last year in our *Proceedings*) on *The Libraries of the Mathers*. But his study suggests many ways in which this may be explained.

And this wider reading, even the Mathers', included much that was written to question or restrain the persecution. Yet it is not strange that to plain Englishmen, in England or New England, the Calvinistic view should have especial cogency. Not alone what seemed its rationalism, but its discrimination—is it not still the reasoner who discriminates that wins us?—but most of all, I think, its appeal to the Bible, the text-book which now made every man his own theologian, and its acceptance of that literal sense which lay for every man upon the surface, these were the qualities to carry weight with pious men just waking now in every field to self-reliance and self-help. And, if it narrowed superstition, it deepened it as well. Precisely as, by robbing the Puritan of all ritual except the Sabbath, it concentrated on the Sabbath all the devotion which in him still craved ritual, so by denying to the Puritan imagination indulgence in other superstitions it made more keen by far its interest in these deeds of darkness which it was Christian virtue to divine and punish.

What picturesqueness such speculations might take on let me illustrate from a sober law-book put forth in the last years of Elizabeth by a scrivener of that southern Yorkshire whence came so many of the earliest founders of New England. Thus in his *Simboleography*[36] William West defines the crimes of "magicke" and "witcherie":

MAGICKE.

Magitians be those which by uttering of certaine superstitious words conceived, adventure to attempt things above the course of nature, by bringing forth dead mens ghosts, as they fasly [falsely] pretende, in shewing of things either secret or in places far off, and in shewing them in any shape or likenes. These wicked persons by oth or writing written

[36] Pp. 87, 88, of pt. 2 in the edition of 1611, which I believe (though I have used no earlier) an unchanged reprint of that of 1592-4. The briefer first edition appeared in 1590. The discerning will, I think, divine that the first sentence of the definition of magic is of older source than the remainder, which savors of the school theology; and it is only the definition of witchery which seems to me to bear a distinctly Calvinistic impress. Note how, though calling it delusion, the author revels in its details. Between these two crimes, as though gradations from one to the other, are described "South-saying Wizzards," "Divination," "Jugling," and "Inchantings and Charming."

with their own blood, having betaken themselves to the devil, have forsaken God, and broken their covenant made in baptism, and detest the benefits thereof, and worship the [divel only: And setling their only hope in him, doe execute his commandements, and being deade, commend both their bodies and soules unto him.

. . . .

WITCHERIE.

A Witch or hag, is she which being [d]eluded by a league made with the divell through his perswasion, inspiration and jugling thinketh she can designe what moner of evil things soever, either by thogt or imprecation, as to shake the aire with lightnings and thunder, to cause haile and tempests, to remove green corne or trees to another place, to be caried of her familer which hath taken upon him the deceitful shape of a goate, swine, or calf etc. into some mountain far distant, in a wonderfull short space of time. And sometimes to flie upon a staffe or forke, or some other instrument. And to spend all the night after with her sweet hart, in playing, sporting, banqueting, dancing, daliance, and divers other divelish lusts, and lewd disports, and to shew a thousand such monstrous mockeries.

But during these same last years of Elizabeth Calvinism found in England an interpreter whose teachings were of more lasting potency on both sides of the sea. A style more lucid, sensible, straightforward, unpedantic, suited to catch the ear and to convince the mind of sober Englishmen, than that of the great Cambridge preacher, William Perkins, it would not be easy to conceive. And all these winning qualities belong to his "discourse of the damned art of witchcraft," which delivered before his university audience, was circulated in manuscript till his death, in 1602, and then was by his literary executors not only published and republished by itself but embodied in that standard collection of his works which for a century was to be a classic on the shelves of every Puritan divine. Though a fellow of Christ's, his relations were closest with Emmanuel College, that cradle of Puritanism, English and American. John Cotton was his convert. Thomas Hooker, Thomas Shepard, John Harvard, were there his hearers or his readers.

Every student of New England witchcraft knows how his dicta are embodied in the books of the Mathers. Nay, Increase Mather quotes with pride the high praise paid New England by a British geographer who wrote that "as to their Religion, the people there are like Mr. Perkins."

Now, the substance of Mr. Perkins's teaching as to witchcraft was that "among us also the sinne of Witchcraft ought as sharply to be punished as in former times; and all Witches . . . ought according to the Law of Moses to be put to death." "The penaltie of Witchcraft being Death by God's appointment . . . binds us, and shall in like sort bind men in all ages"; . . . "for the most notorious traytour and rebell that can be is the Witch, for she renounceth God himselfe," and "as the killing Witch must die by another Lawe, though he were no Witch, so the healing and harmeless Witch must die by this Lawe, though he kill not, onely for covenant with Satan." "Death therefore"—thus closes the sermon—"is the just and deserved portion of the good Witch."[37]

It was high time for English Puritanism to find for its witch theory such an advocate. Its opponents, too, were finding voice and in the highest ranks of the Anglican clergy. Certain cases of child illness or child imposture like those which a century later started the Massachusetts panic had not only given rise to charges of bewitchment, but had called into activity, both among the English Catholics and the English Puritans, men who professed to detect the witch and by supernatural aid to cure the bewitched. Against these, and notably against one John Darrel, a Puritan minister who became a sort of itinerant exorcist, the prelates called in the aid of the courts.[38] The controversy soon

[37] See his *Discourse of the Damned Art of Witchcraft* (London, 1608), closing pages. Perkins advocated, too, the use of torture. Calvin, as is well known, believed also in this; and nowhere was it used more cruelly or more effectively than at Geneva.

[38] I am, of course, far from ascribing to the Puritans in general Darrel's views as to exorcism; yet how far they were from repudiating him may be gathered from Brook (*Puritans*, ii, 117-122), who tells us how eagerly his books were bought at Cambridge.

aired itself in print, and the spokesman of the Anglicans, Dr. Samuel Harsnett, chaplain of the Bishop of London and accounted the mouthpiece of that prelate, put forth (1599, 1603) two vigorous books, which with amazing boldness pour contempt not only on the exorcists and their claims, but on the belief in possession and witchcraft, and on all the superstitions connected with these. "Horace the Heathen," he declared, "spied long agoe that a Witch, a Wizard, and a Conjurer were but bulbeggers to scare fooles."[39] Now, Samuel Harsnett, from 1602 Archdeacon of Essex, was to become successively Vice-Chancellor of Cambridge, Bishop of Chichester, Bishop of Norwich, Archbishop of York; and his backer, Richard Bancroft, Bishop of London, became in 1604 Archbishop of Canterbury and primate of the English Church. With such men at the head of the hierarchy—and supported, as I have found no reason to doubt, by the general opinion of their party—how was it that the persecution of witches was not laughed out of England before the Puritans came to the helm?

Ah, but then came King James. It is true that James was not a Puritan; but, as everybody knows, he was a Calvinist, and the witch question was one not of church government but of theology. All his theology was steeped in Calvinism, and everybody knows how, while still in Scotland, he had distinguished himself as a persecutor of witches. He had been stirred, too, in 1597, by "the fearful abounding at this time" in Scotland "of these detestable slaves of the divell," to put forth a book, his *Dæmonologie*, in order "to resolve the doubting hearts of manie" as to their guilt and to prove that all, regardless of sex, age, or rank, aye even "bairnes," should be put to death—"for," he says, "it is the highest

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Two other obscure Puritan ministers (More and Denison) had some part in his doings or in the defense of them, and one tract in his favor has been ascribed to another, James Bamford. As to all this episode I am happy to be able now to refer to Dr. Notestein's *History of Witchcraft in England* (chapter iv, "The Exorcists").

[39] The rest of this striking passage may be found quoted in Dr. Notestein's work (pp. 88-89). But Harsnett's tone is the same throughout. The long titles of his books and of Darrel's may also be learned from Dr. Notestein.

point of Idolatry, wherein no exception is admitted by the law of God."[40] This book was at once republished at London when, in 1603, James mounted the English throne; and his first Parliament, in 1604, replaced the statute of Elizabeth by one yet sterner. That James's book, odd mixture of Scotch shrewdness and Scotch pedantry and full of Scotticisms in its speech, had serious influence on English thought or action, save as it seemed to give a key to the king's mind, it is not easy to believe. But to James's statute or to its colonial echoes all witches later brought to trial in England or New England owed their fate.[41] Its purpose was frankly the "more severe punishing" of the offense. Its first clause reenacts the felon's death for all who "shall use, practise, or exercise any invocation or conjuration of any evil and wicked spirit"; but this Elizabethan clause—which seems to have been interpreted to mean, as it was doubtless intended to mean, only the deliberate and formal conjurer[42]—was now reinforced by one which was clearly meant to cover all dabbling with witchcraft, and which may have aimed, like the Scottish statute, to make as penal the mere consulting of a witch. All should likewise die, said this clause, who should "consult, covenant with, entertain, employ, feed, or reward any evil or wicked spirit," whatever the intent or purpose,

[40] *Dæmonologie* (ed. of 1603), preface and p. 76.

[41] The colonial laws were, indeed, no mere echoes. Even more than the statute of James they were to the mind of Calvinism; for they had nothing whatever to say of *maleficium* and wholly identified the crime with the sin. Plymouth, in 1636, enumerated after treason and murder, as an "offence lyable to death," the "solemn compaction or conversing with the divell by way of witchcraft, conjuracion or the like." Massachusetts, in 1641 (and, following her, Connecticut in 1642), brought the crime into more direct connection with the Ten Commandments by enacting, as the second of her "Capitall Laws" (between idolatry, the violation of the First Commandment, and blasphemy, the violation of the Third), that "If any man or woman be a witch (that is hath or consulteth with a familiar spirit), They shall be put to death." And New Haven, in 1655, not only followed the same order, but, as was her wont, made the Mosaic law her own: "If any person be a Witch, he or she shall be put to death, according to *Exod.* xxii, 18, *Levit.* xx, 27, *Deut.* xviii, 10, 11."

[42] Thus, e. g., Edward Hartley perished under it in 1597. How little the clause was in thought or understood in the case of an ordinary witch is suggested by that of Joan Cason, who in 1586 was about to be acquitted, when a lawyer pointed out that the invocation of spirits had been made a capital crime and she was sentenced to death. But see the case, as reported by Holinshed (or rather his continuators), *Chronicles*, ed. of 1807-1808, iv, 893.

or who should for purposes of witchcraft exhume the dead or any part thereof. I need not discuss the superstitions, hideous or nauseous, which underlie this list of possible relations with demons. They betray the lettered demonologist, and opened a door to charges and to evidence hitherto little heard in England. For the witchcraft causing bodily injury the new statute next prescribes death as the penalty for the first offense (instead, as heretofore, for the second); and, for treasure-seeking, the use of love-charms, or the attempt, though unsuccessful, to work ill to the bodies or goods of others, death is to be the penalty of the second offense. Here, then, much more than in Elizabeth's statute, the essence of the crime is made to lie, not in the *maleficium* (which no longer need be charged, and, if charged, no longer need be proved), but in the sin. It is patent how this mirrors the king's own views; yet I could wish we knew more clearly the nature and the measure of his part in it.[43] It is at least to be noted that when, in the later years of his reign, the king's views were believed to have changed, the witch-trials, too, fell off.[44]

Alas, what I had meant for a paper is growing to a treatise. To my grief I must forego the tracing further of the influence of Calvinism. I must not so much as speak of its relation to the most notable of English witch-hunts—that led by Matthew Hopkins in the eastern counties during the period of Presbyterian dominance.[45]

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[43] Edward Fairfax, the author of that translation of Tasso which James is said to have valued above all other English poetry, tells us that His "Majesty found a defect in the statutes, . . . by which none died for Witchcraft but they only who by that means killed, so that such were executed rather as murderers than as Witches." (See his *Discourse of Witchcraft*, Philobiblon Society's ed., "Preface to the Reader." I owe this passage to Dr. Notestein, having at hand only Grainge's edition, which lacks it.) I find the statement wholly credible; but we do not know the channel of his information.

[44] Dr. Notestein tells us (p. 105) that all but one of the forty or fifty people whom we know to have suffered for the crime during the reign of James perished within his first fifteen years. He has also tried (p. 105) to determine how many of these who suffered death under the law of James would not have suffered under that of Elizabeth. He finds the number known to us under James much greater; but our statistics are probably so incomplete that little importance attaches to these figures.

[45] Yet I cannot forbear, such is their pertinence to the points in question, to transcribe here some of the words with which the official commentary put forth by divines of the Westminster Assembly, in the very year (1645) when this persecution was set on foot, interprets

More gladly yet would I attempt to point out some of the channels through which this Calvinistic view of witchcraft made its way across the sea—the men who took with them to America experience gained in English witch-trials, the wholesale migrations from regions committed most deeply to this view, the correspondence on this theme and those akin to it between the old home and the new, the return to England for education of those who were to be New England's teachers—was it not there, just at the end of the Protectorate, that the young Increase Mather was drawn into the scheme of the great Puritan commentator, Matthew Poole, for the recording on both sides of the Atlantic of those "remarkable providences" which were so long to keep alive a moribund credulity? Yes, and the pressure still on the New England mind of English sermon and tractate—notably of that Cambridge school whose loyalty to the witch theory is so well known; has not Mr. Mullinger just shown us that to Joseph Mede Cotton Mather owed even his conviction that the New World had become the special dwelling-place of the Satanic powers, now driven from the Old by the advance of Christianity?[46] Above all, I should have liked to inquire with you into the rôle played by religious party, and by

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and applies the Mosaic "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live" (Exod. xxii, 18): "Witchcraft is here forbidden, Deut. 18, 10 and that upon pain of death, 1 Sam. 28, 9. By *Witch* is here meant any one that hath any dealings with the Devil, by any compact or confederacy whatsoever. . . . Some have thought Witches should not dye, unlesse they had taken away the life of mankind; but they are mistaken, both for the art of the Witch, and for the guilt. . . . But why then must the Witch be put to death? *Answ.* Because of the league and confederacy with the Devill, which is high treason against God; because he is God's Chiefest enemy, and therefore though no hurt insue this contract at all, the Witch deserves present and certain death for the contract it self." This commentary was, it is true, not officially undertaken or revised by the Assembly; but its authors were chosen by a committee of Parliament from among the Assembly's leading divines (with but two or three additions from outside) and shared from the first the Assembly's prestige. Nor may it be forgotten that just three years before, in 1642, the great Assembly of the Kirk of Scotland (whose leaders now sat as its deputies with the Westminster Assembly) had used its new-won liberty to pass the "Act for the restraining of witchcraft" which revived the persecution in that land; nor yet that these were years when the Scottish influence was at its height and the Scottish alliance most essential to the Puritan cause. I must add that my transcript is made from the second edition of the commentary (1651), the first not being within my reach; but the words, if changed, are not likely to have been made harsher.

[46] In vol. iii, just published, of his *History of the University of Cambridge.*

its complications, political and social, in New England as in Old. Alas, for this as for so much else, I have discovered how unripe are my studies. If by something of thoroughness where I was best informed I have but shown you that the ascription of an especial responsibility to Calvinism and the Puritans is more than a loose assertion, I am content. But let it again be clearly understood that what I ascribe to the Calvinists, on either side of the sea, is only a leadership and a growing party support—an especial advocacy of the guilt of witchcraft as sin and of the duty of the Christian state to detect and punish sin.

And now for a few paragraphs, without attempt at proof or illustration, and only to give a setting to my thought, let me glance at what is left. I have discussed how the Calvinists believed in witchcraft. But, in the seventeenth century, did not everybody believe in witchcraft, at least everybody except a few of the learned? Again I must dissent, and even more earnestly. The seventeenth century saw vast change as to belief in witchcraft; yet in its darkest day—and the early seventeenth century was confessedly the age of greatest persecution—I do not believe that true. But here again we must discriminate. In *what* witchcraft did everybody believe? Dr. Buckley says—and he has given the matter study—that witchcraft is still believed in by a majority of the citizens of the United States. A month or two ago Mr. Addington Bruce, in the *Outlook*, illustrated the persistence of superstition by studying its survival in the professors at Harvard. Doubtless by a sufficient attenuation of the term the superstitions of the professors of Harvard might be included under witchcraft. Yet I doubt if Mr. Bruce or Dr. Buckley would count the professors of Harvard, or even the majority of the citizens of the United States, on the same side of the question as those who in the seventeenth century put women to death for their league with the Devil. When I hear enumerated among believers in witchcraft the free-thinking Bacon or the incredulous

Hobbes, I confess to the same hesitation. In Bacon's utterances I can find only a cautious skepticism, very thinly veiled. If Hobbes conceded that a witch should be punished, but only for her belief and intent to do mischief, he stopped far short of the Calvinists and of the statute of James, and, by making it necessary to prove against a witch, if not an actual mischief, at least an actual belief and intent, made her conviction almost impossible without the aid of torture. And, as for John Selden, his famous dictum that "if one should profess that by turning the Hat thrice, and crying Buz, he could take away a man's life," it "were a just law . . . that whosoever should turn his Hat thrice, and cry Buz, with an intention to take away a man's life, shall be put to death," was but the formulation of a principle long current in Christian jurisprudence and, however Draconian, would in England have convicted few witches. And, if either Hobbes or Selden thought that witches could thus be convicted, this was not to believe in witchcraft, but only to believe that witches believed in witchcraft—a very different matter.

What was true in the seventeenth century was not less true in the sixteenth. Nay, though to some this may bring surprise, skepticism shows itself more, not less, as one goes back toward its beginning. For—and my own study but confirms the results of other students —the truth is that skepticism had never died. The dogma as to witchcraft was a new one, and the Dominicans had had an up-hill fight to bring it in. In the early years of the sixteenth century it looked much as if they might lose that fight. Over nothing did the all-popular Humanists make more merry than over the credulity and blood-thirstiness of the monkish witch-burners. Agrippa was only the boldest of the group. If then for a time the open protests were hushed, the explanation is simple. The Church had spoken. The Lutheran revolt had discredited Humanism and she fell back on the Dominicans. The Protestant orthodoxies, also a reaction against Humanism, soon also spoke. But doubt

was only silenced, not convinced. The Church spoke because skepticism was rampant; and so did the Protestant orthodoxies. Even Calvin, in whose hearing, if anywhere, doubt would have been dumb, tells us of "the notion which some conceited persons entertain that all these things are fabulous and absurd"; and there is not one of the many defenders of the superstition who does not complain of the numbers, the eminence, and the influence of these doubters.

In England, as we have seen, the persecution was slow in asserting itself, and I believe that there, from the first, the doubters were especially numerous. I am not ready to attempt to point them out, nor should I here take space. In Dr. Notestein's book they may be met at every turn; yet by no means all of them, for his gaze has been fixed mainly otherwhere. If any seeker has failed to find them, I fear it is because he has not looked in the right places. Bear with me and I will suggest a few cautions which I should blush to formulate, were they not so often overlooked.

In the first place, I should not look chiefly among the theologians, or even among the jurists. Theirs are the most conservative of professions—each in the field of its own training—and each profession was early committed to a definite doctrine on this subject. If I did look among these, it should not be first at those who have written comprehensive treatises. These are the men of systems. They are the men of soundness. Were they not so, they would hardly have written treatises, or, if they wrote treatises, would not easily have found a publisher. And if among these I did find doubters—and even among them doubters may be found—I should guess that others had led the way. Again—and I trust I may be pardoned this treason to my cloth—I should not look first among teachers, university or other. They are men of books, not of life; and they were more so then than now. They are often doctrinaires; and this question was one for common sense. Too often they too have a position to keep, an orthodoxy to main-

tain. In the sixteenth and the seventeenth century they were even sworn to that orthodoxy. I would not look at all among the gossips or the journalists. It was their business to find stories and to tell them. They have furnished us much of what we call history; but we take them much more seriously than did their neighbors.

I would look among the men of practical affairs, the men in touch with people and with facts; men of business, men of society, men of politics, men of travel, physicians, pastors. Yet, even among these, I should not listen first to those who talk—whether in books or outside them. Ah, we who fancy ourselves the world's thinkers because we have fallen upon the knack or the habit of being its talkers, how do we forget the long pedigree of common sense!

And, wherever one looks, one must not look for a denial, in so many words, of "the reality of witchcraft." That would be absurd. Nobody denies that now, however, we have grown used to the careless phrase. All that anybody denies is the reality of what somebody else *calls* witchcraft. Just so it was in that old day; only the word had to be dealt with more cautiously. Whoever accepted the authority of the Bible—and who then ventured to question it?—must, of course, have in his mind a notion of something which deserved the name of witchcraft (or, at least, the Hebrew and Greek names he found translated by witchcraft) and which—once if not now—deserved death as its penalty. Of course, to that extent all Christians believed in witchcraft. It did not at all follow that they believed witches those whom their neighbors called so, or believed real what their neighbors laid to their charge. That was what signified—to them and us. Even if they did not believe, it did not follow that they must deny. Sensible men are not given to denial of what they cannot disprove, but only to doubt or to suspension of judgment. Nor let us expect that doubt to be always uttered. Utterance is not the only way—not always the best—for doubt to be effective, or for doubt to leave its trace in history. And when

the doubter spoke, it must not mislead if he was not extreme. The tactful reasoner does not claim too much, and they who doubt are oftenest men of caution, to whom assertion is repugnant. If he will win to mercy, he may even make display of sternness on all points except that which is cardinal—just as, on the other hand, we often find the harshest making most parade of moderation. Such rhetorical devices do not deceive us as to our contemporaries, but they have led historians to some wild judgments.

Nor need the doubter much indulge in labored logic. As for "these proofs and arguments," so wrote in 1588 Montaigne, the arch-doubter, of what were urged on him as proofs of witchcraft, "I do not pretend to unravel them. I often cut them, as Alexander did the knot. After all, it is rating our opinions high to roast other people alive for them." When a Montaigne could count it prudent to write thus, how long must he and other level-headed folk have found it wise to act thus? Can anybody really suspect Michel de Montaigne of being a pioneer? Everybody knows the *mot* of Shaftesbury when after the Restoration he was asked his religion: "Madam, wise men are of but one religion." "And which is that?" "Madam, wise men never tell." It was often safer in the seventeenth century to tell one's religion than one's honest opinion of witchcraft.

But such as these, it may be answered, as of Scot and Webster, were not "scientific rationalists." I am not sure that I understand the term. Universal doubters they certainly were not. Such are few to-day—and it is perhaps as well. Men who used in their own century the science of the next they, of course, were not; history will find none in our day. But if it be scientific rationalism to trust one's human intellect, one's human heart, against the dicta of authority in such things as one's human faculties can test, those old days had many worthy of the name.

Nor do such doubters as to witchcraft seem to me mere isolated men of sense. Largely they can be grouped

under certain great lines of thought. The great Erasmian trend, the heir of Humanism, holding its place between Romanist and Protestant to the century's end, and nowhere more potently than in England; the great lay trend, out of which grew the separatist sects, and, what was more, a growing body of independents or eclectics who trimmed between the faiths or blurred their edges; the great Latitudinarian trend, born of the reaction against Calvinist harshness and spreading with Arminianism to England from that day when John Hales, the ever memorable, listening at the Synod of Dort as England's observer, "bade John Calvin good-night"; the great "natural" movement, which at the hands of jurists and philosophers held so large a place in seventeenth-century thought; the great, albeit so patient, movement of experimental science, of which not Bacon but Harvey was the best English representative: it is along such lines as these that doubt and protest seem to me to cluster. Even the Cambridge Platonists, whose belated credulity has been to some so puzzling, fall into line when one discerns how largely this credulity was but the premise of a philosophic creed. Exceptions of course there were in every group—else might we forget that such groups are only bodies of free men bound by a common purpose.[47] And let not this attempt to classify obscure my conviction that, whatever the pressure of education or environment, there was always room for character, too, to echo or protest.

It will be urged, however, that these doubters were, after all, but a minority. What the majority, counted by the head, may have believed, I do not know. I do not know how to find out. Doubtless those who believed

[47] Such an exception among Anglicans was Edward Fairfax. "I intreat you to be assured," he says to his readers, "that for myself I am in religion neither a fantastic Puritan nor superstitious Papist." But his own words suggest that he fears his zeal against those whom he accuses of bewitching his children may stamp him as a Papist or a Puritan; and his complaints of the incredulity of the magistrates, low and high, and of the "divines and physicians" "who attribute too much to natural causes," with his lament that the witches, when examined, "wanted not both counsellors and supporters of the best," show his consciousness of isolation. (See his *Discourse on Witchcraft*, ed. Grainge, Harrogate, 1882—pp. 32, 36, and *passim*.)

made the most noise. I suspect that, counted by the head, the majority was, as usual, on the side of the latest speaker—and most of the speakers were against the witches. Probably it believed in the church and doubted on the street. If "belief" means to believe *something* as to witches, everybody believed; if it means to believe *everything*, everybody doubted. Doubtless there were as many different shades as to belief as there were souls; and, as there was no vote to be given, doubtless few found it necessary to take careful measure of their own opinions.

But what has all this to do with New England? I am sadly aware how little my paper has justified its title. Yet all I have urged has had New England as its goal. It was only a running start I meant to take, and, though I have reached the jumping-off place before I am ready, I am going to make the jump. I cannot acquit our ancestors on the ground that their belief in witchcraft was universal or was not discreditable or was more logical than disbelief. On the contrary I am forced to admit that it was superstitious and bigoted and cruel, even by the standards of their own time; that they clung to it when it was dying out in all but the most belated parts of Christendom; that, though in a few sequestered regions, the trials dribbled on yet for a century, their final panic was the last on such a scale in any Christian land.[48] Their transatlantic home I cannot think an excuse. New homes have always made new men, and no new home has more proved its emancipating power than has America. Its very discovery set men dreaming of freedom. Here Thomas More placed that No Man's Land where all old fetters, social and religious, were unknown. Here the more practical dreamers planted their colonies for the working out of every fresh experiment in human living. Hither came the men who had broken, or were eager to break, the bonds of prejudice and of convention; and four centuries have proved

[48] That the latest witch-hanging in England was in 1682, ten years before the Salem outbreak, and that the tales of later executions are but the work of literary shysters, is convincingly shown by Dr. Notestein (pp. 375-382).

the soundness of their hope. One thing is sure: we must not blow hot and cold with the same breath. If our fathers were the helpless victims of circumstance, then they were not its masters. If they were the blameless heirs of superstition, then they were not

> "men of present valor, stalwart old iconoclasts,
> Unconvinced by axe or gibbet that all virtue is the past's."

For my part, I cannot plead for them the baby act. Mitigating elements I can see. If they *must* follow Old-World fashions, they must be content, of course, to get them last and keep them latest. If they *could* believe such crimes of their neighbors, they were at least men who met them by action. If that action was cruel, it was but the carrying out, in spirit and letter, of a law which, within the limits of conscience, they doubtless counted themselves bound to enforce. I am not asking you to think them worse than the neighbors who shrank into the background and took sides for neither justice nor mercy, belief nor doubt. I am far from arguing that, take them all in all, they were worse men than they who bravely stood against them. Their opponents, too, had doubtless the faults of their own qualities. But, if this be to acquit them, they would themselves have scorned the subterfuge. They were disciples of Him whose message was "Be ye perfect," ancestors of him who bids us hitch our wagon to a star. When the light at length dawned on them, not their stubborn pride, not their fierce convictions, not their predestinarian theology, could make them seek excuse in good intentions, in circumstances, or in providence. Confessing "I have sinned," they made amends as best they could; and therefore in New England, as nowhere else within my knowledge, the matter ended—and for good and all. From that day till this no corner of the earth has been so free from cruel superstitions.

Ah, "till this." The horizon is by no means free from clouds. Though the name of "belief in witchcraft" is now in disrepute, I am not so sure as is Professor

Kittredge as to the superstition and the cruelty for which it stood. That old witch-mania was no survival of the Middle Ages. It was born and came to its prime in centuries which saw the greatest burst of Christian civilization. If I would have History unflinching, it is not because I think we are better than our fathers. It is because deep in ourselves I feel still stirring the impulses which led to their mistakes. It is because I fear that they who begin by excusing their ancestors may end by excusing themselves. May History do so unto us and more also if through blindness to their failings we repeat their faults.

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