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[3]

WITCHCRAFT.

ZUR,—In the case ov thicky Mr. Western thet thort his darters had auverluded en, I doant zee how he cude go into inny proof ov it, vor the law dithen allow inny wan vor zay that anether is a witch, howiver strong raysons he may hev for it. In the yer 1736 the law was altered zo that no wan shude be persecuted vor witchcraft, but that thay hot be kald wite witches shude be liabel tu be put in chockey, an kept 12 munths, if thay pretended vor vend inny thing, or tell fortens or kure inny wan be their tricks. If Maria an Ellen Western had lived two hunderd yers ago, an thare fathur had akuzed mun ov hurtin ov en by witchcraft, verry likely thay wud hev bin hanged, vor in them times thay cud git a plenty ov witnesses vor testify tu innything thet thay wis wanted vor. Longer ago than this, lots ov vokes hev bin beheded pon the hevidence ov villians, thet was awlmost kept vor zitch purposes, hew wud sware thet thare was a konsperasy, praps, against the life ov the king, an the persons wud be put azide, wen thay thet had tu du way it nawd verry well thit thay was hinnisent. Then awl thare propurtay was konfiskated tu the krown or tu "mother church.·

A man's life wassen thort much ov then, an it tissen verry long ago thet he was onny wurth haf a krown, vor thay wud hang a man vor staylin tu that amownt, but, thank gudeness, things be impruvin, vor twas altured thet no wan shude be hanged vur less than vive shillens. Then arter that thay onny hanged vor staylin sheep or live stock, an ta last that was put a stop tu, but the Lords ov Parliment was a long time avaur thay wud pass it, but thay was oblayged tu altur it, vor the jurys wud let mun off and zay they wassen gilty, cus thay wuden let min be hanged.

Now tu fulfil the prommis made weeks since, I must tell ee abowt the dree Bideford witches thet was hanged in the city of Exeter the 26th day ov August 1682. The hinformashun aginst mun was made upon oath avaur Thomas Gist, Mayor ov the burrough, town, and mannor of Bideford, and John Davie, Alderman, &c., the 26th day of July, Anno Domini, 1682. The names ov the wimmin was Susanna Edwards, Mary Trumbles, an Temperance Lloyd, an thay was "indicted, arraigned, and convicted at the Assizes holden for the county of Devon, at the Castle of Exon, August 14th, 1682."

I shall gie a sampel ov the hevidence that was offerd aginst min, twas fust printed in a pamphlet, a copy ov wich was offer'd in London lately vor 36 shillens. In 1792 'twas publish'd in "Watkin's History of Bideford," ware I've got this vrom but I'm towld that the buke heth bin rayprinted by Perkins of Bideford, an thet it can be had thare vor a shillen.

"The information of Dorcas Coleman, the wife of John Coleman, of Bideford, aforesaid, mariner, taken upon her oath before Thomas Gist, Mayor, and John Davie, Alderman, July 26th, 1682." The said informant upon her oath saith, That about the end of the month of August in the year 1680, she was taken in tormenting pains, by pricking in her arms, stomach, and heart, in such a manner as she was never taken before. Upon which she, this informant, did desire one Thomas Bremicom to repair unto Dr. Beare for some remedy for those pains, and shortly afterwards the said Dr. Beare did repair unto this informant, and upon view of her body he did say that it was past his skill to ease her of her pains, for he told her that she was betwitch'd, and further saith that at the time of her tormenting pains she did see her, the said Susanna Edwards, in her chamber, and that she, this informant, would point with her finger at what place in the chamber the said Susanna Edwards would stand, and where she would go. And further saith that she

hath continued so ever since, more or less every week. And saith that when the said Susanna was apprehended concerning Grace Barnes, of Bideford, aforesaid, that this informant did go to see the said Susanna, and that when the said Susanna was in prison she did confess unto this informant that she had bewitched her, and done her some bodily harm by bewitching of her, and thereupon she fell down on her knees, and desired this informant to pray for her, the said Susanna Edwards. This evidence was confirmed by John Colemann, the husband, and Thomas Bremicom.

There were various other charges preferred against her, and testified to by many witnesses.

Temperance Lloyd was charged with being a witch on the information of Grace Thomas, of Bideford, in the county of Devon, spinster, taken upon oath the 3rd day of July, 1682. The saith informant upon her oath saith that upon or about the 2nd day of February, 1680, this informant was taken with great pains in her head and all other limbs, which pains continued on her till near or upon the 1st day of August then following, and then this informant's pains began to abate, and this informant was able to walk abroad and take the air, but in the night she was in much pain and not able to take her rest. This informant further saith, that about the 30th day of September, now last past, this informant was going up the High Street of Bideford, where this informant met Temperance Lloyd, of Bideford, widow, and she, the said Temperance, did then and there fall down on her knees to this informant and wept, saying, Mrs Grace, I am glad to see you so strong. Upon which this informant said, Why dost thou weep for me? Unto which the said Temperance replied, I weep for joy to see you so well again, as the said Temperance then pretended. This informant further saith, that that night she, this informant, was taken very ill with sticking and pricking pains as though awls had been thrust into her body from the crown of her head to the soles of her feet, and this informant lay as though it had been upon a rack, and saith, that these pricking pains have continued upon her body every since, and that her pains are much worse by night than by day. This informant further saith, that on Thursday the 1st of June last, in the night, she this informant was bound and seemingly chained up with all her sticking pains gathered together in her belly, so that on a sudden her belly was as big as two bellies, which caused her to cry out "I shall die, I shall die," and in this sad condition this informant lay as though she had been dead for a long space, and this informant

further saith, that on Friday night last, being the 30th of June, this informant was again pinch'd and prick'd to the heart, with such cruel thrusting pains in her head, shoulders, arms, hands, thighs, and legs, as though the flesh would have been then immediately torn from the bones with a man's finger and thumb. And further saith, that she was even plucked out over the bed and lay in this condition for the space of three hours, (as she was informed by some of the persons then in the chamber.) This informant further saith, that upon the 1st day of this instant July, as soon as the aforesaid Temperance was apprehended, and put in the prison of Biddeford! she this informant, immediately felt her pricking pains to abate, and saith, that she hath continued so ever since unto this time, but is still in great weakness of body. And further saith, that she believeth that the said Temperance Lloyd hath been an instrument of doing much hurt and harm unto her body, by pricking and tormenting of her, as before she hath set forth.

This evidence was confirmed by other witnesses among the rest being Elizabeth Eastchurch, wife of Thomas Eastchurch, Gent, and Honer Hooper their servant.

Mary Tembles was also charged with practising witchcraft upon the body of Grace Barnes, wife of John Barnes of Bideford, yeoman, and evidence of the same nature was given against her.

Suffice it to say that the evidence was so conclusive that they were all three committed to Exeter for trial; there tried, found guilty, and duly executed as the law then directed.

The whole of the narrative occupies about thirty-five pages of the book aforesaid, and as a memento of the "Gude Old Times," is worth the amount asked for the whole history. It contains their last dying speeches and confessions, in answer to the questions propounded to them by the Sheriffe, and concludes with a note by the Editor as follows:

"No unbiassed mind can believe that these poor wretches were guilty of the crime for which they were executed. The informations against them are too ridiculous to deserve a serious consideration. In her own confession, each of them contradicted herself in the most material circumstances. Upon the whole there can be no doubt but that they were insane, before, or were then frightened out of their senses, by ill-treatment—commonly used to persons so accused, or by the terrors of death.

The belief in witchcraft remained very general in this town and neighbourhood, and there was always some poor devil, either on account of an unlucky visage, sour temper,

or wretched poverty, set up as the object of terror and universal hatred, till about twenty years since. At present I believe this notion is pretty much worn away."

If the notion that witchcraft had died out so long ago as 1792, was general then, it must have revived during the present century for it was very general in many rural places fifty years ago, and the case of Mr. Western proves that there are those who believe in it still.

As I've zed avaur the trade ov a wite witch is abolished by law and if inny wan was fownd practising ov it he is liabel to be punished vor it.

The way they wud vend owt mysteries (or pretend tu do it) is to consult thare oracle, which every wite witch must hev, which is a familiar spirit, and he goes and draes a circle, and standeth owtzide, and repayteth zome charms or incantations, an the spirit cometh inzide the circle, wile the wite witch an his seer or assistant will stand owtzide, vor if they git in the circle they wude be tuke rite away. The wite witch puts the question, an the seer luketh into a crystal, tu zee the anwer, an zometimes, but very sildom, the angels spayk. In the time ov James the 1st it was enacted that all persons invoking any evil spirit, or consulting, covenanting with, or employing, feeding, or rewarding any evil spirit, or taking up dead bodies from their graves to be used in any withcraft, sorcery, charm or enchantment, or killing or otherwise hurting any person by such infernal arts, should be guilty of felony without benefit of clergy, and suffer death. Thare yused tu be rings abowt near the cliffs ware no grass would grow, hot ess awlways yused tu kal pixey rings, an 'twas awlways thort tu be unlucky tu stap inzide min, but how the rings come thare I can't tell, awl I naw is theym thare. Passon Hawker believed 'twas trew, an he zed he wanze warned a lady not tu go inzide, but hur wud go, an he towld hur zomthing wud happen, an shore nuff very zune wan ov hur childern was taken ill. Then hur sent tu the passon tu zay. "Would that I had listened to you, our child has sickened and died."

I should like tu know if anyone can tell what is the origin of these rings. The grass is burnt as if fire had passed over it, while in the centre it is as green as other parts.

Apologizing for occupying so much of you space, I am, Sir,

Your humbel sarvint

ROGER GILES

Welcombe.