THE LANCASHIRE WITCHES: 1612 and 1634.

By Mildred Tonge.

Read 28 January, 1932.

I AM going to consider the two Lancashire witch cases of the seventeenth century in the light they throw on contemporary attitudes to witchcraft. As these two cases were among the most famous of their century they roused much interest and comment. From the historical point of view it is curious to follow the cases and to see how various attitudes are reflected—to see what the King's physician Harvey thought of witchcraft when he was called on to examine the witches' bodies for the devil's mark; to see what the dramatists Heywood and Brome thought when they wrote a topical play to be performed in London while the witches were on view in Fleet Prison awaiting the King's pleasure; to see what the Lancashire curate Webster thought when he had one of the witnesses before him.

In attempting such an estimate it is essential to put aside the assumption that the witches were the "melancholy victims of superstition" that they have frequently been called. We may refuse to believe that the witches rode on broomsticks but we cannot assume that the witches never existed and that the whole episode is an example of seventeenth-century credulity. Modern historical research on the witch-trials indicates that there were in fact groups of witches—the so-called "covens"—scattered through Europe, and that the covens met to accomplish definite ends. Some historians find in these covens the survivors of a primitive religious cult that lingered in remote country neighbourhoods such as the lonely Forest

of Pendle, and especially among the poorest section of the community. It seems to have been usual for each of these covens to have one woman as leader, called Reine du Sabbat or witch-queen. Around her apparently the whole coven focussed.

Old Demdike or Elizabeth Southernes, the leader of the Pendle witch-coven, stated [1] that she had been a witch for fifty years and that she had brought up her children and grandchildren as witches. Her coven had met at the famous Malking Tower. During her rule she had exerted over the neighbourhood the usual powers ascribed to a witch—helping her friends and hurting her enemies. She states that the powers came from her alliance with someone she calls a devil or spirit who offered her anything she wished in exchange for her soul. This familiar Faust-theme which recurs in many of the witches' confessions seems at first sight fantastic, but has a reasonable explanation. The so-called "devils" seem to have been members of the coven, sometimes dressed in the conventional devil's costume of the morality plays, sometimes in ordinary men's costumes, and sometimes wearing animal masks, following the common practice of primitive worship. It is this witch's familiar spirit that gives to the accounts their air of improbability, and that doubtless originated the legends of the witch's black cat or toad. All through the confessions of the Pendle witches there are references to these familiars, both human and animal, and every foal, dog, hare and cat to whom the witch speaks appears in the eyes of the coven as an embryo devil.

The actual meetings of the coven have nothing of this fantastic air. They are sometimes merry-makings, sometimes conspiracies, and at them the members of the coven eat solid food,—"flesh, butter, cheese, bread and drink" . . . and another time "to their dinners they

[1] Potts, *Discovery of Witches in the County of Lancaster.*

had Beefe, Bacon, and roasted Mutton; which Mutton . . . was of a Wether of Christopher Swyers of Barley; which Wether was brought in the night before into this Examinates mothers house . . . and in this Examinates sight killed and eaten . . ."

The powers to which the members of the coven laid claim are a curious mixture; they include old forms of sympathetic magic, some knowledge of herbs, and a clever use of suggestion. The witches make wax images and cause the victim to fade away; they interfere with the churning and with the crops. Doubtless they used more than suggestion on occasion, as when they "bewitched the drink" of one unfortunate gentleman. Naturally the neighbours ascribed to them the fate of John Nutter's cow "which fell sick and languished three or four days and then died." But in the whole account the point is clear that the members of the coven claimed these powers with pride, and that they believed in their own achievements in evil.

When one of His Majesty's Justices, Roger Nowell, decided it was his duty to root out this coven for the honour of Lancashire, Old Demdike and the other members of the coven whom he questioned admitted with evident enthusiasm that they were witches, and were sent to Lancaster Castle to await trial at the Assizes. Before a week was out their friends held a special meeting at Malking Tower, on Good Friday. To the meeting came "all the most dangerous wicked and damnable witches in the County, farre and neare," and after much conference it was decreed that the Jailer of Lancaster Castle, M. Covell, should be slain before the next assizes, and the Castle of Lancaster blown up. This plan came to the ears of Roger Nowell, and "even in the middest of their consultations" he had them arrested and taken to Lancaster Castle.

From the confessions made by the witches during the

course of the trial much interesting light on the subject of witchcraft is thrown. Perhaps the most striking feature is the consistency of accounts such as that of Old Chattox who keeps to her original story in detail, however often she is questioned . . . " was never found to vary, but always to agree in one and the selfe same thing." In fact the witches themselves insist on their own guilt as witches, as do the witches in many of the other witch-trials in France and Scotland, even when a sure penalty of death is facing them for the confession. It has been suggested that this attitude may be due to the witch's belief that her familiar spirit will at the last moment rescue her, and that witch-covens were in this way used in political or other intrigue under promise of safety from the law.

Of the Lancashire witches brought to trial five pleaded guilty, and of these Old Demdike died in prison and the other four were executed. Five others who pleaded innocent and refused to make confession were also executed " at the common place of execution near Lancaster " on August 18, 1612.

The case roused much interest all through Lancashire— " so infinite a multitude came to the Arraignement and tryall . . . the number of them being known to exceed all others at any time heretofore, at one time to be indicted . . ." Through England the main fame of the case rested in the fact that one of the witches executed was a gentlewoman, Alice Nutter of Roughlea. Throughout the century all commentators on the sins of witchcraft make special reference to this unusual phenomenon.

But it is on the case of 1634 that the most interesting contemporary comment is passed. These witches were brought before the Lancashire justices on February 10, 1633, through the report of a boy, Edmund Robinson, who later admitted he had made up the report to avoid a beating when he returned home late. As the interest

shown in this report resulted in various copies of the depositions and confessions, in Privy Council correspondence, and in contemporary notices in letters and tracts, it is possible to trace the development of the case in detail.

Robinson's story is a fantastic one of how he met two greyhounds that turned into human beings—one into a neighbour, Dickenson's wife, one into a boy. The woman then turned the boy into a black horse and carried Edmund with her on the horse to a witches' Sabbat. There are evident echoes of the stories of the Old Demdike meetings in the account of the feast of roast flesh and butter, and in further details of the boy's meeting with the devil who wore a cloven hoof, and of witches who sat up in the chimney or stuck thorns into pictures.[1]

The boy's account was accepted in the neighbourhood. The father, Edmund Robinson, senior, vouched for the fact that the boy had told him the same story when he first found him.[2] Once this impetus had been given other witch-accusations cropped up. Mary Spencer was accused by a neighbour, Nicholas Cunliffe,[3] of causing a pail to come up to her from the well. She is listed with other prisoners in the report: "The Offenders condemned and accused for witchcraft with their markes at their attainder. The evidence which were brought against

[1] There are various versions of this examination:

(*a*) Brit. Mus. 36674, p. 193 (in Magical Treatises by Caius, Forman, Dee, Kelly. Additional MSS. 36674). It is the clearest of the versions, especially in the list of the witches' names.

(*b*) Bodleian Dodsworth MSS. 61, pp. 45–6. There is a transcript of this in Whitaker's *History of Whalley*, in Webster's *Displaying of Witchcraft*, and in Crossley's introduction to Potts.

(*c*) Brit. Mus. Harleian MSS. Cod. 6854, pp. 22–6. There is a transcript in Baines's *History of Lancashire*.

(*d*) Bodleian Rawlinson MSS. D 399, pp. 211–12.

(*e*) Other depositions in Lord Londesborough's MSS. are used by Thomas Wright in *Narratives of Sorcery and Magic*.

[2] The elder Robinson's examination follows the boy's in each MS.

[3] *Cal. State Papers, Dom.*, 1634–5, pp. 78–9. Confession to Bishop Bridgman.

them," and reads thus: "Mary Spencer for causing a Pale or Collocke to come to her full of Water 14 yds. up a hill from a Well." [1] According to the same report, two devils' marks were found on her, and also she is accused, with her father and mother, of "wastinge and impayringe the body of Jno. Leigh," and of killing Henry Roberts.

Another woman involved in this witch-case, Margaret Johnson, was apparently her own accuser. Her confession, taken before the same Justice of Peace at Padiham, less than a month after young Robinson's statement, runs as follows:

"Margaret Johnson of Marsden, widdowe, being examined, confesseth and saith That betwixt seaven or eight yeares since she beinge in her owne house in Marsden in a greate passion of anger and discontent, and withal pressed with some want, there appeared unto her a spirit or devil in the similitude and proportion of a man, aparelled in a suite of black, tied about with silk points, who offered that yf shee would give him her soule, hee would supplie all her wants, and bringe to her whatsoever shee did neede, and at her appointment would in revenge either kill or hurt whom or what shee desired, were it man or beast. And saith, that after a salutation or two, shee contracted and covenanted with the said divell for her soule, and that the said divell or spirit bidd her call him by the name of Mamillion and when shee would have him to doe anie thinge for her, call in Mamillion, and hee would be readie to do her will; and saith, in all her talke and Conference she calleth her said divell Mamillion my god." [2]

Her confession contains much information on the witch covens: she tells that in addition to the particular familiars assigned to each witch, "there was one greate grande divell or spirit, more eminent than the rest"; that witches who desire more power to hurt may have a more powerful devil; that the greatest witches prick themselves with bones given by the devil so that he may

[1] Brit. Mus. MSS. 36674, p. 197.

[2] Cf. Gaule, *Select Cases of Conscience* (1646), p. 62. The witches vow "to take the devil for their god, worship, invoke and obey him."

suck their blood; that the number of marks found on the witches depends on the number of spirits they have; "that men Witches usuallie have woomen spiritts and woomen witches men spirritts"; and that the spirits give them notice of their meetings, carry them from place to place, cause foul weather, and sometimes appear as animals.[1]

She states definitely in her confession that she was not at the great meeting of witches to which the boy referred, but that she was at a great meeting a week later, at which there were thirty or forty witches, "who did all ride to the said meetinge, and the end of their meetinge was to consult for the killinge and hurtinge of men and beasts." The list of witches she gives is entirely different from the one given by young Robinson, and it seems possible that Margaret Johnson did actually belong to a coven in the Pendle neighbourhood. The details of her confession tally with those of hundreds of others in various parts of the world; presumably the devil Mamillion to whom she worshipped was not just a hallucination, but a member of the local coven. However ardently she repents having been a witch when the law takes possession of her, she never denies it in subsequent examinations, and the main facts she states are consistent,[2] as are those in Old Demdike's confession.

From John Webster we get a vivid picture of the young Robinson's burst of fame in the neighbourhood of Pendle after he made his deposition [3]:

[1] There are several versions of Margaret Johnson's confession:
(*a*) Brit. Mus. Harleian MSS. Cod. 6854, pp. 27–9.
(*b*) Bodleian Rawlinson MSS. 399, p. 212.
(*c*) Brit. Mus. 36674, p. 196.
(*d*) Bodleian Dodsworth MSS. 61, pp. 47–8.
The quotations are from (*a*).

[2] Bishop Bridgman in his examination of her in 1634 (*Cal. State Papers. Dom.*, 1633–4, pp. 77–9) notes that she often acknowledged she was a witch,

[3] *Displaying of Supposed Witchcraft, wherein is affirmed that there are many sorts of Deceivers and Imposters, etc.*, London, 1677, ch. 14, "Of various impostures framed and invented."

"The informer was one Edmund Robinson (yet living at the writing hereof, and commonly known by the name of Ned of Roughs) whose father was by trade a Waller, and but a poor Man, and they finding that they were believed and had incouragement by the adjoyning Magistrates, and the persons being committed to prison or bound over to the next Assizes, the boy, his Father, and some others beside did make a practice to go from Church to Church that the Boy might reveal and discover Witches, pretending there was a great number at the pretended meeting whose faces he could know, and by that means they got a good living, that in a short space the Father bought a Cow or two, when he had none before. And it came to pass that this said Boy was brought into the Church of Kildwick, a large parish Church, where I (being then Curate there) was preaching in the afternoon, and was set upon a stall (he being but about ten or eleven years old) to look about him, which moved some little Disturbance in the Congregation for a while. And after prayers I inquiring what the matter was, the people told me that it was the Boy that discovered Witches, upon which I went to the house where he was to stay all night, where I found him and two very unlikely persons that did conduct him, and managed the business; I desired to have some discourse with the Boy in private, but that they utterly refused; then in the presence of a great many people, I took the Boy near me, and said: Good Boy tell me truly, and in earnest, did thou see and hear such strange things of the meeting of Witches, as is reported by many that thou didst relate, or did not some person teach thee to say such things of thy self? But the two men not giving the Boy leave to answer, did pluck him from me, and said he had been examined by two able Justices of the Peace, and they did never ask him such a question, to whom I replied, the persons accused had therefore the more wrong."

At the Lancaster assizes which followed, seventeen [1] of the witches were found guilty by the Jury, but yet (according to Webster), "by the prudent discretion of the Judge, who was not satisfied with the evidence, they were reprieved," and the matter was referred to the King and Privy Council.

[1] According to Webster. Nineteen is the number given by John Stearne in his *A Confirmation and Discovery of Witchcraft*, London, 1648, p. 11; also by Pelham in his letter.

The sensation caused in London by the report of the discovery of the witches in Lancashire is shown by Sir William Pelham's letter to Edward, Viscount Conway, on May 16, 1634.[1]

"The greatest newes from the country is of a huge pack of witches which are lately discovered in Lancashire, whereof it is said 19 are condemned, and that there are at least 60 already discovered, and yet daily there are more revealed; there are divers of them of good ability and they have done much harm. It is suspected that they had a hand in raising the great storm wherein his Majesty was in so great danger at sea in Scotland."

The King naturally took an interest in these creatures who had perhaps charmed against his life, but who were now harmless since they were in the hands of authority, and lodged in Lancaster gaol. He signified his desire to have them brought up to London so that he might see them in person.[2]

During May, 1634, much correspondence was carried on by Secretaries Coke and Windebank. The King's order was that

"some of the principall and most notorious offenders amongst those persons which were lately tryed and condemned for Witchcraft and Sorcery, at the last Assizes in the Countie of Lancaster, and afterwards repreved, should be brought upp to attend his Majesty's further pleasure";

the Lord Chief Justice was ordered to issue writs of Habeas Corpus for them. Their manner of conveyance was also specified: the High Sheriff of Lancashire was to deliver them to the sheriff of the next county, "and so they are to be conveyed from Sheriff to Sheriff, untill they shall arrive at London, and there be presented to the Lord Cheife Justice."

[1] *Cal. State Papers, Dom.*, 1634–5, p. 26, No. 12.

[2] *Council Register*, MS., P.C. 2, 43. The entry is dated May 20, and a marginal note has "ordered the 16th."

Seven witches are named in this order: the self-confessed witch, Margaret Johnson, called "the penitent witch"; Mary Spencer, the girl accused of making her pail come towards her; Frances Dicconson who had taken the boy to a witches' feast, according to his story; Jennet Hargrave; John Spencer, Mary's father; Alice Higgin, and Jennet Loynd.[1]

The order was not carried out immediately, and was repeated on May the 31st, with the same list of names; in the meantime W. Trumbull had written to Secretary Coke[2] explaining that the writs could not be issued "without particular notice of the parties names that are to be sent for," and adding: "the papers were delivered to your Honour where they do still remain. I do therefore humbly beseech your Honour to peruse the said papers, and to send me the names of such as you would have sent for."

The delay put the Lancashire judges in an awkward position also, and Lord Newburgh wrote from the Duchy House to Sir John Coke: "The Lancashire judges have been with me to desire me to solicit you that by your favour and means they may know His Majesty's pleasure and direction about the witches that are condemned and lie in Lancaster gaol."[3]

On the last day of May the order was again given, and further action was directed by the King. A warrant was issued to Thomas Smith[4]

"to repaire to the house of Edmund Robinson dwelling at —— (*blank*) in the Countie of Lancaster, and acquaint him, that you have express order to take into your charge his sonn Edmund Robinson, that discovered the Witches, and bring him in your companie likewise before us."

[1] *Counc. Reg.*, MS., P.C. 2, 43, p. 656.
[2] *Hist. MSS. Comm. Reports*, XII, Pt. 2; *Cowper MSS.*, May 22, 1634, p. 53.
[3] *Op. cit.*, May 23, 1634, p. 53.
[4] *Counc. Register*, MS., P.C. 43, p. 657.

Further, a letter was directed to the Lord Bishop of Chester[1] giving notice of the King's order that the witches should be brought to London, and continuing:

"Forasmuch as his Majesty doth desire to receive as cleare information as may be of the qualitie and nature of their severall offences. Wee doe therefore, according to his Majesty's espresse pleasure pray and require your Lordship presently upon the receipt of these Letters, to cause them, being those whose names are here under written, to be brought before you and to examine them particularly. And thereupon to retourne their examinations to this Board, with all convenient speed."

By this time the witches were famous, as an entry in Sir William Brereton's journal on June 3rd shows.[2] At the Hague he is presented to the Queen of Bohemia,

"where after the queen had put me upon a discourse of the discovery of our Lancashire Witches, she answered it with a relation of a discovery of witches in Westphalia, where a whole village, all witches; and amongst them was the Bishop of Wurzburg's chancellor and his page, all whom deservedly burned."

Bishop Bridgman of Chester acted promptly upon the order to examine the witches held in Lancaster gaol. On June 15 he sent his report to Secretaries Coke and Windebank.[3] Of the seven selected for the King to interview, only three had survived: "John Spencer, Alice Higgin, and Jennet Loynd, died lately in gaol, and Jennet Hargrave, laid sick past hope of recovery." The bishop had, however, on June 13th examined the three survivors, Margaret Johnson, Mary Spencer and Frances Dicconson. He reported on them accordingly:

"The old woman, Margaret Johnson, *alias* the penitent witch, with tears in her eyes, after an exhortation by the Bishop, replied, 'I will not add sin to sin. I have already done enough, nay too much, and will not increase it. I pray God I may repent.' And

[1] *Counc. Register*, MS., P.C. p. 658.

[2] *Travels in Holland, the United Provinces, England, Scotland, and Ireland, 1634–1635, by Sir William Brereton, Bart.* (*Chetham Society*, No. 1, pp. 33–4).

[3] *Cal. State Papers, Dom.*, 1634–5, pp. 77–9.

then she confessed as is set down in her examination, often acknowledging that she was a witch, but more often faulting in the particulars of her actions, as one having a strong imagination of the former, but of too weak a memory to retain or relate the other."

The others whom he examined "their wisdoms will soon discover their guilt or innocence." It is evident that the Bishop inclined to believe their innocence, for he adds a piece of gossip which he could not allow as evidence, to the effect that Mary Fisher, at whose house "the parties dieted in the assize week," and others beside, would testify

"that if Dicconson would have given the accuser Robinson 40*s.* before the arraignment, neither he nor his son (the boy that first set the business on foot) would have said anything against her; but when she advised her husband to give nothing, Robinson said he had no malice to any but her."

The Bishop comments: "Conceit and malice are so powerful in those parts, that they will easily afford an oath to work revenge upon their neighbour."

With this introductory report he enclosed the three examinations. The examination of Margaret Johnson is practically the same as that recorded before the Padiham justices on March 2 of the previous year. It says much for the old woman's conviction of her own share in witchcraft that her story had not changed during the fifteen months of prison, which had killed one man and two women among her fellow-prisoners. Her story of the man "in black attire, with black points" to whose persuasions she yielded, who sucked her blood and called himself Mamillion, is consistent. One might expect tearful denials of witchcraft, or otherwise fantastic additions fabricated during those fifteen months of sordid imprisonment, and the fact that she adds so little to her story suggests that she had not had the wit to invent the original version.

The new matter that comes up in her examination by Bishop Bridgman shows the process by which she believes she became initiated into a witch-coven. She says she was driven to be a witch "upon some vexations of her bad neighbours," and the power that Mamillion promised her in exchange for her soul was the power to hurt whom she would. She had no profit from the contract. The gold and silver Mamillion gave her "vanished soon again, and she was ever bare and poor, though he oft gave her the like." The power to hurt similarly amounted to nothing.

"She never hurt man or woman by witchcraft, only Henry Heap her neighbour called her a witch before she was one, whereupon her spirit willed her to hurt him, but she assented not; yet (forgetting herself) she said that Heap was dead ere her spirit advised her to it."

The killing of Heap is one of the accusations set against her in the list of offenders[1]: the report there notes that she has one devil's mark and that she is held "for killinge of Henry H(eap), for wasting and impayringe the body of Jennet Shackleton."

She is consistent to her previous account of the other witches involved. In March, 1633, at Padiham, she had listed names of seven of her neighbours whom she knew to be witches, among them "Cartmell wife of Colne," and now to Bishop Bridgman she confesses: "There were seven or eight of her neighbours who were witches, but most of them are dead, Jane, wife of Roger Cartmell of Colne, is the only one she can name."

The end of her confession is pathetic:

"Since her imprisonment her familiar never came near her. The rest of the witches now in gaol were unknown to her; is persuaded that Wilkinson and his wife are not witches, because he daily prays and reads, and seems a godly man. She fre-

[1] *The Offenders condemned and accused for witchcraft with their markes at their attainder* (MS.) (presumably recorded during March, 1633).

quented the church till her compact with the devil, but seldom since."

The other two prisoners, Mary Spencer and Frances Dicconson, were entirely different from "the penitent witch" in their attitude. Both insisted that they had been wronged by their neighbours who had accused them, and both denied any part of witchcraft.

"Mary Spencer, of Burnley, aged 20, being examined,[1] utterly denies that she knows any witchcraft, or ever did hurt to anybody thereby. Prays God to forgive Nicholas Cunliffe, who having borne malice to her and her parents these 5 or 6 years, has lately wrongfully abused them. Her father and mother were condemned last assizes for witches, and are since dead and buried. Before her imprisonment usually went to church at Burnley and heard Mr. Brierley, and what she could remember used to repeat to her parents at home. Repeated the Creed and Lord's Prayer, and says she defies the devil and all his works, and hopes to be saved by Christ Jesus."

As to the accusation that she could make her pail come to her by magic, she says:

"Cunliffe accused her to call a collock, or peal (or pail), which came running to her of its own accord. When she was arraigned she would have answered for herself, but the wind was so loud and the throng so great, that she could not hear the evidence against her. When she was a young girl and went to the well for water she used to tumble or trundle the collock or peale, down the hill, and she would run along after it to overtake it, and did overhie it sometimes, and then might call it to come to her, but utterly denies that she ever could make it come to her by any witch craft. She is not afraid of death, for she hopes it will make an entrance for her into heaven."

Frances Dicconson's denial is equally sturdy. She, too, "denies all knowledge of witchcraft."

"The boy who accused her has much wronged her. His father, Edmund Rough, alias Robinson, bought a cow of her

[1] *Cal. State Papers, Dom.*, 1634–5, pp. 78–9.

husband, but he would not let her go without surety, whereupon he has ever since maliced her and her husband." [1]

She adds that Robinson "offered to have freed her if her husband would have given 40s." The other witness against her, Edmund Stevenson, "is lately accused of felony, and maliced her upon bargain of butter," but formerly "confessed he knew nothing of her but well." [2]

The comments of the Bishop and his questions to the prisoners are of interest as they show his attitude to witchcraft. Obviously he discounts much of the evidence, emphasising the part that local jealousy and gossip have played in incriminating the witches. He brings out the tragedy of the condition of the victims in Lancaster gaol. But at the same time he does not discredit the possibility of witchcraft itself, and he has the usual seventeenth-century view of witchcraft as worship of the devil,—hence his notice of any religious devotion on the part of the prisoners. He has the same attitude when he is called on to report on another group of suspected witches imprisoned in Lancaster in 1635. He discounts the evidence of the witnesses: one "formerly distracted," and one "of no reputation"; but he notes of one suspect that he has found growing on the right ear "a strange piece of flesh," supposed by some to be the mark left by the familiar who sucked her blood.[3]

It must be remembered in this connection that it would scarcely have been politic for the Bishop to discredit witchcraft altogether, since the King showed a special interest in it.

The Bishop's report was sent to London on June 15th, 1634, and the witches followed closely upon it. After the Bishop's report that Jennet Hargrave was "laid sick

[1] *Cal. State Papers, Dom.*, 1634–5, p. 79.

[2] The accusation against Frances Dicconson in the List of Offenders is that she has three marks, and that she has wasted the body of Edmund Stevenson.

[3] *Hist. Comm. Reports*, XII, Pt. 2.

past hope of recovery," so that he did not take a deposition from her, it is a surprise to find that she was sent with the other three on that alarming journey to the King in London, being passed from sheriff to sheriff according to instructions. It is impossible to imagine the sensations of the four of them at this point, after the fifteen months in prison—Jennet Hargrave sick and despairing; Frances Dicconson heartily indignant at the false accusations and at malicious neighbours; Mary Spencer at twenty wishing for death after seeing her mother and father die in Lancaster gaol; and with these three the sixty-year-old Margaret Johnson, "the penitent witch," weeping over her associations with the witch-coven and Mamillion her master, and terrifying them by her belief that every dog or cat that fawned on them by the way was Mamillion in animal-form come to see the witches die.

Before the end of June they were in London. Anthony Mingay writes [1] to Framlingham Gawdy on June 28: "Four witches are sent out of Lancashire to the king to be re-examined and divers new ones more apprehended."

On June 29 a warrant was issued [2] by the Privy Council to Alexander Baker, Esq., and Sergeant William Clowes, "his majesty's chirurgions":

"These shall be to will and require you forthwith to make choyce of such Midwives as you shall thinke fitt to inspect, and search the bodies of those Women that were lately brought upp by the Sheriffe of the County of Lancaster indicted for witchcraft, and to reporte unto you whether they find aboute them any such marks as are pretended; wherein the said Midwives are to receive Instruccons from Mr. Doctor Harvey his Majesty's Physician and yourselve."

The endorsement adds: "The prisoners are at the Ship Tavern at Greenwich." Later they were lodged in

[1] *Hist. MSS. Comm. Reports*, X, Pt. 2, p. 147; *Gawdy MSS.*

[2] *Privy Council Register* (MS.), 44, p. 56; Summarised in *Cal. State Papers, Dom.*, 1634–5, p. 98.

the Fleet, where, according to Webster (ch. 14), there were "great sums gotten . . . to show them."

The surgeons' report on the examination of the witches was sent from Surgeons' Hall on July 2.[1] Under direction of Doctor Harvey, the King's two surgeons with five others and ten midwives had inspected the women, and reported no mark on Janet Hargraves, Frances Dicconson, or Mary Spencer. On Margaret Johnson there were two unnatural marks, one of which they thought caused by leeches.

After they had been thus viewed and examined by the King's physicians and surgeons, the witches were also interviewed by the King and Privy Council, according to Webster (ch. 14)—

"and no cause of guilt appearing, but great presumptions of the boy's being suborned to accuse them falsely; therefore it was resolved to separate the Boy from his Father, they having both followed the women up to London, they were both taken and put into several prisons asunder."

By this time the two informers were prepared to swear to whatever might get them safely back to their homes. The Under Sheriff of Lancashire who had brought the prisoners up to London had been discharged on July 5 from further attendance.[2] Doubtless it seemed to the two Robinsons that their only hope was to make a good confession and to get home to Lancashire. The father shifted the whole responsibility for the stories to the son, and was eager to swear that all his Pendle neighbours were "honest harmless people" and not witches at all. The son found himself getting more and more involved, as alarming London officials and even the King himself demanded more stories of wonders about the witch-

[1] *Cal. State Papers, Dom.*, 1634–5, p. 129. In the contemporary play on the *Lancashire Witches* there are references to these examinations for the devil's mark or for the spot from which the familiar sucked blood:

Doughty. Here's good stuffe for a jurie of women to passe upon.

Lawrence. Let me be searcht as never witch was searcht. (Act IV.)

[2] *Privy Counc. Reg.* (MS.), 44, p. 73.

sabbat and the magic bridle, and rather naturally unbosomed himself when " he came to the King's coachman at Richmond, to whom he declared the truth." [1]

Before George Long, Justice of Peace for Middlesex, he confessed that he had invented the whole story of the greyhounds and the magic bridle and the feast at Hoarestones, to avoid a beating when he had been playing instead of fetching home the kine :

" that tale is false and feigned and has no truth at all, but only as he has heard tales and reports made by women, so he framed his tale out of his own invention, which when he had once told he still persisted in.' [2]

Six days later when he was re-examined by the same George Long, he kept to his recantation. He had made up the story of the witch-feast at Hoarestones :

" he says that he had heard the neighbours talk of a witch feast that was kept at Mocking Tower in Pendle Forest about twenty years since, to which feast divers witches came, and many were apprehended and executed at Lancaster, and thereupon he framed those tales concerning the persons aforesaid, because he heard the neighbours repute them for witches."

Then follows his basis for each accusation—Dicconson's wife he listed because Edmund Stevenson had suspected her in the time of his sickness ; Jennet Hargraves because Robert Smith had said his wife on her death-bed had accused her of causing her death ; the others because of similar reports of bewitching men and cattle.

He insisted in this re-examination that he alone had been responsible for the whole story, but Webster reports otherwise,—" the whole I have had from his own mouth more than once . . . that he was taught and suborned to devise and feign these things against them . . ." by his father and by others " whom envy, revenge and hope of gain had prompted on to that devillish design " (ch. 14).

[1] *Cal. State Papers, Dom.*, 1634–5, p. 141. [2] *Ibid.*, pp. 152–3.

Edmund Robinson, senior, was examined before the same Justices of Peace on July 12th and 16th. His attitude was one of sorrow and indignation at his position. The stories his son told he had never believed—at first he had rebuked him, then assumed the boy had seen some vision. As to the idea that he had incriminated the witches, he denied it stoutly, only being present at the assizes as responsible for his son, and refusing there to prefer an indictment against Frances Dicconson. The quarrel over the cow and the offer of a bribe he utterly denied. He grew extremely nervous at his predicament, and filed an agitated petition on July 16th, calling himself "a poor distressed prisoner in the Gatehouse" complaining that he "has been imprisoned since the 28th June in great want, having neither money nor friends, and being almost 200 miles from his poor house." He professes complete ignorance of why he should be imprisoned, but has heard that one of the jury who found the witches guilty at Lancaster had petitioned against him. Again he insists that he had no share in the witches' prosecution, and that the juryman has been paid by John Dicconson to agitate for his wife.[1]

Meantime the topical play on the *Lancashire Witches* was being played in London.[2] Evidently it was produced while the excitement about the witches was at its height, that is, during the summer of 1634. The Prologue makes reference to "those witches the fat Jaylor brought to Towne," and the Epilogue indicates that the fate of the witches was still in the balance:

> "Now while the Witches must expect their due
> By lawfull Justice, we appeale to you
> For favourable censure; what their crime
> May bring upon 'em, ripeness yet of time
> Has not revealed."

[1] *Cal. State Papers, Dom.*, 1634–5, p. 152.
[2] The entry in the *Stationers' Register* is Oct. 28, 1634.

It seems probable that the following lines were added to bring the matter up to date when the boy's recantation came out :

> " . . . Perhaps great Mercy may
> After just condemnation give them day
> Of Longer life . . ."

Webster in his *Displaying of Witchcraft* writes scornfully that when the witches were in London " publick plays (were) acted thereupon." The plural suggests that other plays besides this by Heywood and Brome were written on the theme, but none of the others are extant. Shadwell's *Lancashire Witches* was not performed till 1681. An entry in Crosfield's diary,[1] July 10, 1635 : " The Witches of Lancashire, over ag(ainst) ye Kings Head, their 1. Meetings, 2. Tricks," may refer to another play, but might equally apply to Heywood and Brome's.

As a play Heywood and Brome's *Lancashire Witches* is very poor, but it is a curious piece of writing in its setting. Performed as a " well-received comedy " while the witches were on view in London, it presents crudely the popular view of witchcraft. The confessions of Edmund Robinson and of Margaret Johnson provide most of the witch-material—the boy's meeting with the greyhounds and his ride to the witches' feast, his meeting with the cloven-footed boy who was the devil ; and Margaret Johnson's meeting with the man in black who was the devil—all these details are copied exactly from the depositions, and with a medley of charming make-up the witch-background of the play. The four witches summoned by the King to London appear with their own names, and Mary Spencer's bewitching of the pail becomes one of the pieces of absurd comedy.

The actual plot of the play centres about a fifth witch,

[1] *Crosfield's Diary and the Caroline Stage*, F. S. Boas, *Fortnightly Review*, **123**, pp. 514–24 (April, 1925). Mr. Boas assumes that this was not Heywood's play, but another due to " the popular ferment " over the trial.

Nan Generous, the wife of a respected squire, who joins in the witches' gatherings, using his horse for her night-rides. The group of witches haunt an old mill in the shape of cats, and are attacked by a soldier. The discovery the next morning that Mrs. Generous lacks a hand leads to the arrest of all the witches, and gives Heywood an opportunity to write still another of his famous scenes on the repentant wife and forgiving husband. It seems probable that in Mrs. Generous the dramatists were making copy out of the most notorious of the Lancashire Witches of 1612,—the gentlewoman, Alice Nutter, who was executed during the earlier witch trial.

The dramatists seem to have written a play on the spur of the moment, and to have included in it any available material that could be of interest. There is, for instance, evidence that they drew on chapbook literature of the time in featuring two popular Lancashire characters —Lawrence of Lancashire or Lusty Lawrence [1] is the chief character in the sub-plot; and Mary Spencer becomes Mal Spencer in the play, as Mal the dairymaid and Robin the groom were already familiar from chapbook stories.[2]

Heywood's *Late Lancashire Witches* is, in fact, written to catch the popular taste, catering blatantly to the popular desire to see the wonders of witchcraft staged. Among the characters of the play, to reflect the audience, there is every stage of scepticism and credulity towards witchcraft. The sober gentleman, Mr. Generous, denies its possibility:

> "For my belief is, no such thing can be.
> A madness you may call it."

[1] Lusty Lawrence was already known to the audience, as is shown by an allusion to him in Field's *A Woman is a Weathercock*, V, 2, printed in 1612.

[2] "The famous history of the Lancashire witches . . . with the loves and humours of Roger and Dorothy." This chapbook, according to Harland and Wilkinson (*Legends and Traditions of Lancashire*), dates from the early days of James I's reign. In both the chapbook and the play the dairymaid, Mary or Mal, uses her witchcraft to hurt her rival and causes her lover to ride on a witch-horse. The chapbook exists in various reprints. Brit. Mus. T. 1855 and others.

But most of the other characters assume that every disturbance of crops or other life is due to witchcraft.

While the London audience was making merry over this "pleasant comedy" the witches themselves were being herded back to Lancashire. One can imagine the jeers they had to endure in their progress through the streets with the jailer when one reads in the play the Justice's command: "On afore, Drovers, with your untoward Cattell." After their case was dismissed with the boy's recantation it would be natural to assume that they went back to their homes in Pendle, but a brief entry in the Farington Papers proves otherwise. When William Farington of Worden was appointed High Sheriff of Lancashire in 1636 a calendar that represents a stock-taking was compiled—"A Callender of the names of the Prisoners remaining and being in his Majesty's Gaole and Castle of Lancaster this assizes . . . Witches remaining in his Majesty's Gaole."[1] Among ten names of witches are "Mary Spencer," "Jennet Hargreaves," "ffrances Dicconson." Margaret Johnson is not named. It is probable that she did not survive another two years of prison or possibly, since she had not been exonerated by the confession of young Robinson or by the report of the London surgeons, she may have been detained in London.

This tragic example of a witch-persecution based on very flimsy evidence shows the attitude of the general public in accepting as possibilities fantastic stories of the supernatural, and shows, too, that serious investigators like Bishop Bridgman and Harvey were prepared to consider the devil's mark on the witch's body as evidence of witchcraft. We must remember that belief in the supernatural in witchcraft was common in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and that even Bacon, Raleigh, Sir Thomas Browne and Doctor Henry More believed in

[1] *Farington Papers* (*Chetham Soc.*, **39**, p. 27).

witchcraft as a devilish art. At the same time there were sceptics among the listeners at the trials, men like Webster and others for whom James I wrote his *Demonology*—"to resolve the doubting harts of many." The case of 1612 does suggest that the absurdities at which the sceptics mocked—the broomsticks and the animal-familiars—may not have been entirely fantastic inventions of the witnesses, and that the covens did indeed exist as groups of human beings believing in their power to do evil, though not as supernatural agents.

GENERAL BIBLIOGRAPHY.

(The following does not attempt to be a complete bibliography on witchcraft, but to indicate some of the works used, and to supplement the footnote-references by giving the particular editions used.)

Bacon, Francis, *Philosophical Works*, reprinted from Ellis and Spedding, ed. J. M. Robertson, 1905.

Bernard, Richard, *A Guide to Grand-Jurymen*, divided into two books, 1629.

Bodin, Jean, *De La Demonomanie des Sorciers*, Paris, 1580.

Burton, Robert, *Anatomy of Melancholy*, 3 vols., 1893.

Cooper, Thomas, *The Mystery of Witchcraft*, 1617.

Dalton, Michael, *Country Justice*, 1618. (Reprint in Hardwicke, *Traditions of Lancashire.*)

De Lancre, Pierre, *L'Incredulité et Mescreance du Sortilege plainemant convaincue*, Paris, 1522.

Tableau d'Inconstance des Mauvais Anges et Demons, 1613.

Delrio, M. A., *Disquisitionum Magicarum*, Lovanii, 1599.

Glanvil, Joseph, *Sadducismus Triumphatus*, 1668.

Essay on Witchcraft, 1696.

Guazzo, Franciscus Maria, *Compendium Maleficarum* (his list of the eleven articles of witchcraft reprinted in Sinistrari).

Heywood, Thomas, *Nine Books of Women*, 1624.

Hierarchie, 1635.

Ives, George, *A History of Penal Methods*, ch. 2, The Witch Trials, 1914.

James I, *Daemonologie*, reprint in Bodley Head Quartos, ed. 1924.

Lecky, William Edward Hartpole, in *History of the Rise and Influence of the Spirit of Rationalism in Europe*, Vol. I, ch. 1. The Declining Sense of the Miraculous, 1870.

Lee, F. G., *Glimpses in the Twilight, being various notes, records and examples of the Supernatural*, 1885.

Murray, M. A., *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe*, 1921.

Notestein, Wallace, *A History of Witchcraft in England, from* 1558–1718.

Newes from Scotland, declaring the damnable life and death of Doctor Fian (reprint in Bodley Head Quartos).

Raleigh, Sir Walter, *History of the World*, in Five Books. Book I, ch. 11, on Magic Arts. (11th ed., 1736.)

Scot, Reginald, *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* (ed. Brinsley Nicholson, 1886).

Scott, Sir Walter, *Demonology and Witchcraft*, 1884.

Seymour, St. John D., *Irish Witchcraft and Demonology*, 1913.

Seymour, St. John D., and H. L. Neligan, *True Irish Ghost Stories*, 1914.

Sinistrari, Ludovico Maria, *De Demonialitate, et Incubis et Succubis*, ed. Liseux, 1872 and 1879 (English with Latin text). Translated into English by M. Summers, 1927.

Spalding Miscellany, Vol. I, Scotch trials of 1597–8.

Sprenger, R. P. F., *Malleus Maleficarum*, 1576.

Summers, Montague, *The History of Witchcraft and Demonology*, 1926.

The Geography of Witchcraft, 1927.

Demoniality (trans. from Sinistrari), 1927.

Taylor, Zachary, *The Devil Turn'd Casuist or the Cheats of Rome, in the Exorcism of a Despairing Devil*, etc., 1696.

Thurston, Herbert, *Diabolism* (article on Summers's three books), in *Studies*, Sept., 1927.

Poltergeists (article on *True Irish Ghost Stories*), in *Studies*, March, 1928.

Wagstaffe, John, *The Question of Witchcraft Debated*, 1671.

Webster, John, *Displaying of Supposed Witchcraft*, 1677.

Wickwar, J. W., *Witchcraft and the Black Art*, 1925.

Yve-Plessis, *Essaie d'une Bibliographie Française de la Sorcellerie*, etc., 1900.

The following are some of the more general works used:

Barrett, W. F., *Psychical Research*, 1911 (articles in S.P.R.).

Glover, T. R., *Conflict of Religions in the Early Roman Empire*, 1909.

Gurney (E.), Myers (F. W. H.), Podmore (F.), *Phantasms of the Living*, 1886.

Hastings, *Cyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, articles on Lycanthropy, Spirits, Witches and Fairies, etc.

Hecker, J. F. C., *The Epidemics of the Middle Ages*, trans. Babington, 1844.

Heuze, Paul, *Do the Dead Live?*, 1923.

Richet, Professor Charles, *Thirty Years of Psychical Research*, trans. de Brath, 1923.

Society of Psychical Research (S.P.R.), *Proceedings*, 1882–.
Journal, 1884–.

The MSS. sources used are cited in full in the foot-notes. They are not repeated here therefore. The following works bear on the subject of the Lancashire Witches:

Baines, *History of Lancashire.*

Darrell, John, *The Devil in Lancashire*, 4to, 1600.

Famous History of the Lancashire Witches, chapbook of eighteenth century (copies in Brit. Mus.).

Farington Papers (1547–1688) in *Chetham Society*, vol. **39.**

Potts, Thomas, *Wonderful Discoverie of Witches in the Countie of Lancaster*, MS. copy, Bodl. Wood MSS. B. 18. Reprint in *Chetham Soc.*, vol. **6.**

Weeks, W. S., *The Clitheroe District.*

Whitaker, Thomas, *History of Whalley*, 1818.