The Witchcraft Delusion In Colonial Connecticut (1647-1697)

John M. Taylor

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[Illustration: A Grand Jury Presentment for Witchcraft Reproduced from the original in the Connecticut Historical Society, Hartford

May it please yr Honble Court, we the Grand inquest now setting for the County of Fairefeild, being made sensable, not only by Common fame (but by testamonies duly billed to us) that the widow Mary Staple, Mary Harvey ye wife of Josiah Harvey & Hannah Harvey the daughter of the saide Josiah, all of Fairefeild, remain under the susspition of useing witchecraft, which is abomanable both in ye sight of God & man and ought to be witnessed against. we doe therefore (in complyance to our duty, the discharge of our oathes and that trust reposed in us) presente the above mentioned pssons to the Honble Court of Assistants now setting in Fairefeild, that they may be taken in to Custody & proceeded against according to their demerits.

Fairefeild, Fby, 1692 in behalfe of the Grnd Jury JOSEPH BASTARD, foreman]

THE WITCHCRAFT
DELUSION IN COLONIAL
CONNECTICUT

1647-1697

BY JOHN M. TAYLOR

Author of "Maximilian and Carlotta, a Story of Imperialism," and "Roger Ludlow, the Colonial Lawmaker"

1908

"Connecticut can well afford to let her records go to the world." _Blue Laws: True and False_ (p. 47). J. HAMMOND TRUMBULL.

FOREWORD

The true story of witchcraft in old Connecticut has never been told. It has been hidden in the ancient records and in manuscripts in private collections, and those most conversant with the facts have not made them known, for one reason or another. It is herein written from authoritative sources, and should prove of interest and value as a present-day interpretation of that strange delusion, which for a half century darkened the lives of the forefathers and foremothers of the colonial days.

J.M.T.

Hartford, Connecticut.

TWO INDICTMENTS FOR WITCHCRAFT

"John Carrington thou art indited by the name of John Carrington of Wethersfield--carpenter--, that not having the feare of God before thine eyes thou hast interteined ffamilliarity with Sattan the great enemye of God and mankinde and by his helpe hast done workes aboue the course of nature for wch both according to the lawe of God and the established lawe of this Commonwealth thou deservest to dye."

Record Particular Court, 2: 17, 1650-51.

"Hugh Crotia, Thou Standest here presented by the name of Hugh Crotia of Stratford in the Colony of Connecticut in New England; for that not haueing the fear of God before thine Eyes, through the Instigation of the Devill, thou hast forsaken thy God & covenanted with the Devill, and by his help hast in a preternaturall way afflicted the bodys of Sundry of his Majesties good Subjects, for which according to the Law of God,

and the Law of this Colony, thou deseruest to dye."

Record Court of Assistants, 2: 16, 1693.

A WARRANT FOR THE EXECUTION OF A WITCH[A] AND THE SHERIFF'S RETURN THEREON

To George Corwin Gentlm high Sheriff of the County of Essex Greeting

Whereas Bridgett Bishop als Olliver the wife of Edward Bishop of Salem in the County of Essex Sawyer at a special Court of Oyer and Terminer ---- (held at?)[B] Salem this second Day of this instant month of June for the Countyes of Essex Middlesex and Suffolk before William Stoughton Esqe. and his Associates Justices of the said Court was Indicted and arraigned upon five several Indictments for useing practising & exercising on the ----[B] last past and divers others days ----[B] witchcraft in and upon the bodyes of Abigail Williams Ann puttnam Jr Mercy Lewis Mary Walcott and Elizabeth Hubbard of Salem Village single women; whereby their bodyes were hurt afflicted pined consumed wasted & tormented contrary to the forme of the statute in that case made and provided To which Indictmts the said Bridgett Bishop pleaded not guilty and for Tryall thereof put herselfe upon God and her Country ----[B] she was found guilty of the ffelonyes and Witchcrafts whereof she stood Indicted and sentence of death accordingly passed agt her as the Law directs execution whereof yet remaines to be done These are therefore in the name of their Majties William & Mary now King & Queen over England & to will and command you that upon Fryday next being the fourth day of this instant month of June between the hours of Eight and twelve in the aforenoon of the same day you safely conduct the sd Bridgett Bishop als Olliver from their Majties Goale in Salem aforesd to the place of execution and there cause her to be hanged by the neck until she be dead and of your doings herein make returne to the Clerk of the sd Court and precept And hereof you are not to faile at your peril And this shall be sufficient warrant Given under my hand & seal at Boston the Eighth of June in the ffourth year of the reigne of our Sovereigne Lords William & Mary now King & Queen over England Annoque Dm 1692 Wm. Stoughton

[Footnote A: Original in office of Clerk of the Courts at Salem, Massachusetts. Said to be the only one extant in American archives.] [Footnote B: Some of the words in the warrant are illegible.]

June 16 1692

According to the within written precept I have taken the Bodye of the within named Bridgett Bishop out of their Majties Goale in Salem & Safely Conueighd her to the place provided for her Execution & Caused ye sd Bridgett to be hanged by the neck till Shee was dead all which was according to the time within Required & So I make returne by me George Corwin Sheriff

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THE WITCHCRAFT DELUSION IN COLONIAL CONNECTICUT

CHAPTER I

"First, because Witchcraft is a rife and common sinne in these our daies, and very many are intangled with it, beeing either practitioners thereof in their owne persons, or at the least, yielding to seeke for helpe and counsell of such as practise it." _A Discovrse of the Damned Art of Witchcraft_, PERKINS, 1610.

"And just as God has his human servants, his church on earth, so also the Devil has his--men and women sworn to his service and true to his bidding. To win such followers he can appear to men in any form he pleases, can deceive them, enter into compact with them, initiate them

into his worship, make them his allies for the ruin of their fellows. Now it is these human allies and servants of Satan, thus postulated into existence by the brain of a monkish logician, whom history knows as witches." _The Literature of Witchcraft_, BURR.

Witchcraft in its generic sense is as old as human history. It has written its name in the oldest of human records. In all ages and among all peoples it has taken firm hold on the fears, convictions and consciences of men. Anchored in credulity and superstition, in the dread and love of mystery, in the hard and fast theologic doctrines and teachings of diabolism, and under the ban of the law from its beginning, it has borne a baleful fruitage in the lives of the learned and the unlearned, the wise and the simple.

King and prophet, prelate and priest, jurist and lawmaker, prince and peasant, scholars and men of affairs have felt and dreaded its subtle power, and sought relief in code and commandment, bull and anathema, decree and statute--entailing even the penalty of death--and all in vain until in the march of the races to a higher civilization, the centuries enthroned faith in the place of fear, wisdom in the place of ignorance, and sanity in the seat of delusion.

In its earlier historic conception witchcraft and its demonstrations centered in the claim of power to produce certain effects, "things beyond the course of nature," from supernatural causes, and under this general term all its occult manifestations were classified with magic and sorcery, until the time came when the Devil was identified and acknowledged both in church and state as the originator and sponsor of the mystery, sin and crime—the sole father of the Satanic compacts with men and women, and the law both canonical and civil took cognizance of his malevolent activities.

In the Acropolis mound at Susa in ancient Elam, in the winter of 1901-2, there was brought to light by the French expedition in charge of the eminent savant, M. de Morgan, one of the most remarkable memorials of early civilization ever recovered from the buried cities of the Orient.

It is a monolith--a stele of black diorite--bearing in bas-relief a likeness of Hammurabi (the Amrephel of the Old Testament; Genesis xiv, 1), and the sixth king of the first Babylonian dynasty, who reigned about 2250 B.C.; and there is also carved upon it, in archaic script in black letter cuneiform--used long after the cursive writing was invented--the longest Babylonian record discovered to this day,--the oldest body of laws in existence and the basis of historical jurisprudence.

It is a remarkable code, quickly made available through translation and transliteration by the Assyrian scholars, and justly named, from its royal compiler, Hammurabi's code. He was an imperialist in purpose and action, and in the last of his reign of fifty-five years he annexed or assimilated the suzerainty of Elam, or Southern Persia, with Assyria to the north, and also Syria and Palestine, to the Mediterranean Sea.

This record in stone originally contained nineteen columns of inscriptions of four thousand three hundred and fourteen lines, arranged in two hundred and eighty sections, covering about two hundred separate decisions or edicts. There is substantial evidence that many of the laws were of greater antiquity than the code itself, which is a thousand

years older than the Mosaic code, and there are many striking resemblances and parallels between its provisions, and the law of the covenant, and the deuteronomy laws of the Hebrews.

The code was based on personal responsibility. It protects the sanctity of an oath before God, provides among many other things for written evidence in legal matters, and is wonderfully comprehensive and rich in rules for the conduct of commercial, civic, financial, social, economic, and domestic affairs.

These sections are notably illustrative:

"If a man, in a case (pending judgment), utters threats against the witnesses (or), does not establish the testimony that he has given, if that case be a case involving life, that man shall be put to death.

"If a judge pronounces a judgment, renders a decision, delivers a verdict duly signed and sealed and afterwards alters his judgment, they shall call that judge to account for the alteration of the judgment which he had pronounced, and he shall pay twelvefold the penalty which was in the said judgment, and, in the assembly, they shall expel him from his seat of judgment, and he shall not return, and with the judges in a case he shall not take his seat.

"If a man practices brigandage and is captured, that man shall be put to death.

"If a woman hates her husband, and says: 'thou shalt not have me,' they shall inquire into her antecedents for her defects; and if she has been a careful mistress and is without reproach and her husband has been going about and greatly belittling her, that woman has no blame. She shall receive her presents and shall go to her father's house.

"If she has not been a careful mistress, has gadded about, has neglected her house and has belittled her husband, they shall throw that woman into the water.

"If a physician operates on a man for a severe wound with a bronze lancet and causes the man's death, or opens an abscess (in the eye) of a man with a bronze lancet and destroys the man's eye, they shall cut off his fingers.

"If a builder builds a house for a man and does not make its construction firm and the house, which he has built, collapses and causes the death of the owner of the house, that builder shall be put to death."

It is, however, with only one of King Hammurabi's wise laws that this inquiry has to do, and it is this:

"If a man has placed an enchantment upon a man, and has not justified himself, he upon whom the enchantment is placed to the Holy River (Euphrates) shall go; into the Holy River he shall plunge. If the Holy River holds (drowns) him he who enchanted him shall take his house. If on the contrary, the man is safe and thus is innocent, the wizard loses his life, and his house."

Or, as another translation has it:

"If a man ban a man and cast a spell on him--if he cannot justify it he who has banned shall be killed."

"If a man has cast a spell on a man and has not justified it, he on whom the spell has been thrown shall go to the River God, and plunge into the river. If the River God takes him he who has banned him shall be saved. If the River God show him to be innocent, and he be saved, he who banned him shall be killed, and he who plunged into the river shall take the house of him who banned him."

There can be no more convincing evidence of the presence and power of the great witchcraft superstition among the primitive races than this earliest law; and it is to be especially noted that it prescribes one of the very tests of guilt--the proof by water--which was used in another form centuries later, on the continent, in England and New England, at Wurzburg and Bonn, at Rouen, in Suffolk, Essex and Devon, and at Salem and Hartford and Fairfield, when "the Devil starteth himself up in the pulpit, like a meikle black man, and calling the row (roll) everyone answered, Here!"

CHAPTER II

"To deny the possibility, nay actual evidence of witchcraft and sorcery, is at once to flatly contradict the revealed word of God in various passages both of the Old and New Testaments." _Blackstone's Commentaries_ (Vol. 4, ch. 4, p. 60).

"It was simply the natural result of Puritanical teaching acting on the mind, predisposing men to see Satanic influence in life, and consequently eliciting the phenomena of witchcraft." LECKY's _Rationalism in Europe_ (Vol. I, p. 123).

Witchcraft's reign in many lands and among many peoples is also attested in its remarkable nomenclature. Consider its range in ancient, medieval and modern thought as shown in some of its definitions: Magic, sorcery, soothsaying, necromancy, astrology, wizardry, mysticism, occultism, and conjuring, of the early and middle ages; compacts with Satan, consorting with evil spirits, and familiarity with the Devil, of later times; all at last ripening into an epidemic demonopathy with its countless victims of fanaticism and error, malevolence and terror, of persecution and ruthless sacrifices.

It is still most potent in its evil, grotesque, and barbaric forms, in Fetichism, Voodooism, Bundooism, Obeahism, and Kahunaism, in the devil and animal ghost worship of the black races, completely exemplified in the arts of the Fetich wizard on the Congo; in the "Uchawi" of the Wasequhha mentioned by Stanley; in the marriage customs of the Soudan devil worshipers; in the practices of the Obeah men and women in the Caribbees--notably their power in matters of love and business, religion and war--in Jamaica; in the incantations of the kahuna in Hawaii; and in the devices of the voodoo or conjure doctor in the southern states; in the fiendish rites and ceremonies of the red men,--the Hoch-e-ayum of the Plains Indians, the medicine dances of the Cheyennes and Arapahoes, the fire dance of the Navajos, the snake dance of the Moquis, the sun dance of the Sioux, in the myths and tales of the Cherokees; and it

rings in many tribal chants and songs of the East and West.

It lives as well, and thrives luxuriantly, ripe for the full vintage, in the minds of many people to whom this or that trivial incident or accident of life is an omen of good or evil fortune with a mysterious parentage. Its roots strike deep in that strange element in human nature which dreads whatsoever is weird and uncanny in common experiences, and sees strange portents and dire chimeras in all that is unexplainable to the senses. It is made most virile in the desire for knowledge of the invisible and intangible, that must ever elude the keenest inquiry, a phase of thought always to be reckoned with when imagination runs riot, and potent in its effect, though evanescent as a vision the brain sometimes retains of a dream, and as senseless in the cold light of reason as Monna Sidonia's invocation at the Witches' Sabbath: (_Romance of Leonardo da Vinci_, p. 97, MEREJKOWSKI.)

"Emen Hetan, Emen Hetan, Palu, Baalberi, Astaroth help us Agora, Agora, Patrisa, Come and help us."

"Garr-r: Garr-r, up: Don't knock Your head: We fly: We fly:"

And who may count himself altogether free from the subtle power of the old mystery with its fantastic imageries, when the spirit of unrest is abroad? Who is not moved by it in the awesome stillness of night on the plains, or in the silence of the mountains or of the somber forest aisles; in wild winter nights when old tales are told; in fireside visions as tender memories come and go? And who, when listening to the echoes of the chambers of the restless sea when deep calleth unto deep, does not hear amid them some weird and haunting refrain like Leland's sea song?

"I saw three witches as the wind blew cold In a red light to the lee;
Bold they were and overbold
As they sailed over the sea;
Calling for One Two Three;
Calling for One Two Three;
And I think I can hear
It a ringing in my ear,
A-calling for the One, Two, Three."

Above all, in its literature does witchcraft exhibit the conclusive proof of its age, its hydra-headed forms, and its influence in the intellectual and spiritual development of the races of men.

What of this literature? Count in it all the works that treat of the subject in its many phases, and its correlatives, and it is limitless, a literature of all times and all lands.

Christian and pagan gave it place in their religions, dogmas, and articles of faith and discipline, and in their codes of law; and for four hundred years, from the appeal of Pope John XXII, in 1320, to extirpate the Devil-worshipers, to the repeal of the statute of James I in 1715, the delusion gave point and force to treatises, sermons, romances, and folk-lore, and invited, nay, compelled, recognition at the hands of the scientist and legist, the historian, the poet and the dramatist, the theologian and philosopher.

But the monographic literature of witchcraft, as it is here considered, is limited, in the opinion of a scholar versed in its lore, to fifteen hundred titles. There is a mass of unpublished materials in libraries and archives at home and abroad, and of information as to witchcraft and the witch trials, accessible in court records, depositions, and current accounts in public and private collections, all awaiting the coming of some master hand to transform them into an exhaustive history of the most grievous of human superstitions.

To this day, there has been no thorough investigation or complete analysis of the history of the witch persecutions. The true story has been distorted by partisanship and ignorance, and left to exploitation by the romancer, the empiric, and the sciolist.

"Of the origin and nature of the delusion we know perhaps enough; but of the causes and paths of its spread, of the extent of its ravages, of its exact bearing upon the intellectual and religious freedom of its times, of the soul-stirring details of the costly struggle by which it was overborne we are lamentably ill informed." (_The Literature of Witchcraft_, p. 66, BURR.)

It must serve in this brief narrative to merely note, within the centuries which marked the climax of the mania, some of the most authoritative and influential works in giving strength to its evil purpose and the modes of accusation, trial, and punishment.

Modern scholarship holds that witchcraft, with the Devil as the arch enemy of mankind for its cornerstone, was first exploited by the Dominicans of the Inquisition. They blazed the tortuous way for the scholastic theology which in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries gave new recognition to Satan and his satellites as the sworn enemies of God and his church, and the Holy Inquisition with its massive enginery, open and secret, turned its attention to the exposure and extirpation of the heretics and sinners who were enlisted in the Devil's service.

Take for adequate illustration these standard authorities in the early periods of the widespread and virulent epidemic:

Those of the Inquisitor General, Eymeric, in 1359, entitled _Tractatus contra daemonum_; the Formicarius or Ant Hill of the German Dominican Nider, 1337; the _De calcatione daemonum_, 1452; the _Flagellum haereticorum fascinariorum_ of the French Inquisitor Jaquier in 1458; and the Fortalitium fidei of the Spanish Franciscan Alonso de Spina, in 1459; the famous and infamous manual of arguments and rules of procedure for the detection and punishment of witches, compiled by the German Inquisitors Kraemer and Sprenger (Institor) in 1489, buttressed on the bull of Pope Innocent VIII; (this was the celebrated Witch Hammer, bearing on its title page the significant legend, " Not to believe in witchcraft is the greatest of heresies_"); the Canon Episcopi; the bulls of Popes John XXII, 1330, Innocent VIII, 1484, Alexander VI, 1494, Leo X, 1521, and Adrian VI, 1522; the Decretals of the canon law; the exorcisms of the Roman and Greek churches, all hinged on scriptural precedents; the Roman law, the Twelve Tables, and the Justinian Code, the last three imposing upon the crimes of conjuring, exorcising, magical arts, offering sacrifices to the injury of one's neighbors, sorcery, and witchcraft, the penalties of death by torture, fire, or crucifixion.

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