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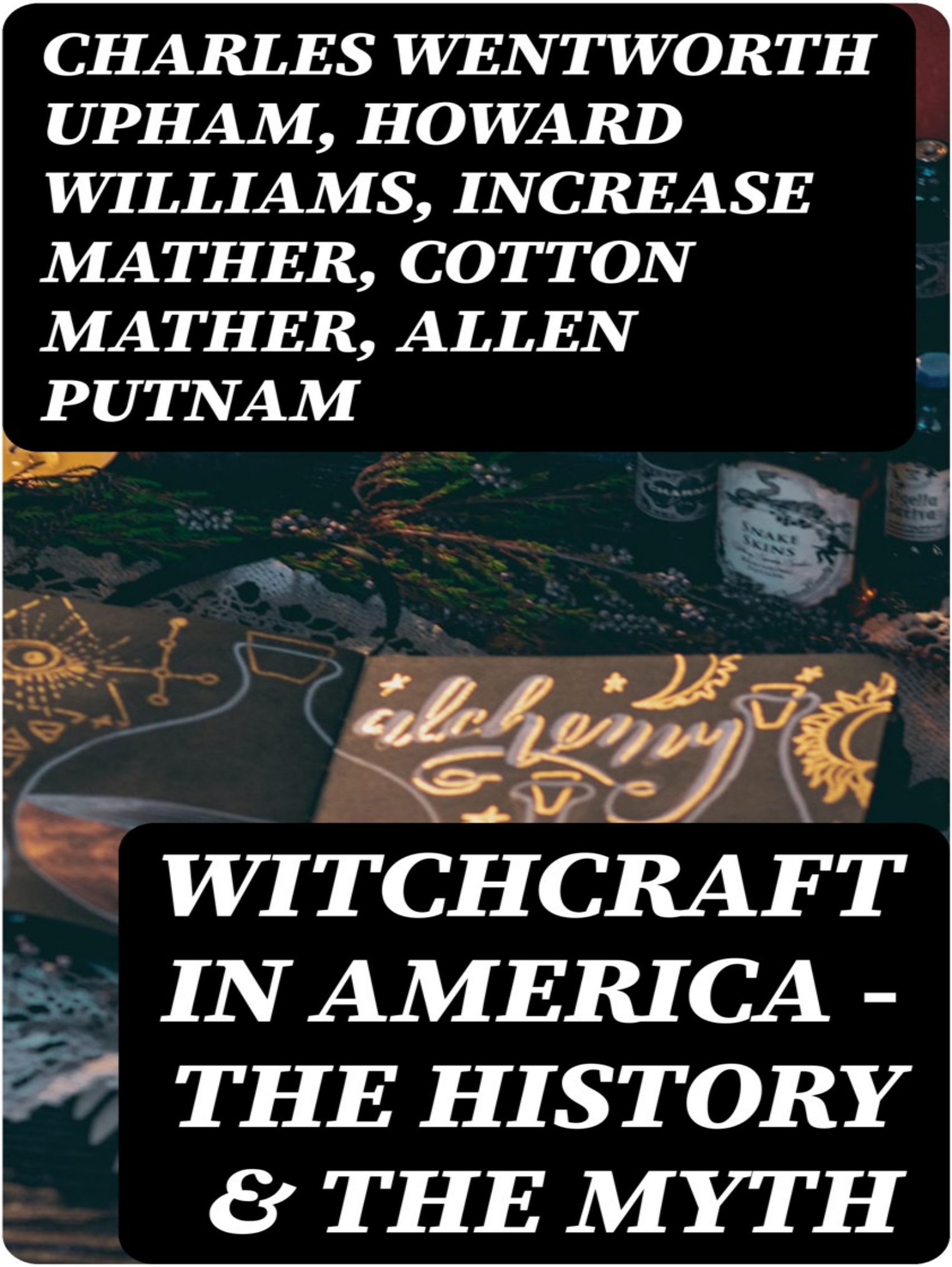

WITCHCRAFT IN AMERICA - THE HISTORY & THE MYTH

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The Superstitions of Witchcraft

by Howard Williams

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'The Superstitions of Witchcraft' is designed to exhibit a consecutive review of the characteristic forms and facts of a creed which (if at present apparently dead, or at least harmless, in Christendom) in the seventeenth century was a living and lively faith, and caused thousands of victims to be sent to the torture-chamber, to the stake, and to the scaffold. At this day, the remembrance of its superhuman art, in its different manifestations, is immortalised in the every-day language of the peoples of Europe.

The belief in Witchcraft is, indeed, in its full development and most fearful results, modern still more than mediæval, Christian still more than Pagan, and Protestant not less than Catholic.

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EARLIER FAITH

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Chapter I.

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The Origin, Prevalence, and Variety of Superstition—The Belief in Witchcraft the most horrid Form of Superstition—Most flourishing in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries—The Sentiments of Addison, Blackstone, and the Lawyers of the Eighteenth Century upon the Subject—Chaldean and Persian Magic—Jewish Witchcraft—Its important Influence on Christian and Modern Belief—Greek Pharmacy and Sorcery—Early Roman Laws against Conjuration and Magic Charms—Crimes perpetrated, under the Empire, in connection with Sorceric Practices—The general Persecution for Magic under Valentinian and Valens—German and Scandinavian Sagæ—The probable Origin of the general Belief in an Evil Principle.

Superstition, the product of ignorance of causes, of the proneness to seek the solution of phenomena out of and beyond nature, and of the consequent natural but unreasoning dread of the Unknown and Invisible (ignorantly termed the supernatural), is at once universal in the extent, and various in the kinds, of its despotism. Experience and reason seem to prove that, inherent to and apparently coexistent with the human mind, it naturally originates in the constitution of humanity: in ignorance and uncertainty, in an instinctive doubt and fear of the *Unknown*. Accident may moderate its power among particular peoples and persons; and there are always exceptional minds whose natural temper and exercise of reason are able to free them from the servitude of a delusive imagination. For the mass

of mankind, the germ of superstition, prepared to assume always a new shape and sometimes fresh vigour, is indestructible. The severest assaults are ineffectual to eradicate it: hydra-like, far from being destroyed by a seeming mortal stroke, it often raises its many-headed form with redoubled force.

It will appear more philosophic to deplore the imperfection, than to deride the folly of human nature, when the fact that the superstitious sentiment is not only a result of mere barbarism or vulgar ignorance, to be expelled of course by civilisation and knowledge, but is indigenous in the life of every man, barbarous or civilised, pagan or Christian, is fully recognised. The enlightening influence of science, as far as it extends, is irresistible; and its progress within certain limits seems sure and almost omnipotent. But it is unfortunately limited in the extent of its influence, as well as uncertain in duration; while reason enjoys a feeble reign compared with ignorance and imagination.[1] If it is the great office of history to teach by experience, it is never useless to examine the causes and the facts of a mischievous creed that has its roots deep in the ignorant fears of mankind; but against the recurrence of the fatal effects of fanaticism apparent in the earliest and latest records of the world, there can be no sufficient security.

Dreams, magic terrors, miracles, witches, ghosts, portents, are some of the various forms superstition has invented and magnified to disturb the peace of society as well as of individuals. The most extravagant of these need not be sought in the remoter ages of the human race, or even in the 'dark ages' of European history: they are sufficiently evident in the legislation and theology, as well as in the popular prejudices of the seventeenth century.

The belief in the *infernal* art of witchcraft is perhaps the most horrid, as it certainly is the most absurd, phenomenon in the religious history of the world. Of the millions of

victims sacrificed on the altars of religion this particular delusion can claim a considerable proportion. By a moderate computation, nine millions have been burned or hanged since the establishment of Christianity.[2] Prechristian antiquity experienced its tremendous power, and the primitive faith of Christianity easily accepted and soon developed it. It was reserved, however, for the triumphant Church to display it in its greatest horrors: and if we deplore the too credulous or accommodative faith of the early militant Church or the unilluminated ignorance of paganism, we may still more indignantly denounce the cruel policy of Catholicism and the barbarous folly of Protestant theology which could deliberately punish an impossible crime. It is the reproach of Protestantism that this persecution was most furiously raging in the age that produced Newton and Locke. Compared with its atrocities even the Marian burnings appear as nothing: and it may well be doubted whether the fanatic zeal of the 'bloody Queen,' is no less contemptible than the credulous barbarity of the judges of the seventeenth century. The period 1484 (the year in which Innocent VIII. published his famous 'Witch Hammer' signally ratified 120 years later by the Act of Parliament of James I. of England) to 1680 might be characterised not improperly as the era of devil-worship; and we are tempted almost to embrace the theory of Zerdusht and the Magi and conceive that Ahriman was then superior in the eternal strife; to imagine the *Evil One*, as in the days of the Man of Uz, 'going to and fro in the earth, and walking up and down in it.' It is come to that at the present day, according to a more rational observer of the seventeenth century, that it is regarded as a part of religion to ascribe great wonders to the devil; and those are taxed with infidelity and perverseness who hesitate to believe what thousands relate concerning his power. Whoever does not do so is accounted an atheist because he cannot persuade himself that there

are two Gods, the one good and the other evil[3]—an assertion which is no mere hyperbole or exaggeration of a truth: there is the certain evidence of facts as well as the concurrent testimony of various writers.

Those (comparatively few) whose reason and humanity alike revolted from a horrible dogma, loudly proclaim the prevailing prejudice. Such protests, however, were, for a long time at least, feeble and useless—helplessly overwhelmed by the irresistible torrent of public opinion. All classes of society were almost equally infected by a plague-spot that knew no distinction of class or rank. If theologians (like Bishop Jewell, one of the most esteemed divines in the Anglican Church, publicly asserting on a well known occasion at once his faith and his fears) or lawyers (like Sir Edward Coke and Judge Hale) are found unmistakably recording their undoubting conviction, they were bound, it is plain, the one class by theology, the other by legislation. Credulity of so extraordinary a kind is sufficiently surprising even in theologians; but what is to be thought of the deliberate opinion of unbiassed writers of a recent age maintaining the possibility, if not the actual occurrence, of the facts of the belief?

The deliberate judgment of Addison, whose wit and preeminent graces of style were especially devoted to the extirpation of almost every sort of popular folly of the day, could declare: 'When I hear the relations that are made from all parts of the world, not only from Norway and Lapland, from the East and West Indies, but from every particular nation in Europe, I cannot forbear thinking that there is such an intercourse and commerce with evil spirits as that which we express by the name of witchcraft.... In short, when I consider the question whether there are such persons in the world as those we call witches, my mind is divided between two opposite opinions; or rather, to speak my thoughts freely, I believe in general that there is and has been such a

thing as witchcraft, but at the same time can give no credit to any particular modern instance of it.'[4] Evidence, if additional were wanted, how deference to authority and universal custom may subdue the reason and understanding. The language and decision of Addison are adopted by Sir W. Blackstone in 'Commentaries on the Laws of England,' who shelters himself behind that celebrated author's sentiment; and Gibbon informs us that 'French and English lawyers of the present age (the latter half of the last century) allow the *theory* but deny the *practice* of witchcraft'—influenced doubtless by the spirit of the past legislation of their respective countries. In England the famous enactment of the subservient parliament of James I. against the crimes of sorcery, &c., was repealed in the middle of the reign of George II., our laws sanctioning not 130 years since the popular persecution, if not the legal punishment.

The origin of witchcraft and the vulgar diabolism is to be found in the rude beginnings of the religious or superstitious feeling which, known amongst the present savage nations as Fetishism, probably prevailed almost universally in the earliest ages; while that of the sublimer magic is discovered in the religious systems of the ancient Chaldeans and Persians. Chaldea and Egypt were the first, as far as is known, to cultivate the science of magic: the former people long gave the well-known name to the professional practisers of the art. Cicero (*de Divinatione*) celebrates, and the Jewish prophets frequently deride, their skill in divination and their modes of incantation. The story of Daniel evidences how highly honoured and lucrative was the magical or divining faculty. The Chazdim, or Chaldeans, a priestly caste inhabiting a wide and level country, must have soon applied themselves to the study, so useful to their interests, of their brilliant expanse of heavens. By a prolonged and 'daily observation,' considerable knowledge

must have been attained; but in the infancy of the science astronomy necessarily took the form of an empirical art which, under the name of astrology, engaged the serious attention and perplexed the brains of the mediæval students of science or magic (nearly synonymous terms), and which still survives in England in the popular almanacks. The natural objects of veneration to the inhabitants of Assyria were the glorious luminaries of the sun and moon; and if their worship of the stars and planets degenerated into many absurd fancies, believing an intimate connection and subordination of human destiny to celestial influences, it may be admitted that a religious sentiment of this kind in its primitive simplicity was more rational, or at least sublime, than most other religious systems.

It is not necessary to trace the oriental creeds of magic further than they affected modern beliefs; but in the divinities and genii of Persia are more immediately traced the spiritual existences of Jewish and Christian belief. From the Persian priests are derived both the name and the practice of magic. The Evil Principle of the Magian, of the later Jewish, and thence of the western world, originated in the system (claiming Zoroaster as its founder), which taught a duality of Gods. The philosophic lawgiver, unable to penetrate the mystery of the empire of evil and misery in the world, was convinced that there is an equal and antagonistic power to the representative of light and goodness. Hence the continued eternal contention between Ormuzd with the good spirits or genii, Amchaspands, on one side, and Ahriman with the Devs (who may represent the infernal crew of Christendom) on the other. Egypt, in the Mosaic and Homeric ages, seems to have attained considerable skill in magic, as well as in chymistry and astrology. As an abstruse and esoteric doctrine, it was strictly confined to the priests, or to the favoured few who were admitted to initiation. The magic excellence of the

magicians, who successfully emulated the miracles of Moses, was apparently assisted by a legerdemain similar to that of the Hindu jugglers of the present day.[5]

In Persian theology, the shadowy idea of the devil of western Asia was wholly different from the grosser conception of Christendom. Neither the evil principle of Magianism nor the witch of Palestine has much in common with the Christian. 'No contract of subjection to a diabolic power, no infernal stamp or sign of such a fatal league, no revellings of Satan and his hags,'[6] no such materialistic notions could be conformable to the spirit of Judaism or at least of Magianism. It is not difficult to find the cause of this essential dissimilarity. A simple unity was severely inculcated by the religion and laws of Moses, which permitted little exercise of the imagination: while the Magi were equally severe against idolatrous forms. A monstrous idea, like that of 'Satan and his hags,' was impossible to them. Christianity, the religion of the West, has received its *corporeal* ideas of demonology from the divinities and demons of heathenism. The Satyri and Fauni of Greece and Rome have suggested in part the form, and perhaps some of the characteristics, of the vulgar Christian devil. A knowledge of the arts of magic among the Jews was probably derived from their Egyptian life, while the Bedouins of Arabia and Syria (kindred peoples) may have instilled the less scientific rites of Fetishism. It is in the early accounts of that people that sorcery, whatever its character and profession, with the allied arts of divination, necromancy, incantations, &c., appears most flourishing. The Mosaic penalty, 'Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live,' and the comprehensive injunction, 'There shall not be found among you that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, or that useth divination, or an observer of times, or an enchanter, or a witch, or a charmer, or a consulter with familiar spirits, or a wizard, or a necromancer,' indicate at

once the extent and the horror of the practice. Balaam (that equivocal prophet), on the border-land of Arabia and Palestine, was courted and dreaded as a wizard who could perplex whole armies by means of spells. His fame extended far and wide; he was summoned from his home beyond the Euphrates in the mountains of Mesopotamia by the Syrian tribes to repel the invading enemy. This great magician was, it seems, universally regarded as 'the rival and the possible conqueror of Moses.'[7]

About the time when the priestly caste had to yield to a profane monarchy, the forbidden practices were so notorious and the evil was of such magnitude, that the newly-elected prince 'ejected' (as Josephus relates) 'the fortune-tellers, necromancers, and all such as exercised the like arts.' His interview with the witch has some resemblance to modern *diablerie* in the circumstances. Reginald Scot's rationalistic interpretation of this scene may be recommended to the commentating critics who have been so much at a loss to explain it. He derides the received opinion of the woman of Endor being an agent of the devil, and ignoring any mystery, believes, 'This Pythonist being a *ventriloqua*, that is, speaking as it were from the bottom of her belly, did cast herself into a trance and so abused Saul, answering to Saul in Samuel's name in her counterfeit hollow voice.[8] An institution very popular with the Jews of the first temple, often commemorated in their scriptures—the schools of the prophets—was (it is not improbable) of the same kind as the schools of Salamanca and Salerno in the middle ages, where magic was publicly taught as an abstruse and useful science; and when Jehu justifies his conduct towards the queen-mother by bringing a charge of witchcraft, he only anticipates an expedient common and successful in Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. A Jewish prophet asserts of the Babylonian kings,

that they were diligent cultivators of the arts, reproaching them with practising against the holy city.

Yet if we may credit the national historian (not to mention the common traditions), the Chaldean monarch might have justly envied, if he could scarcely hope to emulate, the excellence of a former prince of his now obscure province. Josephus says of Solomon that, amongst other attainments, 'God enabled him to learn that skill which expels demons, which is a science useful and sanative to men. He composed such incantations also by which distempers are alleviated, and he left behind him the manner of using exorcisms by which they drive away demons so that they never return.'[9] The story of Daniel is well known. In the captivity of the two tribes carried away into an honourable servitude he soon rose into the highest favour, because, as we are informed, he excelled in a divination that surpassed all the art of the Chaldeans, themselves so famous for it. The inspired Jew had divined a dream or vision which puzzled 'the magicians, and the astrologers, and the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans,' and immediately was rewarded with the greatest gift at the disposal of a capricious despot. Most of the apologetic writers on witchcraft, in particular the authors of the 'Malleus Maleficarum,' accept the assertion of the author of the history of Daniel that Nebuchadnezzar was 'driven from men, and did eat grass as oxen,' in its apparent sense, expounding it as plainly declaring that he was corporeally metamorphosed into an ox, just as the companions of Ulysses were transformed into swine by the Circean sorceries.

The Jewish ideas of good or at least evil spirits or angels were acquired during their forced residence in Babylon, whether under Assyrian or Persian government. At least 'Satan' is first discovered unmistakably in a personal form in the poem of Job, a work pronounced by critics to have been composed after the restoration. In the Mosaic cosmogony

and legislation, the writer introduces not, expressly or impliedly, the existence of an evil principle, unless the serpent of the Paradisaic account, which has been rather arbitrarily so metamorphosed, represents it;[10] while the expressions in books vulgarly reputed before the conquest are at least doubtful. From this time forward (from the fifth century b.c.), says a German demonologist, as the Jews lived among the admirers of Zoroaster, and thus became acquainted with their doctrines, are found, partly in contradiction to the earlier views of their religion, many tenets prevailing amongst them the origin of which it is impossible to explain except by the operation of the doctrines of Zoroaster: to these belongs the general acceptance of the theory of Satan, as well as of good and bad angels.[11] Under Roman government or vassalage, sorceric practices, as they appear in the Christian scriptures, were much in vogue. Devils or demons, and the 'prince of the devils,' frequently appear; and the *demoniacs* may represent the victims of witchcraft. The Talmud, if there is any truth in the assertions of the apologists of witchcraft, commemorates many of the most virtuous Jews accused of the crime and executed by the procurator of Judea.[12] Exorcism was a very popular and lucrative profession.[13] Simon Magus the magician (*par excellence*), the impious pretender to miraculous powers, who 'bewitched the people of Samaria by his sorceries,' is celebrated by Eusebius and succeeding Christian writers as the fruitful parent of heresy and sorcery.

That witchcraft, or whatever term expresses the criminal practice, prevailed among the worshippers of Jehovah, is evident from the repeated anathemas both in their own and the Christian scriptures, not to speak of traditional legends; but the Hebrew and Greek expressions seem both to include at least the use of drugs and perhaps of poison.[14] The Jewish creed, as exposed in their scriptures, has deserved a

fame it would not otherwise have, because upon it have been founded by theologians, Catholic and Protestant, the arguments and apology for the reality of witchcraft, derived from the sacred writings, with an ingenuity only too common and successful in supporting peculiar prejudices and interests even of the most monstrous kind.[15]

In examining the phenomenon as it existed among the Greeks and Romans, it will be remarked that, while the Greeks seem to have mainly adopted the ideas of the East, the Roman superstition was of Italian origin. Their respective expressions for the predictive or presentient faculty (*manteia* and *divinatio*), as Cicero is careful to explain, appear to indicate its different character with those two peoples: the one being the product of a sort of madness, the other an elaborate and divine skill. Greek traditions made them believe that the magic science was brought from Egypt or Asia by their old philosophic and legislating sages. Some of the most eminent of the founders of philosophic schools were popularly accused of encouraging it. Pythagoras (it is the complaint of Plato) is said to have introduced to his countrymen an art derived from his foreign travels; a charge which recalls the names of Roger Bacon, Albertus Magnus, Galileo, and others, who had to pay the penalty of a premature knowledge by the suspicion of their cotemporaries. Xenophanes is said to be the only one of the philosophers who admitted the existence or providence of the gods, and at the same time entirely discredited divination. Of the Stoics, Panætius was the only one who ventured even to doubt. Some gave credit to one or two particular modes only, as those of dreams and frenzy; but for the most part every form of this sort of divine revelation was implicitly received.[16]

The science of magic proper is developed in the later schools of philosophy, in which Oriental theology or demonology was largely mixed. Apollonius of Tyana, a

modern Pythagorean, is the most famous magician of antiquity. This great miracle-worker of paganism was born at the commencement of the Christian era; and it has been observed that his miracles, though quite independent of them, curiously coincide both in time and kind with the Christian.[17] According to his biographer Philostratus, this extraordinary man (whose travels and researches extended, we are assured, over the whole East even into India, through Greece, Italy, Spain, northern Africa, Ethiopia, &c.) must have been in possession of a scientific knowledge which, compared with that of his cotemporaries, might be deemed almost supernatural. Extraordinary attainments suggested to him in later life to excite the awe of the vulgar by investing himself with magical powers. Apollonius is said to have assisted Vespasian in his struggle for the throne of the Cæsars; afterwards, when accused of raising an insurrection against Domitian, and when he had given himself up voluntarily to the imperial tribunal at Rome, he escaped impending destruction by the exertion of his superhuman art.

Of the incantations, charms, and magic compounds in the practice of Greek witchcraft, numerous examples occur in the tragic and comic poetry of Greece; and the *philtres*, or love-charms, of Theocritus are well known. The names of Colchis, Chaldea, Assyria, Iberia, Thrace, may indicate the origin of a great part of the Hellenic sorceries. Yet, if the more honourable science may have been of foreign extraction, Hellas was not without something of the sorcery of modern Europe. The infernal goddess Hecate, of Greek celebrity, is the omnipotent patroness of her modern Christian slaves; and she presides at the witch meetings of Christendom with as much solemnity but with far greater malice. Originally of celestial rank, by a later metamorphosis connected, if not personally identical with, Persephone, the Queen of Hades, Hecate was invested with

many of the characteristic attributes of a modern devil, or rather perhaps of a witch. The triple goddess, in her various shapes, wandered about at night with the souls of the dead, terrifying the trembling country people by apparitions of herself and infernal satellites, by the horrible whining and howls of her hellhounds which always announced her approach. She frequented cross-roads, tombs, and melancholy places, especially delighting in localities famous for deeds of blood and murder. The hobgoblins, the various malicious demons and spirits, who provoked the lively terrors of the mediæval peoples, had some prototypes in the fairy-land of Greece, in the Hecatean hobgoblins (like the Latin larvæ, &c.), Empusa, Mormo, and other products of an affrighted imagination familiar to the students of Greek literature in the comic pages of Aristophanes.[18] From the earliest literary records down to the latest times of paganism as the state religion, from the times of the Homeric Circe and Ulysses (the latter has been recognised by many as a genuine wizard) to the age of Apollonius or Apuleius, magic and sorcery, as a philosophical science or as a vulgar superstition, had apparently more or less distinctly a place in the popular mythology of old Greece. But in the pagan history of neither Greece nor Rome do we read of holocausts of victims, as in Christian Europe, immolated on the altars of a horrid superstition.[19] The occasion of the composition of the treatise by Apuleius 'On Magic' is somewhat romantic. On his way to Alexandria, the philosopher, being disabled from proceeding on the journey, was hospitably received into the mansion of one Sicinius Pontianus. Here, during the interesting period of his recovery, he captivated, or was captivated by, the love of his host's mother, a wealthy widow, and the lovers were soon united by marriage. Pudentilla's relatives, indignant at the loss of a much-coveted, and perhaps long-expected fortune, brought an action against Apuleius for having

gained her affection by means of spells or charms. The cause was heard before the proconsul of Africa, and the apology of the accused labours to convince his judges that a widow's love might be provoked without superhuman means.[20]

Gibbon observes of the Roman superstition on the authority of Petronius, that it may be inferred that it was of Italian rather than barbaric extraction. Etruria furnished the people of Romulus with the science of divination. Early in the history of the Republic the law is very explicit on the subject of witchcraft. In the decemviral code the extreme penalty is attached to the crime of witchcraft or conjuration: 'Let him be capitally punished who shall have bewitched the fruits of the earth, or by either kind of conjuration (*excantando neque incantando*) shall have conjured away his neighbour's corn into his own field,' &c., an enactment sneered at in Justinian's *Institutes* in Seneca's words. A rude and ignorant antiquity, repeat the lawyers of Justinian, had believed that rain and storms might be attracted or repelled by means of spells or charms, the impossibility of which has no need to be explained by any school of philosophy. A hundred and fifty years later than the legislation of the decemvirs was passed the *Lex Cornelia*, usually cited as directed against sorcery: but while involving possibly the more shadowy crime, it seems to have been levelled against the more 'substantial poison.' The conviction and condemnation of 170 Roman ladies for poisoning, under pretence of incantation, was the occasion and cause. Sulla, when dictator, revived this act *de veneficiis et malis sacrificiis*, for breach of which the penalty was 'interdiction of fire and water.' Senatorial anathemas, or even those of the prince, were ineffective to check the continually increasing abuses, which towards the end of the first century of the empire had reached an alarming height.[21]

A general degradation of morals is often accompanied, it has been justly remarked, by a corresponding increase of the wildest credulity, and by an abject subservience to external religious rites in propitiation of an incensed deity. It was thus at Rome when the eloquence of Cicero, and afterwards the indignant satire of Juvenal or the calm ridicule of the philosophic Lucian,[22] attempted to assert the 'proper authority of reason.' To speak the truth, says Cicero, superstition has spread like a torrent over the entire globe, oppressing the minds and intellects of almost all men and seizing upon the weakness of human nature.[23] The historian of 'The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire' justifies and illustrates this lament of the philosopher of the Republic in the particular case of witchcraft. 'The nations and the sects of the Roman world admitted with equal credulity and similar abhorrence the reality of that infernal art which was able to control the eternal order of the planets, and the voluntary operations of the human mind. They dreaded the mysterious power of spells and incantations, of potent herbs and execrable rites, which could extinguish or recall life, influence the passions of the soul, blast the works of creation, and extort from the reluctant demons the secrets of Futurity. They believed with the wildest inconsistency that the preternatural dominion of the the air, of earth, and of hell, was exercised from the vilest motives of malice or gain by some wrinkled hags or itinerant sorcerers who passed their obscure lives in penury and contempt. Such vain terrors disturbed the peace of society and the happiness of individuals; and the harmless flame which insensibly melted a waxen image might derive a powerful and pernicious energy from the affrighted fancy of the person whom it was maliciously designed to represent. From the infusion of those herbs which were supposed to possess a supernatural influence, it was an easy step to the case of more substantial poison; and the folly of mankind sometimes

became the instrument and the mask of the most atrocious crimes.'[24]

Latin poetry of the Augustan and succeeding period abounds with illustrations, and the witches of Horace, Ovid, and Lucan are the famous classical types.[25] Propertius has characterised the Striga as 'daring enough to impose laws upon the moon bewitched by her spells;' while Petronius makes his witch, as potent as Strepsiades' Thessalian sorceress, exclaim that the very form of the moon herself is compelled to descend from her position in the universe at her command. For the various compositions and incantations in common use, it must be sufficient to refer to the pages of the Roman poets. The forms of incantation and horrid rites of the Horatian Sagana Canidia (*Epod.* v. and *Sat.* i. 8), or the scenes described by the pompous verses of the poet of the civil war (*De Bello Civili*, vi.), where all nature is subservient, are of a similar kind, but more familiar, in the dramatic writings of the Elizabethan age. The darker characteristics of the practice, however, are presented in the burning declamations of Juvenal, only too faithfully exhibiting the unnatural atrocities perpetrated in the form and under the disguise of love-potions and charms. Roman ladies in fact acquired considerable proficiency, worthy of a Borgia or Brinvilliers, in the art of poisoning and in the use of drugs. The reputed witch, both in ancient and modern times, very often belonged, like the Ovidian Dipsas, to the real and detestable class of panders: wrinkled hags were experienced in the arts of seduction, as well as in the employment of poison and drugs more familiar to the wealthier class (*Sat.* vi.). The great Satirist wrote in the latter half of the first century of Christianity; but even in the Augustan period such crimes were prevalent enough to make Ovid enumerate them among the universal evils introduced by the Iron age (*Metamorphoses*, i.). The despotic will of the princes themselves was exerted in vain;

the mischief was too deep-rooted to succumb even to the decrees of the masters of the world. Nor did the *divi* themselves disdain to be initiated in the infernal or celestial science. Nigidius Figulus and the two Thrasylli are magical or mathematical names closely connected with the destinies of the two first imperial princes. Nigidius predicted, and perhaps promoted, the future elevation of Octavianus; and the elder Thrasyllus, the famous Rhodian astrologer, skilfully identified his fate with the life of his credulous dupe but tyrannical pupil. Thrasyllus' art is stated to have been of service in preventing the superstitious tyrant from executing several intended victims of his hatred or caprice, by making *their* safety the condition of *his* existence. The historian of the early empire tells of the incantations which could 'affect the mind and increase the disease' of Germanicus, Tiberius' nephew. 'There were discovered,' says Tacitus, 'dug up from the ground and out of the walls of the house, the remains of human corpses, charms and spells, and the name of Germanicus inscribed on leaden tablets, ashes half consumed covered with decaying matter, and other practices by which it is believed that souls are devoted to the deities of hell.'[26]

In the fourth century, the first Christian emperor limited the lawful exercise of magic to the beneficial use of preserving or restoring the fruits of the earth or the health of the human body, while the practice of the noxious charms is capitally punished. The science of those, proclaims the imperial convert, who, immersed in the arts of magic, are detected either in attempts against the life and health of their fellow-men, or in *charming* the minds of modest persons to the practice of debauchery, is to be avenged and punished deservedly by severest penalties. But in no sorts of criminal charges are those remedies to be involved which are employed for the good of individuals, or are harmlessly employed in remote places to prevent premature rains, in

the case of vineyards, or the injurious effects of winds and hailstorms, by which the health and good name of no one can be injured; but whose practices are of laudable use in preventing both the gifts of the Deity and the labours of men from being scattered and destroyed.[27]

Constantine, in distinguishing between good and bad magic, between the *theurgic* and *goetic*, maintains a distinction made by the pagans—a distinction ignored in the later Christian Church, in whose system 'all demons are infernal spirits, and all commerce with them is idolatry and apostasy.' Christian zeal has accused the imperial philosopher and apostate Julian of having had recourse—not to much purpose—to many magical or necromantic rites; of cutting up the dead bodies of boys and virgins in the prescribed method; and of raising the dead to ascertain the event of his Eastern expedition against the Persians.

Not many years after the death of Julian the Christian Empire witnessed a persecution for witchcraft that for its ferocity, if not for its folly, can be paralleled only by similar scenes in the fifteenth or seventeenth century. It began shortly after the final division of the East and West in the reigns of Valentinian and Valens, a.d. 373. The unfortunate accused were pursued with equal fury in the Eastern and Western Empires; and Rome and Antioch were the principal arenas on which the bloody tragedy was consummated. Gibbon informs us that it was occasioned by a criminal consultation, when the twenty-four letters of the alphabet were ranged round a magic tripod; a dancing ring placed in the centre pointed to the first four letters in the name of the future prince. 'The deadly and incoherent mixture of treason and magic, of poison and adultery, afforded infinite gradations of guilt and innocence, of excuse and aggravation, which in these proceedings appear to have been confounded by the angry or corrupt passions of the judges. They easily discovered that the degree of their

industry and discernment was estimated by the imperial court according to the number of executions that were furnished from their respective tribunals. It was not without extreme reluctance that they pronounced a sentence of acquittal; but they eagerly admitted such evidence as was stained with perjury or procured by torture to prove the most improbable charges against the most respectable characters. The progress of the inquiry continually opened new subjects of criminal prosecution; the audacious informers whose falsehood was detected retired with impunity: but the wretched victim who discovered his real or pretended accomplices was seldom permitted to receive the price of his infamy. From the extremity of Italy and Asia the young and the aged were dragged in chains to the tribunals of Rome and Antioch. Senators, matrons, and philosophers expired in ignominious and cruel tortures. The soldiers who were appointed to guard the prisons declared, with a murmur of pity and indignation, that their numbers were insufficient to oppose the flight or resistance of the multitude of captives. The wealthiest families were ruined by fines and confiscations; the most innocent citizens trembled for their safety: and we may form some notion of the magnitude of the evil from the extravagant assertion of an ancient writer (Ammianus Marcellinus), that in the obnoxious provinces the prisoners, the exiles, and the fugitives formed the greatest part of the inhabitants. The philosopher Maximus,' it is added, 'with some justice was involved in the charge of magic; and young Chrysostom, who had accidentally found one of the proscribed books, gave himself up for lost.'[28]

The similarity of this to the horrible catastrophe of Arras, recorded by the chroniclers of the fifteenth century, excepting the grosser absurdities of the latter, is almost perfect. Valentinian and Valens, who seem to have emulated the atrocious fame of the Cæsarean family, with their

ministers, concealed, it is probable, under the disguise of a simulated credulity the real motives of revenge and cupidity.

The Roman world, Christian and pagan, was subject to the prevailing fear. That portion of the globe, however, comprehended but a small part of the human race. The records of history are incomplete and imperfect; nor are they more confined in point of time than of extent. History is little more at any period than an imperfect account of the life of a few particular peoples. Necessarily limited almost entirely to an acquaintance with the history of that portion of the globe included in the 'Roman Empire,' we almost forget our profound ignorance of that vastly larger proportion of the earth's surface, the extra-Roman world, embracing then, as now, civilised as well as barbarous nations. The Chinese empire (the most extraordinary, perhaps, and whose antiquity far surpasses that of any known), comprehending within its limits two-thirds of the population of the globe; the refined and ingenious people of Hindustan, an immense population, in the East: in the Western hemisphere nations in existence whose remains excited the admiration of the Spanish invaders; the various savage tribes of the African continent; the nomad populations of Northern Asia and Europe; nearly all these more or less, on the testimony of past and present observation, experienced the tremendous fears of the vulgar demonism.[29]

With the tribes who, in the time of Cæsar or Tacitus, inhabited the forests of Germany, and, perhaps, amongst the Scandinavians, some more elevated ideas obtained, the germ, however, of a degenerated popular prejudice. By all the German tribes, on the testimony of cotemporary writers, women were held in high respect, and were believed to have something even divine in their mental or spiritual faculties. 'Very many of their women they regard in the light of prophetesses, and when superstitious fear is in the

ascendant, even of goddesses.' History has preserved the names of some of these Teutonic *deities*. Veleda, by prophetic inspiration, or by superior genius, directed the councils of her nation, and for some years successfully resisted the progress of the imperial arms.[30] Momentous questions of state or religion were submitted to their *divine* judgment, and it is not wonderful if, endowed with supernatural attributes, they, like other prophets, helped to fulfil their own predictions. The Britons and Gauls, of the Keltic race, seem to have resembled the Orientals, rather than the Teutons or Italians, in their religious systems. Long before the Romans came in contact with them the magic science is said to have been developed, and the priests, like those of India or Egypt, communicated the mysteries only to a privileged few, with circumstances of profound secrecy. Such was the excellence of the magic science of the British Druids, that Pliny (*Hist. Nat.* xxx.) was induced to suppose that the Magi of Persia must have derived their system from Britain. For the most part the Kelts then, as in the present day, were peculiarly tenacious of a creed which it was the interest of a priestly caste to preserve. On the other hand, the looser religion of the Teuton nations, of the Scandinavians and Germans, could not find much difficulty in accepting the particular conceptions of the Southern conquerors; and the sorceric mythology of the Northern barbarians readily recognised the power of an Erichtho to control the operations of nature, to prevent or confound the course of the elements, interrupt the influence of the sun, avert or induce tempests, to affect the passions of the soul, to fascinate or charm a cruel mistress, &c., with all the usual necromantic rites. But if they could acknowledge the characteristics of the Italian Striga, those nations at the same time retained a proper respect for the venerated Saga —the German Hexe.

Of all the historic peoples of ancient Europe, the Scandinavians were perhaps most imbued with a persuasion of the efficacy of magic; a fact which their home and their habits sufficiently explain. In the Eddas, Odin, the leader of the immigration in the first century, and the great national lawgiver, is represented as well versed in the knowledge of that preternatural art; and the heroes of the Scandinavian legends of the tenth or twelfth century are especially ambitious of initiation. The Scalds, like the Brahmins or Druids, were possessed of tremendous secrets; their *runic* characters were all powerful charms, whether against enemies, the injurious effects of an evil eye, or to soften the resentment of a lover.[31] The Northmen, with the exception of some nations of Central Europe, like the Lithuanians, who were not christianised until the thirteenth or fourteenth century, from their roving habits as well perhaps as from their remoteness, were among the last peoples of Europe to abandon their old creed. Urged by poverty and the hopes of plunder, the pirates of the Baltic long continued to be the terror of the European coasts; but, without a political status, they were the common outlaws of Christendom. They were the relics of a savage life now giving way in Europe to the somewhat more civilised forms of society, continuing their indiscriminate depredations with impunity only because of the want of union and organisation among their neighbours. But they were in a transitional state: the coasts and countries they had formerly been content to ravage, they were beginning to find it their interest to colonise and cultivate. In the new interests and pursuits of civilisation and commerce, a natural disgust might have been experienced for the savage traditions of a religion whose gods and heroes were mostly personifications of war and rapine, under whose banners they had suffered the hardships, if they had enjoyed the plunder, of a piratic life. The national deities from being disregarded, must have

come soon to be treated with undisguised contempt at least by the leaders: while the common people, serfs, or slaves were still immersed (as much as in Christian Europe) in a stupid superstition.

When men's minds are thus universally unsettled and in want—a want both universal and necessary in states—of some new divine objects of worship more suited to advanced ideas and requirements, a system of religion more civilising and rational than the antiquated one, will be adopted without much difficulty, especially if it is not too exclusive. Yet the Scandinavians were unusually tenacious of the forms of their ancestral worship; for while the Icelanders are said to have received Christianity about the beginning of the eleventh century, the people of Norway were not wholly converted until somewhat later. The halls of Valhalla must have been relinquished with a sigh in exchange for the less intelligible joys of a tranquil and insensuous paradise. An ancient Norsk law enjoins that the king and bishop, with all possible care, make inquiry after those who exercise pagan practices, employ magic arts, adore the genii of particular places, of tombs or rivers, who transport themselves by a diabolical mode of travelling through the air from place to place. In the extremity of the northern peninsula (amongst the Laplanders), where the light of science, or indeed of civilisation, has scarcely yet penetrated, witchcraft remains as flourishing as in the days of Odin; and the Laplanders at present are possibly as credulous in this respect as the old Northmen or the present tribes of Africa and the South Pacific. Before the introduction of the new religion (it is a curious fact), the Germans and Scandinavians, as well as the Jews, were acquainted with the efficacy of the rite of infant baptism. A Norsk chronicle of the twelfth century, speaking of a Norwegian nobleman who lived in the reign of Harald Harfraga, relates that he poured water on the head of his new-born son, and called him Hakon, after the name of his father. Harald himself had