

***GEORGE
MOIR***



***MAGIC AND
WITCHCRAFT***

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PREFACE.

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We have long wished that some English or foreign university would offer a prize for a history of Magic and Witchcraft. The records of human opinion would contain few chapters more instructive than one which should deal competently with the Black Art. For gross and painful as the details of superstition may be, yet superstition, by its very etymology, implies a dogma or a system of practice standing upon some basis of fact or truth: and however vain or noxious the superstructure may be, the foundation of it is in some way connected with those deep verities upon which rest also the roots of philosophy and religion.

For a grand error, and such alone can at any time essentially affect the opinions of mankind in general, is ever the imitation or caricature of some grand truth. From one soil spring originally the tree which yields good fruit and the plant which distils deadly poison. The very discernment of the causes of error is a step towards the discovery of its opposite. The bewilderments of the mind of man, when fully analysed, afford a clue to the course of its movements from the right track, or at least enable us to detect the point at which began the original separation between Truth and Error. Alchemy led, by no very circuitous route, to the science of chemistry; the adoption of false gods by the majority of the human race rendered necessary the dispensations of the Jewish and Christian schemes; and the corruption of true reverence for the Good, the Beautiful, and the Holy, was the parent of those arts, which, under the

several appellations of Magic, Witchcraft, Sorcery, etc., drew their professors at first and the multitude afterwards to put faith in the evil, the deformed, and the impure. Magic and Witchcraft are little more than the religious instincts of mankind, first inverted, then polluted, and finally, like all corrupted matter, impregnated with the germs of a corrupt vitality.

So universal is the belief in spiritual influences, and more especially in their malignant influences, that no race of men, no period of time, no region of the globe, have been exempt from it. It meets us in the remote antiquity of Asiatic life, in the comparatively recent barbarism of the American aborigines, in the creeds of all the nations who branched off thousands of years ago eastward and westward from their Caucasian cradle, in the myths, the observances, and the dialects of nations who have no other affinity with one another than the mere form of man.

No nation, indeed, can reproach another nation with its addiction to magic without in an equal degree condemning itself. All the varieties of mankind have, in this respect, erred alike at different periods of their social existence, and all accordingly come under the same condemnation of making and loving a lie. The Chaldean erred when, dissatisfied with simple observation of the heavenly bodies through the luminous atmosphere of his plains, he perverted astronomy into astrology: the Egyptian erred when he represented the omnipresence of the Deity by the ubiquity of animal worship: the Hindoo erred when, having conceived the idea of an incarnation, he clothed with flesh and fleshly attributes the members of his monstrous pantheon: the Kelt

and Teuton erred when, in their silent and solitary forests, they stained the serenity of nature with the deified attributes of war; and the more settled and civilized races who built and inhabited the cities of the ancient world, erred in their conversion of the indivisible unity of the Demiourgos or World-Creator into an anthropomorphic system of several gods. But the very universality of the error points to some common ground for it in the recesses of the human heart; and since Paganism under all its forms was the corruption of religion, and Witchcraft in its turn the corruption of Paganism, an inquiry into the seeds of this evil fruit cannot fail to be also in some measure an investigation of the very ‘incunabula’ of human error.

We have stated, or endeavoured to state, the real scope and dimensions of the subject of Magic and Witchcraft—not however with any purpose of expatiating upon it in so small a volume as the present one. In the pages which follow we offer only a few remarks upon theories or modes of belief which in remote or in nearer ages have affected the creeds and the conduct of mankind. The subject, *in extenso*, belongs to larger volumes, and to maturer learning and meditation.

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An amusing work appeared at Mainz, in 1826, from the pen of “Herr Kirchenrath” Horst, the title of which, translated *in extenso*, runs thus:—“The Magical Library; or, of Magic, Theurgy, and Necromancy; Magicians, Witches,

and Witch Trials, Demons, Ghosts, and Spectral Appearances. By G. C. Horst, Church-Counsellor to the Grand Duke of Hesse." The following pages formed a review of this work, which appeared many years ago^[1].

This book of the worthy Church-Counsellor is rather a singular one: it is not a history of Magic, but a sort of spiritual periodical, or magazine of infernal science, supported in a great measure by contributions from persons of a ghostly turn of mind, who, although they affect occasionally to write in a Sadducee vein, are many of them half-believers at heart, and would not walk through a churchyard at night, except for a consideration larger than we should like to pay. The field over which it travels is too extensive, for us to attempt to follow the author throughout his elaborate subdivisions. Dante divided hell, like Germany, into circles; and Mr. Horst, adopting something of a similar arrangement, has parcelled out the territory of the Prince of the Air into sundry regular divisions, by which its whole bearings and distances are made plain enough for the use of infant schools. It is only at one of the provinces of the Inferno, however, that we can at present afford to glance; though for those who are inclined to make the grand tour, the Counsellor may be taken as an intelligent travelling companion, well acquainted with the road. In fact his work is so methodical and distinct, and the geography of the infernal regions so clearly laid down, according to the best authorities, from Jamblichus and Porphyry down to Glanvil and the Abbé Fiard, that the whole district is now about as well known as the course of the Niger; and it must be the

traveller's own fault if he does not find his exit from Avernus as easy as its entrance has proverbially been since the days of Virgil.

The picture, however, drawn by these intelligent spiritual travellers is by no means calculated to impress us with a high notion of the dominions of the Prince of the Air, or that the *personnel* of his majesty or his government are prepossessing. The climate, as all of them, from Faust downwards, agree, is oppressively hot, and the face of the country apparently a good deal like that between Birmingham and Wolverhampton, abounding with furnaces and coal-pits. Literature is evidently at a low ebb, from the few specimens of composition with which we are favoured in the Zauber-Bibliothek, and the sciences, with the exception of some practical applications of chemistry, shamefully neglected. The government seems despotic, but subject to occasional explosions on the part of the more influential spirits concerned in the executive. In fact, the departments of the administration are by no means well arranged; there is no proper division of labour, and the consequence is, that Beelzebub, "Mooned Ashtaroth," and others of the ministry, who, according to the theory of the constitution^[2] are entitled to precedence, are constantly jostled and interfered with by Aziel, Mephistopheles, Marbuel, and other forward second-rate spirits, who are continually thrusting in their claws where they are not called for. The standing army is considerable^[3], besides the volunteers by which it is continually augmented. Nothing is heard however of the navy, and from the ominous silence which our geographers

preserve on this point, it is easy to see that water is a rare element in this quarter.

The hints given as to the personal appearance and conduct of Lucifer, the reigning monarch, are not flattering. Common readers are apt to believe that Satan occupies that dignity^[4], but this is a great error, and only shows, as Asmodeus told Don Cleofas, when he fell into a similar mistake about Beelzebub, “that they have no true notions of hell.” The morals of Lucifer, as might be expected, are as bad as possible, with this exception, that we see no evidence of his being personally addicted to drinking. His licentious habits, however, are attested by many a scandalous chronicle in Sprenger, Delrio, and Bodinus; and for swearing, all the world knows that Ernulphus was but a type of him. His jokes are all practical and of a low order, and there is an utter want of dignity in most of his proceedings. One of his most facetious amusements consists in constantly pulling the spits, on which his witches are riding, from beneath them, and applying them vigorously to their shoulders; and he has more than once administered personal chastisement to his servants, when they neglected to keep an appointment. He is a notorious cheat; many enterprising young men, who have enlisted in his service on the promise of high pay and promotion, having found, on putting their hands into their pockets, that he had paid them their bounty in tin sixpences, and having never risen even to the rank of a corporal. His talent might, from these narratives, be considered very mediocre, and therefore we are afraid that the ingenious selection from his papers, published by Jean Paul^[5], must be a literary forgery.

At least all his printed speeches are bad,—flashy enough, no doubt, in the commencement, but generally ending in smoke. He has always had a fancy for appearing in masquerade, and once delivered a course of lectures on magic at Salamanca, in the disguise of a professor. So late as 1626, he lived *incog.*, but in a very splendid style, for a whole winter, in Milan, under the title of the Duke of Mammon[6]. It is in vain, however, for his partial biographers to disguise the fact, that in his nocturnal excursions, of which, like Haroun Alraschid, he was at one time rather fond, and where, we learn from the Swedish witches, he generally figured in a grey coat and red small-clothes, ornamented with ribbons and blue stockings, he has more than once received a sound drubbing from honest people, whom he has attempted to trip up by laying his tail in their way. And, in fact, since his affair with St. Dunstan, he has kept pretty much withindoors after nightfall. Luther, as we know, kept no terms with him when he began to crack hazel-nuts in his bedroom at the Wartburg, but beat him all to nothing in a fair contest of ribaldry and abuse, besides leaving an indelible blot of ink upon his red smalls[7]. St. Lupus shut him up for a whole night in a pitcher of cold water, into which he had (as he thought, cunningly) conveyed himself, with the hope that the saint would swallow him unawares[8]. This however, considering his ordinary temperature, must have been an act of kindness, which should have brought on St. Lupus the censure of the church. St. Anthony, in return for a very polite offer of his services, spat in his face; which hurt his feelings so much, that it was long before he ventured to appear in society