

anon., *The Impossibility of Witchcraft* (1712),
a sceptical intervention in the Jane Wenham debate

THE
IMPOSSIBILITY
OF
WITCHCRAFT,

Plainly proving,

From **Scripture** and **Reason**,
That there never was a WITCH;
and that it is both Irrational and Impious to believe there ever was.

In which the

DEPOSITIONS

AGAINST

Jane Wenham,

Lately Try'd and Condemn'd for a
WITCH, at *Hertford*, are Confuted
and Expos'd.

*Somnia, Terrores Magicos, Miracula, Sagas,
Nocturnas Lemures, Portentaq; Thessala rides. Hor.
Deme Veneficiis, Carminibusq; fidem. Ovid.*

LONDON Printed, and Sold by *J. Baker*,
at the *Black-Boy* in *Pater-Noster-Row*, 1712.

Price Six Pence.

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THE
PREFACE.

UPON the repeated Solicitations of many Letters from my Correspondents, who have approv'd of the following Papers, and been urgent for Publishing them together in one Pamphlet for the General Good, they make their Appearance after this Manner. But because some have been pleas'd to observe, That it is a very odd Thing that our Laws Impower Judges to put People to Death For Witchcraft, if there is no such Thing as a Witch in the World; and others affirm, That the Records of Justice are full of Instances, in all Ages, of the Truth of Witchcraft, which, in their Opinion, amounts to a Demonstration. I shall, for the Satisfaction of the First, have Recourse to such Laws as have been Enacted here in England concerning it, as also those that have been made in Foreign Countries; and to quiet the Minds of the last, shew them how far off their Surmises are from any Thing that bears the Face of Reality.

To begin with the first, It is said that the 33d of Henry VIII. was the first Statute against Witchcraft, one Clause of which is, Or for the

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Despight of Christ, or Lucre of Money to pull down any Cross; and is there made Felony, which shews, that this Statute was partly made upon Account of the Religion which then prevail'd, and that this Crime was as Capital as to consume any. Person in his Body, Members, or Goods; so superstitious was this Nation in those Days; but this Statute was afterwards repeal'd in several Reigns, viz. Ed. 6. Cap. 12. 1 Mar. Cap. 1. which perhaps those Two Parliaments never would have done, without making another against Witches, if they had believ'd there were any such Creatures; this Repealing being a Kind of Legal Toleration for Witches, there being no Common Law whereby to punish them. But what Reason the Parliament bad to make this first Statute against Witches, or what Inducement the next Two Reigns bad

to repeal it, or what Motives the succeeding Reigns to make more severe Laws against them, may be worth Enquiry, considering that Witchcraft has always been the same in all Ages.

We are likewise inform'd, That the first Persons who were condemn'd for Witches, suffer'd in the Year 1300, when Frederick the Second made a Law for Burning of Hereticks; and that the Inquisitors having judg'd the Crime of Witchcraft to be Heresy, and that to be a Witch was the same Thing to the Pope, as to be a Traytor to a Temporal Prince; they did in Rome, Spain, &c. condemn, by that Law, suppos'd Witches as Hereticks, because Witches had renounc'd their Baptismal Vow, and ador'd Satan: And this they did to Establish the usurp'd Dominion of the Pope, and for their own Profit, they having a

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Share in the Goods and Estates of such Persons so condemn'd: And probably this Law, and the Example of the Inquisitions have been the chief Grounds that other Countries, in particular, England, did afterwards make Laws of the same Tendency, and punish'd Witches in like Manner, ever since; till the Statute of De Heretico comburendo was repealed. For, according to Coke's Institute 3d, Part 44, 46, it seems as if before this Statute of Henry VIII. Witches were always Try'd by Ecclesiastical Laws and Judges, and condemn'd as Hereticks or Apostates, and that the Cognizance of Persons under these Circumstances, was by this Statute transform'd from an Ecclesiastical to a Temporal Judicature, as they were Killing Witches, not as Hereticks and Apostates.

In Answer to the Second Proposition I shall take the Liberty to declare, that the Records mention'd therein cannot amount to a Demonstration. For if, even Glanvil himself Speaks true, who says, Fol. 103, That we are Ignorant of the Extents and Bounds of Nature's Sphere, and Possibilities, it will follow that We are uncertain whether those Facts for which Witches, have been condemn'd were really done by Witchcraft, or produc'd by the Course of Nature: And can this Uncertainty amount to a Demonstration? Judges, for Interest's sake, have suffer'd themselves to be impos'd upon by False Witnesses, and so condemn'd Innocent Persons for Things they were never Guilty of: And can the Records of those Condemnations amount to a Demonstration? 3. Judges have condemn'd Innocent Persons for Facts that were

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Impossible to be done: And can the Records of these Facts amount to a Demonstration? 4. Judges have condemn'd many Innocent Persons upon the Testimony of Pretended Witchfinders, who being authoriz'd and Encourag'd by great Persons (even of the Ministry) were sent abroad into Scotland, and Northumberland, who made Affidavit that, upon Search, they had found suppos'd Witchmarks, by putting Sharp Pins and Needles into Warts, and Excrescencies of divers Persons who did not at all Complain, and can the Records of these Matters amount to a Demonstration? 5. The Judges themselves are not Infallible, and may, perhaps, have Erroneous Notions of these Dark and Abstruse Matters, and condemn Witches wrongfully, as it is said, a Bishop of Mentz was Excommunicated for holding that there were Antipodes, by some Hundreds of Men that were accounted Learned and Wise, and do these Records of Witchcraft any more amount to a Demonstration, than this Excommunication did of there being no such Creatures as Antipodes? Those Bishops, probably, were as Knowing and Prudent, as the Inquisitors or our own Judges; and the Demonstrations of the Antipodes is far more Obvious and Intelligible than those impossible Instances of Witchcraft, for which 2000 poor Souls have been Innocently Condemn'd: Which Considerations may caution our Juries not to be so hasty in declaring People Guilty of a Crime, that is a meer Ens Rationis, which has its Residence only in Weak and Cowardly Understandings and Tempers.

I should here, according to the Desire of some Persons, enter into the Merits of the several Depositions that are inserted at large in the Full

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and Impartial Account, which are Sixteen in Number, but out of Respect to the Sacred Habit which Two of them Wear, and the Incapacities of the other Fourteen, dismiss them to their Respective Bedchambers, with no farther Remarks than, that the Inconsistencies which they are Guilty of, shew they very much stand in need of Rest, since a Crazie Body very often Indisposes the Soul, and Influences the Mind to entertain Strange and Preternatural Ideas of Things that have no Manner of Existence. But I must not Suffer my Reader to go uniform'd about the large Additions that have been made to the Discourse he is now entering upon the Perusal of, and am to promise that he has it now entirely, as it was at first Design'd, tho' purposely omitted in the Protestant Post-Boy for fear of giving him a Surfeit through too great a Satiety from one Subject.

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THE
Impossibility
OF
Witchcraft.

The Discourse of the Town having been very much taken up for some Days past, with a Trifling pamphlet, in Vindication of the Tryal of one Jane Wenham, a Reputed Witch, whom that Enemy to Superstition, the very Worshipful Sir Henry Chauncy, gravely Committed, without Laughing, to Hertford Goal; where she was Try'd and found Guilty (against the Judge's Will) of Conversing with the Devil in the shape of a Cat, making a Maid that could not Walk without Leading, leap over a Five-Bar Gate, and run as swift as a Grey-hound, with several other Incredibles; it may not be improper to disabuse the People, who too easily give into the Belief of

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such Stories, and receive Impressions from them not so easily to be defaced. Cicero, in Lib. 2. de Divin, says, Nam ut vere loquamur, Superstitio fusa per Orbem oppressit omnium fere animos atq; Hominum occupavit Imbecillitatem. For to speak the Truth, Superstition having over-run the World, hath dastared almost every ones Spirits, taking its Advantage from the Frailty of Man. And strange it is to consider, how far the Folly of Mankind hath proceeded in their Credulity concerning the Actions both of Male and Female Witches: As if, forsooth, they could Transform Men and Women into Beasts; as if they could Destroy the Fruits of the Earth, and the Fruits of the Womb, at their Pleasure; as if they could raise Winds and Tempests, or alay them, enable or disable, in Matters Venerial; in a Word, as if they could enslave Nature herself, and make the Universe Obey their Commands. Examples, indeed, of this Prodigious Power, are scatter'd up and down the Roman Poets, such as Virgil, Horace, Ovid, Tibullus, Propertius, Lucan, &c. But that it has any Foundation in Holy Scripture, or takes its Rise otherwise than from Heathenish Fables, afterwards improv'd by Papal Impostors, must always, by me, be deny'd.

'Tis true, our Translators of the Bible, in the Eighteenth Chapter of Deuteronomy, call a Conjecturer an Enchanter, which why they should, I cannot at all imagine, there

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being not the least Hint of such a Signification in the Hebrew Word Mankesh, which is far better render'd in the old Translation, a Regarder of the Flying of Fowls; for that is Truth, tho' it be not all the Truth, the Flight of Fowls being but One way of Many, which Conjecturers made use of. A Second Mistake of our Translators, in the same Chapter, is, their calling a Miracle-monger a Witch: The Hebrew Word is Mickshaph, which the Septuagint renders by the Greek word *pharmakos* [in Greek characters], meaning an Impostor, not a Poisoner. For it is Ridiculous to think, that Pharaoh's Magicians, Jezabel the Queen, and King Manasses did exercise the Art of Poisoning. Thus in the Eighteenth Chapter of the Revelations, and the Twenty third Verse, the Word *pharmakeiai* [in Greek characters] is neither taken for Witchcraft or Poisons, but for Impostures, tho' our Translations have render'd it Witchcraft.

Now these Miracle-mongers or Jugling workers of Counterfeit Miracles are therefore so severely prohibited in the Law of Moses, because they acted strange things in the sight of the People to confirm them in false Religions. Hence it is that in the Old Testament, where mention is made of Idolatry, you shall frequently meet with Micacle-mongers and Southsayers coupled together. For the Priests of an Idol would commonly advance its Reputation by countefeiting the Gifts of Propheying and Working Miracles,

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pretendedly receiv'd from that God to whose Honour the Idol was Erected. Nor let any one think that for the Performance of these Counterfeit Meracles, they stood in need of the Devils Assistance; for what they perform'd, either exceeded not the Compass of Human Art, altho' miraculous in the Eyes of the Vulgar: Or if it did, then it was not really perform'd, but a mere Jugling Imposture. Such kind of Juglers were those who stood before Pharaoh, in opposition to Moses and Aaron: For whosoever believes that Pharaoh's Magicians could, by the help of the Devil, turn, in an instant, a Stick into a serpent, ascribes to the Devil an Omnipotent Creating Power, equal unto his, who did but say, Let such a thing be, and it was so. St. Augustine, I confess, does seem to endeavour at the Evading this Objection, by laying down a Maxim, That in the Elements the Seeds of all bodies secretly lie hid, which, upon meeting with Convenient Opportunities, do put forth themselves and arise to the just Bounds and Figures due to their respective Species. From hence he Infers, That the Devil, in turning Magicians Rods into Serpents, did not Create those Serpents, because he produc'd them out of their Seeds. But by St. Augustine's good Leave, tho' I should grant him, that the Seed of a Serpent is in a Stick, yet I can never allow the Magicians to be able so suddenly to bring forth this Seed into Act, for the Production of a Serpent. 'Tis true, That Men, by their

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well ordering the Seeds of Plants, may hasten the Generation of such Plants, and the ripening of their Fruits: They may also by putting Eggs into Camels Dung, procure the Generation of Chickens. Wherefore 'tis probable that Devils, being more skilful than Men, may strangely promote the Generation of several Creatures beyond any humane Art: But yet neither Men, nor Devils, in regard they act these Things by the Application of Matter to Matter, can produce any creature out of its Seed, without a considerable space of Time. No, they must attend the Laws of Matter, and wait upon Dame Nature's Leisure: there being many successive Alterations required in Seed, before it can come to the Embryo of a Creature, and many also must afterwards follow, before the Embryo can Arrive to a perfect shape. The Third Error of our Translators is, their mistaking a Consulter with Oracles or False Prophets, for a consulter with Familiar Spirits. The Hebrew Words are [Hebrew omitted], which Word Ob signifies in Scripture, sometimes the Gift of Oracling, and sometimes the Person that hath such a Gift. It signifies also a Bottle or hollow Vessel, and from this signification, I suppose the other came. For it is certain that Oracles did use to counterfeit strange kind of Voices, that they might seem not to be humane. To this purpose, 'tis not unlikely that they made use of a

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Bottle, or Trunk, or some other hollow Vessel, which they spoke through, whereby their Voices must needs be very much altered, especially if they were in a Cave or Room under Ground, when they made Answer to Enquiries. These kind of Cheating Tricks are plainly alluded to by the Prophet Isaiah in these Words; And thy Voice shall be as an Oracler out of the Earth, and thy Speech shall piep out of the Dust. Here I suppose the Prophet chiefly hints at the Necromantick Oracler, or one that pretended to Consult with the Dead: Who by Himself, or his Confederate, did counterfeit a Voice like the pieping of a Chicken, that it might the more plausibly seem to be the small Voice of a poor departed Ghost.

I could produce many other Instances of the like nature, which the Translation of the Bible by Junius and Tremellius, gives us a Light into: but shall Content my self, with bringing some Arguments to prove

in the first Place, That this strange Notion of Witchcraft, has its Foundation in Heathen Fables. Secondly, I shall take upon me to affirm, That it has been improv'd by Papal Inquisitous for the sake of Private Interest. Thirdly, I shall prove, That there is no such Thing, as a Witch in Scripture. Fourthly, I shall endeavour to make appear, There is no such thing as a Witch at all; and produce several Arguments against the Affirmers of Witchcraft, Fifthly, I shall answer other Arguments

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to the contrary. Sixthly and Lastly, I shall shew by what means this Opinion of Witchcraft came into the World.

To begin with my first Particular. Such was the vain Credulity of Men in the Heathen Ages; that they did not only believe those Things were real, which the Priests counterfeited; but they also ascribed unto private Persons, a Power equal to that of the Priests, or rather beyond it. For not only Men, but Women, especially Old Women have been famous for Prophesying of Things to come, whence they were call'd Sagæ; as also for Wonderful and Miraculous Exploits, whence they took the Name of Lamiæ or Veneficæ. They were call'd Lamiæ chiefly from their Adventures among little Children. For it seems, according to the Fable, there was one Lamiæ a Beautiful Woman in Lybia, whom Jupiter fell in Love with; but Juno, out of Jealousy, took her Children which she had by Jupiter and killed them; wherefore she out of mere Grief for the Death of her own Children, made it her Practice to kill those of other Women. They were styl'd Veneficæ, because they were wont to make use of Herbs, which they suppos'd had strange kiud [*sic*] of Vertues in them, for with Herbs or Charms they always acted.

Num te Carminibus, num te pallentibus Herbis
Devovit tacite tempor & noctis Anus?

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As for the Opinions concerning Incubi and Succubi Devils, It's manifest, they had their Rise from the Fables of the Antient Hero's, who (as Socrates in Plato's Cratylus affirms) were begotten from the Conjunction of Deities with Human Creatures; which kind of Conjunction, whosoever believe, makes that Belief of his, a Cloak for the Adulteries of the Heathen Priests, who often lay with other Mens Wives, pretending that the Gods had vouchsafed them the Honour of their Company. Very Remarkable to this Purpose, is the Story of Tyrannus a Priest of Saturn, who under this Pretence had carnal Knowledge of many a Man's Wife, till at last one more Wise than the Rest, discover'd the Cheat. In like manner Mundus a Gentleman of Rome, by the help of the Priests belonging to the Temple of Ifis, enjoy'd his Pleasure on Paulina a Roman Lady, who mistook him for the God Anubis.

Now one wou'd think that these Heathenish Fables and Follies, to come to my second Particular, altho' they took Root in the Minds of the Christian Vulgar, should never have been Assented to by those who account themselves Rabbies and Doctors of the People; yet there is nothing of this Nature that was Credited by those Barbarous Ages, that hath not been declar'd True by the Inquisition and by the Canon Law. Wherefore it may not be amiss, to enquire into those Inquisitors. The first Time that I can hear News of them

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in History is in the Days of Maximus Who contended with Theodosius for the Empire: Though I confess an Inquisition was then but Intended, not brought to Effect. This Maximus, was the first who put Hereticks to Death, namely Priscilian and his Partners, by the Perswasion of one Ithacius, and if it had not been for St. Martin, he would have sent Tribunes into Spain, with Power to search for Hereticks, and to take away their Lives and Goods. In process of time, Charlemain, who was Crowned Emperor in the Eighth Hundred Year after Christ, did by his Laws or Capitulars, declare the Bishop of Rome to be Head of the Church. Nevertheless all those Capitulars, which concern'd the Roman Supremacy, were extracted

from forg'd Authorities, that Cheat being put upon them by the Bishops of Mentz. About Three Hundred years after, in the year One Thousand one Hundred Twenty two, the Emperor Henry the Fifth was forced to resign his Power of Electing and Investing Bishops with the Staff and Ring into the Hands of the Church; of which the Roman Pontiff being declar'd Head, by this Means obtain'd a greater Empire and Power, than ever the Roman Cæsars had. This being perceiv'd by the German Emperors, there was almost a perpetual War between them and the Bishops of Rome: But especially Frederick the Second, who flourish'd in the beginning of the 13th Century, and spent most of his Reign in endeavouring to take down the Church from overtopping the Empire.

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Nevertheless, it was in his Reign, that the Roman Bishops made notable Provision for the Security of their Exorbitant Power; Then it was that Frederick the Second, when he was at Padua, made those unhappy Laws, whereby Hereticks were liable to the Punishment of Death; of which Laws the Popes made very great Advantage. Then it was that Gregory the Ninth advanced the Authority of Canon or Pontifical Laws, by Composing the Decretals by the help of his Chaplain Raymund: Then it was, that the Orders of the Dominican and Franciscan Fryars were founded, to whom was committed the Inquisition after Hereticks.

These Monks at their first setting up for Inquisitors, as Father Paul has observed in the History of the Inquisition, had no Tribunal or Courts of their own, but did only Preach, and stir up Princes and People, engaging them into Crusadoes against Hereticks, by sewing a piece of Red Cloth in the form of a Cross upon their Garments. But Innocent the Fourth, who begun his Pontificate about the latter end of Frederick the Second, observing the furious Zeal of the Fryars, thought good to Erect a Tribunal for them, that so they themselves might proceed to the Tryal of Hereticks. To bring this about he had a fair opportunity upon the Death of Frederick, by reason of the vacancy that then happen'd in the Empire for many years: For now having no Emperor to controul Him in Italy, He took the Confidence to impose the Inquisition upon

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the several Provinces of it. There are Extant several Bulls, written by Innocent the Fourth to the Magistrates of those Countries: One of which sets down the forementioned Laws of Frederick against Hereticks Word for Word, and commands them to be strictly observed. Nor can I blame him for holding his Ecclesiastical Empire upon no other Title than the Pretence of Religion. To be a Heretick must needs be the same thing to Him and his Successors, as to be a Traytor to Temporal Princes. Hence it came to pass, that, when the Inquisition had gotten Foot in many Kingdoms and Countries, an incredible Number of People were frequently Tormented and Burn'd for the Crime of Witchcraft, which they had so twisted and blended with Heresie, or the Denyal of Pontifical Authority, that in seeking out Witches, in Tormenting and putting them to Death, they did at once gratify, as well the Ambition and usurp'd Power of their Lord the Pope, as their own insatiable Covetousness and Thirst after other Mens Goods. In the year 1518. the Inquisitors put to Death abundance of Inchanters, which they had found in the Venetian Territories, where such was the Extortion and Avarice of their Proceedings, that the Country rose up against them, and the Council afterwards was fain to send for these Inquisitors, and enquire into their Proceedings, to pacify the enrag'd Populace. The Inquisition was likewise settled in Lorraine much about the same Time, where according to the Confession of Nicholaus Remigius, who adjudg'd

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them to Death, in Sixteen years time, there were 800 Witches Executed. In a Word, after the Founding of the Dominican and Franciscan Fryars, and the setting up an Office of Inquisition, the World grew so full of Devils and Witches, that I am apt to give into the Judgment of Cardan, who handling this Business of Witches and Witch-finders, observ'd it to be full of Covetousness and Folly, as any one may read in his Book de Varietate Rerum. By this Time methinks it plainly appears out of the preceding

Discourse, that the Notion of a Witch, as it is taken now a-days, has no Foundation at all in Scripture; but had its original or first Rise out of Heathenish Fables, and was afterwards improv'd by Papal Impostures: Nevertheless, to make good my Promise, I shall produce some Arguments to prove, 3dly, That a Witch is not to be found in Scripture. And 4thly, That there is no such Thing as a Witch at all. The first Argument shall be taken from the Difference between our Vulgarly reputed Witches, and those which our Translators of the Bible call so. For whom, I pray, do our Translators call Witches, but the Kings and Queens, and Princes of the Earth. as also the Priests and Philosophers, and Wise Men of this World? Whereas the Witches, now a-days, are poor, silly, contemptible People; for instead of such as King Manasses, and Queen Jezabel, we now hear talk of this old Gammer, and this old Goodwife. It seems the Kingdom of Darkness is quite alter'n in its Politicks, and the Devil is not so Wise as

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some Men make him, if the Opinion of Witchcraft holds good.

The second Argument shall be taken from the Sadduces, a famous Sect among the Jews, who deny'd Spirits, and the Resurrection of the dead; yet had the Five Books of Moses in high Esteem and Regard; wherefore either they did not understand Hebrew, or if they did, the Notion of Witchcraft did not appear in Moses. And if this be once granted, I suppose the other Parts of the Bible will easily follow. But, perhaps, you'll Object, and say, That the Sadduces were a Sect after the Captivity, which kept the Jews so long in Babylon, that they forgot their own Tongue, and that the Jews, after their Return into Judea, spoke not the Hebrew, but the Vulgar Syrian. To this I Answer, That when the Sect of the Sadduces took its Beginning, is uncertain, and that however the Common People did forget the old Hebrew, yet the Priests did always preserve its knowledge. Now that Priests themselves were Sadduces, is Manifest, for even the High-Priest Joseph Hircanus, was one of that Sect, according to the Testimony of Josephus.

The third, and last Argument, shall be taken from the Different Practices, ascrib'd unto our Vulgarly Suppos'd Witches, and unto those in our own Translation of the Bible. For our Modern Witches practice a secret Occult Art, and it requires great Skill to discover them by several strange Signs and horrid Tortures. But those whom our Translators call Witches, in the Bible, were such

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as practised what they did Openly, and in the Face of the World, making Publick Profession of their Art, which was the Counterfeit Art of Prophesying, and Working Miracles. But, alas! had it been this Mysterious Art of Contracting with the Devil, and of using his Power, the Professors whereof are so Clandestine in their Ways, that they can hardly be discover'd by various Scrutinies and Enquiries; how impossible a Thing had it been for Saul to turn them all out of Israel, as we read he did, 1 Sam. 28. This I am sure of, a Proclamation now-a-days set out to that Purpose, would avail nothing, and only serve to move the Laughter of all those that stood by to hear it.

If there be no such Thing as a Witch in Scripture, as I have Vanity enough to think I have prov'd in my last, I shall make use of that, as my first Argument, to prove there is no such Thing as a Witch at all; which was my second Proposal. Nor let any one, thereupon, that abounds with Words, and his own Sense, cry out, then there is no such River as the Thames, there is no such Country as America, if silence in Scripture serves for an Argument. A Man may make such Instances from Morning to Night, and a great Noise to no Purpose; as if there were no Difference between those Things that lie quite besides the Scriptures Notice, and those Things which, if they be True, the Scriptures could not be silent about, without the Charge of Imperfection. For let any one but read the Law of Moses, and then seriously consider, why it should be so

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severe against Incestuous and Bestial Concubinage, and yet not so much as mention Diabolical. The Jews were forbid to meddle with Strange Women of other Nations, and should there be no Caution given against their meddling with strange Creatures, as it were of another World? Observe how curious the Law is in matters of Uncleaness, and shall an ordinary Running Issue be so much Talk'd of, and no Mention made of Teats running with Blood and suck'd by Devils?

Lastly, That Law which by its Years of Jubilee, and several other Constitutions, provided more against Oppression and Cruelty than any other Law in the World; that Law which so detested the Murther of Men, that it made them Merciful to their Neighbours Beasts; I say, that Law could never pass over in Silence, the Cruel and Abominable Actions of Witches, against both Man and Beast. Without question it would have inflicted upon them the severest Punishments, and for the Discovery of their Secret and Devilish Contracts, it would have laid down sufficient Rules for Trial; especially since, in a far less Matter, that of Adultery, it made use of that horrible and amazing Tryal, by the Bitter Water, which caused the Curse.

Secondly, I Argue from the miserable Poverty of our Vulgarly reputed Witches, (such as is the Woman that gives Being to these Reflections) that they are wrongfully accus'd. For I am not willing to believe, that they have such a Power with the Devil, as to make him do wonderful Things at their

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Command, when they never command him to fetch them Money, and to furnish them with Bread. Indeed, in the Night Time he carries them I know not whither, and there they meet with great variety of imaginary Mirth and Feasting. Now such as their Feast is, such is their Witchcraft, not real; but imaginary, as only existing in the wild Fancies of Men. In the Third Place, I charge those who obstinately maintain there are Witches, either with Irrationality or Impiety: For 'tis irrational to think, that the Devils are Creatures full of Malice, and breathing nothing but Mischief against the whole Race of Man, and that they suffer a Man to live, when they can so easily kill us at the Command of a Witch. But if you evade this, by saying, That Devils cannot hurt us without the Divine Permission; Then, I say, 'tis Impious to concern the Great God with Witchcraft. 'Tis true indeed, he may send Death and Diseases amongst the Sons of Men, to punish them for their Sins at his own pleasure; but that he should do so at the desire of the Devil, at the command of a Witch, is such a Gratification of Malice, as is far from God to perform. Calvin, in his Sermons on the two first Chapters of Job, takes a great deal of pains to explode this Opinion of God's Permission, and shews, by several Examples of Abselon, Ahab, and Nebuchadnezzar, that God doth not barely permit, but orders and determines the Actions of Devils and Wicked Men; affirming, That if Asses could speak,

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they would speak Wiser than those Men who talk of God's Permission after this Rate: Nor will he grant, that God afflicted Job upon Satan's Request; but because he himself had so determin'd to try Job's Patience.

Lastly, The Vanity and Falseness of their Opinion who believe there are Witches, appears from nothing more than from this, That it ascribes unto the Devil an Omnipotent Power: Insomuch, that no Rational Man, by the Light of Reason, shall be able to tell, from the History of the Gospel, whether our Saviour himself were a Witch or no; for let some Men think what they please, the Holiness of his Doctrine is not by the Thousandth Part such a Proof of Acting by a Divine Power, as the Miraculousness of his Works. But, alas! What were his Miracles, or how were they valued, if Malicious Creatures, without a Divine Commission enabling them thereto, can make Frogs and Serpents, raise the Dead, give Law to the Winds and Seas, to mention no more of those prodigious Works ascribed unto the Devils upon the Account of Witchcraft? For my part, I am apt to think, that those who believe after this manner, approach very near to the Opinion of the Persians, who held there were Two Great Beings, both Almighty, both at mutual and perpetual War; one the Author of all Good, the other of all Evil. The Good Principle they

called Oromasdes, and the Evil one, Arimanius. Of the same Opinion were the Egyptians, as appears by Osiris and Typhon, and from them Pithagoras carry'd it

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to Greece. In a Word, the whole Heathen World seem to be infected with this Conceit, believing Internal as well as Supernal Gods; and therefore they had Sacrifices as well to appease the Anger, and to avert the Mischiefs of the one, as to propitiate, and procure the Blessings of the other. Nor can those Christians be excus'd from the same Infection, who, upon the Account of Witchcraft, attribute Omnipotency to the Devil; for what less do they believe, concerning the Prince of the Devil and his Power, if according to them, he can command the Influence of the Sun, and Govern the Motion of the Stars: If he can open the Bowels of the Earth, and cause the Vapours to ascend in Clouds into the Middle Region of the Air, and thence, again, descend upon the Earth, in Thunder and Lightning and violent Storms; If he can Transform Men and Women into Cats, and if he can Create Frogs and Serpents. Wherefore I conclude, it was a very seasonable Decree made by the Council of Ancyra, more Antient than the Nicene Council, wherein they declare unto all Christians, the Heathenishness of this Belief and Opinion. Which is manifest, appears only in the Writings of that Superstitious Age, one Instance of which, instead of the many other that could be produc'd on this Subject, I shall give from Hypsiphele's Description of Medea.

Illa reluctantem cuasu deducere Lunam
Nititur, & tenebris abdere Solis equos.
Illa refrænât aquas, obliquaq; Flumina sistit,
Illa loco sylvas, vivaq; saxa movet.

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Per Tumulous errat, sparsis distincta Capillis,
Certaq; de tepidis colligit ossa Rogis.
Devovet absentes, simulachraq; Cerea figit
Et miserum tenues in Jecur urget Acus.

She from her Course the struggling Moon would
The Sun himself in Magick Shades infold: (hold
She curbs the Waves, and stops the rapid Floods,
And from her seat removes whole Rocks & Woods.
With her dishevel'd Hair the wandring Hag,
Does half-burnt Bones from their warm Ashes drag.
In molten Wax, tho' absent, kills by Art,
Arm'd with her Needle, goars a tortur'd Heart.

'Tis true indeed, the Pontifical Authors make a great stir in their Answers to the abovemention'd Decree of the Ancyran Council, sometimes endeavouring to evade its Force with their absurd Interpretations, sometimes to throw Dirt into the Face of the Council, as if it were not to be regarded: But Alciat in his Parerga, does ingeniously confess, that in these their Answers, nec Cælum, nec Terram attingunt, they have neither Head nor Tail. And which is more to be wonder'd at, Martin Delrio the Jesuit is in this point so very impartial, as to dissent from Baronius, who judges that this Council was held at Rome under Damascus, in the Days of St. Hierom: Delrio for sundry Reasons, believing it to have been really held at Ancyra the Metropolis of Galatia, according to the Common Assertion of those who Collected the Antient Canons.

For this Decree of the Ancyran Council was the more necessary, in regard that a little before Manes, or Manicheus had spread abroad, through the whole Christian World, that old Heathenish Doctrine of the Two Principles,

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one of Good and the other of Evil: And it is remarkable, That Witches and Manicheans are coupled together by the Emperors Dioclesian and Maximian, in their Prescript to Julian the Proconsul of Africa, de Maleficis, & Manichœis, as it is cited out of the Gregorian Code, by Ruffinus, in his Collation of the Jewish with the Roman Laws. About a Hundred Years after, and some what more, Priscillian and his Followers, did, in a great Measure embrace the Doctrine of Manes, insomuch that in the Year Five Hundred Sixty Three, there was a Council held at Bracara, a Town of Galicia in Spain, against the Priscillianists. In the Decrees of this Council Manes and Priscillian are frequently join'd together, for their Foolish Conceits, concerning the Power of the Devil, or Evil Principle; but especially they have one Decree very applicable to our present Purpose, wherein they Anathematize all those, who believe that the Devil can make any Creature, or so much as raise Storms and Tempests by his own Authority and Power: The Words are these, Si quis credit, quod aliquantas in Mundo Creaturas Diabolus fecerit, & Tonitrua, & Fulgura, & Tempestates, & Siccitates, ipse Diabolus sua Authoritate faciat, sicut Priscillianus dixit, Anathema sit. If any one believes that the Devil can form or make any Creatures, or that the Infernal Spirit, by the Means of his own Power, can create Thunder and Lightning, and Rain, and Drowth, as Priscillian has affirm'd, let him be Excommunicated and Accursed. Wherefore if the Devil cannot raise Tempests by his own Sufficiency, he did no more

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in the Case of Job (which is always brought in as an Argument against it) than Eliah, or any Mortal Man may do, when he receiv's a Commission from God. Hence I infer, That the Doctrine of Witchcraft magnifying the Diabolical Power beyond its due Proportion, doth favour too Rankly of Priscillian and Manes, and the Heathen World.

And now it is worth the while, in the fifth Place, to consider what these Men can say for themselves, who so obstinately maintain there are Witches, for they being on the Affirmative Part, are bound, by the Laws of Disputation, to prove what they affirm, and 'tis sufficient for their Adversaries to confute their Proofs. But alas! these Men are generally ignorant of the History of Ages that are gone and past, and of the Scriptures also, as to what concerns the Question in Hand. Wherefore they are all wont to wave Argument, and to cry out, This is a Question not to be disputed upon, in Regard it is a Matter of Fact, and consequently the Object of Sense, and not of Reason. Thus, when they are got to their Castle of Defence, they make a great Noise, and cry out upon the Unreasonableness of others, who will not believe what so many Worshipful Persons in the World have heard and seen. And what is that, I pray? Why they have heard Trumpets sound, and Drums beat, when neither Trumpeter nor Drummer have been near the Place. They have seen Chairs and Stools move up and down a Room, when no Body has touch'd them, with many other Things full as strange. Thus will they tell Stories

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of this Nature from Morning to Night, tho' when they have done, they say nothing to the Purpose. For suppose that all these Stories were unquestionably true, yet they wou'd not suffice to prove Witchcraft. I confess indeed they would evince the being of Spirits, a Thing which no Wise Man can deny, tho' he doth not believe it. For it is one Thing to doubt, and another to deny. For my own Part, I firmly believe that there are many Thousands of Spirits, made of an Incorporeal Matter, too fine to be perceiv'd by the Senses of Men. Nor will I contradict the Authority of so many in the World, who affirm they have heard the strange Things which I just now mention'd; supposing that these Spirits may often play mad Tricks among us. But still I demand a Reason why I should believe that they do so, upon the Account of a Contract made with any Man or Woman; for till this is prov'd, the Question of Witchcraft stands undetermin'd. Well then, how do the Affirmers of it go about to prove, that any Man or Woman is Interested in these Devilish Pranks? Why, truly, by Telling such Stories as these; namely, That the Persons tormented by Devils, have fallen into their Fits at the Sight, or upon the Touch of suspected Witches: As also that Persons, thus tormented, have seen the suspected Witches in this or that Place of the Room, where no Stander by else could see any Thing at all, &c. Now here is to be observ'd, that these Kind of Stories are far different from those, which, I said before, did evince the Being of Spirits; for

they are attested by numerous Authorities,

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and worthy of Credit. But these are quite contrary, and founded partly in the Jugling Delusions or Confederated Imposters, partly in the Errors or ridiculous Mistakes of Vulgar Rumours. Nevertheless, that I may not be too strict with my Adversaries, I care not if I grant some of these Stories to be true. For Instance; That there have been Persons vex'd by Devils at the Sight, or upon the Touch of suspected Witches, and quiet again when they were parted: For tho' I should grant this, I see no Reason whereby to conclude there are no such Beings as Witches, but rather that these Spirits, who are so Frolick and Gamesome in doing us Mischief, when they perceive Persons suspected to have set them at Work, may, on Purpose, so manage their malicious Tricks, as to confirm the Suspicion, promote the Accusation, procure the Condemnation of these miserable Wretches; and then may account it the Cream of their malicious Tricks to see poor Innocent, People Hang'd. Now this Answer of mine, altho' it be needless, and ex abundanti, is far more easy and unconstrain'd than any Thing that the contrary Opinion can answer to those Objections, which may be made against that Absurd and Ridiculous Conceit of Seeing a Witch present, that is really at many Miles Distance.

Again, those that stand up for the Being of this Fictitious Power, are wont to say, that immediately upon the Threatning or Cursing used by this or that Person, such or such an Accident hath happen'd to the Person so Threatned and Cursed. These Men would do well to consider, that this World hath stood many Thousand Years, and is of vast Extent, containing many Countries, or Nations full of Men that have divers Interests and Passions; wherefore it is not to be wonder'd at, if there hath often happen'd in it a notable concurrence of Events. 'Tis certain that poor old People, when they are abus'd by the Insulting Petulancy of others, being unable to right themselves, either at Law or at Combat, for want of

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Money, and Strength of Body, do oftentimes vent the Passion of their Discontented Souls in Threats and Curses. 'Tis also certain, that many Men troubled with Diseases of the Head or Heart, seem to be perfect Health, and yet fall down Dead of a sudden. Now if these Two Accidents should meet together, I should see nothing but what is Natural, nor should I cry out upon the Devil and Witchcraft.

But methinks I hear some Zealots Object, and say, with great Vehemence, and Assurance: What need there be any Dispute about these Stories, since Parties themselves, as this Woman in particular, have Confessed their own Witchcraft; and can there be any Thing clearer than Self-Confession? To this I answer, That the Wisest Men in the World may be brought, by Imprisonment and Torture, to confess any thing, whether it be True or False; as many Miserable Creatures confessing themselves Witches, have had their Confessions extorted from them by such cursed Means. Besides, I am not do doubt, but some poor, silly, melancholy old Wretches have really believ'd themselves Witches, and to be guilty of those Actions, which not only their foolish Neighbours, but Men that are call'd Worshipful, have charged them with. Nor is it to be wonder'd at by any one that considers the strange Effects of Melancholy, especially if heightned by Poverty, or want of Good Diet, by Ignorance, Solitariness, and Old Age. For that such People take their very Dreams to be real Visions and Truths, I am sure, not only by Consequences drawn from their Actions, reported in Books, but by Experience also of my own Acquaintance. The Truth is, want of Knowledge in the Art of Physick makes Men attribute mere Natural Distempers to Spirits; Nay, Physicians themselves, who have shewn Excellency of Skill in Anotomy and Chymistry, perhaps have added little or nothing to the Diagnostick part of Diseases, so happily begun by Hippocrates. Hence it is that we

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are still in the Dark, as to the Abstruser Distempers of Human Bodies, especially such as arise from Melancholy; which are of so many Sorts, and have such wonderful Effects, that whosoever should

rightly Describe them, and make them plainly Manifest, would Discover to us an unknown World full of unheard of prodigious Monsters. Thus I have sufficiently Answered the most material Objections, not thinking it worth the while to insist upon every Triffle, such as this is. Why do you not believe that, which so many Thousands of Wise Men in the World have believed? Surely they could not all be deceived, &c. As if a Man did not make Proclamation of his own Folly, by such an Argument, when the various Religions that have been in the World, are more than enough to convince any Rational Person, how Absurd and Ridiculous the Wisest of Men are in Matters of Opinion or Belief.

By this time I cannot chuse but wonder, Sixthly, at the spreading of this foolish Opinion amongst Men, and its taking such deep Root in their Minds; but then I cease admiring when I Consider, That some Men are Knaves, others are Fools, and that all have Fear implanted in them by Nature, the very strongest of all their Passions: For, though it be an Impious and Irrational Saying, That Fear was the first Thing that brought Gods into the World; yet I am not apt to believe, It first of all brought in those Omnipotent Witches that contract with Devils. Now, that Fear very frequently, presents Apparitions to Melancholick and Diseases'd Persons, was well

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enough known to those who govern'd the Antient World, especially the Eastern Parts of it, for they were wise Politicians, Men famous in their Generations, and very much experienced in the Nature of Mankind. Wherefore knowing how Furious and Headstrong a Beast, the Multitude is, not to be dealt with, unless you come as it were on their blind Side, that is, unless you take them by the weakest Part, and lay hold of their Passion of Fear, (I say knowing this) they promoted these People, and improv'd them for the Designs of Government. Hence it came to pass that whatsoever was extraordinary in Nature, & apt to astonish, was, by them, ascrib'd to these Apparitions or Spirits; Namely in the upper Regions of the Heavens, the Eclipses of the Sun and Moon, Thunder and Lightning in the Clouds, Pestilential Seasons, as also those of Famine here below, likewise the most hideous of Diseases, whether they were strange Kinds of Tumours in the Body, or Convulsion Fits, or several Sorts of Madness, &c. For the Remedying of which disastrous Accident, and the Taking away of their malignant. Effects, many Charms or Spells were ordain'd; many Exercising or Conjuring Prayers were invented; In a Word, many Religious Rites or Ceremonies of Worship were instituted with a World of Vanity and Fancy. The Egyptians, that Antient and Wise People, the very Fathers of Learning, had a Respect unto these Kind of Spirits in their Publick Worship, as may be gather'd from Plutarch in his Treatise concerning the Decay

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of Oracles, where he brings in this Consideration of their Religious Rites, as a probable Argument that they were the first Opiners of Dæmons; I mean, the first that brought in the Opinion of the Existence of Devils.

In process of Time, those Actions of the Priests, and great Politicians of the World, began to be imitated by Private Persons, not only Men, but Women also, such as she was that dwelt at Endor; for what will not some attempt to do, when a necessitous Poverty doth torment them with a greedy desire of Gain? These kind of shirking People, a Generation of impudent Liars, Mountebanks in Divinity and Physick, have all along pester'd the Age in which they lived. Hipocrates, Treating *peri hieres noso* [on the sacred disease, in Greek characters] or the Falling-Sickness, hath excellently. well described the Knavish Impostures of some in his Times, who, to cloak their Ignorance of that Disease, pretended it came immediately from the Hand of God, and therefore was to be Cured with certain Expiations and Charms. These Men, says he, had nothing but God in their Mouths, and yet, notwithstanding this Holiness, they basely deluded the People with Magick Cheats: So also did the Heathen Divines, I mean their pretended Philosophers, Men full of Words and Beards, who, for the love of Gain and a Croud of Disciples, would frequently make shew of, I know not what, Sublimity of Knowledge, and Intimate Acquaintance with the Deity, by vertue whereof they would undertake to Charm and Exorcise Evil Spirits. Lucian, in his Dialogue, Entituled,

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philopseudeis [in Greek characters], or Lovers of Lies, makes very good Sport with these sort of Fellows.

Now when Hunger and Covetousness had engaged private Persons in the same Knavish Impostures, which the Priests set on Foot out of Policy, they not enduring to see their Office invaded, did declare unto the World, That all such as attempted Sacred Things, contrary to the due Rights and Ceremonies, were so far from any Communion with the Gods, that they were rather Abandon'd by them, and expos'd to the Society of Evil Spirits; by which Conversation they became full of Malice, and all sorts of Vice and Mischief, like unto the Devils, with whom they conversed: For that this was the Assertion of the Antient Chaldean Priests, is evident; in that Treatise of Jamblichus, which treats of the Mysteries of the Egyptians, Chaldeans, and Assyrians. And thus, I suppose, I have given a true Account of the Rise and Origin of Witchcraft.

But howsoever this Opinion of Witches might, probably, take its first Rise in the Eastern Parts, it quickly also came into the West, and there, at length, it very much prevailed, by reason of the Platonick Philosophy: For these Men being addicted to Fables and Allegories, became so vain, as to turn those Fables and Allegories into Reality. In a word, whosoever reads the Platonick Writings, must find them full of confident Discourse, about what they did not understand, concerning the Gods, Dæmons, and Spirits of Men. Much is their Talk of a Familiar Spirit which every Man hath, calling it sometimes, the, [Greek omitted] sometimes [Greek omitted], sometimes the [Greek omitted]

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[Greek omitted]. Nor is it to be wonder'd at, if Christian Authors have too much exceeded on such Subjects, in regard 'tis well enough known how much the Primitive Christians admir'd the Platonick Sect. Nor is it unlikely, that in their frequent Exorcisings and Conjurations, they did but imitate the Platonicks, who themselves did, therein, but tread in the Steps of the Antient Egyptian Priests: Amongst whom, it's usual to Conjure the Devils, with strange kinds of Threats, viz. That if they would not do as the Priests would have them, They would tear the Heavens assunder, and reveal the Secret of Isis, as may be seen in Jamblicus, whom I have before quoted.

Thus am I come to a Period, to the satisfaction, I hope, of the Gentleman that put me upon this Work, by his Desire to me in writing, and those that give themselves the Trouble of reading it; and if I have advanc'd Opinions contrary to those of the Worshipful Sir Henry Chauncey, whose great Age may excuse the Commitment of the Person that occasions this Dissertation, and cannot join with the Reverend Clergymen, whose Depositions were thought of weight enough, by the Jury, to bring her in Guilty, and whose Prayers of sufficient Efficacy to work a Miracle, and drive the Devil out of the poor sickly Creature, suppos'd to be Bewitch'd; it is to be presum'd I shall not be thought to fall under the Statute of Defamation, or be denied the Benefit of my Clergy. To sum up the whole, I have, in the First Place, shewn, That there is no such Thing as a Witch in Scripture.

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Secondly, That it took its Beginning from Heathen Fables. Thirdly, That it was afterwards Improved by Papal Impostures. In the Fourth Place, I have produc'd several Arguments against the Affirmers of Witchcraft. Fifthly, I have answer'd other Arguments to the Contrary. Sixthly, and Lastly, I have endeavour'd to shew, by what Means this Opinion of Witches came into the World, all which I have handled Succinctly, pointing as it were, at the Heads of Things, and leaving it to some abler Pen, to handle this Question more at large: A thing which is very useful to be done, for if the Doctrine of Witchcraft should be carried up to a Hight, and the Inquisition after it should be intrusted in the Hands of Ambitious, Covetous, and Malicious Men, it would prove of more fatal Consequence to the Lives and Safety of Mankind, than that Antient Heathenish Custom of Sacrificing Men to Idols; insomuch, that we stand in need of another Hercules Liberator, who, as the former freed the World from Human

Sacrifices, should, in like manner, Travel from Country to Country, and by his all-commanding Authority, free it from the evil and base Custom of Imprisoning People to confess themselves Witches, and Burning them after extorted Confessions. Surely the Blood of Mankind ought not to be so cheap, nor so easily to be shed, by such who under the Name of God, gratify exorbitant Passions and Selfish-Ends; for without Question, under this side of Heaven, there is nothing so Sacred as the Life of Man, for the Preservation whereof,

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all Policies or Forms of Government, all Laws and Magistrates are most especially ordain'd. Wherefore I take the Liberty to affirm, That this Discourse of mine, attempting to prove the Vanity and Impossibility of Witchcraft, is so far from any deserved Censure and Blame, that it rather merits Commendation and Praise, if I can but in the least measure contribute to the saving of the Lives of my Fellow Creatures.

FINIS.