

Henry Goodcole's *The Wonderful Discovery of Elizabeth Sawyer* is a fascinating and strange account of the interrogation of a witch by a cleric in 1621. It's also the principal source for the 1621 play *The Witch of Edmonton*, by Thomas Dekker, John Ford and William Rowley.

The following is a faithful transcript; the only change is the alteration of the 'long s' to a modern 's', the conversion of 'VV' to 'W' and the expansion of abbreviations marked with tildes.

The wonderfull discoverie of ELIZABETH SAWYER *a Witch, late of Edmonton, her conuiction and condemnation and Death.*

Together with the relation of the Diuels accesse to her, and their conference together.

Written by HENRY GOODCOLE Minister of the Word of God, and her continuall Visiter in the Gaole of Newgate.

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The Authors Apologie to the *Christian Readers, who wisheth to them all health and happinesse.*

The Publication of this subiect whereof now I write, hath bin by importunitie extorted from me, who would haue beene content to haue concealed it, knowing the diuersitie of opinions concerning things of this nature, and that not among the ignorant, but among some of the learned. For my part I meddle hearewith nothing but matter of fact, and to that ende produce the Testimony of the liuing and the dead, which I hope shall be Authentick for the confirmation of this Narration, and free mee from all censorious mindes and mouthes. It is none of my intent here to discusse, or dispute of Witches or Witchcraft, but desire most therin to be dispensed with all, knowing, that in such a little Treatise as this is, no matter that can be effectually therein can be [sic] comprised; especially, in so short a time of deliberation, as three or foure dayes. And the rather doe I now publish this to purchase my peace, which without it being done, I could scarce at any time be at quiet, for many who would take no nay, but still desired of me written Copies of this insuing Declaration. Another reason was to defend the truth of the cause, which in some measure, hath receiued a wound already, by most base and false Ballets, which were sung at the time of our returning from the Witches execution. In them I was ashamed to see and heare such ridiculous fictions of her bewitching Corne on the ground, of a Ferret and an Owle dayly sporting before her, of the bewitched woman braying her selfe, of the Spirits attending in the Prison: all which I knew to be fitter for an Ale-bench then for a relation of proceeding in Court of Iustice. And thereupon I wonder that such lewde Balletmongers should be suffered to creepe into the Printers presses and peoples eares.

And so I rest at your opinions and iudgements

Your well-wisher in the Lord Iesus,

HENRY GOODCOLE

A true declaration of the manner of proceeding against ELIZABETH SAWYER late of Edmonton Spinster, and the euidence of her Conuiction.

A Great, and long suspition was held of this person to be a witch, and the eye of Mr. *Arthur Robinson*, a worthy Iustice of Peace, who dweleth at *Totnam* neere to her, was watchfull ouer her, and her wayes, and that not without iust cause; stil hauing his former long suspition of her, by the information of her neighbours that dwelt about her: from suspition, to proceed to great presumptions, seeing the death of Nurse-children and Cattell, strangely and suddenly to happen. And to finde out who should bee the author of this mischiefe, an old ridiculous custome was vsed, which was to plucke the Thatch of her house, and to burne it, and it being so burnd, the author of such mischiefe should presently then come: and it was obserued and affirmed to the Court, that *Elizabeth Sawyer* would presently frequent the house of them that burnt the thatch which they pluckt of her house, and come without any sending for.

This triall, though it was slight and ridiculous, yet it setled a resolution in those whom it concerned, to finde out by all meanes they could endeauour, her long, and close carried Witchery, to explaine it to the world; and being descried, to pay in the ende such a worker of Iniquity, her wages, and that which shee had deserued, (namely, *shame* and *Death*) from which the Diuell, that had so long deluded her, did not come as shee said, to shew the least helpe of his vnto her to deliuer her: but being descried in his waies, and workes, immediately he fled, leauing her to shift and answeere for her selfe, with publike and priuate markes on her body as followeth.

1 Her face was most pale & ghoast-like without any bloud at all, and her countenance was still deieted to the ground.

2 Her body was crooked and deformed, euen bending together, which so happened but a little before her apprehension.

3 That tongue which by cursing, swearing, blaspheming, and imprecating, as afterward she confessed, was the occasioning cause, of the Diuels accesse vnto her, euen at that time, and to claime her thereby as his owne, by it discovered her lying, swearing, and blaspheming; as also euident proofes produced against her, to stop her mouth with Truths authority: at which hearing, she was not able to speake a sensible or ready word for her defense, but sends out in the hearing of the Iudge, Iury, and all good people that stood by, many most fearefull imprecations for destruction against her selfe then to happen, as heretofore she had wished and indeauoured to happen on diuers of her neighbours: the which the righteous Iudge of Heauen, whom she thus inuocated, to iudge then and discerne her cause, did reueale.

Thus God did wonderfully ouertake her in her owne wickednesse, to make her tongue to be the meanes of her owne destruction, which had destroyed many before.

And in this manner, namely, that out of her false swearing the truth whereof, shee little thought, should be found, but by her swearing and cursing blended, it thus farre made against her, that both Iudge and Iurie, all of them grew more and more suspitious of her, and not without great cause: for none that had the feare of God, or any the least motion of Gods grace left in them, would, or durst, to presume so impudently, with execrations and false oathes, to affront Iustice.

On Saturday, being the fourteenth day of Aprill, *Anno Dom.* 1621. this *Elizabeth Sawyer* late of *Edmonton*, in the County of *Middlesex* Spinster, was arraigned, and indited three seuerall times at Iustice Hall in the Old Baily in *London*, in the Parish of Saint *Sepulchers*, in the Ward of *Farrington without*: which Inditements were, *viz.*

That shee the said *Elizabeth Sawyer*, not hauing the feare of God before her eyes, but moued and seduced by the Diuell, by Diabolicall helpe, did out of her malicious heart, (because her neighbours where she dwelt, would not buy Broomes of her) would therefore thus reuenge her selfe on them in this manner, namely, witch to death their Nurse Children and Cattell. But for breuities sake I here omit formes of Law and Informations.

She was also indited, for that shee the said *Elizabeth Sawyer*, by Diabolicall helpe, and out of her malice afore-thought, did witch vnto death *Agnes Ratcliffe*, a neighbour of hers, dwelling in the towne of *Edmonton* where shee did likewise dwell, and the cause that vrged her therevnto was, because that *Elizabeth Ratcliffe* did strike a Sowe of hers in her sight, for licking vp a little Soape where shee had laide it, and for that *Elizabeth Sawyer* would be reuenged of her, and thus threatned *Agnes Ratcliffe*, that it should be a deare blow vnto her, which accordingly fell out, and suddenly; for that euening *Agnes Ratcliffe* fell very sicke, and was extraordinarily vexed, and in a most strange manner in her sicknesse was tormented, Oath whereof, was by this *Agnes Ratclifes* Husband, giuen to the Court, the time when shee fell sicke, and the time when shee died, which was within foure dayes after she fell sicke: and further then related, that in the time of her sicknesse his wife *Agnes Ratcliffe* lay foaming at the mouth, and was extraordinarily distempered, which many of his neighbors seeing, as well as himselfe, bred suspition in them that some mischief was done against her, and by none else, but alone by this *Elizabeth Sawyer* it was done; concerning whom the said *Agnes Ratcliffe* lying on her death-bed, these wordes confidently spake: namely, that if shee did die at that time shee would verily take it on her death, that *Elizabeth Sawyer* her neighbour, whose Sowe with a washing-Beetle she had stricken, and so for that cause her malice being great, was the occasion of her death.

To proue her innocency, she put her selfe to the triall of God and the Countrey, and what care was taken both by the honourable Bench and Iury, the iudicious standers by can witnesse: and God knowes, who will reward it.

The Iury hearing this Euidence giuen vpon oath by the husband of the aboue named *Agnes Ratcliffe*, and his wiues speeches relating to them likewise an oath, as she lay on her death-bed, to be truth, that shee had said vnto her husband; Namely, that if she dyed at that time, shee the said *Elizabeth Sawyer* was the cause of her death; and maliciously did by her Witchery procure the same.

This made some impression in their mindes, and caused due and mature deliberation, not trusting their owne iudgements, what to doe, in a matter of such great import, as life, they deemed might be conserued.

The Foreman of the Iury asked of Master *Heneage Finch* Recorder, his direction, and aduice, to whom hee Christianlike thus replied, namely, *Doe in it as God shall put in your hearts.*

Master *Arthur Robinson*, a worshipfull Iustice of Peace dwelling at *Totnam*, had often & diuers times, vpon the complaints of the neighbours against this *Elizabeth Sawyer*, laboriously and carefully examined her, and stil his suspition was strengthened against her, that doutlesse shee was a Witch. An Information was giuen vnto him by some of her Neighbours, that this *Elizabeth Sawyer* had a priuate and strange marke on her body, by which their suspition was confirmed against her, and hee sitting in the Court at that time of her triall, informed the Bench thereof, desiring the Bench to send for women to search her, presently before the Iury did goe forth to bring in the verdict, concerning *Elizabeth Sawyer*, whether that shee was guilty or no: to which motion of his, they most willingly condescended.

The Bench commanded officers appointed for those purposes, to fetch in three women to search the body of *Elizabeth Sawyer*, to see if they could finde any such vnwonted marke, as they were informed of: one of the womens names was *Margaret Weauer*, that keepe the Sessions House for the City of *London*, a widdow of

an honest reputation, and two other graue Matrons, brought in by the Officer out of the streete, passing by there by chance, were ioyned with her in this search of the person named, who fearing and perceiuing shee should by that search of theirs be then discouered, behaued her selfe most sluttishly and loathsomely towards them, intending thereby to preuent their search of her, (which my pen would forbear to write these things for modesties sake, but I would not vary in what was deliuered to the Bench, expresly & openly spoken) yet neuertheless, nicenesse they laid aside, and according to the request of the Court, and to that trust reposed in them by the Bench, they all three seuerally searched her, and made seuerally their answer vnto the Court being sworne thereunto to deliuer the truth. And they all three said, that they a little about the Fundiment of *Elizabeth Sawyer* the prisoner, there indited before the Bench for a Witch, found a thing like a Teate the bignesse of the little finger, and the length of halfe a finger, which was branched at the top like a teate, and seemed as though one had suckt it, and that the bottome thereof was blew, and the top of it was redde. This view of theirs, and answere that she had such a thing about her, which boldly shee denied, gaue some insight to the Iury, of her: who vpon their consciences returned the said *Elizabeth Sawyer*, to be guilty, by dibolicall help, of the death of *Agnes Ratcliffe* onely, and acquitted her of the other two Inditements. And thus much of the meanes that brought her to her deserued death and destruction.

I will addresse to informe you of her preparation to death, which is alone pertinent to my function, and declare vnto you her Confession *verbatim*, out of her owne mouth deliuered to me, the Tuseday after her conuiction, though with great labour it was extorted from her, and the same Confession I read vnto her at the place of her execution, and there shee confessed to all people that were there, the same to be most true, which I shall here relate.

And because it should not bee thought that from me alone this proceeded, I would haue other testimony thereof to stop all contradictions of so palpable a verity, that heard her deliuer it from her owne mouth in the Cappel of *Newgate* the same time.

In testimony whereof, the persons that were then present with mee at her Confession, haue hereunto put to their hands, and if it be required, further to confirme this to be a truth, will bee ready at all times to make oath thereof.

A true Relation of the confession of Elizabeth Sawyer spinster, after her conuiction of Witchery, taken on Tuesday the 17. day of Aprill, Anno 1621. in the Gaole of Newgate, where she was prisoner, then in the presence and hearing of diuers persons, whose names to verifie the same are here subscribed to this ensuyng confession, made vnto me Henry Good-cole Minister of the word of God, Ordinary and Visiter for the Gaole of Newgate. In Dialogue manner are here expressed the persons that she murthered, and the cattell that she destroyed by the helpe of the Diuell

In this manner was I inforced to speake vnto her, because she might vnderstand me, and giue vnto me answere, according to my demands, for she was a very ignorant woman.

Question.

BY what meanes came you to haue acquaintance with the Diuell, and when was the first time that you saw him, and how did you know that it was the Diuell?

Answer.

The first time that the Diuell came vnto me was, when I was cursing, swearing and blaspheming; he then rushed in vpon me, and neuer before that time did I see him, or he me: and when he, namely the Diuel, came to me, the first words that hee spake vnto me were these: *Oh! haue I now found you cursing, swearing, and blaspheming? now you are mine.* [Marginal note: A Gentleman by name Mr. Maddox standing by, and hearing of her say the word blaspheming, did aske of her, three or foure times, whether the Diuell sayd haue I

found you blaspheming, and shee confidently said, I.] A wonderfull warning to many whose tongues are too frequent in these abhominable sinnes; I pray God, that this her terrible example may deter them, to leaue and distaste them, to put their tongues to a more holy language, then the accursed language of hell. The tongue of man is the glory of man, and it was ordained to glorifie God: but worse then brute beasts they are, who haue a tongue, as well as men, that therewith they at once both blesse and curse.

Question.

What sayd you to the Diuell, when hee came vnto you and spake vnto you, were you not afraide of him? if you did feare him, what sayd the Diuell then vnto you?

Answer.

I was in a very greate feare, when I saw the Diuell, but hee did bid me not to feare him at all, for hee would do me no hurt at all, but would do for mee whatsoever I should require of him; and as he promised vnto me, he alwayes did such mischiefes as I did bid him to do, both on the bodies of Christians and beastes: if I did bid him vex them to death, as oftentimes I did so bid him, it was then presently by him so done.

Question.

Whether would the Diuell bring vnto you word or no, what he had done for you, at your command; and if he did bring you word, how long would it bee, before he would come vnto you againe, to tell you?

Answer.

He would alwayes bring vnto me word what he had done for me, within the space of a weeke, he neuer failed me at that time; and would likewise do it to Creatures and beastes two manner of wayes, which was by scratching or pinching of them.

Question.

Of what Christians and Beastes, and how many were the number that you were the cause of their death, and what moued you to prosecute them to the death?

Answer.

I haue bene by the helpe of the Diuell, the meanes of many Christians and beastes death; the cause that moued mee to do it, was malice and enuy, for if any-body had angred me in any manner, I would be so reuenged of them, and of their cattell. And do now further confesse, that I was the cause of those two nurse-childrens death, for the which I was now indited and acquitted, by the Iury.

Question.

Whether did you procure the death of Agnes Ratcliffe, for which you were found guilty by the Iury?

Answer.

No, I did not by my meanes procure against her the least hurt.

Question.

How long is it since the Diuell and you had acquaintance together, & how oftentimes in the weeke would hee

come and see you, and you company with him?

Answer.

It is eight yeares since our first acquaintance; and three times in the weeke, the Diuell would come and see mee, after such his acquaintance gotten of me; he would come sometimes in the morning, and sometimes in the euening.

Question.

In what shape would the Diuell come vnto you?

Answer.

Alwayes in the shape of a dogge and of two collars, sometimes of blacke and sometimes of white.

Question.

What talke had the Diuel and you together, when that he appeared to you, and what did he aske of you, and what did you desire of him?

Answer.

He asked of me, when hee came vnto me, how I did, and what he should doe for mee, and demanded of mee my soule and body; threatning then to teare me in peeces, if that I did not grant vnto him my soule and my body which he asked of me.

Question.

What did you after such the Diuells asking of you, to haue your Soule and Body, and after this his threatning of you, did you for feare grant vnto the Diuell his desire?

Answer.

Yes, I granted for feare vnto the Diuell his request of my Soule and body; and to seale this my promise made vnto him, I then gaue him leaue to sucke of my bloud, the which hee asked of me.

Question.

In what place of your body did the Diuell sucke of your bloud, and whether did hee himselfe chuse the place, or did you your selfe appoint him the place? tell the truth, I charge you, as your will answeere vnto the Almighty God, and tell the reason if that you can, why he would sucke your bloud. [Marginal note: I demanded this question of her to confirme the womens search of her, concerning, that she had such a marke about her, which they upon their oaths informed the court, that truth it was, she had such a marke.]

Answer.

The place where the Diuell suckt my bloud was a little aboue my fundiment, and that place chosen by himselfe; and in that place by continuall drawing, there is a thing in the forme of a Teate, at which the diuell would sucke mee. And I asked the Diuell why hee would sucke my bloud, and hee sayd it was to nourish him.

Question .

Whether did you pull vp your coates or no when the Diuell came to sucke you? [Marginal note: This I asked of her very earnestly, and shee thus answered me, without any studying for an answer.]

Answer.

No I did not, but the Diuell would put his head vnder my coates, and I did willingly suffer him to doe what hee would.

Question.

How long would the time bee, that the Diuill would continue sucking of you, and whether did you endure any paine, the time that hee was sucking of you?

Ansiwer.

He would be suckinge of me the continuance of a quarter of an howre, and when hee suckt mee, I then felt no paine at all.

Question.

What was the meaning that the Diuell when hee came vnto you, would sometimes speake, and sometimes barke. [Marginal note: I asked this question because she sayd that the Diuell did not always speake to her]

Answer.

It is thus; when the Diuell spake to me, then hee was ready to doe for me, what I would bid him to doe: and when he came barking to mee he then had done the mischief that I did bid him to doe for me.

Quest.

By what name did you call the Diuell, and what promises did he make to you?

Answ .

I did call the Diuell by the name of *Tom*, and he promised to doe for me whatsoever I should require of him.

Quest.

What were those two ferrets that you were feeding on a fourme with white -bread and milke, when diuers children came, and saw you feeding of them? [Marginal note: I asked this of her because that some children of a good bignesse, and reasonable understanding, informed the Court, that they had diuers times seene her feed two white ferrets with white bread & milk.]

Answ .

I neuer did any such thing.

Quest.

What was the white thing that did run through the thatch of your house, was it a spirit or Diuell? [Marginal

note: I asked this question of her because her husband testified to the Bench, he saw such a white thing runne thorow the thatch of his house, and that he catcht at it, but could not get it, and hee thought it was a white ferret.]

Answ .

So farre as I know, it was nothing else but a white Ferret.

Quest.

Did any body else know, but your selfe alone, of the Diuells comming vnto you, and of your practises? speake the truth, and tell the reason, why you did not reueale it to your husband, or to some other friend?

Answ .

I did not tell any body thereof, that the Diuel came vnto me, neither I durst not; for the Diuell charged me that I should not, and said, That if I did tell it to any body, at his next comming to me, he then would teare me in pieces.

Quest.

Did the Diuell at any time find you praying when he came vnto you, and did not the Diuell forbid you to pray to Iesus Christ, but to him alone? and did not he bid you pray to him the Divell, as he taught you? [Marginal note: Vpon my generall suspition I asked of her this question.]

Answ .

Yes, he found me once praying, and he asked of me to whom I prayed, and I answered him, to Iesus Christ; and he charged me then to pray no more to Iesus Christ, but to him the Diuell, and he the Diuell taught me this prayer, *Santibicetur nomen tuum*. Amen. [Marginal note: I doe here relate the selfe-same wordes vpon this question propounded vnto her, what prayer the Diuell taught her to say.]

Quest.

Were you euer taught these Latine words before by any person else, or did you euer heare it before of any body, or can you say any more of it?

Answ .

No, I was not taught it by any body else, but by the Diuell alone; neither doe I vnderstand the meaning of these words, nor can speake any more Latine words.

Quest.

Did the Diuell aske of you the next time he came vnto you, whether that you vsed to pray vnto him, in that manner as he taught you?

Answ .

Yes, at his next comming to me hee asked of me, if that I did pray vnto him as he had taught me; and I answered him againe, that sometimes I did, and sometimes I did not, and the Diuell then thus threatned me; It

is not good for me to mocke him.

Quest.

How long is it since you saw the Diuell last?

Answ .

It is three weekes since I saw the Diuell.

Quest.

Did the Diuell neuer come vnto you since you were in prison? speake the truth, as you will answer vnto almighty God. [Marginal note: I asked this question because it was rumoured that the diuell came to her since her conuiction and shamelessly printed and openly sung in a ballad, to which many giue too much credite.

Answ .

The Diuell neuer came vnto me since I was in prison, nor I thanke God, I haue no motion of him in my minde, since I came to prison, neither doe I now feare him at all.

Quest.

How came your eye to be put out? [Marginal note: The reason why I asked this was because her father and mothers eye one of theirs was out.]

Answ .

With a sticke which one of my children had in the hand: that night my mother did dye it was done; for I was stooping by the bed side, and I by chance did hit my eye on the sharpe end of the sticke.

Quest.

Did you euer handle the Diuell when he came vnto you? [Marginal note: I asked of her this question because some might think this was a visible delusion of her sight only.]

Answ .

Yes, I did stroake him on the backe, and then he would becke vnto me, and wagge his tayle as being therewith contented.

Quest.

Would the Diuell come vnto you, all in one bignesse?

Answ .

No; when hee came vnto mee in the blacke shape, he then was biggest, and in the white the least; and when that I was praying, hee then would come vnto me in the white colour.

Quest.

Why did you at your triall for sweare all this, that you now doe confesse?

Answ .

I did it thereby hoping to auoyd shame.

Quest.

Is all this truth which you haue spoken here vnto me, and that I haue now written?

Answ .

Yes, it is all truth, as I shall make answer vnto almighty God.

Quest.

What moues you now to make this confession? did any vrge you to it, or bid you doe it, is it for any hope of life you doe it?

Answ .

No: I doe it to cleere my conscience, and now hauing done it, I am the more quiet, and the better prepared, and willing thereby to suffer death; for I haue no hope at all of my life, although I must confesse, I would liue longer if I might.

A Relation what shee said at the *place of Execution, which was at Tiborne, on Thursday, the 19. day of Aprill. 1621.*

ALL this beeing by her thus freely confessed after her conuiction in the Gaole of Newgate, on Tuesday, the 17. day of Aprill, I acquainted Master Recorder of *London* therewith; who thus directed mee, to take that her confession with me to the place of Execution, and to reade it to her, and to aske of her whether that was truth which shee had deliuered to me in the prison, on Tuesday last, concerning what she said; and how shee dyed I will relate vnto you.

Elizabeth Sawyer, you are now come vnto the place of Execution; is that all true which you confessed vnto mee on Tuesday last, when that you were in prison? I haue it here, and will now reade it vnto you, as you spake it then vnto me, out of your owne mouth: and if it be true, confesse it now to God, and to all the people that are here present.

Answer.

This confession which is now read vnto me, by Master *Henry Goodcoale* Minister, with my owne mouth I spake it to him on Tuesday last at *New-gate*, and I here doe acknowledge, to all the people that are here present, that it is all truth, disiring you all to pray vnto Almighty God to forgiue me my greuous sinnes.

Question.

By what meanes hope you now to bee saued?

Answer.

By Iesus Christ alone.

Question.

Will you now pray vnto Almighty God to forgiue vnto you all your misdeedes?

Answer.

I, with all my heart and minde.

This was confirmed, in the hearing of many hundreds at her last breath, what formerly shee in prison confessed to me, and at that time spake more heartily, then the day before of her execution, on whose body Law was iustly inflicted, but mercy in Gods power reserued, to bestow, when and where hee pleaseth.

My labour thus ended concerning her, to testifie and auouch to the world, and all opposers hereof, this to be true; those that were present with me in the prison, that heard her confession, I haue desired here their testimonies, which is as followeth.

We whose names are heere subscribed, doe thereby testifie, that *Elizabeth Sawyer* late of *Edmonton* in the Countie of *Midds*. Spinster, did in our hearings, confesse on Tuesday the 17. of *Aprill*, in the Gaole of *Newgate*, to Master *Henry Goodcoale* Minister of the word of God, the repeated foule crimes, and confirmed it at her death the 19. of *Aprill* following, to be true: and if wee be thereunto required, will bee ready to make faith of the truth thereof, namely that this was her confession being aliue, and a litle before her death;

Conclusion.

Deare Christians, lay this to heart, namely the cause, and first time, that the Diuell came vnto her, then, euen then when she was cursing, swearing, and blaspheming. The Diuell rageth, and mallice reigneth in the hearts of many. O let it not doe so, for heere you may see the fruites thereof, that it is a playne way to bring you to the Diuell; nay that it brings the Diuell to you: for it seemed that when shee so fearefully did sweare, her oathes did so coniure him, that hee must leaue then his mansion place, and come at this wretches commande and will, which was by her imprecations. Stand on your guard and watch with sobrietie to resist him, the Diuell your aduersary, who waiteth on you continually, to subuert you that so you, that doe detest her abhominable wordes, and wayes, may neuer taste of the cup nor wages of shame and destruction, of which she did in this life: from which and from whose power, Lord *Iesus* saue, and defend thy little flocke. *Amen*.