II.

THE CONFESSIONS OF THE FORFAR WITCHES (1661), FROM THE ORIGINAL DOCUMENTS IN THE SOCIETY'S LIBRARY. BY JOSEPH ANDERSON, LL.D., ASSISTANT SECRETARY AND KEEPER OF THE MUSEUM.

The previous paper by Mr Burns Begg, on the Trial of the Witches at Crook of Devon, 1662, has suggested to me the propriety of printing at the same time a series of documents, relative to the subject of Witchcraft, preserved in the Society's Library. They consist of the attested and authenticated confessions of a number of women tried for witchcraft at Forfar in 1661.

It seems to me that we shall never understand the attitude of the educated mind of the seventeenth century towards witchcraft, until we are able to examine and compare a large number of such documents from different parts of the country. They disclose many things besides the mere curiosities of the processes and confessions.

For instance, it appears that the proceedings against the accused...
persons were usually begun by the minister and elders of the locality or parish, and that up to a certain stage they were the sole movers in the matter. In most kirk-sessions there were elders, who being also magistrates of burghs or baron bailies, could procure the incarceration of persons denounced or suspected. Then the minister and elders went frequently with a notary to the place where the accused were confined and laboured to bring them to confession. For this end they seem to have plied them with questions, the notary taking down the substance of the admissions made in reply to these interrogatories. The results of repeated questionings, brought together and reduced to a sequential form in one document by a notary, were called a confession. This was read over to the accused, and signed by the notary and attested by the minister and other parties present as witnesses. Usually there was no one present on behalf of the accused person, and unquestionably torture and ill-usage were freely resorted to for the purpose of inducing confession. Very often the minister and elders were acting in this capacity by commission from the presbytery, and in this case the confessions were read over to the accused, in presence of the presbytery and authenticated by that court. Then with concurrence of the presbytery an application

1 Sometimes the dittays were drawn up, and the examinations held before the kirk-session in the session-house, or in the kirk, to which the hall parish was summoned to give in accusations (see Spalding Club Mis., vol. i.; Precepts by the Commissioners appointed for the Trial of Witches, p. 184). In 1644, the Presbytery of St Andrews “entreated their brother Mr James Bruce [minister of Kingsbarns], to remember the Earl of Lindsay, to give a general commission for apprehending, trying, and judging of such as are or shall be dilated for witches within the Stewartrie.” The ministers are also found meeting with, and advising the judges as to the accusations, and the apprehension and treatment of prisoners accused of witchcraft. Deputations are also appointed from the presbytery to be present when the confessing witches are confronted with those accused by them, and at the executions of those condemned to death.

2 The practice of authenticating the confessions of witches by the signatures of the ministers and elders in whose presence the examinations were made, can be traced back to an ordinance of the General Assembly of 1587, when “the brethren who deduced the process in St Andrews against a witch presentlie detained in prison, were ordered to subscribe the same authentically, that it might be delivered to the Council, and Mr James Melville (then minister of Anstruther) was ordained to travell in the coast side, for matter of dittay against her.” In 1649, the bailies of Inverkeithing applied to the Synod of Fife for help in examining and bringing
was made to the Privy Council for a commission to put the accused to the knowledge of an assize. All that the commission had to do was to see that the points charged in the indictment were points of witchcraft, relevant to infer a capital sentence. The attested and authenticated confession when produced in the civil court (as it usually was) had the same effect as a plea of guilty on the part of the persons arraigned at the bar. The assize was thus shut up to one verdict, and sentence of death followed as a matter of course.

The points of witchcraft considered relevant in law to infer a capital sentence appear to have varied considerably as time went on, and to have varied also in different parts of the country. The publication of the Treatise on Demonology by King James VI. in 1597, had the effect of widening the basis and simplifying the process of prosecutions for witchcraft. At the time of these trials in 1661, the principal points of witchcraft were held to be these:—(1) Attending meetings with the Devil; (2) Covenanting with the Evil One; (3) Renunciation of Baptism; (4) Malefices, or evil results happening to any person to whom the accused had threatened evil, or to one by whom an injury had

watches to confession, and the Synod recommends this to the Presbytery of Dunfermline. The Presbytery of Lanark, having travelled in obtaining information against a suspected witch, Malie M'Quat, from 14th May 1640 till 20th May 1641, and then finding that the commissary of Lanark, on the result being submitted to him, declared that she might be found guilty of charming only, which could not be followed by sentence of death, the presbytery continued to labour more earnestly, until on 5th November they consider they have sufficient materials for bringing her to trial, "quherupon the presbytery thinks themselves bound not to suffer a witch to live," and proceed to take measures for obtaining a commission to try her. In 1644 a minister excuses himself for not attending to the remit of the presbytery, on the ground that he was at the time attending the condemning and burning of witches. On 22nd November 1649, the presbytery ordained one of the ministers "to write for George Cathie the pricker for helping to discover the mark." At next meeting of the presbytery this minister reported "that he had written for George Cathie, the pricker, who hath skill to find out the mark in witches, and that upon the last day of November in the Tolbooth of Lanark, before famous witnesses " (named, including two bailies and two ministers), "the said George did prik pinnes in everio one of them, and in diverse of them without pain the pin was put in, as the processe at more length bears." In other cases the pins used by the prickers are specified as of "thrie inches in length," and it is stated that they were put in "up to the heid." In 1643 the Presbytery of Orkney applied for a commission "to put Barbara Boundie to the tortures."
been done to the accused which inferred retaliation. If any of these were either confessed or inferred from circumstances in the confession or depositions of witnesses, the persons accused had little or no chance of escape. There was no minor plea in cases of witchcraft. If the case proceeded to a conviction, death was the only sentence.

The curious sameness of the confessions of the parties accused can only be accounted for by the presence of certain ideas of the nature of witchcraft in the minds of the ministers and others who were their examiners-in-chief. They framed the questions, and they or their notaries also shaped the answers into substantive confessions. Though the questions and answers do not usually appear, they have been in some cases partially preserved by the notary; and in other instances, in which the answers only are recorded, they are worded in such a manner as to show clearly that they are not the spontaneous utterances of the persons under examination. The desire to ascertain whether the accused has been guilty of renunciation of baptism, explains the persistence of the questioning as to the names by which the Devil was supposed to have called them, the presumption being that if they were habitually called by a name not given to them in Christian baptism, they could only have received that new name from Satan after renunciation of their baptism by the Church. The fact of a person presumed to be a witch having a popular nickname was used against her, but there are many instances of confessions as to the form of the ceremony used by the Devil in covenanting with him or giving themselves over to him. It is significant that in different presbyteries the formulas of this ceremony differ considerably. This seems to have been due to the examiners shaping these questions in particular ways towards certain acts preconceived in their own minds as the acts proper to the ceremonial "renunciation of baptism," and "giving themselves over to" "or covenanting with the Devil."

The Church, through all its courts, continued to labour strenuously to stir up the civil authorities to inflict the legal punishment of death on all convicted of witchcraft,1 and for that end the presbyteries and kirk-

1 This attitude of the Church Courts is discernible from 1597, at which time "because it was reportit in the Assembly, that albeit sundrie persons were convict of witchcraft, nevirsthew the civil Magistrat, not onlie refusit to punish them con-
sessions were diligent in searching out information which would be
sufficient presumption for their incarceration, and committal for trial.¹
Pitcairn, who, in the appendix to his *Criminal Trials*, has printed several
very remarkable confessions, quotes the statement of Baron Hume, that
on the 7th November of this very year 1661, no fewer than fourteen
commissions for trial of witches were granted for different parts of the
country at one sederunt of the Privy Council. As one unhappy
creature was almost universally induced to accuse several others, and as
the evidence taken in one trial was held to be conclusive in other cases
when the panels were thus proved to be “notour witches,” it was com-
petent for the commissioners to try any number of persons and “to justify
them to the death.” Lords of regalities and baron bailies, in
virtue of their peculiar jurisdictions, were also competent judges in these
cases. The judges often exceeded their powers, and both they and the
underlings responsible for the administration of the law and the execu-
tion of the sentence, frequently acted with most inhuman and merciless
cruelty.²

The ordinary mode of execution of witches was, that they were first
strangled and then burnt. The form of the sentence runs “to be
wirreit at a stake till they be deid and their bodies brint in assis.”

¹ A commission was issued to the provost and bailies of Aberdeen in 1596, and
from the records of the Dean of Guild for the years 1596-97, it appears that no fewer
than twenty-three women and one man were burned in Aberdeen for witchcraft.

² In 1608, it is recorded that the Earl of Mar “declairit to the Counsell, that
sum wemen were tane in Broichtoun as witches; and being put to ane assize and
convict, albeit they perseverit constant in their denial to the end, yet they were
burnit quick (i.e., alive) eftir sic ane crewell manner, that sum of thame deit in
despair renunceand and blasphemeand; and utheris half-brunt brak out of the fyre,
and wes cast in quick in it agane, qhull they were brunt to the deid.” The
sentences upon the women convicted of witchcraft at Aberdeen in 1596 were in each
case “ordint to be brint qhull she be deid.” In 1597 the tenor of the sentences
was altered to “orderis tham to be led out betwixt the hills, bund to a staik and
wirreit thairat qhull they be deid, and than to be brint in assis.”
sentence on Lady Glammis in 1537, was “to be had to the Castell Hill of Edinburgh, and there brynt in ane fyre to the deid as ane traitour.”

FOLLOWETH THE CONFESSIONES OF CERTAINE PERSONES INHABITANTS WITHIN THE BURGH OF FORFAR INCARCERAT IN THE PRISON HOUSE THEREOF FOR WITCHCRAFT, SEPTEMBER 1661.

The Confession of Helen Guthrie Spouse to James Houat in Forfar.

1. First, the said Helen Guthrie confesses that she has been a verie drunkensome woman, a terrible banner and curser and of a very wicked life and conversatione.

2. Shoe confesses hir selfe to be a witch, and that shoe learned to be a witch of one Joanet Galloway who lived neare to Kerymure.

3. That when shoe gave her malisone to any persone or creature it usually lighted.

4. That if shoe sie any witch in Scotland shoe can tell whether they be witches or no after shoe has advysed 24 houres. And that shoe has thrie papers with blood upon them which helps hir thus to know witches. And that shoe receaved these 3 bloody papers 14 yeares since from the said Joanet Galloway. And that shoe will nevir part with them until shoe goe to the fire. And that then shoe sail burn them hir selfe. And that if the minister wold take them from hir before hir going to the fire that he wold wrong himselfe and the burgh and country about.

5. That shoe can tell the malefices which many other witches does though shoe hir selfe be not present with them:—as when Elspet Alexander wronged Baillie David Dickyson, and Helen Alexander wronged David Walker, and Joanet Stout wronged John Couper, and John Tailzour wronged Andrew Watsone, and Ketheren Portour wronged James Peirsone, touue clerk and George Sutty by witchcraft; that shoe knew assuredly all these things though shoe was not present at the acting of them.

6. That on the 15 of September instant about midnight, the divill cam unto hir prison, and labourd to carry hir away, and that shoe was caried up from the earth thrie or four foot heigh at leist, hir head being among the jestes of the house, and that shoe haid been caried away by the divill, were not the watchmen being stout did opose and strike at hir with their swords, and did prevent it. The treuth of this last confession was testified by thrie men which wer on the watch that night, the fourth watchman being absent in the meantime.

1 It appears from the burgh records of Forfar that the town was divided into eight districts, each of which furnished a “gaird for the witches” of six men nightly and daily.
7. Shoe declared that shoe had many other things to confess, and that shoe will confess them before shoe will go to the fire.

This confession was made before the undersubscribers within some few days after shoe was apprehended, and renewed several times since, and lastly before the ministers of the Presbytery of Forfar on the 25th of September 1661 instant.

Mr. Alex. Robertson, minister. Da. Dickson, bailie.
A. Scott, provost. James Benny, calder.

The Confession of Joanet Huit, daughter to James Huit in Forfar, maid at Forfar on the ... day of September 1661, Before Mr. Alex. Robertson, minister, Charles Dickson bailie, Thomas Guthrie lait bailie, John Gray, Thomas Robertson, notars, and William Cuthbert merchant in Forfar.

1. The said Joanet Huit confesseth as followeth, first, that about the beginning of the last oat-sied tyme Isabell Syrie did carry her to the Insch within the Loch of Forfar, and that ther the said Isabell Syrie presented her to the divill, and that the divill said What shall I do with such a little bairn as [this]. And that the said Isabell answered shoe is my maiden take her to you. Further the said Joanet confesses that she saw at this tyme about thirteen witches with the divill, and that they danced together, the divill being all in black, and that her selfe was called by the divill the Pretty Dauncer, and that beside her selfe and the said Isabell Syrie, Mary Rind, Helen Alexander, and [Isabel] Durward nicknamed Noblie alias Ouglie were present; as for the rest shoe did not know them.

2. That about four weeks after the foresaid meeting in the Insch the said Isabell Syrie carried her to another meeting to Muryknowes, a little west of Harcourtmill, and that at this meeting ther were about twenty persons present with the divill, and that they danced together and ate together having beef bread and ale, and that she did eat and drink with them herself, but her belly was not filled, and that she filled the drink to the rest of the company, and that at this meeting the divill kissed her and nipped her upon one of her shoulders, so as she had great paine for some tyme thereafter. And that the said Mary Rind and Isabell Durward and Helen Alexander were present amongst the rest.

3. Thirdly, about six weeks after this second meeting the divill came to her, he being all in grieve at a place called Lapedub half a mile east of Forfar, and that then the divill calling her his bony bird did kiss her, and straikid her shoulder which was nipped with his hand, and that presently after that she was eased of her former paine.
4. That one tyme shoe was with hir owne mother at a place called Newman-hill hard by Forfar about midnight. And that then shoe saw the divill have carnal copulation with hir mother. And that the divill having done, rode away on ane blacke horse. And that shoe followed him a little way until he directed her to return to hir mother. And that when she was returned to hir mother, hir mother forbade her to tell hir father of what shoe had seen that night.

5. Shoe confesses that at the foirsaid mieting at Muryknowes, the divill spoke to hir, saying that if shoe wold doe his biding shoe should nevir want, and that he bade hir renunce hir God, and shoe answered Mary shall I.

This confession was maid before the undersubscribers and ratified before the ministers of the Presbitry on the 25th of September instant, the said Joanet Howit being confronted with Helen Guthrie hir mother.

Th. Robertsone.  Wm. Cuthbert.
Charles Dickeson.  Th. Guthrie.

The Confession of John Tailzour, made at Forfar, the dayes of September, before Mr Alexander Robertsone minister, Charles Thornton and James Bennie younger, burgesses in Forfar.

John Tailzour confesseth as followeth (1) That about bearsied tyme last, the devill apeared to him near to Halcarton, that he haid ane broun horse and that upon his appearence the beastes in the pleugh began to feare and that the divill told him that he knew he was going to some mercates, and that he wold len him money. But he refused to medle with his money. (2) He confessed that at ane other tyme the devill appeared to him at Petterden but he refused to have anything to do with him.

Mt Alexander Robertsone.
Charles Thornton.
James Benny.
A. Heitch.

The Confessione of Isobell Shyrie, made at Forfar on the fyftein day of September 1661, being the Sabbath day between sermons Before David Dickieson baillie whom shoe sent for, Alex. Scott lait baillie, John Dickieson merchant, John Gray, Chairles Thorntoun and William Cuthbert, burgesses of Forfar.

(1) Shoe confeses that she is a witch, and tooke on hir the guilt of witchcraft. (2) That amongst severall other meetings shoe did meet with the devill at the green hill near the Loch of Forfar, within these 20 dayes or ane moneth last past, wheher ther were present John Tailzour, Helen Guthrie, Mary Rind,
Elspet Alexander, Jeanet Stout and Joanet Howatt. And that the divill haid ther carnall copulations with hir. (3) That she wronged Baillie Wood by braying to pouder two toad's heads and ane peecce of ane dead man's skull and ane peecce dead man's flesh which the divill perfumed. And having condescended with the divill therewith to be Baillie Wood's death, the divill declared that within a moneth or 20 dayes as shee pleased he sould die. And that shee went thereafter to Baillie Wood's house, and inquired for a pan which was before that time pointed fra hir for cess. The baillie called on hir and gave hir a drinke, and before shoe delvered the cup to him againe shoe put the pouder in it, and he died within the time prescribed. (4) That she hade wronged Thomas Webster in his meanes by casting ane cantrop before his doore, but could not have power of his person.

Jo. GRAY.  D. DICKSON, baillie.
JAMES BENNY, calder.  CHARLES THORNTOUN.
WM. CUTHBERT.  A. HEICH.
A. SCOTT, provest.

The Confessions of Elspet Alexander, spouse to Jon Muffit in Forfar, maid at Forfar on the 17th of September 1661, Befor the minister, Charles and David Dickson baillies, Thomas Guthrie lait baillie, Charles Thorntoun and James Beny burgesses, Thomas and John Robertson notars in Forfar, and William Cuthbert merchant there.

Elspet Alexander confesseth as followeth, First, that about thrie halfe yeares since shoe was at a mieting of witches with the divill at Peterden midway betwixt Forfar and Dondie, and that ther amongst others ther wer present beside hir selfe Isabell Shyrie Helen Guthrie Joanet Howit John Tailzour and Joanet Stout. And that at the said mieting they daunced together and that they received new names from the divill, viz., shoe hir selfe was called Alyson, Isabell Shyrie was called The Horse, Helen Guthrie was called The White Witch, Joanet Howit was called The Pretty Dauncer, John Tailzour was called Beelzebob; further shoe confesses that the divill marked hir selfe that night on the left shoulder. Shoe confesses that about four weeke after this mieting at Peterden she was at ane second mieting at the Muryknowes, and at this

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1 There is an unamended copy of this confession taken “between sermons,” and signed by Mr Alexander Robertson, minister, along with the other signatures. It has the words before the third item of the confession: —“And being inquired if shee hade done any malefice to any, shee answered that shee wronged Baillie Wood &c.” as above; and before the fourth item: —“And having inquired if shee hade done any other maleficees shee confessed that shee had wronged Thomas Webster,” as above.
second meting the divill and the witches did drinke together, having flesh bread and aile, and that the persones in the first meting were lykeways present at the second meting. Further shoe confesses that the divill straiked her shoulder with his fingers and that after that she had ease in the place formerly niped by the divell.

Shoe confesses that shoe was present at ane third meting with the forenamed persones near Kerymure and that the divill and the said witches daunced togidder, and that the divill kissed hir selfe that night and that it was ane cold kisse. Shoe confesses that Mary Rynd was at one of thir meetings, and that shoe was called The Divill's Daught[her]. Shoe confesses hir selfe guilty of witchcraft and that shoe is willing to suffer deith for it.

This confession was maid befor the subscribers, and ratified befor the ministers of the Presbitry of Forfar on the 25th of September instant.

Mr Alex. Robertsone.  J. Guthrie.
D. Dickson, Baillie.  J. James Benny.
Charles Dickson.  J. Robertson, wreitter in Forfar.
Charles ThoMontoun.  WM. Cuthbert.
Th. Robertsone, writer in Forfar.

The Confessione of Jonet Stout.

Joanet Stout confesseth as followeth, First That about thrie halfe yeares since shoe was at a meting with the divill and other witches at Petterden in the midway betwixt Forfar and Dondie. And that beside hir selfe ther wer present at this meting Elspet Alexander Isabell Shyrrie Helen Guthrie Joanet Howit and John Tailzour. And that at the said meting the divill and the said witches daunced togither and that the divill kissed sundrie of them bot did not kisse hir selfe because shoe stealled behind the backes of the rest. And that they received new names viz. Elspet Alexander was called Alesone, Isabell Shyrrie The Horse, Helen Guthrie The White Witch, Joanet Howit The Pretty Dauncer, John Tailzour Beelzebob, and for hir own name shoe hade forgot it.

(2) That shoe was at ane other meting with the divill and the said witches at the Mury Knowes about four or six weekes after the first meting at Petterden and that at this second meeting the divill and the said witches did eat and drinke, having flesch bread and aile upon ane table as shoe thought, and that the said Joanet Huit was capper and filled the drinke.

(3) That shoe was at a third meting with the divill and the said witches, and that they daunced at the said meting which was near to Kerynure.

(4) Shoe confesses that the divill appeared to hir two severall tymes at the well of Drumgley and told hir that shoe sould not want.
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(5) Shoe confesses hir selfe guilty of witchcraft and that shoe is willing to suffer deith for it.

This confession was maid on the 17th September before the under-subscribers and ratified before the ministers of the Presbitry of Forfar on the 25th day of the said moneth of September instant.

Mr ALEX. ROBERTSONE.  JAMES BENNY.
DA. DICKSON, Baillie.  J. ROBERTSONE, writer in Forfar.
CHARLES DICKSON.  WM. CUTHBERT.
CHARLES THORNTOUNE.  A. HEICH.
TH. ROBERTSONE, writer in Forfar.

[Another copy of this confession has the following under the signatures: — ]

The said Jonet confess befors John Hepburne James Esplen and George Renney that she had carnale copulation with the divill at Petterden.

The Confession of Ketheren Portour, maid at Forfar on the day of September 1661 Befor the subscribers and ratified at severall tymes befors several other persones.

Ketheren Portour confesseth as followeth First That about . . . . hir selfe and two other women who are now both dead did meet at the quarrie near the buter wall and that the divill met them there and haid some discourse with the other two women, bot for hir selfe shoe was feared and did haist away.

(2) Shoe confesses that at ane other tyme the said women being present with hir selfe the divill came to them at the bleachin grien hard by the toune of Forfar and haid discourse with the said two women who are now dead. Bot for hir selfe shoe reproved them and told them if they wold not com away that shoe being blind wold goe be hir selfe allon as shoe could.

(3) That after that, the forsaid two women tooke hir furth to Ferytounfields near to Forfar to get ane sour coug and quhill they wer togither in the said Ferytounfields the divill came to them and that although shoe was a blind woman for many yeares before, yit at that time shoe hade some sight so far as that shoe saw the divill and that he hade ane blacke plaid about him and that the divill tooke hir by the hand and that his hand was cold and that ther-upon shoe haistened away.

(4) That shoe hes been a great banner and a terrible curser, and a very wicked woman.

Mr ALEX. ROBERTSONE.  WM. CUTHBERT, merchant.
T. GUTHRIE, Bailie.  A. HEICH.
J. ROBERTSONE, writer in Forfar.
The Confession of Agnes Sparke, maid at Forfar the 26th September 1661, before Mr Alexander Robertson minister, Charles Dickyson baillie, James Webster, Thomas Robertson and Thomas Scot, notars in Forfar.

The said Agnes Sparke confesseth as followeth, first, that in August last Isobel Shirie cam to hir about midnight, and carried her away to Littlemiln or thereabout, and that ther shoe did sie about ane dusson of people dauncing, and that they had suet musicke amongst them and as shoe thought it was the musicke of ane pype, and that shoe hard that people ther present did speake of Isabell Shirie and say that shoe was the divills horse, and that the divill did always ryde upon hir, and that she was shoad like ane mare or ane horse, and that night the said Isabel Shirrie went aside fra hir for some tymne, and that the divill (as shoe supposed), had then carnal copulation with hir. And that shoe did see Joanet Howit ther, and that shoe was called the pretty dauncer. And that Isabel Shirrie carried hir back again to hir owne house. That the nixt day after, shoe went to see the said Isabell, and that shoe fund hir lying on hir bed, and that shoe did ly all that day. And that hir hands were very sore and that she plucked the skin off them and maid great moan and said that it was no wonder that shoe haid so sore hands seeing shoe was so sore tossed up and doune, and the said Agnes answered hir If you haid not been at such worke yesterevin as you was at, you wold not have been lying in your bed this day. And that Isobell said Have ye nothing to doe with that and speake nothing of it to anie bodie. That the said Isobell used many entysing words to draw hir on to the devill's service, and said it would be ane great joy to hir to be in such service. But she refused to hearken to hir.

Mr Alex. Robertson. TH. Robertson writer in Forfar.
CHARLES DICKSON. A. HEICH.

Ane further Confession made be Helen Guthrie, prisoner in the Tolbooth of Forfar for witchcraft on the 28 of October 1661, before Mr Alexander Robertson minister, Alexander Scot provost, Thomas Guthrie and David Dickesone baillies, Charles Dickesone lait baillie, Charles Thorntoun, James Benny elder, and James Benny younger, John Auld, William Cuthbert and Alexander Benny, burgesses of the said burgh of Forfar.

First, the said Helen confesses that about the tymne that St Johnstounes bridge wes carried away shoe murdered hir mother's dochter callit Marget Hutchen,¹ being hir halfe-sister about sex or seven yeares of age, and that for

¹ The following is added on the margin :—“Killed her sister named Marget Hutchen, who was mother children with hir, by a stroak she gave hir, to the effusion of hir blood, and of the which she died within few dayes.”
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the said murther hir mother did give always hir malison to hir, yea and upon hir death the bed continued to give her malison notwithstanding the said Helen's earnest request and beseechings in the contrair, and that she strak hir said sister at that tyme till she bled, whilk stroak was afterwards hir death.

(2) That about thrie years before the last ait seed tyme, she was at a meeting in the church yeard of Forfar in the holfe thereof and that ther wer present ther the divell himself in the shape of a black iron hewed man, and these persons following Katheren Porter, Mary Rynd, Isobell Shyrrie, Elspet Alexander, Jonet Stout, Cristen Whyte, Andrew Watsone, John Tailzeor, George Ellies, and that they daunced together, and that the ground under them was all fireslaughts, and that the said Andrew Watsone had his usuale staff in his hand altho' he be a blind man yet he daunced alse nimblie as any of the company and made alse great mirriement by singing his old ballads, and that the said Isabell Shyrrie did sing her song called tinkletum tankletum, and that the divil kist every ane of the women and for herself the divell kist onlie her hand.

(3) That about ane yeare efter the forementioned meeting betwixt the aitsaid and the beir-seid she was at ane other meeting at the pavilione-holl and that ther wer present the divell himselfe in shape as befor, and the persones of the first meeting, viz. Mary Rynd, Isobell Shyrrie, Elspet Alexander, Jonet Stout, Christen Whyte, Catheren Porter, Andrew Watsone, John Tailzeor, George Ellies and besides these there were also Helen Alexander living in Forfar, Catheren Wallace in the parochin of Forfar, Isobel Smith in the paroch of Oathlaw, and that they daunsed a whyle togidder till they were skaired by some people coming by and that thereupon they were fryghted and [fled] suddenly.

(4) That this same year, betwixt the oatsei and beacri said shee was at ane other meeting in the church yeard of Forfar in the holfe thereof about the same tyme of the nyght [as they used to hold] meetings, viz., at midnyght and that there were present the divell himselfe [and all the] persones mentioned in the first meeting together with Helen Alexander and that they daunced togither a whyle and then went to Mary Rynds house and sat doune at the table the divell being present at the head of it and that some of them went to John Bennyes house he being a brewer and brought ale from thence and that they [went] threw in at a little holl lyk bies and took the substance of the ale, and others of them to Alexander Hieches and brought aqua vitae from thence and thus made themselves mirrie, and that the divell made much of them all but especially of Mary Rynd and that he kist them all except the said Helen herself whose hand onlie he kist, and that at the said meeting they agreed togidder to undoe the aforesaid John Benny in his means, and that she and Jonet Stout sat opposite ane to another at the table.
(5) That at the first of these meetings Andrew Watson, Mary Rynd, Elspet Alexander, Isobell Shyrrie and herself, went up to the church wall about the south east door, and the said Andrew Watson reased a young bairne unbaptized, and took several pieces thereof, as the feet, the hands a pairt of the head and a pairt of the buttock, and that they made a py thereof that they might eat of it, that by this means they might never make a confession (as they thought) of their witchcraft. And that she knows that Elspet Bruice and Marie Rynd and several other witches went to see the King's coronation.

(6) That the beginning of the last oatstied tyme, Elspet Bruice in Cortaquhie, now prisoner upon the suspitioine of witchcraft, hade a webb of cloth stollen from her and that thereby by turning the sive and the sheires she reased the divell who being worry hard to be laid againe ther was a meeting of witches for laying of him and that amongst others shee herselfe and Janet Stout and the said Elspet Bruice were present; for the rest shee knew them not. And that at this meeting they hade pipe musick and dauncing as they used to have at all other meettings. And that at last they went to the bridge of Cortaquhie with intentione to pull it doune and that for this end shee herselfe, Janet Stout and others of them did thrust their shoulders against the bridge, and that the divell was bussie among them acting his pairt, and that ther wes ane extraordinary great wind rasied so that the boards of the bridge flew to and fro at a great distance and that at this meeting the divill kist them all except herself and that he kist her hand onlie.

(7) That about a week before St James's day last herselie Isobell Shyrrie and Elspet Alexander did meet togethier at an aile-house near to Barrie a little before sunset and that after they hade stayed in the said house about the space of ane houre drinking of thrie pints of ale togidder they went foorth to the sands, and that ther thrie other women met them and that the divell was ther present with them all in the shape of ane great horse, and that they concludit the sinking of ane shipp lying not far off from Barrie, and that presentlie the said company appoynted herselie to tak hold of the cable tow and to hold it fast until they did retourne and she her selfe did presentlie take hold of the cable tow and that the rest with the divill went into the sea upon the said cable as she thought and that about the space of an houre thereafter they returned all in the same likeness as of before except that the divell was in the shape of a man upoune his retourne, and that the rest wer sore traiked and that the divill did kiss them all except herselie and that he kist her hand onlie, and that then they concludit another meeting to be at the nixt Hallowmes and that they parted so late that night that she could get no lodging and was forced to lie at ane dykesyde all nyght.

(8) That the last summer except one she did see Johne Tailzeor sometymes in the shape of a todde and sometimes in the shape of a swyn and that the
said John Tailzeor in these shapes went up and downe among William Millne, miller at Hetherstake, his cornes for the destructione of the same, because the said Williame hade taken the mylne over his head, and that the devell cam to hir and pointed out John Tailzeor in the foresaid shapes unto her and told her that that wes John Tailzeor.

That she the said Helen Guthrie knewes assuredlie that Elspet Pigots cleath which wes in wanting laitlie, wes taken away by a gentleman's servand who lodgit in the house at ane certane tyme and that she wes assured of this by a spirit which she has besyde other folkes ye besyde all the witches in Angus.

Charles he the grace of God King of Great Britane France and Ireland defender of the faith to all and sundry our leidges and subjects whom it efferis to whose knowledge thir our letters shall come greiting Forsameikle as Issobel Syrrie indweller in Forfar hes confest the abominable croume of witchcraft in entering into paction with the divell renuncing hir baptism and otherways as hir depositions in presence of divers famous witnesses beares therefore wee with advyce and consent of the Lords of our Privy Council have granted and given and by these presents gives and grantes our full power authority express bidding and charge to our lvitts Patrick Cairncrosse of Balmishammer Mr Thomas Huntar of Restennett David Huntar of Burnseide Gideon Guthrie of Halkertoune Alex. Guthry of Carsbank Alex. Scott provest of Forfar Thomas Guthrie and David Dickson baylies there or any fyve of them to meitt at such tymes and places as they shall think most convenient and there to affix and hold courts call suits amercaiat absents uplift unlawes and amerciaments and creat clerks sergands demsters and all other members of court neidful. And in their said courts to call the said Issobell Syrrie and to put her to her tryall and to the knowledge of ane assyse and if she shall be found guilty upon volunteer confession without any sort of torture or any other indirect means used against her to bring her to ane confession or that
malefices be otherways legally instructed and proven that then and in that
case and no otherways they cause justice be administrat and execute upon her
conform to the lawes of this kingdome And to doe all other things necessary
to the execution of this [commission according to] the lawes of the kingdome.
With power also to the said [Commissioners] or any fyve of them to secure
such others as are or shall be delate guilty and to examine them and to use all
fair meanes without any sort of torture for their tryall and bringing them to
the confession of their sinnes. Given under our Signett at Edinburgh the
sevent day of November and of our reigne the threttenth yeare 1661.

GLENCAIRN Cancellarius.  JO. GILMOUR.
ROTHES.  JO. FLETCHER.
LINLITHGOW.  J. LOCKHART.
HOME.  ROBT. MURRAY.

The Confession off Isdbell Smith witch, drawn from hir mouth and written
by the minister, frequently repeated befor the under subscribers and
witness with tears and cryes for mercie and the help of their prayers
[2nd Jan. 1662].

First shee confessed adultery twentie years agoe with ane man who is now
dead, desyring to pray for hir poor soule.
Secondly shee confessed covenant and pactione with the divell . . . . years
agoe when shee dwelt in Hillsyd, the conditiones was that shee sould renunce
god and hir Baptisme and serve and obey him if he would wrong [the persons]
that wronged hir, or she pleased to wrong for . . . . . And he promised hir
three halfpennies a year wages which shee affirmed to be little gaine in respect
of hir great [loss] of hir soule.
Thirdly shee confessed many meitings with the divell and hir compacts.
Ane on the head off the hill off Fineheaven while she was alone gathering
heather hee appeared to hir alone lik ane braw gentleman when she was
desyring either god or the divell to revenge hir on James Gray, Bowman to
my Lord Spynie, and that tyme they made their covenant and he kissed her
and lay with her as shee thought and his mouth and breath wer very cold and
his body lyk clay. The second meiting was in the playfield of Forfar wher
Hellen Guthrie Mary Rynd Isobell Shyrrie Elspet Bruce, Helen Cothills and
the divell danced. The third meiting was at Cadgers Denne coming out
of Breichan when the divell appeared to her alone lik ane light gentleman
and convoyed hir a piece dating hir and lay with hir and went away. The
fourth meiting was at Corteqhuhy Bridge. Hellen Cothills cam about hir and
guyded hir through the bog of Coule and when she cam ther she met with the
divell, Hellen Guthrie Elspet Bruce, Isobell Sherry pepperpocks or Isobell
CONFESSIONS OF THE FORFAR WITCHES.

Smith and ane old body off . . . . called Finlason who could help us nothing quoth shee. Wee all rewed that meitting for we hurt ourselves lifting. The occasion of the meitting was Elspet Bruce wanted ane piece cloath which was drying on the Bridge-revills and therefore the devill and shee concluded ther could pass nobody mor that bridge. When wee had done quoth shee Elspet Bruce gave the devill ane goose in hir own house. And hee dated hir maist of them all because shee was ane prettie woman. And by these meitings they met with him every quarter at Candlemas Roodday Lambsmas and Hallow [mas] in any place wher hir appointed. Shee confessed ther was ane wholl Army of them at these meitings tho' shee knew but few of them; and that Hellen Guthrie and Hellen Cothills went on the head of the army. Shee said that Be[ssie] Croket in Tannides was one of the army.

Fourthly shee confessed that because James Gray would not lett hir cow eat on hir own rigge syd, shee was his death by blowing ill . . . . in his face, wishing hee might niver keep that barne so long as hir husband did, upon which hee died sudainly.

Fifthly shee confessed that shee was the death of John Dargy by laying on hir hand on the small off his back, wishing that hee might never be able to doe so much to any other as hee had done to hir (for hee had strucken hir and drawin hir in ane strip), upon which itt followed that hee dwined long, sweating daily till hee died.

Sixthly shee confessed shee took away Androw Nicolls cowes milk out off greed thinking hee might spare it and shee would 'be the better of it, and yit tho' the cow gave no mor milk shee got none of it but what his wyff gave her that morning. Shee confessed she did the lyk to John Dyk because his wyf would not give hir milk and that the calf followed hir. She lykwyss confessed Isobell Webster brak hir hens legg and therefore shee prayed Let thee never get mor good off thy cows milk nor I get off my hen's eggs; and the cow gave no mor milk; she confessed she would have wronged [Isobell Webster] hir selfe if shee could.

Seaventhly besides hir own confession shee was delated to be ane witch by Hellen Guthrie and Hellen Cothills, and Hellen Guthrie gave in many presumptions on hir as death off John Fyff and Margaret Fyff and tormenting off Jannet Mitchell by keeping hir pictur the casting ill betwixt Alex. Kid and his wyf, and the death of ane horse that eated hir corn, the wrong off Androw Peacok by casting som thing at him, disabling him in his hench, because he feed hir son, and took him not home, and that hir mother caist ill one Robert Dog, and shee took it off and cuist it one his foal which died suddenly and he recovered of his girneing and foaming at the mouth. These presumptiones tho' shee has not confessed them are many of them probably true because they followed immediately upon som acts of hirs.

Thursday, 2nd Jan. 1662.—The above-written confession was ratified,
approven, and acknowledged be the said Isobell Smith before the judges nominat in the Commission.

Mr A. Stratone, minister.
Robert Lindsay.
Alexander Hog.
James Burne.
David Fitchit.

Th. Robertson, clerk.
[5 more illegible].

Ane additione to hir Confession.

Imprimis shoe confesses that at the meitting att Cortequhby ther was ther besydes . . . . Margeret Nicol Elspet . . . . Hebrone, whom Helen Guthry and Helen . . . . guily lykewyse.

2nd She declares these three to have been at the playfield of Forfar dancing.

Thirdly that witches many times wronges themselves . . . . snares for other men and ther goods which will . . . . that which comes nearest it be it ther own or . . . .

Hellen Guthry confessed to me that ther was ane wyff in the town of Oathlaw who wronged Robert . . . . ane old man to hir husband and dwelt at K . . . . shee thought that I might know whom shee meant.

Wee have severall presumptiones against som other persones and desyres they may be tryed.

Mr A. Stratone, minister.

2nd Jan. Before the Judges in the Session-house.

The said Isobell did confess that Bessie Croket was with them at [a meitten] and that Mary Rynd was with them in the playfield [of Forfar], and that they had four meetings at Candlemas Ruidday, Lambeemas and Hallowmas, and that Elspet Bruce was in the playfield.

Thursday 2nd January 1662.

Conveined James Keith of Caldhame Sheriff-Depute of Forfar Patrick Cairncross of Balmishenner, David Hunter of Burnesyde Mr Thomas Hunter of Restennet, Alexander Guthrie of Carsbank as Judges nominat be ane commissione granted be His Hieghness with consent of the Lords of his Majestie privie Counsell.

Concludet be the mouth of the said James Keith preces nominat be them that if any of the judges shall faile in keiping of the dyets appointed to be hereafter the partie faithier to pay a certane soume to be nominat be those present with consent of the preces.
Helen Cothill after reading of hir confession to hir did acknowledge the samen and declared all wes trew that wes [exprest] therein.
Isobell Smith in Oathlaw compeared and ratified approved and acknowledged hir confessione as the samen is written and subscrivit.
Helen Guthrie acknowledgit bir confessione and that she wold know any witch when she sies them in the face and that Elspet Bruce raised the great wind at the meeting at the brig of Cortaquhie.
Helen Cothill and Elspet Bruce being confronted togidder the said Helen affirmed that the said Elspet was at the meetings exprest and given up in hir confessione.
Isobell Smith being also confronted with the said Elspet veryfied hir delationes made and given up in hir confessione against the said Elspet Bruce.
Helen Guthrie being confronted with the said Elspet verified in her face that she was the death of Lady Isobell Ogilvy dochter to the Erle of Airlie and that she was a witche, and that she was the death of John Finnie and that ther was a fyre at the gavill of the said Elspets hons that nycht Lady Isobell Ogilvy was buried, and that John Finnies wyfe Helen Robertsone, cam at nIch to the said Elspet, and saw the fyre and her children dancing about it and that Isabell Bruce servand to the said Elspet knowes something of the fyre. The said Elspet being asked if this were proven against her wold she tak with the guilt of witchcraft on her? She replyed she wold doe so.
She also granted that if so be that it wer proven against her that she had committed adulterie she would acknowledge herself a witche, and also that if the things wer found in hir house as wes aledged and to be proven she wold tak the guilt of witchcraft on her. The said Elspet being inquired if she wald tak the guilt of witchcraft on hir if it wer proven against hir that there was ane rossin goose in her house that day the wind was risen and the buirds of the brig of Cortaquhie did flie from it, she replied if it wer so proven she wold tak with the guilt and sin of witchcraft.

Friday, 3d January 1662.

Conveined James Keith of Caldham Sheriff-Deput of Forfar Patrick Cairncross of Balmishenner Mr Thomas Hunter of Restennet David Hunter of Burnesdyde Alexander Guthrie of Carsbank Alexander Scott provest, Thomas Guthrie and David Dickisone baillies, as Judges nominat be our Soverayne lord's commissione for putting to tryell of Helen Cothill, Isobell Smith and Elspet Alexander and other persones contained in the commissione, and having called before them the said Helen Cothill Isobell Smith Elspet Alexander, after reiding of their confessiones severallie befor the persons of Inquest following the said three persons arraigned did object nothing aganes the assysers, the Judges did put the said three persones to the tryell of the said assyae.

Quhilk day the heall assyse be the mouth of the said James Burne chancellor to them did find the said Helen Cothill Isobell Smith and Elspet Alexander and either of them guiltie of the said abominable crime of witchcraft and malefices done be them, conform to their several confessiones and therefore aught and sould suffer death as witches. And remits the way manner and tyme of their deathes to the judges above-named.

James Burne.

The judges ordanes the said Isobell Smith Helen Cothill and Elspet Alexander and aither of them to be first strangled and thereafter burnt to ashes the morrow Saturday betwixt 12 aclok in the morning and one aclok in the efternone. Whereupon Donald Mackeynge gave doom.

Confession of Marjorie Ritchie in presence of the Commissioners James Keith Sheriff Deput of Angus. . . . Lyon of . . . John Fotheringham of Dinoon. . . . Ogilvy of Quich, Alexander Bonar of Kincairdrum. . . . Guthrie of Halkertoone, Thomas Broune of . . . . and the Provest and Bailies of Forfar or any five of them . . . . to call the said Marjorie Ritchie and to put her to a legal and judicial tryall and to make ane report to your Lordships of what confessions should be made be her judicaillie and that at the time of her confession she was of sound judgement noways distracted tortured or under any . . . . to die and what malefices should be legally instructed and proven against her, to the effect your lordships may give further ordour for proceeding against her conforme to the lawes of this realme.

Whilk commission being on this thretten day of Junii 1662 years presented and with reverence receaved be us within the tolbooth of the burgh of Forfar after reading thereof we did cause call the said Marjorie Ritchie who willingly and freely declared and confess the particular confession after exprest viz.: She confessed that the devill appeared to her thrie severall times in the similitude of a womane, the first time in one Jonet Barries house, the second time while she was pulling up lint in the compynie of the said Janet, and that the devil did take her by the hand at that time and promised that she should never want moneys, and thereafter that the devil appeared to her in the moss of the Newtoune of Airly, where and when she did renounce
her baptism. She also confess at being at ane marcat in Aleth, wher she offering to buy ane cow frae ane certaine man he refusing to sell her upone the pryce she offered him she caused the cow to follow her home. As also confessed that she having ane great grudge at her neighbour John Storrok in the kirktoone of Inneraritie she resolved to be avenged upoun him or his wyfe she in ane morning did lay doune a little meall with a threid befor the said Johne his door wheroutof his wyfe having come first and passing over the meall and threid immediately thereafter she had ane alteratione in all the members and parts of hir bodie and for the space of ane yeare thereafter she was not able to turne hirself upon hir bed. Shee also confess that she was the death of one William Keith by casting ane clod at him in the greene of the loane of Inneraritie, and that she did cast evil upon Robert Douglas whereby he was and is distracted, and that she witched ane cow by casting a clod at her who afterwards died. And that she having indignatione at her son-in-law Alexander Meassone, she did lay doune ane little quantitie of oats before his doore thereby thinking to bring him to povertie, and that she was the death of ane horse belonging to Robert Lonnane in Arlie she having malice against the said Robert. After which confession we under writtars having inquired the said Marjorie giff she had been any wayes tortured she answered she was not, and that what she had confessed was friely willingly and of tenth, and that she had no furder to confess. And this for report of your Lordships commission and discharge of our dutie we mak manifest and notour to your Lordships be ther presentis, written be Thomas Robertsone clerk depute of the burgh of Forfar and clerk to our court. Subscribed be us and him att Forfar the said threeten day of June 1662 years.

Followeth the declarationes of the witches afternamed made and givin in against Elspet Bruice in the paroch of Cortachie, prisoner in the warehouse of Forfar on suspitione of witchcraft, before James Keith of Caldhame, Sheriff-Deput of Forfar, Patrick Cairncross of Balmysenner, David Hunter of Burnesyd, Mr Thomas Hunter of Restenpent, Alexander Guthrie of Carsbank, Alexander Scott provest, Thomas Guthrie and David Dickson baillies of the burgh of Forfar, Judges nominat by the Lords of His Majesties Privy Counsell for putting of the said witches to tryall on the second day of January 1662 years.

Whilk day Helen Guthrie witch in Forfar being confronted with the said Elspet Bruice before the Judges above-named, did declare that the said Elspet Bruice was as reale a witch as the said Helen is, and that she was at severall
meetings with the divill and uther witches, and speciallie at ane meeting at
the bridge of Cortachie wher the divill and they reased ane greit wind of
intentione to pull doune the bridge, and that the said Elspet Bruice was the
death of Lady Isobell Ogilvy daughter to the Earle of Airlie, and the night
the said Ladie was buried there was ane greit fyre seen at the geavill wall of
the said Elspets house whereat the said Elspet and hir children were seen
dancing. The said Elspet being inquyred if ther was such a fyre that night
and shee and her children about it shoe replyed ther was not, and declared
that if it could be proven that ther was any such fyre she tuck the guilt of
witchcraft upone hir. And it being allaiged that she had committed adulterie,
she denied and declared that if it could be proven against her shoe would also
take with the guilt of witchcraft, and which adulterie the said Elspet thereafter
did confess. It being also allaiged be the said Helen Guthrie against the said
Elspet that that night or the night before ane greit wind was reased at the
bridge of Cortachie, the said Elspet had ane rossin goose in her house for the
divill and some of her night[bouras]. The said Elspet denying that, shoe
declared that if it could be provin against her that she hed ane rossin goose in
her house or that she was in the toune of Kerymure that day the great wind
was reased at the bridge of Cortachy shoe would lykways tak upone her the
guilt of witchcraft.

The said Helen Guthrie also declared and affirmed that the said Elspet
Bruice was a witch and that shoe hed kepit severall metings with the devill
[herselfe] and the said Helen Guthrie ; one meting at the bog of Coule, and
ane uther at the bridge of Cortachie, wher they did turn the sive and [tried to
discover a] wob of gray cloath that the said Elspet had wanted, ane other
meting at the brunt hutch, and ane other meting at the said Elspet Bruice's
house wher the said Elspet did give the divill a goose to tell [her who had]
stolen the gray wob.

The deceist Isobell Smith witch in the paroch of Oathlaw being confronted
with the said Elspet Bruice, declared and affirmed the said Elspet to be a
witch [and that] she had kepit severall metings with the divill and herself
Helen Guthrie, Helen Cothill and severall other witches, one meting on the
play-field of Forfar [ane other] meting at the bog of Coule, ane other meting
at the bridge of Cortachie, and ane other at the said Elspets own house where
she gave the divill the goose.

Extractit furth of the . . . . of the judges above-named
at their . . . . be me.

TH. ROBERTSONE, clerk-depute of the
Burgh of Forfar and Clerk to the said Judges.

First of August 1662, delveryit this extract of the above-written declarations
to William Bowmane to delvery it to my Lord Airlie.