

Original Documents.

WITCHCRAFT IN THE SOMERS ISLANDS.

By Major-General J. H. LEFROY, C.B., F.R.S., Governor of the Bermudas.

(Continued from p. 101.)

“ Here followeth several attestations taken about the trial of Alice Moore, supposed to be a witch.

“ The attestation of Edward Holmes taken by the Grand Inquest the 17th day of Maye, 1653, who saith that he having a beast loose in Mr. Wittenhall his land, north side, about the month of December last, which he could not take of himself, he got his brother William Homes to go with him to help him to catch him, and as they were going along between 8 and 9 of the clocke in the morning, by Thomas Moore’s house on the west side of yt, he saith that he heard a voyce cry, ‘ Wilt thou never have done sucking? I think you will bring me off my leggs, for I must go work now.’ They say that they thought goodman Moore had bin in the hous talking with his wife, because they heard a voyce, but going along they saw him on the topp of a hill close by his owne wood, and further sayth not.

“ Further, William Holmes his brother affirmeth that this is the truth, for he was with him and also herd the voyce, and to his belief ond hearing, as near as he was able to judg, yt was goodwife Moore’s voyce, and further sayth not.

“ The attestation of Thomas Gaplin, who saith that about four or five months agoe old Thomas Moore of Warwicke Tribe askt of him leave to tye a hogg or sowe in his grounds to root up some fearnе, and she being afterwards with pigg, he asked this deponent to let him have one of the young ; he answered he could not promise him, he knew not that he should have any himself. And after the sowe had pigged this deponent sayth that he disposed of them, being that goodman Moore did not come to him, and after this goodwife Moore asked this deponent for a pigg, and he told her they were all gone, he had sould them all but two, and goodwife Moore answered, ‘ It is no matter, for they will all die,’ and soe they did ; and further saith not.

“ The attestation of John Burt who saith that two or three yeares since, he having a great sowe, eyther goodman Moore or his wife, he remembereth not which of them, came to his house to buy the sowe, and he sett them a price, but they would not consent, and a matter of six weekes after the sowe pigged, and then the sowe and all her piggs died, and further saith not.

“ The information of Dorothy Gaplin, wife of Thomas Gaplin of War-

wicke tribe, taken by Mr. John Waynewright and Mr. John Wentworth, councillors, this 14th day of Maye, 1653—

“Who, sworn, saith that about the month of July, 1652, this deponent spake unto Jacob Bradshave, a dweller in her house, to desire Anne Holmes presently to come up to her house. She demanded the occasion wherefore she sent for her. This deponent said she did desire her skill about making sope. The same Anne replied she had not any knowledge in the making of yt. The said Anne layd a short time at this deponent’s house and then took her leave and went awaye. She had not bin long gone ere goodman Conyers came into this declarant’s house, who did demand of her where her husband was. This declarant replied and said he was gone to Peter Fables house for potatoe slippes, and would not stay long. She hearing a shoat or small hog to crie, wisht her daughter to goe downe and see what the matter was with the shoat, her answer was that it would not stand. This declarant demanding agayne whether it were not tangled she said noe. She wisht her daughter againe to goe looke, who returned agayne, and said the pigg was dead, then this deponent went down with goodman Conyers to see the pig, and doubteing whether the collar might choake him, made trial with her hand, and found the collar so wide it might have slipt off, and yet the pig was dead at the end of the rope. Soe taking up the pigg this declarant called for a knife emediately, and before the pigg was sticked Mother Moore came there bare footed and bare legged. Then this declarant said that if yt had bin her owne pig yt would not have troubled her soe much, and said it was Jacob’s. Then goody Moore said, ‘I thought yt had bin yours.’ And this deponent saith further, that that night their owne pigge which was fellow to the other that was dead, died alsoe, being found dead like the other at the ende of the rope. About two dayes after, this deponent went down to Jacobs to Turtle bay, and Ann Holmes junior demanded of her why she would not give her some shoat? This declarant asked the said Anne how she knew that she had any. Here reply was that her grandmother Moore told her soe as she was going home on Wednesday last from this declarant’s house. Then this deponent replied and said, ‘Truly I think then that she is a witch! for she came up to our house when we were about the pigg.’”

“Anne Holmes being sworne saith that goodwife Gaplin sent for this deponent, and when she came to her, she told her that she sent for her to see if she had any judgement in the making of sope. This deponent replied and said she had no skill, for she did not meddle with her mother’s sope when she made any; presently after this deponent went awaye, and in going toward her godmother Moore’s, she espied her godmother coming towards her with a knife and a ragg in her hand and this deponent meeting her about the chimney end of her house she asked her blessing, and demanded of her where she was going, her Godmother replied and said she was going to stop her trough, for it did leak so that she could keep no water. She askt this deponent if she would come and smoake it. She replied with thanks that her pipe was *alreadie* lighted, and she was in hast. Then goodwife Moore demanded of this deponent how goody Gaplins sope did, and she answered she knew not, but as goodwife Gaplin sayd it was lost, she *must have* boyled it all away. Then she replied and said that was pitty and that she had herd that goody Gaplin had a shoat dead that day. Then this deponent

replied it was now she knew, for she herd not of it when she was there, and further saith not."

"The attestation of Nathaniel Conyers taken before Mr. John Wainwright and Mr. John Wentworth, the 14th day of Maye, 1653—

"Who sworn saith, that about that tyme which goodwife Gyplin hath calculated she being boylinge sope, this deponent came to Thomas Gaplins house, and demanded of his wife where her husband was, she said he was gone to Peter Falls Island for potato slippes to plant.⁵ She said further she thought he would not tarry long, in regard he was gone over since morning, and therefore this deponent resolved to stay until he came home : and in a moment of tyme tarrying he herd a shoat crye. The woman goodwife Gaplin willed her daughter to goe to see what ayled the shoat: Her daughter returned emediately with this answer, 'That the shoat was cleere,' her mother asked if she was suer of yt. Her daughter replied she would goe againe and see and returned agayne with expedition tould her mother that the shoat was dead, and then goodwife Gaplin went down to the house where the shoat was tyed, and this informant with her, who saw the pigg lie dead there and in the cleare from any tangling, and the collar about the neck so slacke that it might have been slipt over his head. Emediately came goodwife Moore even at that very instant of their being with the pigg, being bare footed and bare legged, and she demanded of them what they were doing. Goodwife Gaplin replied and said they had a pigge died and goodwife Gaplin calling for a knife to sticke yt goodwife Moore replied and said, 'Let goodman Conyers sticke it for he can sticke it better than you.' This declarant saith that goodwife Moore went straightway up with goodwife Gaplins daughter to the dwelling house and left this deponent and the woman there, who went presently after her, and carried the pigg after them. Goody Gaplin after she came up said, she had rather the pigg had bin her *owne* for Jacob would be mad when he came home. Goodwife Moore replied she had thought it had been Goodwife Gaplins, and withal asked whose sow yt was. Goodwife Gaplin answered yt was Jacobs : then goodwife Moore replied with a gesture, 'Oh I am sory it is Jacobs.' and further saith not."

"The information of Mr. John Waynewright delivered to the grand Inquest upon the 17th day of Maye, 1653—

"Who saith that about 3 or 4 yeares since he having 2 shares of land in his hands, one share of my Lord of Warwicke, and one of Mr. Georg Turberfield,⁶ Thomas Moore having one share of my Lord of Warwicks lie between the two, upon any small variance the said More forwarned the said John Waynewright from going acrossse his grounds, nor wold suffer the said John to tread the paths he went in himselfe, the path lying near the lyne I told him then, If ever it lay in my power I would displace him, and at last I obteyned yt, that share which Moore lived upon, by friends and means that I wrought by, and then I warned the said Moore off that land. Yet I made provision for him else where. And not long after this I had many of my creatuers strangly taken and died, all my cattell dyeing sodaynly. And shoats running loose one houer dead the next and never could discerne any thing they ayled neither living nor dead : but were as ffatt and as lusty as any creatuers

⁵ The sweet potato.

⁶ A share of land was 25 acres.

in the world, yet perished about this tyme. I had sett according to my estimation about 16 acres of corne ground, which sprouted in the ground very well, some above ground, and some arrived even of the ground, and turned too and agen like the worm of a pease" [tendrill?] "and soe lay fresh in the ground, and never came to good. Though free from clods or other ympediment. I never saw the like before or since.

"After this when I had built and was settled in my house, goodwife Moore wife to Thomas Moore aforesaid came to my house with pretences to buy or begg some fyne thread as my wife told me, and looking about praysed my dwelling place to my wife and asked her if she did not breed good store of hoggs, my wife told her Yes! but they were little the better for them, for they died, and came to little, Wee have had such ill success with them. Goodwife Moore asked her alsoe about breeding fowles, and said she thought she bred but few to which my wife answered, Noe, for they are carried off. . . .

"Not long after, when I came out of England, I had a very fayre sowe pigging, and goodwife Moore being at my house and seeing her praysed her, not long after she pigged and all her piggs died as soon as they were pigged. Att the tyme of Captain Turners entrance into his Government or a little after I did charg goody Moore with these and many things else. And first for that she should declare how she came to know that myself with the rest of the company that were in the shipp with me were taken by the Turkes or chased by them. Though she did mention none but the womens 2 husbands, and myselfe and Thomas Inglethorpe, w^{ch} she denied, though it was then affirmed by divers.

(Signed) "John Wainwright."

"The names of the women who were appoynted to search the body of Aliche Moore, being suspected of witchcraft May the 17th 1653."

(12 Names.)

"Who doo affirme that upon the search of the body of Alice Moore aforesaid they have found 3 marks, or teates as to biggnes, on the right side of her body, and another in her mouth towards the almonds of her ears—and another between her tooes on her left foote which teates or duggs being prickt by them did not bleed. Only a little waterish blood, and they say she did not sensibly feele when they prickt them, although they asked her if she felt them, and besides they say that they found also other suspitious markes which are declared to belong to a witch upon some secret partes of her body and also some blew spots there also.

"The names of the Grand Inquest."

(16 Names.)

"The Jury for Life and Death."

(12 Names).

"The Jury for the keeper of the Common Wealth of England doth presente Christian Stevenson of Pembroke tribe in the Somer Islands spinster for that she not having the feare of God before here eyes hath feloniously, wickedly and abominably consulted, contracted and consented to and with the Devill to become a witch, as doth appear by severall signes and markes upon her body. And that abominable sinne of witchcraft hath put into practice from tyme to tyme upon the persons and cattell of severall people within these Somer Islands, and

upon the body of a childe of Thomas Murrill w^{ch} was soddaynely smote with grievous and tormenting paynes, soe that yt died. And upon the body of Anne Buller her hogges and cattell, as also upon the body of Prudence Sheare. Also upon the body of Thomas Winerley, and also upon the body of Widdow Hopkins and her daughter Mary Hopkins, and also upon the piggs of Mr. Christopher [*blank*] and upon the work of Thomas Denicombe blacksmith, and upon the persons and goods of divers others besides these afore mentioned, she hath by her diabolicall practices tormented vexed disquieted and destroyed contrary to the peace of the Common Wealth of England and the dignity thereof.

“To which indictment she pleaded not guilty but being by the Grand Inquest found a true bill, she put herself for her tryall upon God and the country, w^{ch} country being a Jury of 12 men sworne found her guilty of witchcraft; and for the same was adjudged to be carried to the place of execution, and to be hanged by the neck until she was dead, which sentence of death was put in execution accordingly the 20th Maye 1653.

“The Jury for the Keepers of the liberties of the Common Wealth of England doth present Alice Moore of Warwicke Tribe of the said Islands for that &c. (as above) she hath destroyed the cattell and hogges of Mr. John Waynewright and Thomas Gaplin both of Warwicke Tribe and of divers other persons, contrary &c.”

The plea, the finding, and the sentence are in identical terms with those of Christian Stevenson, and the execution was carried out under the following warrant the same day :—

“To Mr. Anthony Jenour Sheriff.

“By y^e Governor

“These are to will and require you that upon sight here of you cause the bodys of Christian Stevenson and Alice Moore to be taken from prison and from thence to be conveighed unto the place of execution, and ther cause them to be hanged by the necke until they be dead, according to the sentence passed upon them the 18th day of Maye 1653. If need shall so require to command the aid and assistance of any manner of persons whatsoever for the execution of your office And for y^e so doing this shall be your sufficient warrant.

“Given this 20th daye of May 1653.

(Signed) “Josias Ffoster.”

“Presentation by the Grand Inquest, in Maye 1653.

“Wee the Grand Inquest taking into our consideration how yt hath pleased God upon slight and slender ground being carefully followed upon one person for suspicion of witchcraft, what good successe and yssues hath followed upon yt. Therefore we desire that all such persons as wee have hereunder mentioned may have some careful eyes cast upon them, soe that if yt shall please our God to discover more of them they may be pursued after and proceeded agaynst until as David saith, wee have cut off wicked doers from off this Island.

“Henery Ward.”⁷

(There is no other name mentioned.)

“Ffurther wee have bin credibly informed that Seignior Ambrosiac the Spanish sergoon hath said that there are eight or twelve witches in

⁷ See the previous charge against him on p. 92.

these Islands. Wee desier that he may be dealt withall in some way that he may make discovery of them.

"It was then ordered also that those that are or shalbe suspected for witches be carefully observed and search made to find out the truth thereof with all convenient speed.

"165 $\frac{1}{2}$ Captain William White master of the Maiefflower complained unto Captain Josiah Ffoster Gov^r of the Som^r Islands that there were two women in his sayd ships wch he did vehemently suspect to be witches, and desired Justice against them. Which the Gouvernor yielded unto, and were brought unto their trial accordingly which is as followeth.

"The attestation of Elixabeth Cobson taken the 1st January 165 $\frac{1}{2}$ before Captain Josias Ffoster Gou^rno^r, Mr. Thomas Peniston Councillor and Antho. Jenour Secretary. Who being sworne saith as ffolowyth—

"That about 3 or 4 yeares ago, shee and Elizabeth Page being in *bedlam* (*sic*) at the 3 tons, and falling into discourse together, she then and there heard the said Elizabeth Page saye, that she had raised the deuill and whipt him with briars, and further that she had made *Maidstone Jaile* doors stand open, so that others might or did goe forth but she had no power to go forth herself and further saith not.

"Mrs. Rathorne being sworne the same tyme saith That she only herd Elizabeth Page tell her several passages about *Lancaster witches*, but herd not anything of herselfe being a witch.

"Thomas Crofts sworne the same tyme sayth that he being present when Charles Hancocke was at the helme, That Eliz. Page being by the compas had her finger over the compas and made it turne round and round ever, yet never tuched yt.

(Signed) "Tho. Crofts.

"Charles Hancocke being sworne saith that he being at the helme Elizabeth Page had her finger over the compas and yt ran round from north to south—and turned back again, and said that any woman that was with child may make yt do soe. And about 3 days after she told him that she had a steele needle about her that caused yt yet he ther present she said do you not see how yt runs, and further saith not.

(Signed) "Charles Hancocke.

"The attestation of Jeames Man before the grand Inquest the 3rd January 165 $\frac{1}{2}$.

"Who sworne saith that he being in the cabin with Jane Hopkins, she said Jane wished that God might showe some signe whether she was a witch or not, and immediatly there was a thing in the likeness of a ratt appeared unto them, and further saith not.

(Signed) "James Man.

"Beffore the grand Inquest aforesaid—

"Thomas Cobbsome sworne sayth that at the same tyme he saw a thing in the likeness of a ratt, after the said Jane Hopkins had wished that god might show some signe, and still further, that before the appearance there was a noyse which made him appeare.

(Signed) "Thomas Cobbsome.

"Antho. Love before the Grand Inquest, saith upon oath—

"That Mrs. Page her maide having mist a botle aboard the shippe made her moave to Mrs. Hopkins. And Mrs. Hopkins said that if she would crosse her hand with a peece of silver of something that she would coniure for her botell and that she should have yt that night or

the next morning, and that night she had the bottell, and further saith not.

“Upon these fformer grounds the Gov^rno^r commanded a Jury of women to be empanelled whose names are as ffolloweth, who searcht the body of Elizabeth Page the 20th day of December 1654.”

(13 Names.)

“Whose verdict is as followeth. Who do all affirme upon their oathes that they find not any marke or spotts or signes which may move them to judge Elizabeth Page to be a witch. Only something more than ordinary [in her secret parts] *substitute* in a certain place.”

A Jury with the same forewoman, Mrs. Margery Seon, and three of same women, but with six new names, was empanelled to search the body of Jane Hopkins: and it is difficult to avoid a suspicion that the negative result of the preceding search determined this change in the constitution of the jury. Much stronger measures were occasionally resorted to.

In 1626, one Margaret Heyling, charged with stealing a turkey, being returned not guilty, the Governor promptly committed the jury to prison, and fined them 20 lb. of tobacco a man! Another jury was presently impanelled, and it is needless to say found the prisoner guilty.

The result in the case before us was much the same. The jury did “all jointly affirme that Jane Hopkins hath in her mouth a suspicious marke, and under her arm she hath a dugg or teat. And upon her shoulders a wart, and upon her necke another warte^s . . . and they all declare that all these were insensible when they were prickt and tried.

“The third day of January 165 $\frac{1}{4}$ Captain Josias ffoster Gov^rno^r and Captain General of these islands called a Sessions when were present these Councillors following,”

(7 Names.)

“The Grand Inquest.”

(14 Names.)

“The Jury of Life and death.”

(12 Names.)

“Wee the Grand Inquest doe present Elixabeth Page being a passenger in the good shipp called the Mayflower for that see not having the feare of God before her eyes wickedly and felloneously consulted and covenanted with the devill contrary to natuer and to the law of God and man. And contrary to the peece of the Comonwealth of England and the dignity thereof.

“To which indictment Elizabeth Page pleaded not Guilty, and for her triall put herselfe upon God and the country, w^{ch} country being 12 sworne men found her not guilty, and was quitt by proclamation.”

The like presentment against Jane Hopkins adds to the covenant with the devil, “him hath suckled and fedd contrary to nature and the laws of God and man, as doth appear by markes and signes upon her body, contrary,” &c. She was found guilty, and “for her sentence was condemned to be carried to the place of execution, and there be hanged by the neck until she was dead. Which was done accordingly as appeareth by his warrant dated 5 Jan., 165 $\frac{1}{4}$.”

“Whereas Jane Hopkins, one of the passengers by the Mayefflower having bin accused for witchcraft and for the same hath been indicted

^s The MS. has a passage which cannot be given.

arrayned and tried at a court held in the Somers Islands the third day of January 165 $\frac{1}{2}$ and then and there found guiltie and condempned to death. These are therefore to require and charge you to take her from the prison, and cause her to be carried to the place of execution and therto be hanged until she be dead. Horeof faile you not as you will answeere the contrary at y^r perill. Given this 5th January 165 $\frac{1}{2}$; *vera copia.*

“ Josias fforster.

“ Directed to Anthony Jenour S^r officiating in the Sheriffe’s Office.”

“ 1655. The Jury for the Commonwealth of England doth present Grace the wife of John Bidwell of Georges towne in the Som^r Islands spinster⁹ ffor that she not having the feare of God before her eyes hath ffelloneously and wickedly had consultation and familiarity with the Devell as doth appear by several markes and signes upon her body and by his instigation hath malitiously and unnaturally vexed and afflicted severall persons : most especially upon the body of Kate an Indian woman servant of Robert Powell hath used witchcraft contrary &c.”

The depositions in this case are not recorded : she was found “ Not guiltie.”

“ William Haynes of Hamilton for his uncivel behaviour towards such as gave in evidences against him when he was questioned for his defaming Mrs. Miller in reporting she was a witch.

“ The said Haynes did acknowledge in open court that he had done her and her posterity liveing great wrong in reporting and saying Mrs. Miller was a witch, and was hartily sorry for the same, and desired them all to forrgive him, which was accepted and passed by, and he set free from his recognizances.

“ 1658. The attestation of John Richards, who sworne saith, That some tyme in the month of June, being in bedd in his master’s house, he having been asleep was awaked by some noyse in the roome where he lay, and that he there saw the wyfe of Thomas Moore in the room, or the divell in her likeness and that this deponent did speake to her there, and did tell her that she was a witch, and that he would have her hanged, and had had the like sight twice since, and upon Tuesday the 10th day of this instant month. That he met the said Thomas Moore and his wife as they were going along the path, and the said Moore said to this deponent What, are you sicke, where upon this deponent replied, I was, and the said Moore replied, ‘ I herd you were scared,’ whereupon this deponent answered ‘ Yes.’ Whereupon the said Moore answered ‘ I herd you should say yt was my wife ’ and this deponent said againe ‘ Yt was eyther your wife or some in her likeness that I did see,’ and further saith not.

(Signed) “ John Richards.

“ Nathaniell Astwood being sworne saith, That his servant John Richards had after the sight he had seen laid by sick and was recovered, and since that tyme that he met Thomas Moore and his wife in the path he had been very yll and is much ympayned in his body and that upon that viry night he was taken very ill that he did meate the above said partyes.

“ Upon the attestations taken as aforesaid the said goodwife Moore

⁹ See note *ante*, p. 91.

was sent downe to Georges Gaol and for triall of this delinquent Captain Josias ffoster Governor commanded an Inquest of woemen to be empannelled and sworne whose names are as ffolloweth."

Mrs. Norwood heads the jury, which includes fifteen names, of whom four were on the jury which acquitted Elizabeth Page, and three on that which convicted Jane Hopkins.

"The woemen being sworne to make diligent search upon the body of the wife of Thomas Moore aforesaid, whether there did appear any signes or markes tending to witchcraft. Their verdict or Reports were That there was upon her body noe such signes nor markes.

"1658. Michael Brother being called before the Governor and Councell to answer the complaynt of goodwife Crockford who complayned that the said Brothers had called her witch and said he wold prove yt and make yt good : but he confest himselfe to be in drinke, and forgott what he spoke, and he did engeniously acknowledge his offence and asked the woman for forgiveness upon his knees—upon which she past by the said offence."

The government of Captain Josias Forster came to an end soon after this trial : he subsequently fell into poverty and neglect. Captain William Saile who succeeded him in January 1659, was more enlightened.

"1659. Nicholas Hon of Pagets Tribe presented for suspicion of witchcraft as upon the attestation of Henrie Sims and his wife doth appear at large, was dismissed with an admonition given him by the Governor."

The superstition lingered, however, in the Colony, as it did, and indeed does, in secluded parts of England ; and so late as 1696 a committal for witchcraft is to be found.

"1696. The daughter of Mr. Harman late of Somerset Island deceased upon oath declareth That Sarah Spencer widdow did afflict the body of the said Sarah Harman. And it was the said Sarah Spencer or the devil in her likeness. The said Sarah Spencer was by [Quarter] court committed to prison till y^e next assizes and General Gaol delivery, or until she be delivered by due course of Law ; on an accusation of witchcraft." The sequel to this case has not been found.

There is one other case which may be quoted as an instance of the descent of a popular tradition for nearly 150 years, although the offence for which the victim suffered bears more relation to the Obi of the West Indian negroes than to witchcraft. In 1730, an old negress called Sarah Basset was charged with trying to compass the death of her master and his family by a course of treatment in which there were some charms and some poison. She was sentenced, although nobody was actually poisoned, "to be fastened to a sufficient stake, and there to be burnt with fire until her body were dead," which was carried into execution about the 7th June. To this day the locality is pointed out, apocryphal sayings are attributed to the witch, and, as tradition has it that the day of her execution was an unusually hot one, any broiling Bermudian summer day is sometimes called a "regular Sarah Basset day."

The following note has been received from General Lefroy in reference

to the performance of the marriage ceremony by Captain Forster, mentioned at the commencement of these curious particulars (p. 89) :—

Captain Fforster may have acted on authority, but it would appear by an entry of 1657 that Oliver's edict against clerical marriages, the date of which I have not been able to ascertain, was not generally enforced in the *Somæ*r Islands until five years later than the acts here referred to.

At the Assizes at St. George's, November, 1657, "It was presented that whereas the Lord Protector of England having made and publisht lawes prohibiteing all such as call themselves ministers to entermeddle with solemnizeing marriages: but yt is only to be the work of the magistrate, they (the Grand Jury) desier that these Lawes may stand in force here.

"Which being taken into consideration was ordered accordingly."

As Captain Fforster resided at St. George's, it is to that parish that we should naturally look for civil marriages performed by him, but unfortunately the registers of this period are lost or destroyed.