

STORY OF WITCHCRAFT AT BRIGHTLING.

(WITH NOTES).

THE Rev. William Hayley, Rector of Brightling (the antiquary), who died in 1789, and left his MS. Collections relating to Sussex to the British Museum, wrote a history of his own parish, in which he records some remarkable traditions, &c. The following narrative strongly illustrates the superstitious belief in Witchcraft which once existed, not simply among the illiterate and vulgar, but also among the educated classes of society.

From internal evidence, the events here recorded must have occurred earlier than the year 1662, when the Rev. Joseph Bennet was ejected from the living of Brightling for nonconformity. Among the other persons who figure in the narrative are Colonel Busbridge, of Haremore in Echingham, and Captain Collins, of Socknersh in Brightling, both men of good family, and county magistrates. That these two gentlemen, as well as the four clergymen, were fully persuaded of the reality of the alleged facts is obvious from the tenor of the statement itself. The book called "A Mirror or Looking-Glass for Saints and Sinners, by Samuel Clarke," I am unable to procure, and I think it is of considerable rarity.

The copy of the narrative from which I print this was kindly communicated to me by the Rev. Burrell Hayley, of Catsfield Place.

" AT BRIGHTLING, IN SUSSEX.

" As touching y^e Relation of y^e Brightling Story, which is in substance undoubtedly true, however some circumstances of it may vary, be pleased to take y^e following account.

From a paper sent to Mr. G. Freeman, of Hollingrove, by his Coz., Mr North of the Borough of Southwar

I remember to have seen the same formerly, in a book lent by Mrs. Dear, of Burvahl, to Mrs. Burgess, therefore y^e book from which Mr. North transcribed it.

" On Monday was three weeks, at or near y^e house of Joseph Cruttenden of Brightling, an old woman about noon came to a servant girl of the said

Cruttenden's and tells her sad Calamities were coming upon her Master and Dame, their house should be fired, and many

other troubles befall them, but tells this Girl withal, That if she spake of what she had told her, y^e Devil would tear her to pieces, otherwise she need not fear, for no hurt should come to her.

“The same night, as the man and woman lay in bed, Dirt and Dust was thrown at them, but they could not tell whence it came; They rise and pray, during which the disturbances cease. Some say they went to bed again, but finding y^e same

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I saw a larger account of y^e matter at Mr. Katt's* at Robertsbridge Abbey, in a Book entitled “A Mirror or Looking Glass, both for saints and sinners,” by Samuel Clarke, Minister of St Bernet, London, in folio. The account of wh^{ch} book is from Mr Jos. Bennett, of Brightling.

trouble they are forced to rise. Tuesday, about noon, Dust and Dirt, and several things are thrown at them again; before night, a part of one end of their house fired; they rake it down, it flashes somewhat like gunpowder; as they stopped it there, it began in another place and then in another, till the whole house was burnt down. Some say something like a Black Bull was seen tumbling about; y^e certainty of which I aver not. The house, though it burned down to the ground, it flamed not. The night was spent in carrying away goods, or one thing or another to one place or another, they I think remaining most without doors. Thursday Colonel Busbridge (whose house the former was, being acquainted with y^e man's sad accident,) bid them go into another of his Houses in y^e Parish, whither, when y^e Goods were brought, such like Disturbances were there also; y^e house fireth, endeavours are made by many to quench it, but in vain, till y^e Goods are thrown out, when it ceased with little or no help.

“In this condition none durst let them into their doors; they abide under a Hut; y^e Goods are thrown upside down; Pewter Dishes, knives, Brickbats strike them, but hurt y^m not. Mr. Bennett and Mr. Bradshaw, Ministers, came to pray with y^m, when a knife glanced by y^e Breast of Mr. Bennett, a Bowl or Dish thrown at his Back, but while at Prayers quiet; they were without doors, there being

Tut, I suppose to be a word used in Sussex for Scoop to laide Water.

very many present, a wooden *Tut* came flying out of y^e air, by many, and came and struck the man; as likewise a horse-shoe; which was by some laid away, and it was

* Father of the late Mr. William Catt, of Bishopston Mills. See *Sussex Worthies*, p. 217

observed of its own accord to rise again and fly to the man, and struck him in y^e midst of a hundred people.

“ Upon strict examination y^e man confesseth that he had been a thief, and did it under y^e Colour of Religion, Sabbath day. Y^e girl told her Dame y^e former story of y^e woman’s discourse; she is sent for and examined before Capt. Collins and Mr. Busbridge, and she is watched and searched twenty-four hours; the girl saith she is like y^e woman, but I think will

The farm called *Hodges Mills*, Isaac Cruttenden, used by Colonel Busbridge, at £6 per annum, which was haunted: y^e house part of it burnt down.

not swear it is the same. This woman was formerly suspected to be a Witch, had to Maidstone about it, but got away, and hath lived about Burwash some time since; her name I know not.

Tuesday Four Ministers kept a Fast, Mr. Bennett, Weller, Bradshaw and Golden. Since I hear not of any trouble. Tis said that they are in a Barn or Alehouse. While they lay without doors, y^e woman sending some meal to a Neighbour’s to make some bread, they could not make it up into Loaves, but it was like Butter, and so they put it into y^e Oven, but it would not bake, but came out as it went in.

“ This relation came from Mr. Collins, who was an Eye-Witness to much of it.”

M. A. L.