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Great Britain: Witchcraft.

Murray.

Witches' Familiars in England. *By M. A. Murray.*

61

The usual conception of a witch's familiar is a small animal or bird, nourished by sucking the witch's blood, carrying out her wicked behests, and animated by an evil spirit.

This form of familiar is so strictly limited to England that Hutchinson is able to say, "I meet with little mention of *Imps* in any Country but ours, where the Law makes the feeding, suckling or rewarding of them to be Felony."* They are referred to by Forbes, "To some he [the Devil] gives certain Spirits or Imps to correspond with, and serve them as their Familiars, known to them by some odd Names, to which they answer when called. These Imps are said to be kept in Pots or other Vessels."† Though the Scotch law made these provisions, the Scotch trials show no record of such familiars, but the description applies accurately to the imps of the English witches. The eastern side of the country, particularly the counties of Essex, Suffolk, Huntingdoushire, and Rutland are the places in which this kind of familiar is most common; it is also recorded in Lancashire, Somerset, Devon, and Northamptonshire.

These familiars were small animals, cats, ferrets, mice, moles, toads, and occasionally dogs. They were always named; were kept in pots or boxes lined with sheep's wool; were fed on milk, bread, raw meat and the witch's blood; and were used for working magic. When the religion was at its height, the imp was probably used for good as well as bad purposes; but as the cult was not recorded until decadent, we find the familiars used only for evil. The witch might have more than one familiar; she then used one for working magic on human beings, the others for bewitching cattle, horses, or inanimate objects.

The imp being regarded as a substitute of the Devil, it is spoken of indifferently either as "the Devil" or by its proper title of "familiar." Hellen Clark, an Essex witch tried in 1645, "confesseth that about six weeks since, the Devill appeared to her in her house in the likenesse of a white dog, and that she calleth that familiar Elimanzer. . . . Rebecca Weste told this informant that the Devill appeared to them in the shape of a dogge; afterward in the shape of two kitlyns; then in the shape of two dogges; and that the said familiars did doe homage in the first place to the said Elizabeth Clarke, and skipped up into her lap, and kissed her."‡

The witch-trials of Essex extend over more than a century, and contain in detail practically all the facts. The information from trials in other parts of the country is useful for supplementing and for clearing up a few obscure points.

The earliest of the Essex trials is that of the witches of Hatfield Peveril, in 1556. The accused were Elizabeth Francis, Mother Waterhouse, and her daughter, Joan Waterhouse. Elizabeth Francis "learned this arte of witchcraft at the age of xii yeeres of hyr grandmother whose nam mother Eue. Item when shee taughte it her, she counseiled her to renounce *God* and his work and to geue of her bloudd to Sathan (as she termed it) whyche she deliuered her in the lykenesse of a whyte spotted Catte, and taughte her to feede the sayde Catte with breade and mylke, and she dyd so, also she taughte her to cal it by the name of Sathan and to kepe it in a basket. . . . Item, that euery tyme that he did any thynge for her, she saide that he required a drop of bloude, which she gaue him by prycking herselfe, some time in one place and then in an other, and where she pricked herselfe there remayned a red spot. . . . When she had kept this Cat by the

* Hutchinson: *Historical Essay*, p. 77.

† Forbes: *Institutes of the Law of Scotland*, II, pp. 32-4.

‡ Howell: *State Trials*, IV, 839, 841.

“ space of xv or xvi yeare, and as some saye (though vntruly) beinge wery of it, she
 “ came to one mother Waterhouse her neyghbour, she brought her this cat in her
 “ apron and taught her as she was instructed before by her grandmother Eue, telling
 “ her that she must cal him Sathan and geue him of her bloude and bread and mylke
 “ as before.” Mother Waterhouse appears to have followed the instructions faithfully ;
 the most interesting part of her evidence is the transference of the magical power
 of one animal to another, and the charm by which the transference was effected :
 “ She receyved this cat of this Frances wyfe in the order as is before said . . .
 “ She (to trye him what he coulde do) wyld him to kyl a hog of her owne, which
 “ he dyd, and she gaue him for his labour a chicken, which he fyrste required of her and
 “ a drop of her blod. And thys she gave him at all times when he dyd anythyng for
 “ her, by pricking her hand or face and puttinge the bloud to his mouth whyche he
 “ sucked, and forthwith wold lye downe in hys pot againe, wherein she kept him . . .
 “ Also she said that when she wold wyl him to do any thinge for her, she wolde
 “ say her Pater noster in laten. Item, this Mother Waterhouse confessed that shee
 “ fyrst turned this Cat into a tode by this meanes, she kept the cat a great while
 “ in woll in a pot, and at length being moved by povertie to occupie the woll, she
 “ praied in the name of the father and of the son and of the holy ghost that it would
 “ turne into a tode, and forthwith it was turned into a tode, and so kept it in the
 “ pot without woll.”*

The second set of trials was of the witches of St. Osyth in 1582. Here again
 the evidence goes to prove that the familiars were small animals kept and fed in a
 special way. Thomas Rabbet “ saith, that his said mother Ursley Kempe alias Grey
 “ hath foure severall spirites, the one called Tyffin, the other Titty, the third Pigine,
 “ and the fourth Iacke ; and being asked of what colours they were, saith, that
 “ Tytty is like a little grey Cat, Tyffin is like a white lamb, Pygine is black like
 “ a Toad, and Iacke is blacke like a Cat. And hee saith, he hath seen his mother
 “ at times to giue them beere to drinke, and of a white Lofe or Cake to eate, and
 “ saith that in the night time the said spirites will come to his mother, and sucke
 “ blood of her upon her armes and other places of her body.” Ursley Kemp gave
 evidence against mother Bennet and Ales Hunt : “ About a quarter of a yeere past,
 “ she went vnto mother Bennets house for a messe of milke, the which she had
 “ promised her. But at her comming this examine saith that shee knocked at her
 “ dore, and no bodie made her any answere, whereupon shee went to her chamber
 “ window and looked in therat, saying, ho, ho, mother Bennet are you at home :
 “ And casting her eyes aside, shee saw a spirit lift up a clothe, lying over a pot,
 “ looking much like a Ferret. And it beeing asked of this examine why the spirit
 “ did looke vpon her, she said it was hungrie. . . . About the foureteene or fifteene
 “ day of Januarie last, shee went to the house of William Hunt to see howe his
 “ wife did, and shee beeing from home, shee called at her chamber window and
 “ looked in, and then espied a spirite to looke out of a potcharde from under a
 “ clothe, the nose thereof beeing browne like vnto a Ferret.” Mother Bennet herself
 confessed that “ about two yeeres past there came vnto her two spirits, one called
 “ *Suckin*, being blacke like a Dogge, the other called *Lierd*, beeing red like a Lion,
 “ *Suckin* this examine saith is a hee, and the other a shee. . . . Many times
 “ they drinke of her milke bowle. And when, and as often as they did drinke of
 “ the mylke : this Examine saith they went into the said earthen pot, and lay in
 “ the woll.” In the evidence of Ales Hunt and her step-daughter Febey the recorder
 has made a curious mistake. Ales confessed to having two spirits, “ like unto little
 Coltes ” ; Febey stated, “ yt shee hath seen her mother to haue two litle thinges like

* *Philobiblon Society*, VIII : “ Examination and Confession of certain Witches at Chelmsford,”
 pp. 24-29, 29-32. Mother Waterhouse was executed.

“ horses, the one white, the other blacke, the which shee kept in a litle lowe earthern pot with woll, colour white and blacke ; and that they stode in her chamber by her bed side, and saith that she hath seene her mother feede them with milke.” From the size of the animals in question and judging by similar animals employed as familiars, the word used was probably “cote,” a provincial pronunciation of “cat” ; but the recorder thinking it was “colt” elaborated it further into “horses.”

The third set of trials in Essex took place in 1645 ; these are the best known, as it was here that Matthew Hopkins obtained notoriety as a witch-finder. The confessions of the women show the continuation of the customs of their predecessors, which were also known both before and after in other parts of the country : “Rose Hallybread saith, that about fifteen or sixteen years since, there was an imp brought to her house by one Goodwife Hagtree, which imp this examinant entertained, fed it with oatmeale, and suckled it on her body, for the space of a yeer and a half, or thereabouts, and then lost it. . . . Susan Cock saith, that about three or four yeeres since, one Margery Stokes, the examinant’s mother, lying upon her death bed, and this examinant comming to visit her, shee the said Margery desired this examinant privately to give entertainment to two of her imps. One of the said imps was like a mouse, and the other was of a yellow colour about the bigness of a cat . . . and the same night her said mother dyed, the said two imps came to her accordingly, and sucked on her body. . . . Anne Cooper hath had three imps suckled on the lower parts of her body. The said Anne offered to give unto her daughter Sarah Cooper an impe in the likeness of a gray kite [? cat] to suck on the said Sarah.”*

The Huntingdonshire witches, tried in 1646, had familiars of the same kind as the Essex witches. Elizabeth Weed confessed that “there did appeare unto her three Spirits, one in the likeness of a young man or boy, and the other two of two Puppies, the one white and the other black.” Frances Moore “saith that about eight yeares since she received a little blacke puppy from one *Margaret Simson* of great *Catworth*, which dog the said *Margaret* had in bed with her, and took it thence when she gave it to this Examinee. The Examinee further saith, that the said *Margaret* told her, that she must keep that dogge all her life time ; and if she cursed any Cattell, and set the same dog upon them, they should presently dye, and the said *Margaret* told her that she named it already, his name was *Pretty*. And the said Examinee further saith, that about the same time goodwife *Weed* gave her a white Cat, telling her, that if she would deny God, and affirme the same by her bloud, then whomsoever she cursed and sent that Cat unto, they should dye shortly after. Whereupon the said Examinee saith that she did deny God, and in affirmation thereof shee pricked her finger with a thorne, whence issued blood, which the Cat presently licked, and the said goodwife *Weed* named the cat *Tissy*. And she further saith, that she killed the said Dog and Cat about a yeere since.” Jane Wallis said that, when “Blackman” came to her, “he told her he would send one Grissell and Greedigut to her, that shall do anything for her. And after Blackman was departed from her, within three or 4 dayes, Grissell and Greedigut came to her in the shapes of dogges with great brisles of hogges hair upon their backs.”†

The evidence, even in the few extracts given above, shows that the sucking familiar is common in these later trials, it is, however, rare in the sixteenth century. It is therefore possible that it was a late development, deriving from the witches’ ritual of pricking themselves and then letting the animal lick off the resulting drops

* Howell, IV, 852, 853, 845.

† Davenport : *Witches of Huntingdon*, pp. 1, 5, 12.

of blood. The facts are, however, so definitely stated, that there seems little doubt that in the seventeenth century the English witches actually trained the animals to suck some portion of their (the witches') bodies. One of the physical characters of witches was the supernumerary nipple. This was in itself considered a proof that the person was a witch; the nipple, or "teat," as it is usually called, being given to the witches by the Devil as his mark. As the supernumerary nipple secretes milk it was very possibly used for the purpose of suckling the familiar.

The evidence of the Lancashire witch, Margaret Johnson, in 1633, shows that both methods were in use among the witches at that time. She "sayth, yt such "witches as have sharp bones given them by the devill to pricke them, have no "pappes or dugges whereon their devil may sucke; but their devill receiveth bloud "from the place, pricked with the bone; and they are more grand witches than any "yt have marks. Shee also saith, yt ye devill (after he begins to sucke) will make "a pappe or dugge in a short tyme, and the matter which hee sucks is blood. Shee "alsoe saith, yt when her devill did come to sucke her pappe, hee usually came to "her in ye liknes of a cat, sometymes of one colour, and sometymes on (*sic*) an "other."*

The remarkable fact about the sucking familiar is its limited distribution, both geographically and chronologically. It does not occur in any other country than England, and even there it is not found further north than Lancashire. It would seem, from the evidence, that the custom arose in, or was introduced into, the eastern counties, and spread thence across the country. There is, however, nothing to show from what part of Europe such a custom could have been brought; neither the French nor Belgian trials give any indication of familiars used in this way. It is impossible to believe that the custom arose suddenly all over England in the seventeenth century, yet the earlier trials, though very detailed, never refer to it. Even to regard it as a development of the original pricking by the witch of her own person, as I have suggested above, does not explain the apparently sudden adoption of the custom in the whole of England.

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India.

Panikkar.

Religion and Magic among the Nāyars. By K. M. Panikkar.

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The religious beliefs of the Nāyars show an extraordinary mixture of Hindu and Dravidian cults. All the temples are dedicated to Krishna Siva or Kartyayani. There are also a few *kavus* or groves for the worship of the lesser Hindu deities. But the important point with regard to this is that the Nāyars are as a whole a people almost without a religion,† and they use Hindu temples for practices which receive no sanction even in the generous vagueness of that creed. The religious conceptions of Hinduism have but the slightest influence on the Nāyar community as a whole. It is quite true that there are a good many devout Hindus among the Nāyars, but the very fact that the distinction of Saiva-ism Sakti-ism, Vaishnavism, &c., have not reached them is sufficient proof that though they have been Hinduised in form, and have belonged to the Hindu fold, their primitive beliefs have been survived to a great extent.

Nothing shows so much the extreme persistence of primitive culture, even in the face of higher civilising agencies, than the wide and almost universal acceptance of spirit-worship, and the almost entire absence of religious life, among the Nāyars, after at least twenty centuries of contact with Hinduism. Their contact with religions has not been limited indeed to Hinduism. The Jews flying after the destruction of their Temple found refuge among the Nāyars, and have lived in their

* Whitaker: *History of Whalley*, p. 216.

† See the discussion following.