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An introduction to the proof of the existence of apparitions, spirits, and witches.

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THE INTRODUCTION

An Introduction to the Proof of the Existence
of Apparitions, Spirits, and Witches.

S E C T. I.

The great usefulness and seasonableness of the present Argument, touching Witches, and Apparitions, in subserviency to Religion.

THE Question, whether there are *Witches* or not, is not matter of vain Speculation, or of indifferent Moment; but an Inquiry of very great and weighty Importance. For, on the resolution of it, depends the Authority and just Execution of some of our *Laws*; and which is more, our *Religion* in its main Doctrines is nearly concerned. There is no one, that is not very much a stranger to the World but knows how *Atheism* and *Infidelity* have advanced in our days, and how openly they now dare to shew themselves in Asserting and Disputing their vile Cause. Particularly the *distinction* of the *Soul* from the *Body*, the Being of *Spirits*, and a *Future Life* are Assertions extremely despised and opposed by the Men of this sort, and if we lose those Articles, all Religion comes to nothing. They are clearly and fully Asserted in the Sacred Oracles, but those Wits have laid aside these

these Divine Writings. They are proved by the best Philosophy and highest Reason; but the Unbelievers, divers of them are too shallow to be capable of such proofs, and the more subtle are ready to Scepticize away those grounds.

But there is one Head of Arguments that troubles them much, and that is, the Topick of *Witches* and *Apparitions*. If such there are, it is a sensible proof of Spirits and another Life, an Argument of more direct force than any Speculations, or Abstract reasonings, and such an one as meets with all the sorts of *Infidels*. On which account they labour with all their might to persuade themselves and others, that *Witches* and *Apparitions* are but Melancholick *Dreams*, or crafty *Impostures*; and here it is generally, that they begin with the young men, whose understandings they design to Debauch.

They expose and deride all Relations of *Spirits* and *Witchcraft*, and furnish them with some little Arguments, or rather Colours against their *Existence*. And youth is very ready to entertain such Opinions as will help them to phansie, they are wiser than the generality of Men. And when they have once swallowed this Opinion, and are sure there are no *Witches* nor *Apparitions*, they are prepared for the denial of *Spirits*, a *Life to come*, and all the other Principles of *Religion*. So that I think it will be a considerable and very seasonable service to it, fully to debate and settle this matter, which I shall endeavour in the following sheets, and I hope so, as not to impose upon my self or others, by empty Rhetorications,
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ious Relations, or Sophistical Reasonings, but treat on the Question with that freedom and plainness, that becomes one that is neither fond, fanciful nor credulous.

S E C T. II.

The true stating of the Question by defining what a Witch and Witchcraft is.

I Know that a great part of the Labour in most Controversies, useth to be bestowed on things impertinent to the main business, and by them the Minds of both sides are so confounded, that they wander widely from the point in difference, and at last lose it quite. It would quickly be thus in the Question of *Witchcraft*, and usually is so, without previous care to avoid it. But I shall take the best I can, that my pains on this Subject be not so mis-bestowed, but closely applied to the purpose: And in order thereunto shall briefly define the terms of the Question, and then set down what I *grant* to mine Adversaries, and what I *demand* from them. And when these *Preliminaries* are well adjusted, we shall proceed with more distinctness, and still see whereabouts we are, and know how far what is affirmed or proved, reaches the main matter in debate.

The Question is, whether there are *Witches* or not. Mr. *Webster* accuseth the Writers on the Subject of defect, in not laying down a perfect Description of a *Witch* or *Witchcraft*,

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or explaining what they mean, p. 20. What his perfect Description is, I do not know; but I think I have described a *Witch* or *Witchcraft* in my *Considerations*, sufficiently to be understood, and the Conception which I, and, I think, most Men have is, That a *Witch* is one, who can do or seems to do strange things, beyond the known Power of Art and ordinary Nature, by vertue of a Confederacy with Evil Spirits.] Strange Things, not Miracles; these are the extraordinary Effects of Divine Power, known and distinguished by their circumstances, as I shall shew in due place. The strange things are really performed, and are not all *Impostures* and *Delusions*. The *Witch* occasions, but is not the *Principal* Efficient, she seems to do it, but the *Spirit* performs the wonder, sometimes immediately, as in *Transportations* and *Possessions*, sometimes by applying other Natural Causes, as in raising *Storms*, and inflicting *Diseases*, sometimes using the *Witch* as an *Instrument*, and either by the Eyes or Touch, conveying Malign Influences: And these things are done by vertue of a *Covenant*, or *Compact* betwixt the *Witch* and an *Evil Spirit*. A *Spirit*, viz. an *Intelligent Creature* of the *Invisible World*, whether one of the *Evil Angels* called *Devils*, or an *Inferiour Demon* or *Spirit*, or a wicked *Soul* departed; but one that is able and ready for mischief, and whether altogether *Incorporeal* or not, appertains not to this Question.

S E C T. III.

That neither the Notation of the Name that signifies indifferently, nor the false Additions of others to the Notion of a Witch can any way disettle the Authors definition.

THis I take to be a plain Description of what we mean by a *Witch* and *Witchcraft*: What Mr. *Webster* and other Advocates for *Witches*, talk concerning the words whereby these are exprest, that they are improper and Metaphorical, signifying this, and signifying that, is altogether idle and impertinent. The word *Witch* signifies originally a *Wise Man*, or rather a *Wise Woman*. The same doth *Saga* in the Latine, and plainly so doth *Wizzard* in English signify a *Wise Man*, and they are vulgarly called *eunning Men* or *Women*. An Art, Knowledge, *Cunning* they have that is extraordinary; but it is far from true *Wisdom*, and the word is degenerated into an ill sense, as *Magia* is.

So then they are called, and we need look no further, it is enough, that by the *Word*, we mean the *Thing* and *Person* I have described, which is the common meaning; and Mr. *Webster* and the rest prevaricate when they make it signify an ordinary *Cheat*, a *Couzener*, a *Poysoner*, *Seducer*, and I know not what. Words signify as they are used, and in common use, *Witch* and *Witchcraft*, do indeed imply these, but they imply

more, *viz.* Deluding, Cheating and Hurting by the Power of an *Evil Spirit* in *Covenant* with a wicked Man or Woman: This is our Notion of a *Witch*.

Mr. *Webster* I know will not have it to be a perfect Description. He adds to the Notion of the *Witch* he opposeth, *carnal Copulation* with the *Devil*, and *real Transformation* into an *Hare*, *Cat*, *Dog*, *Wolf*; the same doth Mr. *Wagstaffe*. Which is, as if a Man should define an *Angel* to be a Creature in the shape of a Boy with Wings, and then prove there is no such Being. Of all Men I would not have Mr. *Webster* to make my Definitions for me; we our selves are to have the leave to tell what it is that we affirm and defend. And I have described the *Witch* and *Witchcraft*, that sober Men believe and assert. Thus briefly for Defining.

S E C T. IV.

What things the Author concedes in this Controversie about Witches and Witchcraft.

I Shall let the Patrons of *Witches* know what I allow and grant to them;

First, I grant, That there are some Witty and Ingenious Men of the opposite Belief to me in the Question. Yea, it is accounted a piece of Wit to laugh at the Belief of *Witches* as silly Credulity. And some Men value themselves upon it, and pride them in their supposed Sagacity of seeing

ing the Cheat that imposeth on so great a part of Believing Mankind. And the Stories of *Witches* and *Apparitions* afford a great deal of Subject for Wit, which it is pity that a witty Man should lose.

Secondly, I own that some of those who deny *Witches* have no design against, nor a disinclination to Religion, but believe Spirits, and a Life to come, as other sober Christians do, and so are neither *Atheists*, *Sadducees*, nor *Hobbists*.

Thirdly, I allow that the great Body of Mankind is very credulous, and in this matter so, that they do believe vain impossible things in relation to it. That carnal Copulation with the Devil, and real Transmutation of Men and Women into other Creatures are such. That people are apt to impute the extraordinaries of Art, or Nature to *Witchcraft*, and that their Credulity is often abused by subtle and designing *Knaves* through these. That there are Ten thousand silly lying Stories of *Witchcraft* and *Apparitions* among the vulgar. That infinite such have been occasioned by Cheats and *Popish* Superstitions, and many invented and contrived by the Knavery of *Popish* Priests.

Fourthly, I grant that Melancholy and Imagination have very great force, and can beget strange persuasions. And that many Stories of *Witchcraft* and *Apparitions* have been but Melancholy fancies.

Fifthly, I know and yield, that there are many strange natural Diseases that have odd Symptoms, and produce wonderful and astonishing

effects beyond the usual course of Nature, and that such are sometimes falsely ascribed to *Witchcraft*.

Sixthly, I own, the *Popish* Inquisitours, and other Witch-finders have done much wrong, that they have destroyed innocent persons for *Witches*, and that Watching and Torture have extorted extraordinary Confessions from some that were not guilty.

Seventhly and Lastly, I grant that the Transactions of *Spirits* with *Witches*, which we affirm to be true and certain, are many of them very strange and uncouth, and that we can scarce give any account of the Reasons of them, or well reconcile many of those passages to the commonly received Notion of *Spirits*, and the State of the next World.

If these Concessions will do mine Adversaries in this Question any good, they have them freely. And by them I have already almost spoiled all Mr. *Webster's* and Mr. *Wagstaffe's*, and the other Witch-Advocates Books, which prove little else, than what I have here granted. And having been so free in Concessions, I may expect that something should be granted me from the other party.

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Those that are mentioned in the second Concession, though they are not Atheists, Sadducees nor Hobbits; yet if they deny Witches, it is plain they are Antiscripturists, the Scripture so plainly attesting the contrary.

S E C T. V.

The Postulata which the Author demands of his Adversaries as his just right.

THe demands that I make are; First, That whether *Witches* are or are not, is a question of Fact: For it is in effect, whether any Men or Women have been, or are in Covenant with *Evil Spirits*, and whether they by the *Spirits* help, or he on their account performs such or such things.

Secondly, That matter of Fact can only be proved by immediate Sense, or the Testimony of others, *Divine* or *Humane*. To endeavour to demonstrate Fact by abstract reasoning and speculation, is, as if a Man should prove that *Julius Caesar* founded the Empire of *Rome*, by *Algebra* or *Metaphysics*. So that what Mr. *Webster* saith, p. 43. That the true and proper medium to prove the actions of *Witches* by, are *Scripture* and sound *Reason*, and not the impro-

per way of *Testimony* (which we use in the opposition that *Testimony* stands to *Scripture* and *sound Reason*) is very Non-sense.

Thirdly, That the History of the *Scripture* is not all *Allegory*, but generally hath a plain literal and obvious meaning.

Fourthly, That some *Humane Testimonies* are credible and certain, *viz.* They may be so circumstantiated as to leave no reason of doubt. For our Senses sometimes report truth, and all Mankind are not Liars, Cheats, and Knaves, at least they are not all Liars, when they have no Interest to be so.

Fifthly, That which is sufficiently and undeniably proved, ought not to be denied, because we know not how it can be, that is, because there are difficulties in the conceiving of it. Otherwise *Sense* and *Knowledge* is gone as well as *Faith*. For the *Modus* of most things is unknown, and the most obvious in Nature have inextricable difficulties in the Speculation of them, as I have shewn in my *Scepſis Scientifica*.

Sixthly and lastly, we are much in the dark, as to the *Nature* and *Kinds* of *Spirits*, and the *particular* condition of the other World. The *Angels*, *Devils*, and *Souls* happiness and misery we know, but what kinds are under these generals, and what actions, circumstances and ways of Life under those States we little understand. These are my *Postulata* or demands, which I suppose will be thought reasonable, and such as need no more proof.

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