



THE DEVILS OF LOUDUN

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THE HISTORY OF THE DEVILS OF LOUDUN

THE ALLEGED POSSESSION OF THE URSULINE NUNS, AND THE
TRIAL AND EXECUTION URBAIN GRANDIER,

TOLD BY AN EYE-WITNESS.

TRANSLATED FROM THE ORIGINAL FRENCH,
AND EDITED

BY

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The Devils of Loudun By Edmund Goldsmid.

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As to the Mother Superior, towards the end of the year 1635, something happened to her of a most extraordinary nature. Lord Montague came to Loudun, accompanied by two other English noblemen. He brought the exorcists a letter from the Archbishop of Tours, ordering them to edify his Lordship as much as possible. The Superior, in the midst of a convulsion, stretched out her left arm, and the name of Joseph appeared on it written in capital letters. The report of this event was signed by the English noblemen. Lord Montague hastened to Rome, abjured his heresy, embraced the ecclesiastical career, and, under another name, settled in France, where he lived many years. He is mentioned in the memoirs of Madame de Motteville.

At the beginning of 1636, on Twelfth Night, Father Surin resolved to compel the last demon that remained in the Mother Superior to adore Jesus Christ. He had the lady tied to a bench. The exorcisms drove the demon into a fury; and instead of obeying, he vomited a multitude of maledictions and blasphemies against the three persons of the Holy Trinity, against Jesus Christ, and against his Holy Mother, so execrable that one would be horrified to read them. The father knew that he was about to come out, and had the lady unbound. After tremblings, contortions, and horrible howlings, Father Surin pressed him more and more with the Holy Sacrament in his hand, and ordered him in Latin to write the name of Mary on the lady's hand. Raising her left arm into the air, the fiend redoubled his cries and howls, and in a last convulsion issued from the lady, leaving on her hand the holy name Maria, in letters so perfectly formed that no human hand could imitate them. The lady felt herself free and full of joy; and a *Te Deum* was sung in honour of the event.

Such is the true story of the possession of the nuns of Loudun and of the condemnation of Urbain Grandier, so different from the false accounts hitherto published. Even those who do not blush to deny the truth of infernal possessions need only notice that the human race has always believed, and still believes, that there are intelligent creatures in existence other than man, and almost similar to those whom the Pagans have always represented as Gods of Evil, or subterranean genii, like the demons believed in by Christians; and the belief in infernal possession, having in it no longer anything repugnant, will seem at once to them not only possible but probable. To believe that Urbain Grandier was unjustly

condemned and executed, we must blindly believe hundreds of things which revolt common sense. One of the Protestant writers, for example, after having said in a thousand different ways that the possession of the nuns of Loudun was a mere imposture and horrible farce, confesses that it is impossible to conceive human beings, and especially women, driving a priest to a horrible death by such a series of feigned possessions.

APPENDIX 1

THE DUKE OF LAUDERDALE ON WITCHCRAFT.

Instances sent me (Baxter) from the Duke of Lauderdale; more in other Letters of his I gave away, and some Books of Forreign Wonders he sent me.

Sir,

It is sad that the Sadducean, or rather atheistical denying of spirits, or their apparitions, should so far prevail; and sadder, that the clear testimonies of so many ancient and modern authors should not convince them. But why should I wonder, if those who believe not Moses and the prophets, will not believe though one should rise from the dead? One great cause of the hardening of these infidels is, the frequent impostures which the Romanists obtrude on the world in their exorcisms and pretended miracles. Another is the too great credulity of some who make everything witchcraft which they do not understand; and a third may be the ignorance of some judges and juries, who condemn silly melancholy people upon their own confession, and perhaps slender proofs. None of these three can be denied, but it is impertinent arguing to conclude, that because there have been cheats in the world, because there are some too credulous, and some have been put to death for witches, and were not, therefore all men are deceived. There is so much written, both at home and abroad, so convincingly, and by so unquestionable authors, that I have not the vanity to add any thing, especially to you; but because you have desired me to tell you the story of the nuns at Loudun, and some others, I shall first tell you of a real possession near the place I was born in; next of disquietings by spirits, (both of which I had from unquestionable testimonies) and then I shall tell you what I saw at Loudun, concerning that which I do not doubt to call a pretended possession, sure I am a cheat. About 30 years ago, when I was a boy at school, there was a poor woman generally believed to be really possessed. She lived near the town of Duns, in the Mers, and Mr John Weems, then minister of Duns, (a man known by his works to be a learned man, and I knew him to be a godly honest man,) was perswaded

Euphan M'Calzeane was a lady possessed of a considerable estate in her own right. She was the daughter of Thomas M'Calzeane Lord Cliftonhall, one of the Senators of the College of Justice, whose death in the year 1581, spared him the disgrace and misery of seeing his daughter fall by the hands of the executioner. She was married to a gentleman of her own name, by whom she had three children. She was accused of treasonably conspiring the King's death by enchantments;⁷ particularly by training a waxen picture of the King; of raising storms to hinder his return from Denmark; and of various other articles of witchcraft. She was heard by counsel in her defence; was found guilty by the jury, which consisted of landed gentlemen of note; and her punishment was still severer than that commonly inflicted on the Weyward Sisters,—She was burned alive, and her estate confiscated. Her children, however, after being thus barbarously robbed of their mother, were⁸ restored by act of Parliament against the forfeiture. The act does not say that the sentence was unjust; but that the King was touched in honour and conscience to restore the children. But to move the wheels of his Majesty's conscience, the children had to grease them, by a payment of five thousand merks to the donator of escheat,⁹ and by relinquishing the estate of Clifton-hall, which the King gave to Sir James Sandilands of Slamanno.

As a striking picture of the state of justice, humanity, and science in those times,¹⁰ it may be remarked that this Sir James Sandilands, a favourite of the King's, ("ex interiore principis familiaritate,") who got this estate, which the daughter of one Lord of Session forfeited, on account of being a witch, did that very year murder another Lord of Session in the suburbs of Edinburgh, in the public street, without undergoing either trial or punishment.

1620.

Margaret Wallace.

Margaret Wallace¹¹ was tried before the Court of Justiciary. The Duke of Lennox, the Archbishop of Glasgow, and Sir George Erskine of Innerteil, sat as assessors to the judges, and an eminent counsel was heard in

⁷ Rec. of Just., 8th May 1591

⁸ Unprinted Acts, A.D. 1592. No. 70.

⁹ He who obtains a gift of the forfeiture.

¹⁰ "Johnstoni Historia Rerum Britannicarum," p. 172.

¹¹ Records of Justiciary, March 20. 1620.

