

The genuine history of the good devil of Woodstock. The story of Jane Gilbert, a supposed witch / [by Christopher Smart] The feuds of the houses of Kintair and Seaton.

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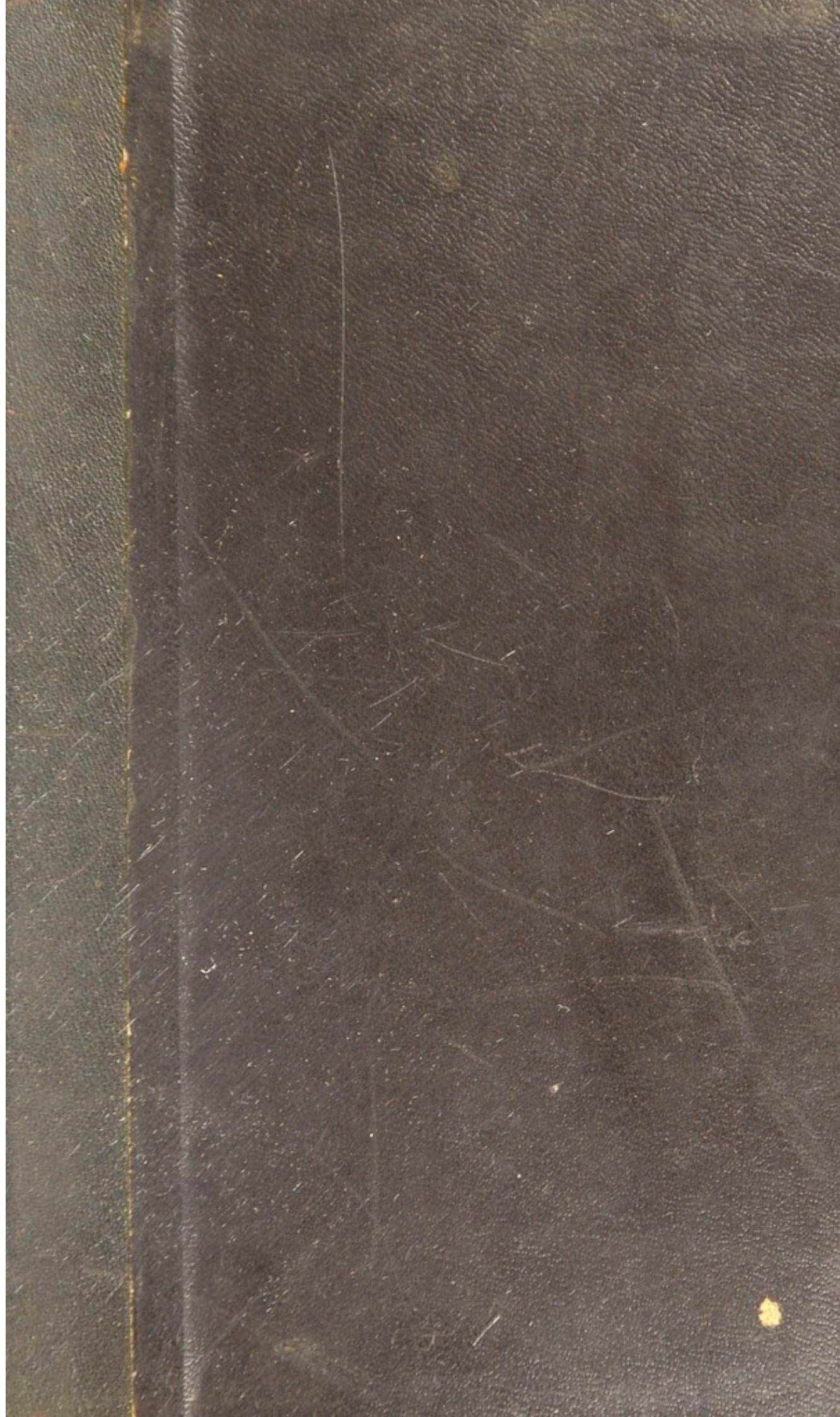
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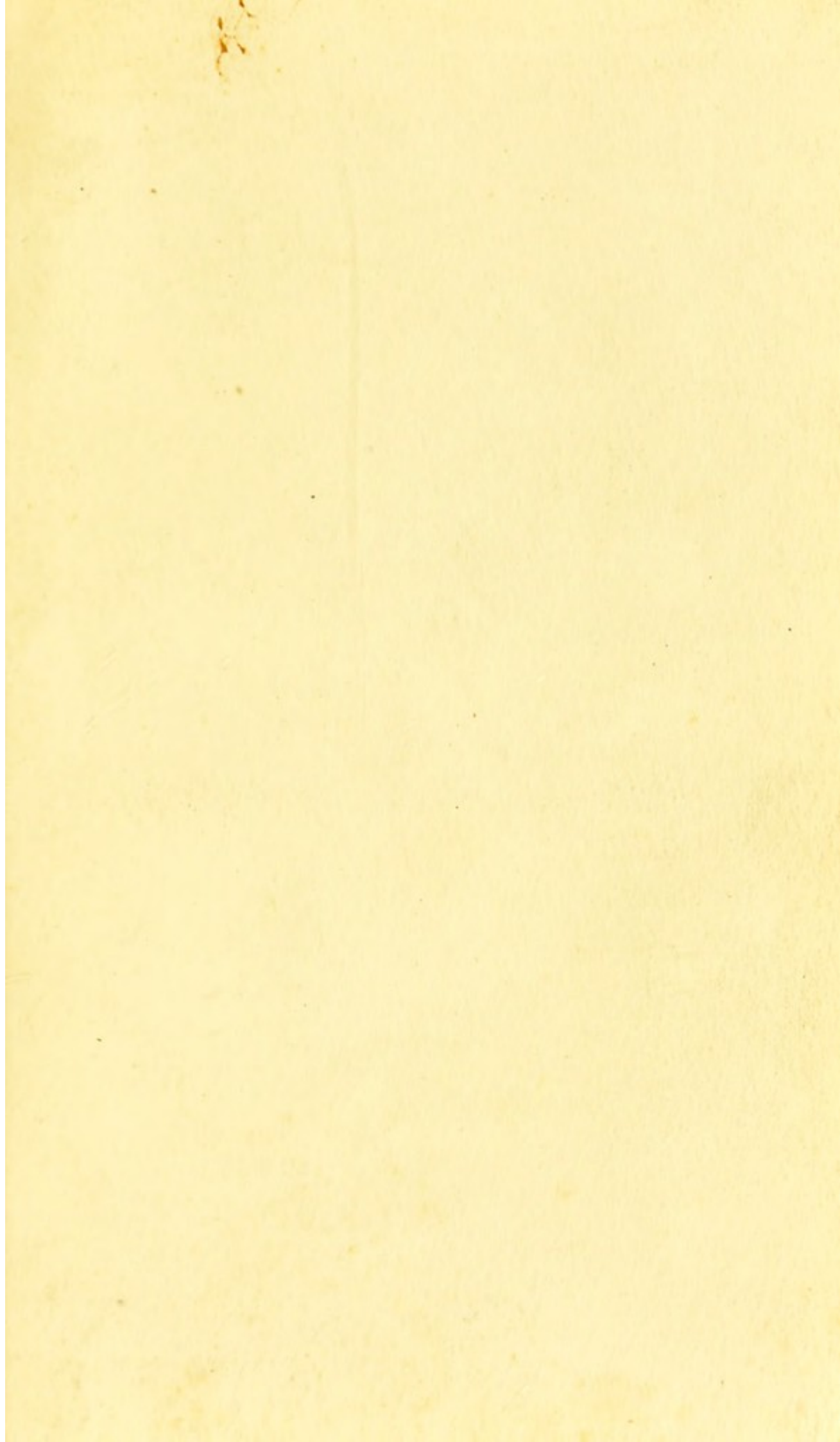


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GENUINE---

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SURPRISING APPARITIONS.



Alais' Scalp.

Upon this the same peasant was so bold as to draw a sword, but he had scarce got it out when he perceived another invisible hand had hold of it.

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A New Edition, Improved.

THE
GENUINE HISTORY
OF
THE GOOD DEVIL
Of Woodstock.

THE STORY OF
JANE GILBERT,
A Supposed Witch.

THE FEUDS
OF THE
HOUSES OF
KINTAIR and SEATON.

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THE
GENUINE HISTORY
OF THE
Good Devil of Woodstock.

*Being a particular account of the strange and
surprising APPARITIONS, and works of
SPIRITS which happened in the Months of
October and November, in the year of our
Lord Christ, 1649. When the Honourable
Commissioners for surveying the said Manor,
sat and remained there. Collected and attest-
ed by themselves.*

IN times when a general knowledge of the Scien-
ces pervade mankind, we hope it may not be con-
sidered improper to shew the weakness of our an-
cestors, in allowing their understandings to so rea-
dily give way to a belief in supernatural causes.
However our public amusements tend to expose
the arts by which the learned few imposed upon
A 2 their

their contemporaries: the Phantasmagoria having a wonderful effect on the powers of the mind, and convinces me that all supernatural appearances have been produced by men misusing science, to delude and terrify the multitude, by an unmanly and unjust deprivation of their natural reason, in order to attain their own purposes. The following story will elucidate this remark, and give strength to the justice of it: when we consider, that so lately as 1649. six gentlemen appointed as Commissioners from Oliver Cromwell, to survey the manor of Woodstock, were so grossly imposed upon by the practice of a little natural philosophy, and chemistry, as to believe themselves surrounded by evil spirits; and under the influence of this deception left the place, convinced that nothing but supernatural powers could have produced such causes.

The Honourable the Commissioners arrived at Woodstock manor house October the 13. and took up their residence in the kings own rooms. His Majesty's bed-chamber they made their kitchen, the council-hall their pantry, and the presence-chamber was the place where they sat for the dispatch of business: His Majesty's dining-room they made their wood yard, and stow'd it with no other wood but that of the famous royal oak, from the high park: which, that nothing might be left with
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the name of the king about it, they had dug up by the roots, and split and bundled up into faggots for their firing.

October, 16. This day they first sat for the dispatch of business. In the midst of their first debate, there entered a large black dog (as they thought) which made a terrible howling, overturned two or three of their chairs, and doing some other damage, went under the bed, and there gnawed the cords : the door this while continued constantly shut, when after some two or three hours, Giles Sharp their secretary, looking under the bed, perceived that the creature was vanished, and that a plate of meat which one of the servants had hid there was untouched, and shewing this to their honours, they were all convinced there could be no real dog concerned in the case, the said Giles also deposed on oath, that to his certain knowledge there was not.

October, 17. As they were this day sitting at dinner in a lower room, they heard plainly the noise of persons walking over their heads, though they well knew the doors were all locked, and there could be none there ; presently after they heard also all the wood of the kings oak brought by parcels from the dining room, and thrown with great violence into the presence chamber ; as also, the chairs, stools, tables, and other furniture forcibly

hurled about the room: their own papers of the minutes of their transactions torn, and the ink-glass broken. When all this had sometime ceased, the said Giles proposed first to enter into these rooms, and in presence of the Commissioners, of whom he received the key, he opened the doors, and entering, with their honours following him, he there found the wood strewed about the room, the chairs tossed about and broken, the papers torn, and the ink-glass broken over them, all as they had heard; yet no footsteps appeared of any person whatever being there, nor had the doors ever been opened to admit or let out any persons since their honours were last there. It was therefore voted Nem Con that the person who did this mischief could have entered no other way than at the key-hole of the said doors.

In the night following this same day, the said Giles and two others of the Commissioners servants as they were in bed in the same room with their honours, had their beds feet lifted up so much higher than their heads, that they expected to have their necks broken; and then they were let fall at once with such violence as shook them up from the bed at a good distance, and this was repeated many times, their honours being amazed spectators of it. In the morning the bedsteads were found
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crack'd and broken : and the said Giles and his fellows declared they were fore to the bones with the tossing and jolting of their beds.

October, 19. As they were all in bed together, the candles were blown out with a sulphurous smell, and instantly many trenchers of wood were hurled about the room ; and one of them putting his head above the cloaths, had not less than six forcibly thrown at him, which wounded him very grievously. In the morning the trenchers were all found lying about the room, and were observed to be the same they had eaten on the day before, none being found remaining in the pantry,

October, 20. This night the candles were put out as before, the curtains of the bed in which their honours lay, were drawn to and fro many times with great violence ; their honours received many cruel blows, and were much bruised beside with eight great pewter dishes, and three dozen wooden trenchers which were thrown on the bed, and heard afterwards rolling about the room.

Many times also this night, they heard the forcible falling of many faggots by their bed-side, but in the morning no faggots were found there ; no dishes nor trenchers were there seen neither ; and the aforesaid Giles attests, that by their different
arranging

arranging in the pantry, they had assuredly been taken thence, and after put there again.

October, 21. The keeper of their ordinary and his bitch lay with them this night, they had no disturbance.

October, 22. Candles put out as before. They had the said bitch with them again, but were not by that protected: the bitch made a very pitious cry, the cloaths of their bed were all pull'd off, and the bricks without any wind, were thrown off the chimney-tops into the middle of the room.

October, 24. The candles put out as before. The curtains of the bed in the drawing room were forcibly drawn many times, the wood thrown about as before, a terrible crack like thunder was heard; and one of the servants running to see if his master was not killed, found at his return three dozen of trenchers laid smoothly upon his bed under the quilt.

October, 26. The beds were shaken as before, the windows seemed all broken to pieces and the glass fell in vast quantities all about the room. In the morning they found the windows all whole, but the floor strewn with broken glass; which they gathered and laid by.

October,

October, 29. At midnight candles went out as before, something walked majestically through the room and opened and shut the window, great stones were thrown violently into the room, some where-off fell on the beds, others on the floor; and at about a quarter after one, a noise was heard as of forty cannon discharged together, and again repeated at about eight minutes distance. This alarmed and raised all the neighbourhood, who coming into their honours room, gathered up the great stones, fourscore in number, many of them like common pebbles and boullers, and laid them by where they are to be seen to this day, at a corner of the adjoining field. This noise like the discharge of cannon was heard thro' all the country for sixteen miles round. During these noises which were heard in both rooms together, both the Commissioners and their servants gave one another over for lost, and cryed out help; and Giles Sharp snatching up a sword, had nigh killed one of their honours, taking him for the spirit, as he came in his shirt into the room. While they were together the noise was continued, and part of the tiling of the house, and all the windows of an upper room were taken away with it.

October, 30. At midnight something walked into the chamber treading like a bear, it walked
many

many times about, then threw the warming-pan violently on the floor, and so bruised it that it was spoiled; vast quantities of glass were now thrown about the room, and vast quantities of horses bones and great stones thrown in; these were all found in the morning, and the floor, beds, and walls were all much damaged by the violence they were thrown.

November, 1. Candles were placed in all parts of the room, and a great fire made. At midnight the candles all yet burning, a noise like the burst of a cannon was heard in the room, and the burning billets were tossed all over the room and about the beds, that had not their honours called in Giles and his fellows, the house had been assuredly burnt, an hour after the candles went out as usual the crack of many cannon were heard, and many pails full of green stinking water were thrown on their honours in bed, great stones were also thrown in as before, the bed-curtains and bedsteads torn and broken. The windows were now all really broken and the whole neighbourhood alarmed with the noises, nay, the very rabbit stealers that were abroad that night in the warren, were so frightened at the dismal thundering, that they fled for fear and left their ferrets behind them.

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One of their honours this night spoke, and in the name of god asked what it was, and why it disturbed them so. No answer was given to this, but the noise ceased for awhile, when the spirit came again, and as they all agreed, brought with it seven devils worse than itself. One of the servants now lighted a large candle and set it in the door way between the two chambers to see what passed; and as he watched he plainly saw a hoof striking a candlestick into the middle of the room, and afterwards making three scrapes over the snuff of the candle to scrape it out: upon this the same peasant was so bold as to draw a sword, but he had scarce got it out when he perceived another invifible hand had hold of it, and at length prevailing struck him so violently on the head with the pummel that he fell down for dead with the blow. At this instant was heard another burst like the discharge of a broadside of a ship of war, and at about two minutes distance each, no less than nineteen more such; these shook the house so violently that they expected every moment it would fall upon their heads. The neighbours on this were all alarmed and running to the house they all joined in prayers and psalm singing, during which the noise still continued in the other rooms, and the discharge of cannon without, though no one was there.

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We shall conclude our relation of this event, by observing that though tricks have been often played in affairs of this kind, many of these things are not reconcileable to juggling; such as 1st: The loud noises made beyond the power of man without such instruments as were not there. 2nd. The tearing and breaking the beds. 3d. Throwing about the fire. 4th. The hoof treading out the candle. and, 5thly. The striving for the sword, and the blow the man received from the pummel of it.

To see however, how great men are sometimes deceived; Dr. Plot, who records this relation, concludes—that he had from under the mans own hand that he, Joseph Collins, commonly known by the name of funny Joe of Oxford, was himself this very devil; that he hired himself as a servant to these Commissioners, under the feigned name of Giles Sharp; and by the help of two friends, and an unknown trap door in the ceiling of the bed-chamber, and a lb. of white gun-powder, played all these amazing tricks by himself and his fellow servants, whom he had introduced on purpose to assist him.

The candles were contrived, by a common trick of gunpowder put in them, to put themselves out at a certain time.

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The dog who began the farce, was, (as he swore) only a bitch who had the day before whelped in that room, and made all this disturbance in seeking for her puppies : and which, when she had served his purpose he let out, and then looked for.—The story of the hoof and sword, himself alone was witness to, and was never suspected of the truth of his assertions, tho' in reality mere fiction.—By the trap door his friends let down stones, faggots, glass, water, &c. which, they either left there or drew up again, as best suited with them ; and by this way let themselves in and out without opening the doors, or going thro' the key-holes *as their honours had wisely determined*.—All the noises he declares he made, by placing quantities of white gun powder over pieces of burning charcoal on plates of tin ; which, as they melted went off with that violent explosion.

He tells us also, one thing beyond all the rest, and was what in reality drove them from the house, though they never owned it. This was, they had formed a reserve of part of the premises to themselves, and hid their mutual agreement which they had drawn up in writing, under the earth in a pot, in a corner of the room where they usually dined, in which an orange tree grew ; when in the midst of their dinner one day this earth of itself took fire, and burnt violently with a blue flame, filling the

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room

room with a strong sulphureous stench; and this he also professes was his own doing by a secret mixture he had placed there the day before.

We are happy in having an opportunity of setting history right about these remarkable events, and would not have our readers disbelieve Collins's account of them from his naming white powder going off when melted, or his making the earth about the pot take fire of its own accord; since, however improbable these accounts may appear to some readers, and whatever secrets they might be in Joe's time, they are well known now in chemistry.

As to the last, there needs only to mix an equal quantity of iron filings finely powdered with some pure powdered sulphur, and make them into a paste with fair water; this paste when it has lain together twenty six hours, will of itself take fire and burn all the sulphur away with a blue flame and a great stink.

For the others, what he calls white gun-powder, is plainly the thundering powder called *pulvis fulminans* by our Chymists, it is made only of three parts of salt-petre, two parts of pearl-ashes, or salt of tartar, and one part of flour of brimstone, mixed together and beat to a fine powder, a small quantity

tity of this held on the point of a knife over a candle, will not go off till it melts, and then give a report like a pistol ; and this he might easily dispose in larger quantities, so as to make it go off itself when he was with his masters.

THE END.



THE FEUDS
OF THE HOUSES OF
KINTAIR and SEATON.
A Scottish History.

*Giving a faithful account of a Family Quarrel
which happened in the North, during the
reign of MALCOM King of Scotland.*

IN the North-west parts of Scotland, in the reign of Malcom, and nearly cotemporary with the usurper Macbeth, whose history our immortal Shakspeare has made the subject of one of his Tragedies, there lived two young noblemen, at the head of two parties, the mortal enemies of one another: scarce a week passed at those times when the families were near one-another without accounts of rapes, duels, and private murders—for the hatred was so universally strong through the multi-

multitude, that from the lord to the meanest servant all thought it a merit and an honour to injure, even in the most dishonest manner, any body that belonged even in any degree to the enemies party.

The names of the two young noblemen, at this time at the head of those parties, were Seaton and Kintair; the former a youth of a most promising genius and great abilities, joined to great integrity, and an earnest love of virtue; his hereditary hatred to the Kintairs was in short, the only thing that could sully his character; and that he governed in such a manner, that had it not been for the temper of his enemy, the world saw the family quarrel might have been made up between them, and a deal of misery and blood-shed prevented to the country: but such was the implacable hatred and native cruelty of the young Kintair, that all offers of this kind in his lifetime must have been vain, and could only have exposed the goodness of the offerer to the imputations of weakness, cowardice, and fear. The violent Kintair was in his temper bloody, revengeful, pitiless, and savagely cruel, to a degree scarcely to be conceived; yet all these passions, and all his hatred to the Seaton family, could not prevent his falling in love at first sight, with one of that house: indeed the sister, tho he at first knew it not, of the very lord he hated so implacably.

This lady whose name was Margaret, had not only a very charming person; but the innate virtues of her soul displayed themselves outwardly in her face and whole deportment, and gave her an air and manner not to be resisted; she and a twin sister so like her in every lineament of face, that they were not easily to be known asunder, were the only relations of the young Seaton; and with him made all the remainder of that noble and ancient family.

Opportunities of meeting, it is easy to imagine were not very frequent between these two families, especially between the heads of them: in short it happened that the rough Kintair had never seen this lady, till one evening as she was returning on horseback from a visit to a friend at some miles distance, met her as he was going across the country, attended by half a dozen servants to a party of diversion. The moment he beheld her, he stopped his horse, ordered as polite a message as he could dictate to be delivered to her, and begged he might have leave to speak to her: the lady alighted from her horse, and readily admitted him: when he approached her, he threw himself upon his knees, entreated her to tell him her condition; and if the laws of honour would permit, he would make her wife to the first nobleman of the country; for that he was the lord Kintair. The lady who had till
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that word heard him with a downcast look, and a face covered with a blush of modesty, now immediately leaping on her horse again, told him; young lord, a word will answer you: my name is Margaret Seaton. And with these words in her mouth, left him and went on her journey.

Words are too faint to describe the conflict of raging passions in the breast of the wild Kintair on this occasion; love, anger, pride, revenge, the lost hopes of enjoyment of the lady, and the disdain of a refusal, all combatting together in his breast, left him no room at first for words, or for a resolution: he threw himself on the ground, and tore up the very earth in agony; at length arising in a fury, he bade his servants follow and bring her, and her attendants back to him: they were not got far however, before he changed his opinion, and thinking on the uncertainty of their success, as the lady's attendants were equal to them in number, and determining to trust his revenge to nobody but himself, mounted his horse and followed them.

Love and revenge gave him wings as it were, he soon overtook his own servants, and quickly after the lady Margaret and hers; here he rode up to her, and addressed himself to her a second time in these words: Insolent idiot, did you imagine you could escape me thus, and that I would let you go home

home, to make your brother sport with my entreaties, and your proud refusal? No! think not I would marry the sister of a man that I hate, or be the scandalous means, by a boyish passion, of making up an enmity, which has so just a cause as that between our families; and which I hope will be eternal. There is a shorter way for me to satiate my desires with you; and one that gives me too a double pleasure, that feeds at once my hatred and my love, and gives me the noblest revenge on all your house that my hate can even wish. With these words he gave the signal of murder to his attendants; who destroyed all the unhappy lady's servants after a short conflict; during which, the inhuman lord ravished their miserable mistress. Within a moment after this, tho' too late alas to prevent it, a party of near a hundred of the Seatons appeared upon a neighbouring hill, they however saw nothing of this; but the savage ravisher fearing to be overpowered by numbers, mounted his horse and with his attendants rode off in haste through the woods. The Seatons passed another way, and the wretched lady was in a moment left alone, encompassed with the horrors of her own fate, the carcasses of her murdered servants, and the bloody weapons of the murderers; which, in their haste to get away on sight of the other party, had made them leave behind them. Her first resolution

resolution was to end her life and misery together, by plunging one of the daggers in her own bosom; but religion forbidding that, and her own shame preventing her returning home, she came to a final resolution of hiding herself from the world for ever; and picking up the weapons to lay before her as an eternal remembrance of the horrid scene, made her way to a distant cottage, where she told her story; and giving to the poor honest hinds her money, jewels, and whatever else of value she had about her, swore them to an eternal secrecy, and conjured them to let her spend the remainder of a miserable life with them.

The bloody Kintair as soon as he had got to a place of safety, sat down with his attendants. exulted with them in the success of his monstrous villainy, and swore he never tasted the pleasures of revenge before, he praised their courage, gave them a number of presents, and promised them a thousand more, and finally bound himself in an association with them, to make them his companions, and his friends for ever; and give them all estates, provided they joined heartily with him in prosecuting a scene of vengeance, which he told them he had now concerted, and of which, this was but the auspicious beginning. All were proud of the honour their lord did them; and all, with the severest imprecations, entered into the association

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he promoted, of never resting till the whole family of the Seatons, which, as I have before observed, consisted now of three persons only, should be extinct.

Friends and brothers in revenge said Kintair on this, hear me now, and know the first step to my design is this: the lady whom I have enjoyed must perish; this must be the first done, and you shall then see and be surprized at my concerted vengeance; I had not spared her then, but for the party we saw above us, but now the desperate attempt must be to seize her again e'er she get home, and kill her on the spot where I enjoyed her: this compleats my yet unfinished vengeance on her, and leads on beside to a scene of complicated mischief with which my brain is full, which you can of yet have no idea of. The words were no sooner uttered, but all were up, and ready for the enterprise; and made that haste that they soon got forwarder than she could possibly have been by that time had she continued her journey homewards; here they pitched in a thick wood, thro' which the road to the castle of the Seatons lay, and waited for the unfortunate lady. She, poor creature, was otherwise employed than they imagined; but her sister, the lady Jane unfortunately for her, had the same day been abroad to some little distance, and returning home in the dusk of the evening alone,

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the villains immediately seized on her, and according to the orders of their lord, carried her to the fatal place where the rape and murder had been before committed. It was late in the night before they arrived there, and the moon shining bright, the distracted lady Margaret had left her cottage, and wandered to weep her sorrows at the fatal place where the horrid act had been committed; she was here tossing herself on the ground, and making the rocks and woods resound with her distracted cries, when the murderers approached with their unhappy prey; the trampling of horses, the oaths and blasphemies of the company, and the known voice of the hated Kintair terrified the lady Margaret so, that she crept among the bushes and thorns that wounded her tender skin as she passed on at every step, till she came to a thicket, behind which she rested to listen to the noise of these abandoned ruffians. They were now come to the place, and the servants throwing down the unfortunate and mistaken victim of their fury, whose mouth they had before stopped and tied over with handkerchiefs to prevent her outcries, no voice was heard but of the savage Kintair; who walking up to her, cried in an insulting tone: we were prevented lady this morning, but here is now a favour that you shall soon strikes you to the heart; with these words he plunged his sword into her bosom, and ended her
 life

life, without discovering his mistake. As soon as the unfortunate lady fell, the inhuman murderer seating himself on her body yet struggling in the agonies of death, said to his attendants, now friends hear the utmost of my intentions; alarm you the neighbouring villages with cries of murder; those other bodies are yet warm, and they shall be made to believe all tell together. I'll join in the croud that first comes, and do you Farquarson (speaking to one of his servants) mount the swiftest horse, and as you see us approach, ride with your utmost speed towards Seaton castle, then round the heath and join us, and you shall be rejoiced at what my revenge shall make of this. Immediately all separated to the work, and the afflicted Lady Margaret took that opportunity to get back to her cottage: she was scarce there when the whole country was raised; the bloody Kintair joined the mob, and Farquarson when they came in sight, fled as he was ordered before them; Kintair pursued him with a number of the clowns; and when he was got from them, that monster of villany returned, and assured and persuaded his followers that it was Lord Seaton who fled before them. The clowns willing to shew their discernment, agreed to a man that they knew him all the way he went, and knew the horse he rode on; and on now viewing the bodies of the murdered persons, The abandoned Kintair persuaded

suaded every body, that this Seaton had debauched his sister and brought her hither, where, with the assistance of his other servants, he had murdered her and all that were there present. His own people it is easy to imagine joined readily to this, and the rest were soon brought over to follow their opinion : and as soon as Kintair found this, he made them a long declamation on the horror of the crime and persuaded them all to follow him immediately to the next large town, and relate before the magistracy what they had seen. His persuasions and the rewards he promised to all who would go with him, made every one present follow, and immediately they set forward, tho' in the night, and never stopped nor stayed till they arrived at the end of their journey. All the way as they went on, the villainous Kintair's attendants extolled the generosity, the goodness, and love of justice their master shewed in this, and partly by these praises, and partly by promised rewards to all that should be able to give material evidences against the murderers, the clowns were led into forming a thousand circumstances, all positive against the pretended murderer. When they arrived at the town, it happened that the Magistracy was at that time sitting : they were all rejoiced at this, and went in a body to the hall, and demanding (on account of the horrid enormity of the crime they came to give evidence on, an immediate

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diate audience) were admitted. The arch devil Kintair entering at their head, recounted to the Magistracy the story that he had before concerted, and swore to the identity of the person he accused ; his servants all followed his example, and unwilling not to say something from their own knowledge, each singled out some one by name of the innocent Seaton's servants, whom he accused of the murder of the attendants ; and the clowns joining their positive oaths to the same facts, and many other forged circumstances, the absent Seaton and six of his attendants were accused of a most horrid murder, on the positive oaths of more than thirty persons, who all declared themselves to have been eye witnesses of the facts they alledged against them.

The innocent Lord Seaton knew nothing of any part of this fatal tragedy, but was returning to his castle and some of his servants, from a short journey he had taken to meet his sisters, when he was seized by the officers of justice sent to apprehend him ; all circumstances are construed into meaning by people possessed of an opinion ; and accordingly this unhappy lord's being now found returning, with a number of his servants from that part of the country where the murder had been committed, was looked on as a proof of his having been committing it ; and the agonies, grief, astonishment, and horror with which he received the news of the death

death of his beloved sister and his servants, were construed into confessions of his guilt.

The mistake of the two sisters was never found out, and the positive oaths of the accusers, that it was Lady Margaret that was murdered, made it not at all doubted. That unfortunate Lady was glad of the mistake, wishing since the rape for nothing but to be unknown to the whole world, and looking on this as the most secure of all the means of being so would never, had she not afterwards felt the then necessity that compelled her to it, have declared herself to the world.

A short journey brought the accused Lord before the Magistracy; he entered the room before they expected him, and immediately on his appearance all the accusers renewed their oaths, that he and his attendants who were now with him, were the very persons who had committed the murders, and the vile Kintair made a long harangue to the court, aggravating in the strongest manner the horror of the crime, and adding a thousand reproaches. When he had done, the accused Lord advanced towards his judges with a settled countenance, and looking with disdain on his accuser, and on his judges with that modest but intrepid confidence that conscious innocence ever gives, spoke in the following manner:—

My LORDS and JUDGES,

View with an impartial eye the conduct of my past life, and you will determine, I cannot but be innocent of the horrid crimes I am accused of, and that I am so, be it sufficient that I now once, in the most solemn manner affirm before you.

Consider my accuser is the professed enemy of my house and family, and that these who are accused as my accomplices, are the very friends, the fathers, and the brothers of my murdered honest servants.

Is it probable that they could for my sake be induced to murder these, or that I, who have been known to love my sister Margaret with a more than a common affection could be her murderer? Impossible! think on these circumstances, and weigh them well ere you determine any thing, be not rash or hasty. You know not what hereafter may appear, that yet is not suspected.

Here the accused ended his defence, which was soon overpowered by the number and repeated oaths of the evidences, and particularly of his enemy Kintair; who asserted that he saw him plunge his dagger in the breast of the Lady Margaret, and saw the others butchering his attendants. The supreme judge was now rising from his seat, to pronounce sentence on the accused lord and his attendants,

dants, when a voice was heard crying with the utmost earnestness :—Forbear, forbear, O Judge ; guard well the doors that none escape. and at the same instant a woman threw herself at the feet of the judges, crying out, I am that Margaret whom this innocent, this best of brothers is accused of murdering ; and look, whose are these ?—With these words she threw down the daggers. The court all rose in a moment, astonished at her appearance ; her brother threw himself on her neck in a transport of joy, and the court examining the daggers and finding on each the name of its owner, demanded of the lady the true history of the fact. She on this related the whole catastrophe in the most pathetic manner. And when she had heard the sentence intended for her brother and his servants, passed on his accusers, retired into a nunnery, and left the innocent, but unhappy Seaton in the possession of his own, and the forfeited estates and titles of his accusers—which his descendants, the Seatons of that country enjoy to this day.

T H E
STORY OF JANE GILBERT,
A SUPPOSED WITCH,

BY MR. CHRISTOPHER SMART.

THERE was in the west of England, where I lived several years, a poor industrious woman, who laboured under the evil report of being an old witch. Every hog that died with the murrain, every cow that flipt her calf, she was accountable for. If a horse had the staggers, she was supposed to be in his head, and whenever the wind blew a little harder than ordinary, Goody Gilbert was said to be playing her tricks, and riding on a broomstick in the air.

These and a thousand other phantasies, too ridiculous to recite, possessed the pates of the common people. Horse-shoes were nailed with the heels upwards, and many tricks were made use of, to entrap and mortify the poor creature. Such, indeed, was their rage against her, that they even petitioned Mr. Williams, the parson of the parish, not
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to let her come to church ; and, at last, even insisted upon it. This, however, he over-ruled, and allowed the poor old woman a nook in one of the aisles to herself, where she muttered over her prayers in the best manner she could.

The parish, thus disconcerted and enraged, withdrew the small pittance they allowed for her support ; and would have reduced her to the necessity of starving, had she not been still assisted by the benevolent Mr. Williams. He often sent her bread and meat ; frequently procured her spinning-work from the next market-town ; and was so provoked at their behaviour to the poor old creature, that he once applied to a neighbouring justice of the peace in her behalf ; but, as there happened a storm the night before, which stripped part of the thatch off his worship's stable, that wise haberdasher of the law refused her relief.

I was one afternoon drinking tea with Mr. and Mrs. Williams, when a message being brought that poor Jane Gilbert was extremely ill, we all three went to see her. As she was sick, I expected to have found her in bed ; and we opened the door softly, not to disturb her ; but, when we came into her little hovel, poor Jane was spinning by a small peat fire, which I could have covered with my hand.

As the poor old soul was deaf, she did not hear us

us open the door, and I had an opportunity of taking a full survey of her before she perceived us. A picture of such wretchedness I never saw before or since. Her body was half naked, insomuch that her withered shoulders and part of her breasts appeared through her tattered gown. Her head was bound round with an old blue stocking, that exposed her bald crown and her ears to view. Her hose were composed of two haybands, tied round her legs with packthread. She sat in an old elbow-chair; and, by fits, dozed, and then again turned her wheel, to the motion of which her under-jaw kept exact time.

When Mr. Williams called to her, she raised herself up: and, by the support of the chair, made us a curtley.

The manner of our coming in had a little confused her, but she soon recovered herself, and, by our desire, sat down. Mr. Williams then enquired into the state of her disorder; and she told him, that she believed her illness was occasioned by her eating that food, pointing to an earthen pan that stood before us, in which were mixed a little barley meal, salt, and water; and adding, that she had not had any bread or meat for seven days. At this he was surpris'd, and asked what was become of the victuals he sent her the beginning of that week? She thanked him for it; and replied, that two fellows in the neighbourhood, whose names she

she mentioned, had taken it from her, and that one of them had struck her several blows. Mr. Williams seemed angry that she did not inform him of it: but she desired he would not be displeased; and said, she was loth to be too troublesome.

Mrs. Williams, who is a mighty good woman, was greatly affected with this circumstance, and shed tears; which were, indeed, accompanied with my own. She then warmed a little sack-whey she had brought in her pocket, and gave it the poor creature to drink. This Jane swallowed eagerly, and was so chearful after it, that she talked to us above two hours, entertained us with her whole story, and the history of her time, which was frequently interrupted with the warmest expressions of gratitude to Mr. and Mrs. Williams.

When I expressed my surprize at her memory and good sense, she told me that she was once a young gentlewoman's waiting-maid, with whom she had a good education; and could, even now, read and write very well, but that the neighbours would not suffer her to have a pen and ink, and had stolen her bible and spectacles.

Just as we were coming away, I put two half-crowns in her hand, which she returned me again, and begged I would oblige her with some halfpence in their stead—"for the people," says she, "in the neighbourhood, are possessed with a notion, that
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"I can turn lead into silver and gold; but that, by and by it will become lead again; and therefore none of the shops will change my money."

When we parted with the old woman, she cried; and whispered to Mr. Williams to come again, and give her the sacrament, for that she did not think she should live long.

I could recite many other circumstances in Jane, or (as they by way of reproach called her) Joan Gilbert's behaviour, which I think proved that she was not a witch, but a pious and good Christian, unless witchcraft can be supposed to consist of true wisdom, morality and religion. But I now hasten to the sequel of my story, in which you will find that the source from whence witchcraft is reputed to spring, is poverty, age, and ignorance; and that it is impossible for a woman to pass for a witch, unless she is very poor, aged, and lives in a neighbourhood where the people are void of common sense.

Some time after we had this interview with Jane Gilbert, a brother of her's died in London; who though like a truly adopted son of Care, he would not part with a farthing while he lived, at his death was obliged to leave her five thousand pounds; money that he could not carry in the coffin with him. This altered the face of Jane's affairs prodigiously: she was no longer Jane, alias Joan Gilbert, the ugly old witch, but Madam Gilbert, her
old

old ragged garb was exchanged for one that was new and genteel ; her greatest enemies made their court to her ; even the justice himself came to wish her joy ; and, though several hogs and horses died, and the wind frequently blew after that, Madam Gilbert was never supposed to have any hand in it ; and from hence it is plain, as I observed before, that a woman must be very poor, very old, and live in a neighbourhood where the people are very stupid, before she can possibly pass for a witch.

It was a saying of Mr. Williams, who would sometimes be jocular, and had the art of making even satire agreeable, that if ever Jane deserved the character of a witch, it was after this money was left her ; for that, with her five thousand pounds, she did more acts of charity and friendly offices than all the people of fortune within fifty miles of the place. Many thousands of my readers know this to be true ; but as some may be ignorant of it, I must inform them, that she gave bibles and common-prayer books to all the people in the neighbourhood, and she paid for the schooling of forty boys and girls. She boiled a large copper twice a week, and made broth and dumplings for all her neighbours who were old or sick ; she lent five hundred pounds, in small sums, to poor tradesmen and farmers, without interest, for ever ; and appointed trustees to take the best security they could, so that the principal might not be lost ; and

to remove the sums occasionally from one family to another, when the one could spare it, and the other wanted assistance. She settled twenty-five pounds per annum on the minister of the parish, to visit and pray by them, and teach the children their catechism; and to each child that came to church to repeat the catechism, she ordered a plumb-cake every Sunday.

Among her donations, she did not forget her friends, Mr. and Mrs. Williams, but gave their son and daughter five hundred pounds a-piece in her life-time. As to her own part, she allowed herself but eighteen pounds a year to live on; and that, at her death, she bequeathed to an old woman who attended her.

And this is a woman they were about to destroy for witchcraft and sorcery! But the people are now ashamed of their behaviour, and therefore I have concealed the name of the place.

THE END.

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