

The Devil

ON TRIAL

Witches, Anarchists,
Atheists, Communists,
and Terrorists in
America's Courtrooms

BY PHILLIP MARGULIES
AND MAXINE ROSALER

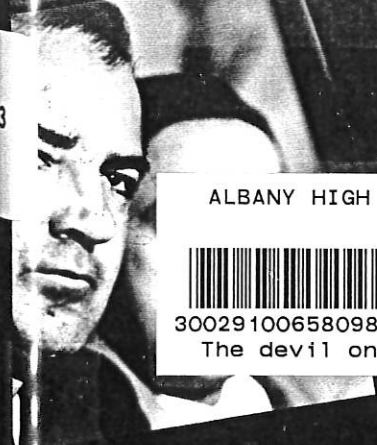
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The devil on trial : witches,



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"Sarah Good . . . Why do you thus torment
these poor children?" — *John Hathorne*

"We ourselves were not capable to understand,
nor able to withstand the mysterious delusions of
the Power of Darkness, and the Prince of the Air."
— *Written statement of the Salem Witch Trial jurors
on the Day of Humiliation, January 14, 1697*

A nineteenth-century painting by T. H. Matteson depicting the Salem witch trials.

❖ Chapter 1 ❖

The Salem Witch Trials

In every generation, there has always been some feared group to play the role of the devil in the American imagination. In 1692, in the little English colony of Massachusetts, the role of the devil was played by . . . the Devil . . . and by those who were said to have signed their name in his book. Once the accusations began to fly, anyone who questioned the justice of the trials was asking to join the ranks of the accused.

THE BEWITCHMENT

The winter of 1692 was the coldest to afflict New England in years. Water froze in pots and buckets, and the surfaces of wells had to be broken up with axes. In the meetinghouse where the God-fearing inhabitants of Salem, Massachusetts, attended religious services, even the sacramental bread froze, making a harsh rattling sound when it was dropped onto the sacramental plates. In fruitless searches for warmth, worshipers draped blankets across their laps, placed pans of hot coals beneath the benches where they sat, and nestled their feet under the bellies of their dogs. Sometimes, the only way for the pious villagers to escape the bitter cold was to leave the meetinghouse altogether and go home to seek whatever meager warmth their fireplaces had to offer.

That January the villagers were confronted by an uncanny series of events which added fear of the unknown and a conviction of spreading evil to the discomforts already experienced by the community. The trouble began when two girls living in the household of the village minister, Samuel Parris, started to behave very strangely. Betty Parris, the minister's daughter, was the first to exhibit the odd symptoms. She began to forget things and would fidget nervously during

religious services. When her father scolded her for failing to keep her mind on her prayer, she would bark like a dog. Instead of reciting her evening prayers, she spewed forth gibberish. She threw her Bible against the wall.

Soon her orphaned cousin Abigail, adopted into the Parris household, started having fits, too. Abigail would run around the house flapping her arms and trying to fly, shouting, "Whish! Whish!" Once she tried to fly up the chimney.

Samuel Parris summoned a group of doctors to the house. None of them could find a medical explanation for the girls' strange behavior. Finally, Dr. Samuel Griggs made the diagnosis that would lead to the most famous series of trials in American history. Within a period of less than a year, nineteen innocent men and women—and two dogs—would be hanged for an invisible crime. More than a hundred innocent people, including a four-year-old child, would be imprisoned for months, chained to the walls of dark, rat-infested dungeons, and one man would be forced to lie naked on the ground while heavy stones were piled onto his chest until he died.



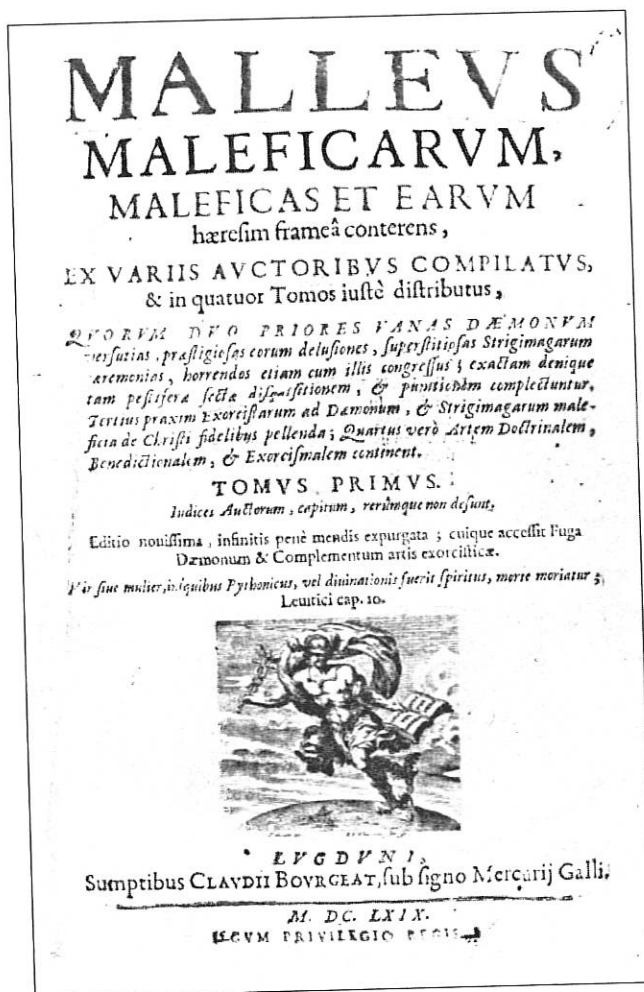
Condemned witches being hung in a public square in Europe.

The doctor set this chain of events into motion when he declared, "The evil hand is upon them." In his professional opinion, the girls were bewitched.

No one thought it odd that a learned man would make such a statement, for belief in witchcraft was all but universal in 1692. In fact, the Salem witch trials were the last of a great wave of witch trials conducted throughout the mid-sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, almost all of them in Europe. Witchcraft was a crime punishable by death, and during the previous two centuries, as many as one hundred thousand people in the Old World were executed for being witches.

When literate New Englanders wanted to know more

about the subject, they could consult *Maellus Maleficarum* ("Hammer of the Witches"), written in 1486 by a group of German monks. For two hundred years *Maellus Maleficarum* was the second most popular book in the world, right after the Bible. Judges presiding over witchcraft trials in Europe kept a pocket-size edition of it by their sides to consult as they sent thousands of people to their deaths. Nearer to home, a prominent Boston minister named Increase Mather had written a book in 1684 entitled *An Essay for the Recording of Illustrious Providences, or Remarkable Providences*, which included detailed accounts of a



The frontispiece to *Malleus Maleficarum* (The Hammer of Witches), the 1486 book that served as the major reference manual on witches for two centuries.

supposed episode of witchcraft that had taken place in the nearby town of Groton in 1671.

It was believed that a witch was a person who entered into a pact with the devil in exchange for supernatural powers to do evil. The evil acts—the *maleficia*—of witches included wicked deeds such as damaging crops, making the milk curdle, and causing illness or death to people and animals.

Beyond any immediate harm witches were thought to cause, their most serious crime was that of recruiting people to sign the book of Satan and join the ranks of his evil minions.



A drawing depicting three witches standing around a boiling cauldron; above them hovers the devil.

THE CITY ON A HILL

If Satan was trying to bring the inhabitants of Massachusetts into his fold, he was attempting the spiritual seduction of an exceptional group of people with an exalted sense of their destiny. The English villages of Massachusetts had been settled beginning in the early 1600s by a Protestant sect called the Puritans. In theology, the Puritans were Calvinists, believing that the vast majority of human beings were sinners doomed to suffer eternal hellfire, that a very small group of “the elect” would be saved, and that God, knowing everything, already knew who the saved would turn out to be. Naturally, most of the saved would be Calvinists.

The Puritans dressed plainly in black and white and wore their hair simply, in contrast to the lacy collars, brilliant cloth, and curly wigs that were then fashionable in Europe. They shunned music and dancing. They made a point of working on Christmas, which they considered to be a pagan holiday. They hoped to show by their austere ways that they were worthy of salvation.

The government of King Charles I considered the Puritans dangerous, for they opposed the Church of England, the religion of the state and of the monarch. Charles encouraged them to go to the colonies. The Puritans were eager to go, inspired by the idea of starting a new society far from the temptations of Europe. The settlers' leader, John Winthrop, gave words to this sense of mission, and in so doing he created a myth of American destiny that has persisted until the present day. The new colony, said Winthrop, would be "a city upon a hill," and "the eyes of all people" would be on them. Though most Americans are not descended from the Puritans, the character of the United States owes a great deal to them. They were tough, thrifty, hard-working pioneers who brought with them England's most democratic institutions. These institutions formed the basis of democracy when the colonies became a nation.

The American sense of destiny has also persisted. Long after the Puritans, with their buckled shoes and punishments for Sabbath-breaking, had faded into a quaint legend, Americans would continue to be drawn to the idea that their country has a mission—as an example of human liberty, as a promised land for immigrants.

TROUBLE IN SALEM

In Salem, people had been seeing signs of the devil's presence even before the strange behavior of the girls in Samuel Parris's household announced it to them. A succession of Indian raids and smallpox epidemics made the settlers feel as though their world could fall apart at any time. The political security of Salem was in jeopardy as well: Massachusetts had been in legal limbo ever since the charter giving the colony the right to govern itself had been revoked by the British

Crown eight years earlier. All attempts to negotiate a new charter had failed, and the inhabitants of this small farming community were growing anxious about their rights to the land they had worked so hard and long to cultivate.

There was also tension in the community between old settlers and new settlers, between the town of Salem, which was located on the coast, and the village of Salem, which was located inland. Salem Town, part of the seaboard world of merchants and mariners, was relatively worldly and freethinking. Salem Village, which had been created to provide food for Salem Town, was inhabited by more traditional Puritans, who disliked the individualism they saw emerging in Salem Town. The leaders in Salem Village wanted to distance themselves, legally, from Salem Town's corrupting influences. As a first step, they founded a separate church for the village and invited Samuel Parris (father of the bewitched Betty) to be its minister. These conflicts would take a dark turn when both these rival factions began to suspect that their enemies were the allies of Satan.

THE FIRST ACCUSATIONS

As the girls, Betty and Abigail, continued to behave more and more strangely, Samuel Parris called in ministers from neighboring towns and villages to look at them. The ministers all agreed that the children were bewitched—that is, they were victims of witchcraft. In the ministers' view, the bewitchment of the girls explained many things. Clearly, Satan had allies in Salem doing his bidding. Indian attacks, the lack of a charter from England, the strife between town and village, the smallpox outbreaks, even the bitterness of the winter: it was all Satan's work.

Word of the bewitchment spread, and people came to see the amazing antics of the afflicted girls. They watched as Betty and Abigail jumped under tables and twisted their bodies into seemingly impossible positions. When the villagers asked the girls who was hurting them, the girls refused to answer.

Finally, Mary Sibley, one of the women of Salem, decided to take matters into her own hands. It was known that witches usually had evil helpers known as familiars—devils who would disguise themselves as dogs, cats, or birds, or any

weird combination of animals. (A familiar of one of the accused Salem witches, for example, was “a thing with a head like a woman with two legs and wings.”) Mary Sibley suspected the Parrises’ dog of being a familiar. Hoping to break the evil spell, she made use of an old white-magic remedy. Under Sibley’s direction, the Parrises’ slave, Tituba, baked a “witch cake” out of flour and Betty’s and Abigail’s urine and fed it to the dog.

When Samuel Parris found out about the witch cake, he was furious. As far as he was concerned, there was no such thing as good magic. It was all the work of the devil, and using it was tantamount to “[going] to the Devil for help against the Devil,” he said. During religious services, the minister raged, “The Devil hath been raised among us and his rage is vehement and terrible, and, when he shall be silenced, the Lord only knows.”

Parris seemed to have a point, for after the baking of the witch cake, two more girls announced that they were afflicted. One of them was Anne Putnam, Jr., the twelve-year-old daughter of Thomas and Ann Carr Putnam.

At last, four days after the baking of the witch cake, the girls named their tormentors: Sarah Osborne, Sarah Good, and Tituba.



Painting showing Puritans on their way to church, by George Henry Boughton, 1867.

Sarah Osborne was a sick, penniless old woman. Sarah Good was a homeless beggar. In their lowly condition, both women resembled the many thousands who had been executed as witches in Europe in the previous two centuries.

Tituba was a Native American slave Samuel Parris had brought over with him from Barbados. During the long winter, Betty and Abigail had spent a lot of time with Tituba, who entertained them with tales of magic and sorcery. One of the things the girls liked to do with Tituba was play at fortunetelling. They would drop the white of an egg into a glass of water. Whatever form the egg white took would indicate the profession of their future sweethearts. During one of the girls' séances, the egg white turned into the shape of a coffin. John Hale, a pastor in a neighboring town, would later write that the coffin was "a just warning to others to take heed of handling the Devil's weapons."

It was soon after the incident with the egg-white coffin in mid-January that the girls began to show symptoms of their mysterious disease. By the end of the following month, they had made their first accusations of witchcraft. The witch-hunt had begun.

THE MAGISTRATES MARCH INTO TOWN

In 1692, English legal procedures were far less systematic and fair than they would later become, and in the colonies they were even more irregular. There was no police force; officials called "magistrates" performed the roles of judges. Magistrates were usually men of high standing in the community, but they did not necessarily have any legal training.

In criminal trials, the accused were not represented by defense counsel. There was no one responsible for protecting their rights. Defendants were not considered innocent until proven guilty, and torture was widely used to extract confessions. Modern ideas about the rights of the accused, rights ultimately written into the U.S. Constitution, were still undergoing development in England.

Thomas Putnam, the most prominent landowner in the village and the father of the most "afflicted" of the afflicted girls, asked the town's magistrates to inves-

tigate the crime. Accompanied by marshals armed with spears, they rode in from Salem Town to examine the suspects. Crowds from Salem and the surrounding villages flocked to the meetinghouse, where the hearings were held. The witch-hunt had now become an official legal proceeding.

THE QUESTIONING BEGINS

Presiding over the hearings were two magistrates from Salem Town, Jonathan Corwin and John Hathorne. Hathorne was the great-grandfather of Nathaniel Hawthorne, who would one day write about his Puritan ancestors in the novel *The Scarlet Letter*.

The first person brought in to be examined was Sarah Good. Pregnant and dressed in rags, Sarah Good persisted in proclaiming her innocence. Every time she denied the charges, the afflicted girls would fall into hysterics. Throughout the months of proceedings, the girls would, as a matter of routine, have fits whenever one of the alleged witches took the witness stand. A glance from a witch was thought to be capable of inflicting physical pain on her victim. To protect the girls, the magistrates directed the accused to keep their gazes averted from the girls at all times. Once, on her way



A late-fifteenth-century woodcut depicting three witches assuming the forms of strange-looking animals as they fly through the air.

to be questioned, an accused witch glanced across the square toward the meetinghouse, apparently causing a heavy roof beam inside to come crashing to the floor.

“Sarah Good,” Magistrate Hathorne asked, “do you not see now what you have done? Why do you not tell us the truth? Why do you thus torment these poor children?”

“I do not torment them.”

“Who do you employ then?” Hathorne pressed.

“I employ nobody. I scorn it.”

“How came they thus tormented?”

“What do I know?”

At this point in the questioning, Good made an effort to turn the attentions of the magistrates away from herself and toward another scapegoat.

“You bring others here and now you charge me with it,” she said.

“Why, who was it?” asked Hathorne, goading the frightened woman.

“I do not know but it was some you brought into the meetinghouse with you.”



Tituba teaching witchcraft to four children.

"We brought you into the meetinghouse."

"But you brought two more."

"Who was it then, that tormented the children?"

"It was Osborne," said Sarah Good.

Sarah Osborne was questioned next. Osborne, who had been dragged out of her sickbed to stand before the magistrates, said she was "more like to be bewitched than she was a witch." At one point she made a feeble attempt to join the ranks of the afflicted, complaining about having been pinched by invisible forces, all the while steadfastly refusing to admit to being a witch. But her pathetic ploy did not work, and she was dragged off to jail, where she would later die, the first victim of the Salem witch-hunt.

TITUBA'S CONFESSION

Last to be called before the magistrates was Tituba, who admitted very early in the questioning that she was, indeed, a witch. Having been beaten by Parris into confessing, she now stood before the magistrates and a packed house of villagers and shocked everyone with fantastic stories about flying around the village on broomsticks and being visited by strange creatures, sometimes in the form of a beast like a hog or a "great dog."

Tituba's confession marked the end of the first phase of the outbreak. A witch had confessed! Soon everyone would be wondering who among them were witches or wizards. In the months to come neighbor would turn against neighbor; husband would turn against wife; and child would turn against parent.

Confessing to witchcraft was the only way that an accused witch was able to escape execution, and soon the accused realized that it was safer for them to confess than it was for them to maintain their innocence.

In order to make their confessions more believable, the accused witches wove elaborate tales of their bewitchments, telling how they had come face-to-face with the devil, who sometimes appeared in the form of a black man with a hat, and how they had been forced to sign his book with their own blood. They told

how they had attended witches' covens where they were given red bread to eat and red wine to drink and heard witches discuss "pulling down the Kingdom of Christ and setting up the Kingdom of Satan."

Prodded on by the judges, the accused charged other members of the community of witchcraft and soon the line between the accuser and the accused became blurred.

By the end of the witch scare 55 of the more than 160 people accused of witchcraft would confess. Each confession would be bolstered by more accusations and eventually the ranks of the "afflicted" grew to nineteen, most of them female, most of them young girls. The escalating confessions and accusations reinforced people's fear that the devil was taking over the community.

MORE ACCUSATIONS

The witch-hunt gained momentum in March, when Anne Putnam, Jr., accused Martha Cory, a respectable church member, of bewitching her. The idea that the devil had managed to infiltrate the ranks of admired members of the community made it seem as though the village were infested with witches.

Martha Cory's open skepticism about the hearings had made her vulnerable to attack. Her response to being accused of witchcraft was "Nay, we must not believe these distracted children."

A week later Rebecca Nurse, a woman revered by all, was accused by several of the girls. On the same day that Rebecca Nurse was brought in to be examined, Dorcas Good, the four-year-old daughter of Sarah Good, was questioned, as part of the investigation into the guilt of her mother. Dorcas said that she "had a Snake that used to Suck on the lowest Joynt of [her] for-finger." Upon examining her finger, the magistrates detected a red spot (most likely a flea bite). As far as the magistrates were concerned, this was proof that Dorcas was suckling a demon. At the end of the day, the four-year-old child and the saintly old Rebecca Nurse were sent to jail.

By the end of May, there were at least thirty-nine people in jail.



Illustration created by Howard Pyle for an article ("The Second Generation of Englishmen in America," *Harpers New Monthly Magazine*, 1883), depicting an old hag being arrested for witchcraft.

IN THE JAILS OF SALEM

The proceedings that had taken place so far were all preliminary hearings. Without a charter, the colony could not legally hold trials, and so the accused were made to languish for months in filthy, rat-infested prisons, which were unbearably cold in the winter and unbearably hot in the summer.

Beyond being forced to endure the inhumane treatment of and daily indignities of life in the miserable prisons, the witches were systematically tortured in an

attempt to extract confessions from them. They were made to stand in one position for hours of brutal interrogation. Their necks were tied to their heels until blood gushed out of their noses. They suffered from not knowing what had become of their children, many of whom were left with no one to care for them. Although most of the accused were women, as time wore on more and more men were accused as well, and the streets of Salem were scattered with abandoned children who had not only lost their parents but also their homes, since the property of all accused witches was seized.

A local merchant described what had become of the belongings of one of the supposed witches: "The sheriff came to his house and seized all the goods, provisions and cattle that he could come at . . . threw out the beer of the barrel, and

carried away the barrel; emptied a pot of broth, and took away the pot, and left nothing in the house for the support of the children.”

THE COURT OF OYER AND TERMINER

Finally, on May 14, Massachusetts was granted its long-awaited charter. Along with the new charter, the colony received a new governor, William Phips. Phips set up a Court of *Oyer* and *Terminer* (“to hear” and “to determine” in French legal language). Courts of Oyer and Terminer were special courts that could be convened by colonial governors in the absence of regular courts of justice. Phips appointed nine magistrates to be judges and twelve people to serve on the jury. At the same time, he ordered the alleged witches to be put into chains.

To the twenty-first-century mind, one of the strangest things about the Salem

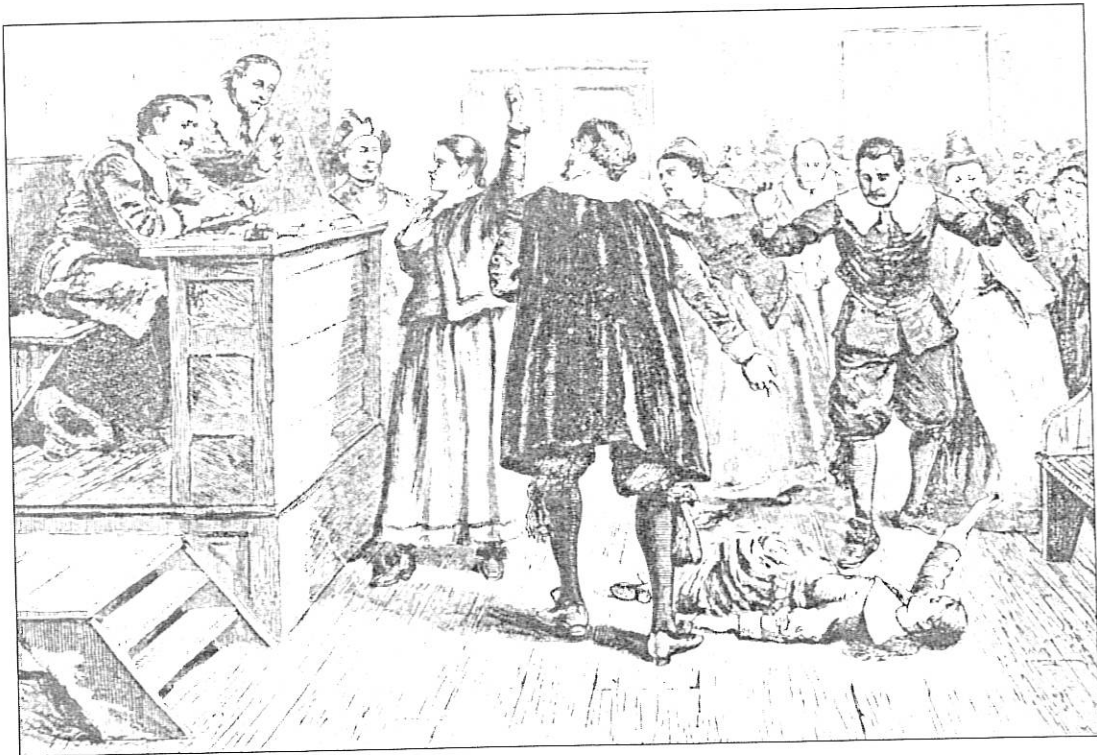


Illustration (originally appearing in *Pioneers in the Settlement of America* by William A. Crafts) depicting a courtroom scene in which an “afflicted” girl falls on the floor as an accused woman stands holding her right hand over her heart and gesturing upward as if declaring her innocence.

witch trials was the nature of the evidence that the judges considered acceptable in a court of law. According to *Maelleus Maleficarum*, the standard reference manual on witchcraft at the time, a telltale sign that a person was a witch was the presence on her body of a "witch's teat." A witch's teat was thought to serve the same function as the nipple of a nursing mother, but instead of providing milk to babies, it supplied blood to the witch's evil helpers, or familiars. A committee of physicians searched the bodies of the accused. Any imperfection in the skin—a wart, a pimple, a mole, a birthmark, a freckle—was deemed to be evidence of the specially adapted teat the witch used to suckle her familiars. "A preternatural excrescence of flesh" thought to be the dreaded teat was discovered in the genital areas of three of the accused women.

But the strangest evidence of all was the afflicted girls' assertions that they had seen apparitions of the witches—either in the appearance of the witches themselves or in the form of their familiars. Throughout the trials, the girls told frightening and increasingly elaborate tales of being visited by the "spectres" of the accused witches. It was thought that witches allowed the devil to appear in their forms in order to inflict harm on his victims. The spectral shapes of the witches were visible only to the afflicted. Many people were sent to their deaths on no firmer basis than this so-called spectral evidence.

THE EXECUTIONS BEGIN

The first witch to be executed was Bridget Bishop, a tavern keeper who had been previously accused (and subsequently exonerated) of witchcraft. One of the villagers, Samuel Gray, testified that Bishop's specter had appeared over the cradle of his child, who shortly thereafter fell ill and died.

In response to Hathorne's questioning, Bishop said, "I am innocent to a witch. I know not what a witch is."

Hathorne rejoined, logically and cruelly, "How do you know then that you are not a witch?"

On June 10, 1692, Bishop was taken in a cart up to the first hill to be found on

Salem March the 19th 1692

There being Complaint this day made, before us,
 By Edward Putnam and Honery Keyes Yeomen
 both of Salem Village, Against Martha Cory
 the wife of Gily Cory of Salem Harms for
 Suspicion of having committed sundry acts of
 Witchcraft and thereby done much hurt and
 injury unto the bodies of Aunt Putnam the
 wife of Thomas Putnam of Salem Village Yeoman
 and Anna Putnam his daughter of Thomas
 Putnam and Mercy Lewis single women living
 in Putnam's family; also against William, one of
 his papers his family and Elizabeth Hubert Doct^r,
 for his maid.

You are therefore in thaire Maj^{ties} names
 hereby required to apprehend and bring before
 us. Martha Cory the wife of Gily Cory about said
 on Monday next being the 21st day of this Instant
 month, at the house of Nathaniel Ingersoll
 of Salem Village, ^{about twelve o'clock for the} in order to her Examination
 Relate my to the promises and hereof you are
 not to faile Dated Salem March the 19th 1692

John Hathorne
 Josseau. Conwin }
 To Geo Henrick Marshall
 of the County of Essex
 or any Constable in Salem

St. Chaw taken
 March 21. Martha Cory and brought to us house of Lou
 Nath. Ingersoll where she is in all Glory of Lord
 forson by me Requies and is Lash tomorrow at Down
 12. m. Joseph Henrick
 Constable for Salem

A copy of the original warrant for the arrest of Martha Cory.

the way out of Salem, a barren rock elevation that came to be known as Gallows Hill, and there she was hanged in front of a crowd of jeering onlookers. To save the trouble of burying her body, it was thrown into the crevices between the rocks. This is how the eighteen other bodies that would be hanged on Gallows Hill would be disposed of as well.

When Bishop was hanged, one of the judges, Nathaniel Saltonstall, resigned in disgust. Saltonstall, who would later be accused of being a witch, although never arrested, was the first of a small core of prominent officials who had the courage to speak out against the trials.

In the wake of Bridget Bishop's hanging, a group of Boston ministers wrote to the governor, urging that caution be used in the prosecution of the witches. What resulted was a document entitled *The Return of the Several Ministers Consulted*. The message conveyed by *The Return* was a mixed one: while saying that "exceeding tenderness" should be used toward the accused, the document gave a closing recommendation for a "speedy and vigorous prosecution" of the witches, thus undermining its ability to act as a force of moderation.

The contagion continued to spread, extending beyond Salem to the surrounding towns of Andover, Ipswich, Gloucester, and other outlying areas. When the court reconvened on June 29, five more accused witches were tried. Among them was Rebecca Nurse, who would be the sole person to be acquitted, but only very briefly. The jury's verdict of not guilty for Nurse sent the girls into an agony of fits. In response, Chief Justice William Stoughton urged the members of the jury to reconsider, and they eventually came back with the sought-after guilty verdict.

There was a lot of unease surrounding Nurse's conviction. Thirty-nine people had signed a petition on her behalf. Her daughter, Sarah Nurse, had cast doubt on the girls' credibility with a deposition in which she stated: "I saw Goody Bibber pull pins out of her close [*sic*] and held them between her fingers and clasped her hands round her knees and then she cried out and said Goody Nurse pinched her. This I can testify."

But the girls and Stoughton prevailed. The jury caved in and now Rebecca Nurse would be executed.

It was dangerous to doubt the accusers, but there were always some who were willing to take the risk for the sake of standing up for what they believed. John Proctor, a sixty-year-old farmer and tavern owner from Salem Town, asserted that the behavior of the afflicted girls could be corrected with harsh discipline, saying, "If they were let alone so we should all be Devils & witches quickly." Soon after making that statement, Proctor would be executed for the crime of witchcraft.

On July 19, five witches were hanged. In response to Reverend Nicholas Noyes's request that she confess as she mounted the scaffold, Sarah Good shot back, "I am no more a witch than you are a wizard, and if you take away my life, God will give you blood to drink." (Ironically, years later, Noyes would suffer an internal hemorrhage and end up choking to death on his own blood.)

On August 5, there were six more convictions. Among those found guilty was George Burroughs, a former minister of Salem Village who gave a moving recita-



This mid-nineteenth-century painting, *Examination of a Witch* by Thompkins H. Matteson, depicts a young girl being stripped and examined for "witch marks."

tion of the Lord's Prayer at his hanging. Witches were supposed to be incapable of prayer, and Burroughs's perfect rendition made many of the villagers have second thoughts about what was happening. At one point it looked as if some of the spectators would try to stop the execution. To quell the crowd, Cotton Mather, the son of Increase Mather (author of *Remarkable Providences*) and the best-known New England Puritan minister of his generation, proclaimed that the devil was known to transform himself "into an angel of light."

Most of the accused submitted to the trials. There was, however, one exception: Giles Cory, the husband of Martha

Cory, who had already been accused of witchcraft. Giles Cory was an irascible eighty-year-old landowner, and he refused to be tried. Pointing out that no one called before the Court of Oyer and Terminer was ever let off, he said that he "rather chose to undergo what death they would put him to."

Resorting to an Old English form of torture known as *peine forte et dure*, the magistrates ordered that Cory be forced to lie naked on the ground, his hands and legs bound, while a succession of heavy rocks was piled upon his chest. With each rock heaped onto him, the magistrates would command Cory to confess, but throughout the course of the two days that it took him to die, Cory never



This painting, created by Thomas Slatterwhite Noble in 1869, depicts a condemned woman being marched to Gallows Hill.

wavered in his contempt for the proceedings. According to some reports, his only reply to the magistrates was "More weight, more weight."

THE END OF THE TRIALS

In early September six more of the accused witches were hanged. That would be the last set of hangings.

The events of the previous months had created a feeling of general unrest among the people of Salem. The execution of the saintly Rebecca Nurse, the moving recitation of the Lord's Prayer by George Burroughs before his death, the stubborn heroism of old Giles Cory, all combined to sow the seeds of doubt in the minds of many of the villagers.

Finally that unrest manifested itself in doubts about the afflicted girls themselves. The girls started overreaching themselves: the people they cried out against were more and more prominent. Things started to backfire on them when they included in their list of the accused Lady Phips, the wife of Governor Phips.

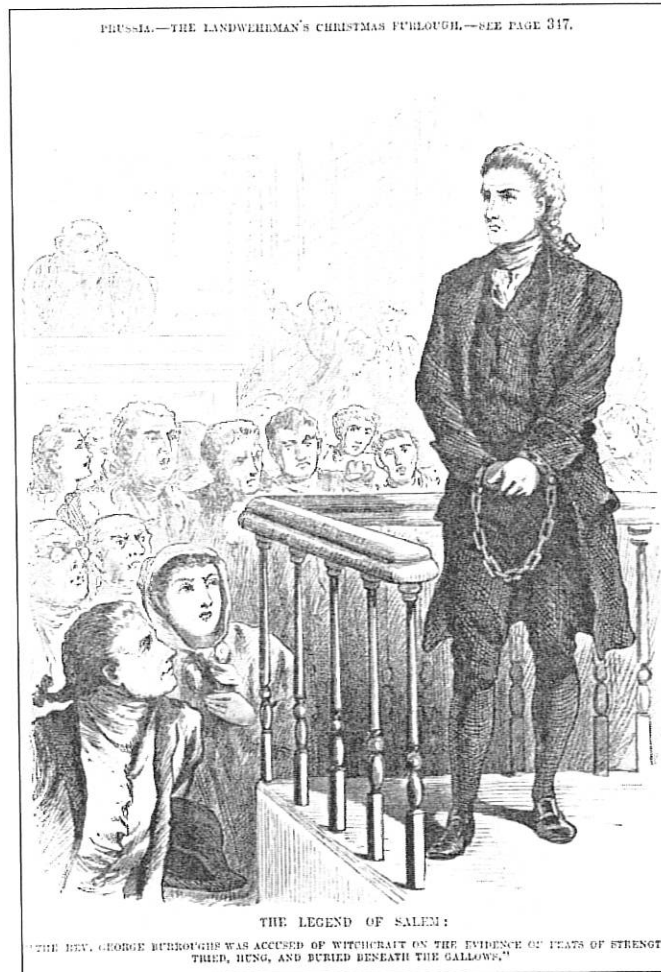
There was no one point at which it can be said that the madness of Salem was at an end, but looking back from this distance, it is easy enough to read the signs that indicated it was. In October, Phips wrote to London. After blaming the trials on the "loud cries and clamours" of the people, he went on to express his misgivings about them: "I found that the Devill had taken upon him the name and shape of severall persons who were doubtless innocent and to my certain knowledge of good reputation for which cause I have now forbidden the committing of any more that shall be accused without unavoidable necessity." At a witch trial of twenty-six people in January 1693, all but three who had confessed were found not guilty, and Phips later pardoned the three who had been found guilty. (In 1694, Phips was recalled to London, where he died shortly after his arrival.)

One day, the afflicted girls went to investigate an incident of witchcraft in a neighboring town. Encountering an old woman along the way, the girls proceeded to go into one of their fits. But instead of turning on the woman, the people passing by simply told the constable who accompanied them to take the

“wenches” elsewhere. Recovering their composure, the girls returned home. After that, they made no more accusations.

Ironically, a book written by one of the witch-hunt’s most prominent advocates ultimately helped to end it. In *Cases of Conscience*, Increase Mather, father of Cotton, argued forcefully against the use of spectral evidence, pointing out that casting suspicion on good people might be one of the devil’s tricks: “To take away the life of anyone, merely because a specter or Devil, in a bewitched or possessed person does accuse them, will bring the guilt of innocent blood on the land.”

After making his statement, Mather interviewed confessors in prison, the majority of whom recanted. Eight of the confessors told him that they had forsworn themselves to please the judges, whom they feared, and to prolong their lives. In a deposition, Sarah Ingersoll, the innkeeper of the tavern in which the trials were held, wrote how one of the accused girls told her how she was coerced into confessing: “She came to me crying and wringing her hands, seemingly to be much troubled in spirit. I asked her what she ailed. She



This illustration, which appeared in *Frank Leslie's Weekly* (a literary and news magazine founded in 1852), depicts Reverend George Burroughs standing with his hands in chains at his trial for witchcraft. The original *Leslie's* caption read: "The legend of Salem: The Rev. George Burroughs was accused of witchcraft on the evidence of feats of strength, tried, hung, and buried beneath the gallows."

answered, she had outdone herself." The girl told Ingersoll that "if she told Mr. Noyes but once [that] she had set her hand to the Book [witches' book] he would leave her [alone], but, if she told him the truth, and said she had not set her hand to the book, a hundred times he would not believe her."

"It was all false," one of the other girls stated.

THE AFTERMATH

Within two years of the end of the witch trials, the colony of Massachusetts abolished witchcraft as a crime. On January 15, 1697, it held a Day of Humiliation during which one judge and all twelve Salem jurors begged forgiveness. In a written statement, the jurors admitted, "We ourselves were not capable to understand, nor able to withstand the mysterious delusions of the Power of Darkness,

and the Prince of the Air [i.e., Satan]."



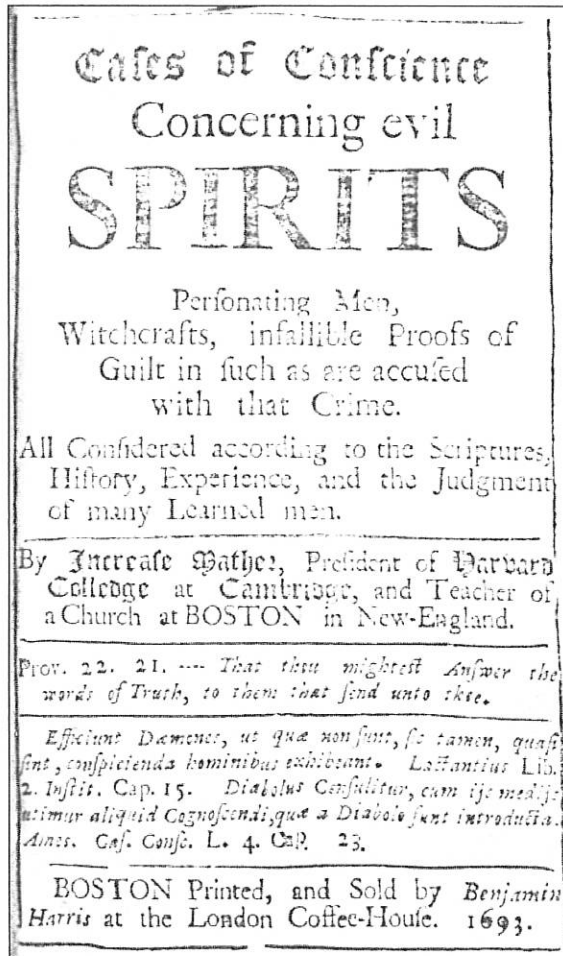
Portrait of Cotton Mather, a prominent Puritan minister, who played an important role in fanning the flames of the witch hysteria in Salem, Massachusetts, in 1692.

The year 1697 also saw the death of John Hale, a minister who had favored the witch trials until his wife was accused. Before he died, Hale wrote a book, the title beginning, *A Modest Enquiry into the Nature of Witchcraft . . .* Published in 1702, the book concluded that the trials had been based on "unsafe principles." "Such was the darkness of that day, the tortures and lamentations of the afflicted, and the power of former presidents [precedents] that we walked in the clouds, and could not see our way."

Samuel Parris was eventually forced to leave Salem. William Stoughton, who was the chief judge at the trials as well as the colony's lieutenant governor, never apologized for his actions and eventually became governor of Massachusetts. Cotton Mather, who had talked a crowd out of preventing the execution of George Burroughs, later achieved fame for his eloquent sermons and writings. Before he died in 1728, he lent his voice to the cause of smallpox vaccination—a medical advance that would one day lead to the eradication of the disease. It is difficult to draw one moral from so mixed a record; perhaps the point Cotton Mather's life best illustrates is that people are neither wholly good nor wholly evil.

In 1706, Ann Putnam, Jr.—who at the height of the witch scare had claimed to have been bewitched by a total of seventeen of the accused—made a public confession in Salem's church. She asked to “be humbled before God for that sad and humbling providence” that led, in 1692, to her becoming “an instrument for the accusing of several persons of a grievous crime, whereby their lives were taken away.” She died, unmarried, in May 1715.

Of the other afflicted girls, some were married and had children, some did not marry, some lived long lives, some died within a few years of the trials, and others simply walked out of the spotlight of history, their fate forever unknown.



The title page of the 1693 edition of *Cases of Conscience Concerning Evil Spirits* by Increase Mather.