

MAGIC AND WITCHCRAFT.

In England, the first law against witchcraft was made under Henry VIII. It was repealed in the following reign, but renewed under Elizabeth. In Lecky's (recently published) "History of the Rise and Influence of the Spirit of Rationalism in Europe," the author writes as follows:—"Soon after the accession of James to the throne of England, a law was enacted, which subjected witches to death on the first conviction, even though they should have inflicted no injury upon their neighbours. This law was passed when Coke was attorney-general, and Bacon a member of parliament; and twelve bishops sat upon the commission to which it was referred. The prosecutions were rapidly multiplied throughout the country, but especially in Lancashire; and at the same time the general tone of literature was strongly tinged with the superstition. Sir Thomas Browne declared that those who denied the existence of witchcraft, were not only infidels, but also, by implication, atheists. Shakespeare, like most of the other dramatists of his time, again and again referred to the belief; and we owe to it that melancholy picture of Joan of Arc, which is, perhaps, the darkest blot upon his genius. Bacon continually inveighed against the follies shown by magicians in their researches into nature; yet in one of his most important works, he pronounced the three 'declinations from religion' to be 'heresies, idolatry, and witchcraft.'"

The description of the tortures inflicted in Scotland on old and feeble women, is deeply painful and revolting. "If the witch was obdurate, the first, and it was said the most effectual, method of obtaining confession, was by what was termed 'waking her.' An iron bridle or hoop was bound across her face with four prongs, which were thrust into her mouth. It was fastened behind to the wall by a chain, in such a manner that the victim was unable to lie down; and in this position she was sometimes kept for several days, while men were constantly with her to prevent her from closing her eyes for a moment in sleep. Partly in order to effect this object, and partly to discover the insensible mark which was the sure sign of a witch, long pins were thrust

into her body. At the same time, as it was a saying in Scotland that a witch would never confess while she could drink, excessive thirst was often added to her tortures. Some prisoners have been waked for five nights; one, it is said, even for nine.

"The mental and physical suffering of such a process was sufficient to overcome the resolution of many, and to distract the resolution of not a few. But other and perhaps worse tortures were in reserve. The three principal, that were habitually applied, were the penny-winkis, the boots and the caschielawis. The first was a kind of thumbscrew; the second was a frame in which the leg was inserted, and in which it was broken by wedges, driven in by a hammer; the third was also an iron frame for the leg, which was from time to time heated over a brazier. Fire-matches were sometimes applied to the body of the victim. We read in a contemporary legal register, of one man who was kept for forty-eight hours in 'vehement tortour' in the caschielawis; and of another, who remained in the same frightful machine for eleven days and eleven nights, whose legs were broken daily for fourteen days in the boots, and who was so scourged that the whole skin was torn from his body. This was, it is true, censured as an extreme case, but it was only an excessive application of the common torture.

"How many confessions were extorted, and how many victims perished by these means, it is now impossible to say. A vast number of depositions and confessions are preserved, but they were only taken before a single court, and many others took cognizance of the crime. We know that in 1662, more than 150 persons were accused of witchcraft; and that in the preceding year no less than fourteen commissions had been issued for the trials. After these facts, it is scarcely necessary to mention, how one traveller casually notices having seen nine women burning together at Leith in 1664, or how, in 1678, nine others were condemned in a single day. The charges were, indeed, of the most comprehensive order, and the wildest fancies of Sprenger and Nider were defended by the Presbyterian divines. In most Catholic countries, it was a grievance of the clergy, that the civil power refused to