

whom I am largely indebted for my facts, expressly says this was done out of compliment to the king's position as an expert and specialist in witchcraft; and I would ask the reader to bear this in mind, as I shall have occasion to refer to it later on. This act remained the law of the land for more than a century, and the wording of its chief clause is curious, shewing, as it does, the definition and meaning of witchcraft, as believed in by the greatest legal lights of the age. Nor are these legal lights even in our day to be despised. Chief among them—one authority says—the framer of the clause, was Sir Edward Coke, and Lord Bacon approved and endorsed it. It may be worth while to quote this clause in full. "If any person or persons shall use, practise or exercise any invocation or conjuration of any evil and wicked spirit, or shall consult, covenant with, entertain, employ, feed or reward any evil and wicked spirit, to or for any intent or purpose, or take up any dead man, woman or child out of his, her or their grave, or any other place where the dead body resteth, or the skin, bone, or any part of any dead person, to be employed or used in any manner of witchcraft, sorcery, charm or enchantment, or shall use, practise, or exercise any witchcraft, enchantment, charm or sorcery, whereby any person shall be killed, destroyed, wasted, consumed, pined or lamed in his or her body, or any part thereof"—every such offender is a felon without benefit of clergy. With the exception of clearer definition, and, in consequence, somewhat greater rigor in the application, the new act left the law unchanged, the penalties being practically the same. And now let us see how these laws were enforced, for it is the enforcement of a law which proves whether or not it speaks the voice, and contains the belief, of those who live under it. Trials and executions for witchcraft do not seem to have been so numerous in England as in the other countries of Europe, but

they were numerous enough. The 12th, 13th, 14th and 15th centuries contain records of numerous convictions, and still more numerous accusations, these latter being most abundant during times of political ferment, such as the Wars of the Roses. In the 16th century, until towards its close, they were not so frequent, but in the 17th century they increased again. In 1634, seventeen persons were burned on the evidence of one young boy, and in the three years from 1645 to 1647, between two and three hundred were indicted, more than half of whom were convicted and executed. In most of these cases, the accused confessed before execution; but it is outside my province to discuss this curious, and in many ways inexplicable problem. In Scotland, the executions and accusations were very much more numerous than in England, and the enforcement of the law lasted to a later date, the last Scotch witch being burned in 1722, after conviction before the sheriff of Sutherland. The last certainly recorded conviction in England, was in 1712, and the sentence was not carried out. It must further be remembered, that the records give no figures for the hundreds who died under ordeals administered by lynch law. I have said enough, however, on this head, to shew clearly that the law was no dead letter, but was enforced with the willing consent of the people.

This fact established, we are enabled to judge in some measure the point of view from which Shakespeare's audience regarded the witches in *Macbeth*. Their appearance was to them an actual, possible, nay, even probable occurrence. Every man felt that he might himself encounter such beings, not perhaps in so great pomp of devilry (such witches being reserved for kings to see), but in humbler guise. Conceive, then, although it is almost impossible for us to conceive it, the effect such witches as those in *Macbeth* must have had upon such an audience.