


#  The Decline of Witchcraft, 1650-1700:  
Critics & Sceptics.

from: Wm. Monter (ed) European Witchcraft

## PART FOUR

### *The Decline of Witchcraft, 1650-1700*

Students of European history have long known that the persecution of witches was declining in the second half of the seventeenth century, but this phenomenon has been little studied. Of course, we should note at the outset that the rhythm of persecutions was not the same everywhere. Certain regions (Sweden, Austria, New England, and others) reached their statistical peaks in this period, and a few places (like Poland) actually reached their zenith of persecution only in the early eighteenth century. But generally, Europe saw her last serious outbreak of witch-trials during the later 1600's. Perhaps more important is the fact that the cultural leaders of seventeenth-century Europe—the English, French, and Dutch—were definitively abandoning the persecution of witches after 1650. Many smaller governments slavishly followed the styles of Versailles or London in this as in so many other matters; this is clearly the case for the border regions between France and Germany.

However, the end of persecution in the principal European nations was not, as we would like to believe, a direct consequence of the enormous scientific advancement of the seventeenth century, from Galileo and Descartes to Leibniz and Newton. This point was recently and brilliantly made by Hugh Trevor-Roper:<sup>1</sup>

"The decline and apparently final collapse of the witch-craze in the late 17th century, while other such social stereotypes retained their

<sup>1</sup> Trevor-Roper, *Religion the Reformation, and Social Change*, pp. 168-69.

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power, is a revolution which is surprisingly difficult to document. We see the controversies continue . . . And yet on neither side are the arguments new; they are the arguments which have always been used . . . Nevertheless, without new argument on either side, the intellectual belief quietly dissolved.<sup>2</sup>

The solution to this paradox is to be sought not in the writings of the "experts" on witchcraft in the seventeenth century, nor in the writings of the great scientists themselves, but in a subtle change of weltanschauung among Europe's ruling classes:<sup>3</sup>

"What ultimately destroyed the witch-craze on an intellectual level was not the two-edged arguments of the skeptics, nor was it modern 'rationalism,' which could exist only within a new context of thought. It was not even the arguments of Bekker, tied as they were to Biblical fundamentalism. It was the new philosophy, a philosophical revolution which changed the whole concept of Nature and its operations."

The only other recent historian to tackle this problem in detail, Robert Mandrou, has also complained (in selection three) about this lack of precise documentation and has also stressed that mere "progress of enlightenment" or of Cartesianism is insufficient to explain this change. In many ways, seventeenth-century objections to witchcraft had not gone so very far beyond Weyer's or Montaigne's arguments, but their arguments were now accepted. Why?

The selections in this section are all taken from France. My justification for so doing is that France was the single most influential country in Europe in the second half of the seventeenth century; that she produced some of the most eloquent "libertines" (Cyrano de Bergerac) and some of the very best philosophers (Malebranche) who wrote about witchcraft; and finally that only for France do we possess a detailed study of the rejection of witchcraft by a present-day historian (Mandrou).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 180.

# I

## Cyrano de Bergerac A Letter Against Witches" (1654)

The archetypical "libertine" and skeptic, model for the famous nineteenth-century theatrical figure with the long nose, Cyrano was a prolific essayist. His writings are remarkable less for their originality (like most libertines of his age, he had very little of this) than for the vigor of his prose. His ideas about witchcraft, in fact, are almost exclusively taken from Montaigne.<sup>1</sup> But his procedure is radically different from Montaigne's; Cyrano is more concerned to kill witchcraft by ridicule and thus less detached in his tone than Montaigne. And attempting to ridicule belief in witchcraft was a novel and daring approach in the 1650's.

The reader should notice two things in Cyrano's argument that truly show the "libertine" temper at work. The first is his care to preserve at least the appearance of Christian orthodoxy. The second is Cyrano's undisguised class contempt for the rustic peasantry among whom witchcraft proliferated; phrases like "the brainless caprices of an ignorant villager," "the crack-brained head of a ridiculous shepherd," "this old clod of a shepherd," spring naturally to his pen and are near the very center of his ridicule.

Consider how many Witches throughout the world have been convicted of making a pact with the devil and have been burned, and how many wretched people have admitted at the stake that they had attended the Sabbat. Some of them, under questioning, have even confessed to the judges that at their feasts they had eaten children who, after the death of the condemned person, have been found fully alive and who understood nothing

<sup>1</sup> Compare above, p. 67f.

SOURCE. Cyrano de Bergerac, "Lettre contre les sorciers" (1654) translated from Frederic Lachevre, ed., *Les Oeuvres Libertines de Cyrano de Bergerac*, Vol. II, Paris: Librairie Honore Champion, 1911, pp. 211-218. Reprinted by permission of the publisher.

when the subject was mentioned to them. One ought not believe everything about a man, because a man can say anything. Even if, by God's special permission, a soul can return to earth to ask someone for the help of his prayers, should one believe that Spirits or Intelligences (if there be any) are so playful as to oblige the brainless caprices of an ignorant villager? that they appear at either end of a field, depending on whether the black humour is stronger or weaker in the crack-brained head of a ridiculous Shepherd? that they rise to the bait like a falcon on the Hunter's wrist and, according to this rascal's whim, dance the *guimbarde* or the *matasims*? No, I do not believe in Witches, even though several important people do not agree with me; and I defer to no man's authority, unless it is accompanied by reason or comes from God, who alone should be believed about what He says simply because He says it. Neither the name of Aristotles, more learned than I, nor that of Plato, nor that of Socrates will persuade me, unless my judgment is convinced by reason of what they say. . . . Reason alone is my ruler, to whom I voluntarily pay homage. Besides, I know from experience that the most sublime minds have made the worst blunders; since they fall from greater heights, they fall farther. Finally, our fathers were often mistaken in the past, their nephews are mistaken today, and ours will be mistaken some future day.

So do not embrace an opinion because many people hold it, or because it is the thought of some great Philosopher, but only because we see more likelihood that it be true than false. For my part, I make fun of Pedants who have no stronger arguments to prove what they say than to allege that it is a maxim, as if their maxims were much more certain than their other propositions. I will believe them, however, if they show me a Philosophy whose principles cannot be doubted, which agrees with all of Nature, or which has been revealed to us from on high. Otherwise I make fun of it, for it is easy to prove anything you want when principles are adjusted to opinions, and not opinions to principles. Beyond that, if it were just to defer to the opinions of these great men, and if I were forced to admit that the first Philosophers have established these principles, I would surely force them to admit in their turn that the Ancients, like

us, did not always write what they believed. Often the Laws and Religion of their country compelled them to accommodate their precepts to political interests and needs. That is why one ought to believe about a man only what is human, *i.e.*, possible and ordinary. Therefore I admit no Witches until someone proves it to me.

If someone can demonstrate it to me by stronger and more pressing arguments than my own, I will undoubtedly tell him, "Welcome, sir; I have been waiting for you, I renounce my opinions and I embrace yours!" Otherwise, what advantage would the clever man have over the fool, if he thought what the fool thinks? People should be satisfied when a great soul pretends to acquiesce in the sentiments of the greatest number, not resisting the torrent, without trying to put handcuffs on his reason. On the contrary, a Philosopher ought to judge the crowd, and not judge like the crowd. However, I am not so unreasonable that, after escaping from the tyranny of authority, I wish to establish my own without proof. Therefore you will approve that I tell you my motives for doubting so many strange effects which are told about the Spirits. It seems to me that I have observed many important things in order to get free of that chimera.

First, I have almost never been told a story about Witches that did not ordinarily take place three or four hundred leagues away. This remoteness made me suspect that they wanted to deprive the listener of the desire and power to learn about it himself. In addition, this band of men dressed as cats is located in the middle of the countryside, without witnesses. The Faith of one person alone should be suspect in such a miraculous thing. Close to a village, it is easier to deceive idiots. The woman was poor and old. She was poor: necessity might have constrained her to lie for money. She was old: age had weakened her reason. Age makes one gossipy: she invented this story to amuse her neighbors. Age weakens the sight: she mistook a Hare for a Cat. Age makes one afraid: she thought she saw fifty instead of one. Because finally it is more likely that something happened which is seen every day and not a supernatural adventure, without logic or precedent.

But, if you please, examine one of these captured Witches. You will find that he is a very crass Peasant, whose mind is in-

capable of disentangling the mesh which holds him. His understanding has been deadened by the greatness of his peril, so that his soul is not active enough to let him justify himself. He would not even dare to reply pertinently, for fear of having the preoccupied [judges] believe that the Devil is speaking through his mouth. If however he says not a word, everybody cries that he is convicted in his conscience, and immediately he is thrown into the fire. But is the Devil, who could formerly change him into a cat, so foolish not to change him now into a fly, so that he can fly away? The Witches (they say) have no power after they are in the hands of the law. Oh! by my faith! that is well invented. Thus Master Jean Guillot, whose father stole the property of his ward, acquired through the twenty thousand pilfered crowns which his Office of Judge cost him, the power to command Devils; truly, Devils have great respect for Thieves. But these Devils should at least remove this poor unhappy man, their very humble servant, when they knew that a campaign was underway to seize him: for to abandon their followers in this way discourages anyone from serving them . . .

I have also noticed that all these presumed Magicians are beggars like Diogenes. O Heaven! is it so likely that a man would expose himself to eternal fires, with the hope of remaining poor, hated, hungry, and in continual fear of being grilled on the public square? Satan should give him, not oak leaves, but heavy [Spanish] *pistoles* to buy Offices which would put him on the right side of the Law. But you will see that the Demons of these times are extremely stupid, and that they lack the wit to imagine such fineses. This old clod of a Shepherd whom you hold in your prisons, a day away from being boiled, on what convictions do you condemn him? He was surprised while reading the Wolf's *paternoster*. Ha! please have him repeat it. You will find only great silliness there, and less evil than there is in a *kill-devil* [an amulet worn for protection from devils], for which however no one is put to death. Beyond that, it is said that he bewitched flocks. Either he did it by words or by the secret properties of some natural poisons. By words? I don't believe that the twenty-four letters of the alphabet hold, in their grammar, the occult malignity of such a real venom, nor that to open one's mouth, grit one's teeth and put one's tongue on

one's palate in such-and-such a way has the power to sicken sheep or to cure them. If you answer me that it happens because of the pact, [I reply that] I have not yet found in my chronology the time when the devil agreed with mankind that, when one articulated certain words specified in the contract, [the devil] would kill; with others, he would cure; and that with others, he would come to talk with us. I wish that he had passed this contract with a private person: that person would not have everyone's consent to oblige us to that agreement. When some dullard, without thinking, speaks certain syllables, the devil flies straight there to frighten him and would not give the slightest visit to a powerful, depraved, illustrious, witty person who gave himself to him with all his heart and who, by his example, would cause the loss of a hundred thousand souls.

Perhaps you will admit to me that magic words have no power, but that wizards hide under barbaric words the malignant properties of the simple things with which they poison livestock? Well then, why not make them die as poisoners and not as sorcerers? They confess (you reply) to attending the Sabbath, to sending Devils into the bodies of some people who, in effect, are demoniacal. As for the trips to the Sabbats, here is my belief: with the soporific drugs with which they anoint themselves while awake, they imagine that they are soon transported, straddling a broomstick, through the chimney into a room where one can revel, dance, make love, or kiss the ass of a goat. The strong imagination of these Phantoms shows them, in sleep, little things like a broomstick between their legs, a countryside over which they pass in flight, a goat, a feast, and other Ladies. So when they wake up, they think they have seen what they have just dreamed.

As for demonic possession, I will also give you my thoughts with the same frankness. In the first place, I find that one encounters ten thousand women for every man there. Is the Devil so ribald as to seek the embraces of women so arduously? No, but I guess the cause—a woman has a lighter mind than a man and is consequently bolder in inventing comedies of this kind. She hopes that a little Latin which she garbles, a few grimaces, a few leaps, acrobatics and postures, will always be believed to be very far beyond the strength and modesty of a girl.

And finally she thinks herself so strong in her weakness that, once the imposture is discovered, her extravagances will be attributed to some suffocation of the womb, or that at worst it will be pardoned on account of the infirmity of her sex. You will perhaps answer that even if there are cheats among them, nothing is proved against those who are truly possessed. But if that is your Gordian knot, I will soon be your Alexander.

Let us examine, without care for shocking popular opinion, whether there were demons in times past and whether there are any today. I do not doubt that some formerly existed, because the sacred Books assure us that a Chaldean woman, by magic arts, sent a Demon into the corpse of the Prophet Samuel and made it speak; that David conjured with his harp the one by which Saul was obsessed; and that our Saviour Jesus Christ expelled Devils from the bodies of some Hebrews and sent them into the bodies of pigs. But we are obliged to believe that the Devil's Empire ceased when God came into the world; that the Oracles were snuffed out under the Messiah's cradle, and that Satan forever lost his power of speech at Bethlehem, the changed influence of the Star of the three Kings having doubtless given him a disease of the tongue.

Therefore I laugh at all the present-day possessed and will continue to laugh at them until the Church commands me to believe them. To imagine that Gaufridi's parishioner, or that nun from Loudun, or that girl from Evreux were bedevilled because they turned somersaults, made grimaces and gambols! Scaramouche, Colle and Cardelino will easily outdo them. How then! they cannot even speak Latin? Lucifer takes poor care of his Devils in not sending them to secondary school. Some of them respond correctly enough when the Exorcist recites a prayer from the Breviary, which they scramble through somehow by the force of repetition. Barring that, you see them imitate madmen and pretend a perpetual mental distraction to everything preached at them. However, I surprised some of them attentively enjoying in passing some verse from their Office in order to answer appropriately, like those who wish to sing at Vespers and don't know the part, waiting in their hiding place for the "Gloria Patri, etc." to bawl it out.

I also find highly diverting their hesitations when they are em-

barrased whether they must obey or not obey. The Conjuror commands one of them to kiss the ground every time he speaks the holy name of God! This Devil of obedience did it very devoutly; but when their came another test ordering her to do the same thing in terms to which she was not accustomed (for he commanded her by the Co-eternal son of the Sovereign Being), this demoniacal novice, who was no Theologian, lay flat, blushed, and broke into insults, until the Exorcist quieted her down by more ordinary words. . . . Moreover, I noticed that when the Priest raised his voice, the Devil raised his anger, often at words of no importance, because he had pronounced them with more vividness. On the contrary, he swallowed exorcisms to make one tremble sweetly as milk, because the Exorcist, tired from shouting, had pronounced them in a low voice. But it was far worse when, some time afterwards, an Abbot conjured them. They were not made for his style, and therefore those who wanted to respond answered so incorrectly that all those poor Devils on whose forehead some modesty still remained became ashamed. Afterwards, the whole day through, it was impossible to draw an evil word from their mouth. In truth, they cried for a long time that they sensed incredulous men there; because of them they wished to do nothing miraculous, from fear of converting them. But the fraud seems highly obvious to me. If it were true, why warn them about it? They ought, on the contrary, to harden us in our incredulity, hide in those bodies and not do things which could remove our blindness. You will answer that God forces them to that in order to make his Faith manifest. Yes, but I am not yet convinced nor obliged to believe that it is the Devil who does all this monkey business, because a man can do it naturally. Twisting one's face towards the shoulders? I've seen it done by Gypsies. Leaping? who doesn't do it, except paralytics? Sweating? one meets only too many who do that! Marking certain symbols on one's skin? either waters or stones will color our flesh that way without a miracle.

If the Devils are forced, as you say, to perform miracles in order to illumine us, let them do convincing ones. Let them take the towers of Notre-Dame of Paris, where there are so many unbelievers, and carry them unbroken into the country-

side of Saint-Denis to dance a Spanish *safabande*. Then we will be convinced.

I also have observed that the Devil, who they say is such a slanderer, never induces them (in the middle of their great labors) to slander one another. On the contrary, they respect each other greatly and have no wish to act otherwise, because the first one to be offended would reveal the mystery. Why, my Reverend Father, is your trial not begun because of the crimes of which the Devil accuses you? The Devil (you say) is the Father of lies. Then why, the other day, did you have that Magician burned, who was accused only by the Devil? For I answer like you: "the Devil is the Father of lies." Admit, admit, my Very Reverend, that the Devil either tells the truth or lies according to its usefulness to your malicious Fatherhood. But, good Gods, I see that Devil shiver when holy water is thrown on him. Is it such a holy thing that he cannot stand it without horror? To be sure, it astonishes me that he has dared to enclose himself in a human body which God has made in His image, capable of seeing the Most High, has recognized as His child through Baptismal regeneration, and has marked with holy oils, the Temple of the Holy Ghost and the Tabernacle of the holy Host. Where did he get the impudence to enter a place which should be much more venerable to him than some water over which prayers have merely been recited? But it must have a good ending. I see the demoniac who throws a fit at the sight of a Cross which is shown to him. O! mister Exorcist, how good you are! Don't you know that there is no place in Nature where there are no crosses, since all matter has length and width and a cross is nothing but length matched with width? This means that the Cross you hold is not a Cross because it is made of mahogany; that other is not a cross because it is made of silver; but both are Crosses because a width has been put across a length. So if that demoniac has a hundred thousand lengths and a hundred thousand widths which are all crosses, why show her any new ones? However, you see that woman, whose lips have been brought close to it by force, feign prohibition. What a trick! Go ahead, take a good fistfull of switches and whip me with them like a friend. For I pledge you my word that if all the demoniacs whom one hundred blows of the strap per

day couldn't cure were condemned to be thrown into the water, none of them would drown.

I have already told you that I do not doubt the power of the Creator over his creatures. But unless convinced by the authority of the Church, to whom we should blindly extend our hands, I will continue to call all these great magical effects the gazette of fools or the "Credo" of those with too much faith.

## 2 FROM

*Malebranche**Recherche de la Vérité (1674)*

*This philosopher and monk (1643-1715), famous in the history of thought as the great Christianizer of Cartesianism, provided a more carefully argued case against witchcraft than had Cyrano. His is among the earliest rationalist attempts to explain witchcraft—not merely to deny it—which attempts to pick up where Weyer left off over a century before. The nub of Malebranche's explanation, the enormous power of the imagination plus the influence of certain soporific drugs, can also be found briefly in Cyrano (p. 117). Here, too, are the same middle-class contempt for the rustic shepherd, the same argument that the Devil has no real power over baptized Christians, and the same care to maintain orthodoxy.*

*Malebranche represents the limits of mechanistic, Cartesian explanations of witchcraft and demonic possession in the seventeenth century; he is superior to the overrated work of Balthasar Bekker in Holland in the 1690's, which some scholars have mistakenly assumed dealt a crushing blow to the Devil and the witches. Malebranche and his psychology of groove-like traces in people's imaginations, reinforced primarily by hearsay evidence, may strike us as crude, but it did convince educated opinion in Louis XIV's France.*

SOURCE. Malebranche, *Recherche de la Vérité* (1674), Book II, Part iii, Chapter 6; in *Oeuvres*, edited by G. Rodis-Lewis, Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1962, I, pp. 370-376. Reprinted by permission of the publisher.

The strangest effect of the power of imagination is the disorderly fear of the apparition of spirits, of enchantments, of symbols, of the charms of Lycanthropes or Werewolves, and generally of everything which is supposed to depend upon the demon's power.

Nothing is more terrible or more frightening to the mind, or produces deeper vestiges on the brain, than the idea of an invisible power which thinks only about harming us and which is irresistible. Speeches which reveal this idea are always heard with fear and curiosity. Holding on to everything extraordinary, men take bizarre pleasure in recounting these surprising and prodigious stories about the power and malice of Witches, in order to frighten both others and themselves. So it is not astonishing if Witches are so common in some countries, where belief in the Sabbat is too deeply rooted; where the most absurd stories about spells are listened to as authentic; and where madmen and seers whose imagination has become disordered . . . from telling these stories . . . are burned as real Witches.

I well know that some people will take exception to my attributing most witchcraft to the power of imagination, because I know that men want to be made afraid, that they become angry with those who want to demystify them, and that they resemble imaginary sick men who respectfully hear and faithfully follow the orders of doctors who diagnose baleful accidents for them. Superstitions are not easily destroyed, and they cannot be attacked without finding a large number of defenders. It is easy enough to prove that the inclination to believe blindly all the dreams of Demonographers is produced and maintained by the same cause which makes superstitious men stubborn. Nevertheless, that will not prevent me from describing in a few words how, I believe, such opinions get established.

A shepherd in his fold after dinner tells his wife and children about the adventures of the Sabbat. As his imagination is moderately inspired by vapours from wine, and since he believes that he has attended that imaginary assembly several times, he does not fail to speak about it in a strong and lively manner. His natural eloquence, together with the disposition of his entire family to hear such a new and terrible subject discussed, should doubtlessly produce strange traces in weak imaginations. It is

naturally impossible that a woman and her children not remain completely frightened, full, and convinced of what they have heard said. This is a husband, a father, who is speaking about what he has seen and done; he is loved and respected; why should he not be believed? This Shepherd repeats it on different days. Little by little the mother's and children's imagination receives deeper traces from it. They grow used to it, the fears pass, and the conviction remains. Finally they become curious to go there. With this intention they rub themselves with a certain drug, and go to sleep. Their hearts' disposition heats their imagination even more; and the traces which the Shepherd had formed in their brain open up enough to let them judge in sleep, as if they were present, all the movements of the ceremony which he had described to them. They arise, question each other and tell each other what they have seen. In this fashion they fortify in themselves the traces of their vision. The one with the strongest imagination, persuading the others best, fixes the imaginary history of the Sabbat within a few nights. So there are your finished Witches, made by the Shepherd. One day they will make many more, having a strong and lively imagination, unless fear prevents them from telling such stories.

Several times Witches of good faith have been found, who generally tell everybody that they have gone to the Sabbat, and who are so convinced of it, that although several persons watched them and assured them that they had not left their beds, they could not agree with their testimony.

Everybody knows that when ghost stories are told to children, they almost never fail to be frightened by them, and cannot stay without light and company. This is because when their brain receives no traces from any object present, the one which the story has formed reopens, often with enough force to represent before their very eyes the ghosts which have been described to them. However, they are not told these stories as though they were true. The stories are not told to them with the same tone of conviction, and sometimes they are told in a fairly cold and languid manner. So we should not be astonished if a man who thinks he has been to the Sabbat, and consequently talks about it in a firm voice and with an assured countenance, easily persuades some people who listen to him respectfully about all the circumstances

which he describes, and thus transmits in their imagination traces similar to those which deceive him.

When men talk to us, they engrave in our brain traces similar to those which they possess. When they have deep traces, they talk to us in a manner which engraves deep ones in us; for they cannot speak without making us in some way similar to them. Children at their mother's breast only see what their mother sees. Even when they have become worldly-wise, they imagine few things of which their parents are not the cause, since even the wisest men conduct themselves more by the imagination of others, *i.e.*, by opinion and custom, then by the rules of reason. Thus in places where Witches are burned, a great number of them are found. Because in places where they are condemned to the fire, men truly believe that they commit witchcraft, and this belief is fortified by the speeches which are made about it. If one were to stop punishing them and were to treat them like madmen, then it would be seen in time that there would no longer be any Witches, because those who do it only in imagination (who are surely the greater number) would then abandon their errors.

It is indubitable that real Witches deserve death, and that even those who do it only in imagination ought not be treated as completely innocent; since ordinarily they are only persuaded to become Witches because they have a disposition of heart to go to the Sabbat, and have been rubbed with some drug to achieve their unhappy purpose. But by punishing all these criminals indifferently, common opinion is strengthened, imaginary Witches are multiplied, and so an infinity of people are lost and damned. It is thus right that many Parlements no longer punish Witches. There are many fewer of them in the lands of their jurisdictions; and the envy, hatred, or malice of evil men cannot use this pretext to destroy the innocent.

The dread of werewolves, or men transformed into wolves, is another pleasant sight. By a disordered effort of his imagination a man falls into this madness, so that he thinks he becomes a wolf every night. This mental disorder never fails to move him to perform every action which wolves do, or which he has heard that they do. Thus he leaves his house at midnight, runs through the streets, throws himself on a child if he meets one,

bites him and maltreats him. The stupid and superstitious people imagine that in effect this fanatic becomes a wolf, because the unhappy man himself believes it and has said it secretly to some persons who have not been able to keep silent about it.

If it were easy to form in the brain the traces which persuade men that they have become wolves, and if one could run through the streets and commit all the ravages which these miserable werewolves do without having one's brain entirely scrambled—if it this were as easy as it is to go to the Sabbat, in bed and without waking up—then these nice stories about the transformation of men into wolves would surely produce their effects, like those which are told about the Sabbat, and we would have as many werewolves as we have Witches. But the persuasion of being turned into a wolf supposes a cerebral confusion far more difficult to produce than that of a man who only thinks he goes to the Sabbat, *i.e.*, who thinks he sees unreal things at night and who, waking up, cannot distinguish his dreams from the thoughts which he has had during the day.

It is ordinary enough for some people to have fairly lively dreams at night and to be able to remember them exactly when awake, although the subject of their dream is not in itself very terrible. Thus it is not difficult for people to persuade themselves that they have been at the Sabbat, for that merely requires that their brain preserves the traces made there during sleep.

The chief reason which prevents us from taking our dreams for realities is that we cannot link our dreams with the things we have done during our wakefulness. By that we recognize that they were only dreams. But Witches cannot recognize in this way that their imaginary Sabbat is a dream. For one only goes to the Sabbat at night, and what happens at the Sabbat cannot be linked with other actions of the day. Thus it is morally impossible to undeceive them by that means. And it is not even necessary that the things which these supposed Witches believe they have seen at the Sabbat keep any natural order among themselves; for the more absurdities there were, and the more confusion in their order, the more real they then seem. It is thus sufficient for deceiving them that the ideas of the things of the Sabbat be lively and frightening, which cannot fail to happen,



if we consider that they represent new and extraordinary things.

But for a man to imagine himself a cock, goat, wolf, or bull requires such a great disorder of the imagination that it cannot be ordinary; although such reversals sometimes happen, either by divine punishment, as the Scripture reports about Nebuchadnezzar, or by a natural surfeit of melancholy in the brain, of which examples are found in the Authors of Medicine.

I am persuaded that true Witches are very rare, that the Sabbath is only a dream, and that the Parlements who dismiss accusations of witchcraft are the most equitable. However, I do not doubt that Witches, charms, enchantments, etc., could exist, and that the demon sometimes exercises his malice upon men by special permission of a superior power. But Holy Scripture teaches us that Satan's kingdom is destroyed; that the Angel of Heaven has chained the demon up and has imprisoned him in the abyss, which he will only leave at the end of the world; that Jesus Christ has stripped off this strong weapon; and that the time has come when the Prince of the world [the Devil] has been expelled from the world.

He had reigned until the coming of the Saviour, and he still reigns, I grant, in places where the Saviour is not yet known. But he no longer has any right or any power over those who are reborn in Jesus Christ. He cannot even tempt them, unless God permits it; and if God permits it, it is in order for them to vanquish him. It is thus doing the devil too much honor to report Stories as marks of his power, as some new demonographers are doing, since these Stories make him formidable to weak minds.

Demons must be despised just like executioners must be despised. Man should tremble before God alone; His is the only power which must be feared. One must learn His judgments and His wrath, and not irritate Him by despising His Laws and His Gospel. One should be respectful when He talks, or when men talk to us about Him. But when men talk to us about the power of the devil, it is a ridiculous weakness to be frightened and troubled. Our trouble does honor to our enemy. He likes to be respected and feared, and his pride is satisfied when our spirit is bowed before him.

### 3 FROM Robert Mandrou

#### *Magistrates and Witches in Seventeenth-Century France*

*The product of nearly fifteen years of research, this book provides historians with the first truly thorough investigation of the decline of witchcraft persecution in any major European country. Mandrou has established the basic chronology of French persecution: after the last great wave of trials which covered all parts of the kingdom between 1580 and 1610 came an age dominated by a few famous trials of priests accused of bewitching entire convents of nuns, coincident with occasional regional outbreaks of the traditional, rural witchcraft. Finally, after 1660, French persecutions began to ebb definitively. The crucial point in this evolution was the decision of the Parlement of Paris, whose jurisdictional bounds included about half the kingdom, to stop persecuting persons accused of witchcraft sometime around 1640. But this new Parisian attitude was only slowly adopted by the other Parlements or sovereign courts of France. Often it had to be forced down the provincial judges' throats by royal action. Colbert intervened to stop death sentences for witchcraft at the Parlements of Pau, Rouen, and Bordeaux in the 1670's.*

*Mandrou's account of this evolution, which concludes with the new royal decree of July 1682 and its enforcement, is a full and rich narrative that pays considerable attention to the changing attitudes of the University of Paris, to the range of scientific opinion, of theology, and of medicine, as well as to the statements of the judges themselves. It is a detailed account giving us our first full answer to the question of how Europe's ruling classes came to change their opinions about witchcraft.*

SOURCE: Robert Mandrou, *Magistrates and Witches in Seventeenth Century France*, Paris: Librairie Plon, 1968, pp. 548-564. Translated by Robert A. Wagoner, N.Y.: State Maritime College. Reprinted by permission of the publisher.