blance to quibbles, cranks, and rhimes. Of these it is quite unnecessary to exhibit specimens.

WITCHCRAFT, a supernatural power of which per­sons were formerly supposed to obtain the possession by en­tering into a compact with the devil. They gave them­selves up to him body and soul ; and he engaged that they should want for nothing, and that he would avenge them upon all their enemies. As soon as the bargain was con­cluded, the devil delivered to the witch an imp, or familiar spirit, to be ready at a call, and do whatever it was direct­ed. By the assistance of this imp and the devil together, the witch, who was almost always an old woman, was ena­bled to transport herself in the air on a broomstick or a spit to distant places to attend the meetings of the witches. At these meetings the devil always presided. They were also enabled to transform themselves into various shapes, par­ticularly to assume the forms of cats and hares, in which they most delighted ; to inflict diseases on whomsoever they thought proper, and to punish their enemies in a variety of ways.

The belief that certain persons were endowed with su­pernatural power, and that they were assisted by invisible spirits, is very ancient. The *sagoe* of the Romans seem rather to have been sorcerers than witches ; and indeed the idea of a witch, as above described, could not have been pre­valent till after the propagation of Christianity, as the hea­thens had no knowledge of the Christian *devil.* Witchcraft was universally believed in Europe till the sixteenth century, and even maintained its ground with tolerable firmness till the middle of the seventeenth. Vast numbers of reputed witches were convicted and condemned to be burnt every year. The methods of discovering them were various. One was, to weigh the supposed criminal against the church Bible, which, if she was guilty, would preponderate: another, by making her attempt to say the Lord’s Prayer. This no witch was able to repeat entirely, but would omit some part or sentence of it. It is remarkable, that all witches did not hesitate at the same place, some leaving out one part, and some another. Teats, through which the imps sucked, were indubitable marks of a witch : these were always raw, and also insensible, and if squeezed, sometimes yielded a drop of blood. A witch could not weep more than three tears, and that only out of the left eye. This want of tears was, by the witch-finders, and even by some judges, considered as a very substantial proof of guilt. Swimming a witch was another kind of popular ordeal ge­nerally practised. For this she was stripped naked, and cross-bound, the right thumb to the left toe, and the left thumb to the right toe. Thus prepared, she was thrown into a pond or river, in which, if guilty, she could not sink; for having, by her compact with the devil, renounced the benefit of the water of baptism, that element, in its turn, renounced her, and refused to receive her into its bosom. Sir Robert Filmer mentions two others by fire : the first, by burning the thatch of the house of the suspected witch ; the other, burning any animal supposed to be bewitched by her, as a hog or ox. These, it was held, would force a witch to confess. The trial by the stool was another method used for the discovery of witches. It was thus managed : having taken the suspected witch, she was placed in the middle of a room upon a stool or table, cross-legged, or in some other uneasy posture ; to which, if she submitted not, she was then bound with cords ; there she was watched, and kept without meat or sleep for the space of twenty- four hours ; for, they said, within that time they should see her imp come and suck. A little hole was likewise made in the door for imps to come in at ; and lest it should come in some less discernible shape, they that watched were taught to be ever and anon sweeping the room, and if they saw any spiders or flies, to kill them : if they could not kill them, then they might be sure they were imps. If witches, under examination or torture, would not confess, all their apparel was changed, and every hair of their body shaven off with a sharp razor, lest they should secrete magical charms to prevent their confessing. Witches were most apt to confess on Friday. By such trials as these, and by the accusation of children, old women, and fools, were thousands of unhappy women condemned for witchcraft, and burnt at the stake.

For a considerable time after the inquisition was erected, the trials of witches, as heretics, were confined to that tri­bunal ; but the goods of those who were condemned being confiscated to the holy office, its ministers were so active in discovering sorcerers, that the different governments found it necessary to deprive them of the cognizance of this crime. On the continent, commissioners were then appointed for the discovery and conviction of witches, who, though less active than the inquisitors, were but too zealous in prosecuting their function. In 1494, Sprenger and in­stitor, two persons employed in this commission, published a collection of trials, most of which had come before them­selves, under the title of *Malleus Maleficarum.* This served as a kind of institute for their successors.

∣ The first writers against witchcraft were stigmatized as atheists, though they only endeavoured to prove the im­becility of the persons accused, and the infatuation or the knavery of their accusers. Such were the epithets bestow­ed by Dr More. Wierus, the disciple of the celebrated Agrippa, gave rise to the first great controversy on this subject. His master had taught him humanity ; and he en­deavoured, but with too feeble a hand, to stop the bloody proceedings of the judges. Wierus appears to have been a well-disposed, weak man, with extensive reading on this sub­ject, but too narrow-minded to comprehend it thoroughly. He involved himself in unspeakable difficulties, by admit­ting the action of supernatural powers in certain diseases, and in possessions, while he denied that witches had any con­currence in them. These appearances, said he, are illusions of the devil, who persuades simple and melancholy persons that the mischief he himself performs is done by them, and at their pleasure. He was weak enough to attempt the explanation of every story alleged by his antagonists, with­out questioning the truth of the facts.

Bodin, a French lawyer of eminence, who had assisted at several trials of witches, wrote against Wierus, in his *Demonomania.* He urged the concurrent testimonies of sufficient witnesses, and the confessions of the witches themselves, to establish the existence of sorcery. Wierus owned that the unhappy persons believed themselves to be guilty of the crimes alleged against them, but that they were deceived by the devil. But what do you make of the witches’ meetings, cried Bodin ? The witches, replied his antagonist, are atrabilious. This explanation was so unsa­tisfactory, that Wierus passed for a magician, whom the devil had furnished with specious arguments to save others from punishment. Lerchemer,Godelmann, Ewichius, Ewal- dus, and some others, followed him, notwithstanding this stigma ; but they were opposed by men of more acuteness and consistency than themselves ; by Remigius, who had condemned several hundreds of sorcerers to the flames ; Delrio, whose book is a complete Corpus Magiæ ; Cujacius, Erastus, Scribonius, Camerarius, and a crowd of others.

In this country, while the belief in witchcraft was sup­ported by royal authority (for James I. is universally known to have written on demonology), countenanced by Bacon, and generally adopted among the people, only one writer was hardy enough to oppose it. This was Reginald Scot, who published a collection of impostures detected, under the title of “ Discoveries of Witchcraft.” James ordered the book to be burnt by the common executioner, and the judges continued to burn witches as usual. During the civil wars, upwards of eighty were hanged in Suffolk, on