

THE WITCHCRAFT DELUSION OF 1692

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649247066

The Witchcraft Delusion of 1692 by Thomas Hutchinson & William Frederick Poole

Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilisation of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the permission of the publisher, Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd, PO Box 1576 Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia.

All rights reserved.

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

www.triestepublishing.com

THOMAS HUTCHINSON & WILLIAM FREDERICK POOLE

THE WITCHCRAFT DELUSION OF 1692

THE
WITCHCRAFT DELUSION OF 1692

BY GOV. THOMAS HUTCHINSON

FROM AN UNPUBLISHED MANUSCRIPT (AN EARLY DRAFT OF HIS HISTORY OF
MASSACHUSETTS) IN THE MASSACHUSETTS ARCHIVES

WITH NOTES BY
WILLIAM FREDERICK POOLE

BOSTON
PRIVATELY PRINTED
1870

THE WITCHCRAFT DELUSION OF 1692.

INTRODUCTION.

IN May last I had occasion to consult the original manuscript of Gov. Hutchinson's second volume of the *History of Massachusetts*, which, it is well known, is among the Hutchinson papers in the State archives in Boston. I had never before seen the manuscript, and did not readily find the passage of which I was in search. The first portion of the manuscript seemed to be missing, and its place was supplied by matter which belonged to the Appendix. My first impression was that the missing sheets were those which Gov. Hutchinson did not recover after the stamp-act riot of 1765. Finding the matter of the Appendix out of place, suggested that the volume might have been carelessly arranged for binding. On collating the manuscript the early portion was found in another part of the volume. This was the copy used by the printers.

In my search I came to sheets which contained the subject matter of the printed text, but expressed in different language. I saw, on a closer examination, that this was an earlier draft, and the identical manuscript which had passed the ordeal of the riot of 1765: for portions of it were much defaced, and bore the marks of being trampled in the mud. The copy from which the volume was printed was evidently prepared at a later date. For the convenience of those who may hereafter consult this manuscript, I made in folio 7 (following the matter of the Appendix), the following memoranda:—

"There has been an error in binding this manuscript. The matter which precedes this is Appendix No. 1 (printed pp. 449-481, edition 1767, and pp. 404-423, edition 1795). The first portion of the history proper, ending with manuscript page 28 (to printed p. 40, edition 1767, and p. 43, edition 1795), has been placed in folios 32-100. Page 29 is opposite. This is the manuscript from which the second volume was printed.

"In folio 55 is the beginning of another manuscript, an earlier draft, from which the author prepared the narrative which appears in the printed vol-

ume. The earlier draft, ending in folio 91, carries the substance of the narrative to the word "Boston," on p. 313, edition of 1767, and p. 284, edition of 1795.

"These memoranda were made May 17, 1870 (with the approval of Mr. Secretary Warner), at which time the earlier draft was first identified."

[SIGNED.]

Both manuscripts are wholly in the autograph of Gov. Hutchinson, and they seem to be prepared with equal care. In form of expression and phraseology they are quite unlike. Incidents and opinions contained in the earlier draft are changed, abridged and sometimes omitted in the later draft. In matters of fact the earlier draft is often more precise and accurate than the printed text, for the author doubtless prepared it with the original authorities before him.

The researches of Gov. Hutchinson into the early annals of Massachusetts are of the highest historical value. He had opportunities of access to original papers such as no person now possesses. He had the tastes, the capacity for close application and research, the judicial understanding and the freedom from prejudice and partizanship which characterize the genuine historian. His style, if not always elegant, is clear and simple, and singularly free from that sensational and rhetorical method of statement which is the bane of much of the historical writing of the present day.

Each of the several editions of Gov. Hutchinson's *History of Massachusetts* has become rare, and a new and revised edition will soon be demanded. In the preparation of that work the earlier draft of the second volume, which has now come to light, will furnish important materials. For the purpose of exhibiting the character and value of this manuscript, and for contributing some additional information upon a special subject, I have extracted for publication that portion which treats the "Witchcraft Delusion of 1692."

So far as a presentation of facts is concerned, no account of that dreadful tragedy has appeared which is more accurate and truthful than Gov. Hutchinson's narrative. His theory on the subject—that it was wholly the result of fraud and deception on the part of the "afflicted children"—will not be generally accepted at the present day, and his reasoning on this point will not be deemed conclusive. That there were fraud and deception attending it, no one will doubt; but there is now a tendency to trace an analogy between the phenomena then exhibited, and modern spiritual manifestations. No man of any reputation who lived in that generation, and saw what transpired at Salem Village and its vicinity, doubted that there was some influence then exerted which could not be explained by the known laws of matter or of mind. As these men left the stage, the theory of fraud was gradually accepted by their descendants; and at the period when Gov. Hutchinson wrote, it was well nigh the universal belief among the educated classes.

For the information of persons interested in tracing the resemblance between the abnormal manifestations of our time and those of the seventeenth century, I have appended notes to the other cases mentioned by Gov. Hutchinson, which may lead such inquirers to a further knowledge of their psychological phenomena.

The author's notes are indicated by stars, &c., and are signed H. The editor's notes are indicated by numerals, and are signed F. W. P. P.

On [mutilated]¹ May, at a general council, there was an appointment of sheriffs, justices and other civil officers, and, among the rest, Commissioners of Oyer and Terminer for the trial of witches. Upon this occasion the Governor suffered the council to choose the officers, and he gave or refused his consent to the choice—a mistake which no other governor has made, and which was giving up a right derived to him from the charter, the great difference between a nomination and assent being very obvious.

The old constitution being dissolved, it was absolutely necessary an Assembly should be called. What was the rule of law in the meantime might be made a question; but at the first meeting of the General Assembly (the 8th of June) an act passed that all the laws of the Colony of Massachusetts Bay and the Colony of New-Plymouth, not being repugnant to the laws of England, nor inconsistent with the charter, should be in force to the 10th of November, 1692, in the respective colonies, except where other provisions should be made by acts of assembly; and all justices of the peace had the same power given them in the execution of laws which magistrates used to have. No other acts were passed except two or three relative to the revenue; an act for erecting a naval office; another to enable the Governor, with the advice of the council, for six months to come, to raise and transport, or march the militia into either of the governments of Rhode Island, Connecticut, Narragansett or New-York; and another act for establishing a court of sessions of the peace, and inferior court of common pleas. The assembly was adjourned on the second of July to the second Wednesday in October.

The confusion occasioned by the supposed witchcraft seems to have been the reason why nothing more was done towards a body of laws better adapted to the new constitution; for on the 2d of June the commissioners held their special court at Salem.

¹ The council met on the 16th, 17th, 20th, 24th and 27th of May, 1692. On the 27th the appointments named (of sixty-seven justices, eight sheriffs, and two coroners) were made. The twenty-eight councillors were also authorized to act as justices in their own localities. This injury to the manuscript was occasioned by its being thrown into the street during the stamp-act riot on the evening of August 26, 1766, when Gov. Hutchinson's house was sacked. In his subsequent draft, as the date was missing, he did not supply it, but said "At the first general council," &c. This paragraph commences on page 8 of the manuscript. F.

Before I relate their proceedings, I will collect, as far as I am able, the several instances of what was called Witchcraft, from the beginning of the country.

It is natural to suppose that the country, at the first entrance of the Europeans into it, afforded the most suitable scene, especially as a notion prevailed that the savages all worshipped the Devil; but I find no mention of witchcraft for the first twelve or fifteen years. About the year 1645,¹ several people in Springfield, upon Connecticut River, were suspected of witchcraft, and a greater number were supposed to be bewitched; among the rest two of the minister's children.² Great pains were taken to prove the facts upon the suspected persons; and about the year 1650, a poor wretch, Mary Oliver,³ no doubt weary of her life, after long examination, was brought to confession. It does not appear that she was executed.

¹ The date named for the beginning of the Springfield troubles is probably three or four years too early. Gov. Hutchinson relied for the date of what he supposed to be the earliest witch case in the Massachusetts Colony, on Johnson's *Worshiping Providence*, p. 139, where the date 1645 stands at the head of the page. As I have explained in my reprint of Johnson (pp. xiii.-xv.), these headings are unreliable, and, quite likely, were so often inserted by the printer as by the author. The date in the heading may be true as to some incident recorded on the page and cross-rows as to other incidents. Keeping in mind the date when the work was written—from 1649 to 1651—the statement in the text involves no error. This portion was written in 1651. The author says, "There hath of late been more than one or two in this town [Springfield] gravely suspected of witchcraft; yet have they need much diligence, both in finding them out, and for the Lords assisting them against their witchery, yet have they, as is supposed, bewitched not a few persons, among whom two of the reverend Elders children." The cases came to examination and trial the same year the narrative was written, 1651, and the testimony offered covers the two previous years.

² Johnson.
 ³ The name of this woman was not Mary Oliver, but Mary Parsons. She was tried in Boston, May 13, 1651, on the charge of witchcraft and for murdering her own child. She was convicted on the latter charge on her own confession, and sentenced to be hanged. She was reprieved till May 29 (Mass. Rec. iv, p. 1, p. 47). In *Judd's History of Hoxley* (p. 254), it appears that Mary Parsons was again tried for witchcraft in 1661, and discharged. This is doubtless an error in copying or printing 1661 for 1651, when the trial already named took place; for in both instances she was charged with bewitching the children of Mr. Moxon the minister. Mr. Moxon returned to England in 1652.

Hugh Parsons, her husband, had previously been tried and convicted of witchcraft; and the most damaging charges against him had been brought by his wife. Among these were the following—1. Mrs. P. had an intimate friend Mrs. Smith, to whom she freely expressed her mind. Now Mrs. Smith was a person who went little abroad, and Mrs. P. was sure she would not speak of the secrets committed to her trust; and yet her husband knew all about their conversation. 2. He would be out late nights; and half an hour before he came home, she would hear strange noises about the house. 3. He would come home in a discontented mind, put out the fire, pull off the bed clothes, and throw peas about the house. 4. He would gabble in his sleep, have strange dreams, and say he had been fighting the Devil. The jury found him guilty. The magistrates set aside the verdict, and the case came before the General Court at Boston, May 31, 1652, when he was acquitted (*Ibid.*, p. 96). The numerous and very curious depositions in the Springfield case may be seen in the Appendix of Drake's *Annals of Witchcraft*, 1869, pp. 219-228. Hutchinson (in note, vol. 1, p. 166) mentions the case of Hugh Parsons, but not that of his wife. He mentions it again (vol. 1, p. 22), and does not seem to be aware that his Mary Oliver case was that of Parsons's wife. My references to Hutchinson are to the edition of 1795.

Whilst this inquiry was making, Margaret Jones* was executed at Charlestown.† Mention is made by Mr. Hale, of a woman at Dorchester,‡

* Vol. i. p. 150. [Hutchinson's references to his earlier vol. are to the ed. of 1761.] sr.

† Margaret Jones was executed June 4, 1648, and was therefore by more than two years, so far as now appears, the first case of conviction and execution for witchcraft in the Massachusetts Colony. The case is reported in Winthrop's *Journal*, ii. p. 326, and Hale's *Modest Inquiry concerning Witchcraft*, p. 17. Mr. Hale relates incidents not recorded by Winthrop. On the day of her execution, he, then twelve years of age, went to her cell, "in company with some neighbors who took great pains to bring her to confession and repentance; but she constantly professed herself innocent of that crime." p.

‡ No writer on this subject seems hitherto to have given the name of the person who suffered at Dorchester. Mr. John Hale, in *Modest Inquiry*, 1697, p. 17, thus alludes to the matter: "Another that suffered on that account sometime after was a Dorchester woman." And upon the day of her execution Mr. Thompson [Wm. Thompson], minister of Branbury and J. P. her former minister took pains with her to bring her to repentance. And she utterly denied her guilt of witchcraft, for she had when a single woman played the "harlot, and being with child, used means to destroy the fruit of her body to conceal her sin and shame; and although she did not effect it, yet she was a murderer in the sight of God for her endeavors, and showed great penitence for that sin; but owned nothing of the crime kind to her charge." Mr. Drake in his *Annals of Witchcraft*, and the *History of Dorchester*, make no mention of this case.

I think I have found a clue to the name of this Dorchester woman. Increase Mather, in his *Remarkable Providences*, 1681, gave some of the cases of witchcraft which had occurred in New-England. He sent a copy of this book to his brother Nathaniel, a minister in Danville. In a letter, dated Dec. 31, 1681, Nathaniel Mather acknowledged the receipt of the book, and says: "Why did you not put in the story of Mrs. Hibbins witchcrafts and the discovery thereof; and also of H. Lake's wife, of Dorchester, whom as I have heard the Devil drew in by appearing to her in the likeness, and acting the part of a child of hers then lately dead on whom her heart was much set; as also another of a girl in Connecticut, who was judged to die a real convert, though she died for the same crime—stories, as I have heard them so remarkable for some circumstances as most I have read." (Mather Papers, *Mass. Hist. Coll.*, vol. xxxviii. p. 68.) Mr. Mather probably heard these stories before he went abroad. The precise date of his departure does not appear. It was, however, before March 23, 1686-31, when he writes from London. There was a Henry Lake residing in Dorchester in 1678, who, with his children, was named as the residuary legatee in the will of Thomas Lake, a prominent citizen of the town, who died Oct. 27, 1678 (*History of Dorchester*, p. 125). Mr. Savage (*General Diet*) says there was a Henry Lake, currier, in Salem, in 1689, "who may have been the Henry Lake of Dorchester"; but he makes no mention of his wife being executed for witchcraft.

The details of the case as related by Mr. Mather are quite unlike those related by Mr. Hale. One or both of the statements must be incorrect. The error I think must be in that of Mr. Hale. Mr. Mather was a resident of Dorchester, and a graduate of the college in 1647. He gives the name of the person accused, and was so situated as to be familiar with all the incidents. Mr. Hale was a resident of Charlestown, and in 1650 was but fourteen years of age. He did not know the name of the person, and gives the same incidents to a Springfield case. He says, p. 19: "There was another executed at Boston Anno 1656 [Mrs. Hibbins] for that crime; and two or three of Springfield, one of which confessed, and said the occasion of her familiarity with Satan was this: She had lost a child, and was exceedingly disconcerted at it, and longed *Oh that she might see her child again!* And at last the Devil in likeness of her child came to her bed-side and talked with her, and asked to come into the bed to her that night and several nights after, and so entered into covenant with Satan and became a witch. This was the only confessor in those times in this government." If any person, other than Mary Ferris, was executed at Springfield for witchcraft, no details have come down to us. Increase Mather probably omitted to mention the cases of Mrs. Hibbins and Mrs. Lake, with which he must have been familiar, in deference to the feelings of their friends then living. p.

and another at Cambridge⁴ about the same time, all denying what they were charged with, at their death; and soon after Mrs. Hibbins⁵ the magistrate's widow, was executed at Boston. In 1662, at Hartford, about 30 miles below Springfield, upon the same Connecticut River, one Ann Cole, whose father is said to have been a godly man who lived next door to a Dutch family, was supposed to be possessed by a Demon who sometimes spake Dutch and sometimes English, and sometimes an unintelligible language, the demons speaking in her things unknown to herself, and holding a conference, &c. Several ministers who were present took the conference in writing with the names of the persons mentioned as actors; and, among the rest, of a woman in prison upon suspicion, [one] Greensmith. Upon examination she confessed also, and appeared to be astonished at the discovery, and owned that she and the rest had been familiar with a demon who had carnal knowledge of her, and though she had not made a formal covenant with him, yet she had promised always to be ready at his call, and was to have had a high frolick at Christmas, and then the agreement was to be signed. The woman upon this confession was executed.⁶ Goffe, the Regicide, says in his diary, January 20, '62, that three witches were condemned at Hartford; and afterwards, Feb. 24, that the maids were well after one of the witches was

⁴ This was the case of Mrs. Kendal, of Cambridge, who was executed for bewitching to death a child of Goodman Genings, of Watertown. The principal evidence was that of a Watertown nurse, who testified that the said Kendal did make much of the child, and then the child was well, but quickly changed in color and died a few hours after. The court took this evidence without calling the parents of the child. After the execution the parents denied that their child was bewitched, and stated that it died from imprudent exposure to cold by the nurse the night before. The nurse soon after was put in prison for adultery, and there died, and so the matter was not farther inquired into. Haie's *Modest Inquiry*, p. 18.

⁵ Rev. Lucius R. Paige, of Cambridgeport, has recently found in the Middlesex court records, 1660, another alleged case of witchcraft in Cambridge, which was tried that year. Winifred Holman, an aged widow, was accused by her neighbors, John Gibson and wife, their son John Gibson, Jr., and their daughter Rebecca, wife of Charles Stearns. Actions of defamation were commenced against these parties, and on the trial, they, by way of justification, presented their supposed proofs of witchcraft, some details of which may be seen in *Hist. and Genral Register*, vol. xxiv, p. 89. Probably other cases were tried in the courts of that period, of which nothing is now known. John Danton, in 1683, said there had been twenty cases of witchcraft recently tried in the co.ony. (*Lettiers*, p. 72.)

⁶ Vol. i. p. 157.

⁷ See *Mass. Rec.*, vol. iv, pt. 1, p. 262. Joshua Scottow's representation, dated March 7, 1655-6, that he did not intend to oppose the proceedings of the court in the case of Ann Hibbins, is in *Mass. Archives*, vol. cxxxv, fol. 1. She was executed June 19, 1656.

⁸ *Magnalia*.
⁹ The case of Ann Cole was fully reported in a letter by Mr. John Whiting, minister at Hartford, under whose observation it occurred, to Increase Mather, dated Dec. 10, 1682. The document is one of the *Mather Papers*, and is printed in *Mass. Hist. Soc. Coll.*, vol. xxxviii, pp. 466-469. An abstract of the case is in Increase Mather's *Remarkable Providences*, chap. v, pp. 96-99, London ed. 1836, and Cotton Mather's *Magnalia*, Hartford ed. 1855, vol. II, p. 448. Several of the incidents are not correctly stated by Hutchinson, either in the manuscript or printed text. Ann Cole did not live next door to a Dutch family. The name of the woman executed, Greensmith, appears in both abstracts by the Mathers, but not in Mr. Whiting's original statement. The woman and her husband were both executed. p.