

**THE SALEM BELLE:
A TALE OF 1692**

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The Salem Belle: A Tale of 1692 by Anonymous

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ANONYMOUS

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INTRODUCTION.

THE following letter addressed to the author, will explain the circumstances which led to the publication of this little work.

Cumberland County, Va., July, 1841.

DEAR SIR :

In compliance with your request, I now send you a manuscript which contains all the material circumstances of a remarkable legend, founded on the singular events of 1692. The original chronicle is lost, but its general features were strongly impressed on my memory, and I committed them to writing, some years since, and very soon after the discovery that the first manuscript was missing. I hope you will be able to make such use of these materials, as shall expose the danger of

popular delusions, and guard the public mind against their recurrence. It is too late to revive the folly of witchcraft, but other follies are pressing on the community,—fanaticism in various ways is moulding the public feeling into unnatural shapes, and shadowing forth a train of undefined evils, whose forms of mischief are yet to be developed. In this state of things, our true wisdom is to take counsel of the past, and not suffer ourselves to be led astray by bold and startling theories, which can only waste the mental energies, and make shipwreck of the mind itself on some fatal rock of superstition or infidelity.

It is an age of boasted liberty and light, but it may well be doubted whether these high pretensions are any powerful defence against popular mistakes. It often happens that the moral plague spot is first seen in the walks of science. It was so in the days which this manuscript commemorates: men renowned for talents and learning gave countenance to a delusion which swept over the land, and will be known in all coming ages by its track of blood and death.

I am not opposed to innovations upon any vicious principle or habit whatsoever. I have no respect

for any venerable theory, unless its claims are supported by the Bible and common sense ; but how often is that noble edifice of Truth, which the Bible reveals to our eye, deformed by the additions and inventions of men ! The Catholic church has for ages thrown up its battlements and towers on the heavenly structure ; but these imagined ornaments have only marred its beauty, and hidden its real grandeur from the eye. Other sects have attempted to improve upon the divine Architect ; and thus it has happened that the cumbrous scaffolding has fallen, and buried multitudes in its ruins. But if this Temple had been permitted to stand in its own native simplicity, its perfect symmetry, its unrivalled strength and glory, not one of the countless millions who have sought its mysteries would have thus miserably perished.

The elements of delusion always exist in the human mind. Sometimes they slumber for years, and then break forth with volcanic energy, spreading ruin and desolation in their path. Even now the distant roar of these terrible agents comes with confused and ominous sound on the ear. What form of mischief they will assume is among the mysteries of the future ; — that desolation will fol-

low in their train, no one can doubt; that they will purify the moral atmosphere, and throw up mighty land-marks as guides to future ages, is equally certain; the evil or good which shall be the final result, depends, under Providence, on the measure of wisdom we may gather from the lessons of the past.

With sincere regard,

Yours truly,

J. N. L.

The foregoing letter speaks for itself; and in conformity to the writer's suggestions, we shall now introduce to our readers the new scenes and hitherto unknown actors in that fatal tragedy, which stains so deeply the history of New England. Follies equally great with those of the witchcraft delusion may yet infest a land as enlightened and civilized as ours; and we cannot agree with our friend in the belief that it is even now too late to revive the same superstition, though its madness may not, as then, terminate in blood. Not more than twelve years since, this same delusion existed in a neighboring state, and within a few miles of its metropolis; numbers visited the spot, and to this day be-

lieve that invisible and mysterious agencies controlled the movements of individuals and families.

It is the object of the following pages to hold up the beacons of the past, and in this connection to illustrate the social condition, the habits, manners, and general state of New England, in these early days of its history. We love to contemplate the piety and simplicity, while we deplore the superstition of those times. Much of the former still remains to challenge our admiration and excite our gratitude; the latter, we trust, is passing away. Our fathers were not faultless, but as a community, a nobler race was never seen on the globe: they were indeed in some degree superstitious and intolerant, but far less so than even the brilliant circles of wealth and fashion they left behind, in their father land; and it will be well for their sons, if they do not stumble over worse delusions, and fall into more fatal errors, than those of their primitive ancestors.