

II.

THE CONFESSIONS OF THE FORFAR WITCHES (1661), FROM THE ORIGINAL DOCUMENTS IN THE SOCIETY'S LIBRARY. BY JOSEPH ANDERSON, LL.D., ASSISTANT SECRETARY AND KEEPER OF THE MUSEUM.

The previous paper by Mr Burns Begg, on the Trial of the Witches at Crook of Devon, 1662, has suggested to me the propriety of printing at the same time a series of documents, relative to the subject of Witchcraft, preserved in the Society's Library. They consist of the attested and authenticated confessions of a number of women tried for witchcraft at Forfar in 1661.

It seems to me that we shall never understand the attitude of the educated mind of the seventeenth century towards witchcraft, until we are able to examine and compare a large number of such documents from different parts of the country. They disclose many things besides the mere curiosities of the processes and confessions.

For instance, it appears that the proceedings against the accused

persons were usually begun by the minister and elders of the locality or parish,¹ and that up to a certain stage they were the sole movers in the matter. In most kirk-sessions there were elders, who being also magistrates of burghs or baron bailies, could procure the incarceration of persons denounced or suspected. Then the minister and elders went frequently with a notary to the place where the accused were confined and laboured to bring them to confession. For this end they seem to have plied them with questions, the notary taking down the substance of the admissions made in reply to these interrogatories. The results of repeated questionings, brought together and reduced to a sequential form in one document by a notary, were called a confession. This was read over to the accused, and signed by the notary and attested by the minister and other parties present as witnesses.² Usually there was no one present on behalf of the accused person, and unquestionably torture and ill-usage were freely resorted to for the purpose of inducing confession. Very often the minister and elders were acting in this capacity by commission from the presbytery, and in this case the confessions were read over to the accused, in presence of the presbytery and authenticated by that court.² Then with concurrence of the presbytery an application

¹ Sometimes the dittays were drawn up, and the examinations held before the kirk-session in the session-house, or in the kirk, to which the hail parish was summoned to give in accusations (see *Spalding Club Mis.*, vol. i.; *Precepts by the Commissioners appointed for the Trial of Witches*, p. 184). In 1644, the Presbytery of St. Andrews "entreated their brother Mr James Bruce [minister of Kingsbarns], to remember the Earl of Lindsay, to give a general commission for apprehending, trying, and judging of such as are or shall be dilated for witches within the Stewartrie." The ministers are also found meeting with, and advising the judges as to the accusations, and the apprehension and treatment of prisoners accused of witchcraft. Deputations are also appointed from the presbytery to be present when the confessing witches are confronted with those accused by them, and at the executions of those condemned to death.

² The practice of authenticating the confessions of witches by the signatures of the ministers and elders in whose presence the examinations were made, can be traced back to an ordinance of the General Assembly of 1587, when "the brethrin who deduced the process in St Andrews against a witch presentlie detained in prison, were ordered to subscribe the same authentically, that it might be delivered to the Council, and Mr James Melville (then minister of Anstruther) was ordained to travell in the coast side, for matter of dittay against her." In 1649, the bailies of Inverkeithing applied to the Synod of Fife for help in examining and bringing

was made to the Privy Council for a commission to put the accused to the knowledge of an assize. All that the commission had to do was to see that the points charged in the indictment were points of witchcraft, relevant to infer a capital sentence. The attested and authenticated confession when produced in the civil court (as it usually was) had the same effect as a plea of guilty on the part of the persons arraigned at the bar. The assize was thus shut up to one verdict, and sentence of death followed as a matter of course.

The points of witchcraft considered relevant in law to infer a capital sentence appear to have varied considerably as time went on, and to have varied also in different parts of the country. The publication of the Treatise on Demonology by King James VI. in 1597, had the effect of widening the basis and simplifying the process of prosecutions for witchcraft. At the time of these trials in 1661, the principal points of witchcraft were held to be these:—(1) Attending meetings with the Devil; (2) Covenanting with the Evil One; (3) Renunciation of Baptism; (4) *Malefices*, or evil results happening to any person to whom the accused had threatened evil, or to one by whom an injury had witches to confession, and the Synod recommends this to the Presbytery of Dunfermline. The Presbytery of Lanark, having travailed in obtaining information against a suspected witch, Malie M'Quat, from 14th May 1640 till 20th May 1641, and then finding that the commissary of Lanark, on the result being submitted to him, declared that she might be found guilty of charming only, which could not be followed by sentence of death, the presbytery continued to labour more earnestly, until on 5th November they consider they have sufficient materials for bringing her to trial, "quherupon the presbytery thinks themselves bound not to suffer a witch to live," and proceed to take measures for obtaining a commission to try her. In 1644 a minister excuses himself for not attending to the remit of the presbytery, on the ground that he was at the time attending the condemning and burning of witches. On 22nd November 1649, the presbytery ordained one of the ministers "to write for George Cathie the pricker for helping to discover the mark." At next meeting of the presbytery this minister reported "that he had written for George Cathie, the pricker, who hath skill to find out the mark in witches, and that upon the last day of November in the Tolbooth of Lanark, before famous witnesses" (named, including two bailies and two ministers), "the said George did prik pinnes in everie one of them, and in diverse of them without pain the pin was put in, as the processe at more length bears." In other cases the pins used by the prickers are specified as of "thrie inches in length," and it is stated that they were put in "up to the heid." In 1643 the Presbytery of Orkney applied for a commission "to put Barbara Boundie to the tortures."

been done to the accused which inferred retaliation. If any of these were either confessed or inferred from circumstances in the confession or depositions of witnesses, the persons accused had little or no chance of escape. There was no minor plea in cases of witchcraft. If the case proceeded to a conviction, death was the only sentence.

The curious sameness of the confessions of the parties accused can only be accounted for by the presence of certain ideas of the nature of witchcraft in the minds of the ministers and others who were their examiners-in-chief. They framed the questions, and they or their notaries also shaped the answers into substantive confessions. Though the questions and answers do not usually appear, they have been in some cases partially preserved by the notary; and in other instances, in which the answers only are recorded, they are worded in such a manner as to show clearly that they are not the spontaneous utterances of the persons under examination. The desire to ascertain whether the accused has been guilty of renunciation of baptism, explains the persistence of the questioning as to the names by which the Devil was supposed to have called them, the presumption being that if they were habitually called by a name not given to them in Christian baptism, they could only have received that new name from Satan after renunciation of their baptism by the Church. The fact of a person presumed to be a witch having a popular nickname was used against her, but there are many instances of confessions as to the form of the ceremony used by the Devil in covenanting with him or giving themselves over to him. It is significant that in different presbyteries the formulas of this ceremony differ considerably. This seems to have been due to the examiners shaping these questions in particular ways towards certain acts preconceived in their own minds as the acts proper to the ceremonial "renunciation of baptism," and "giving themselves over to" "or covenanting with the Devil."

The Church, through all its courts, continued to labour strenuously to stir up the civil authorities to inflict the legal punishment of death on all convicted of witchcraft,¹ and for that end the presbyteries and kirk-

¹ This attitude of the Church Courts is discernible from 1597, at which time "because it was reportit in the Assemblie, that albeit sundrie persons were convict of witchcraft, nevirthless the civill Magistrat, not onlie refusit to punish them con-

sessions were diligent in searching out information which would be sufficient presumption for their incarceration, and committal for trial.¹ Pitcairn, who, in the appendix to his *Criminal Trials*, has printed several very remarkable confessions, quotes the statement of Baron Hume, that on the 7th November of this very year 1661, no fewer than fourteen commissions for trial of witches were granted for different parts of the country at one sederunt of the Privy Council. As one unhappy creature was almost universally induced to accuse several others, and as the evidence taken in one trial was held to be conclusive in other cases when the panels were thus proved to be "notour witches," it was competent for the commissioners to try any number of persons and "to justify them to the death." Lords of regalities and baron bailies, in virtue of their peculiar jurisdictions, were also competent judges in these cases. The judges often exceeded their powers, and both they and the underlings responsible for the administration of the law and the execution of the sentence, frequently acted with most inhuman and merciless cruelty.²

The ordinary mode of execution of witches was, that they were first strangled and then burnt. The form of the sentence runs "to be wirreit at a stake till they be deid and their bodies brint in assis." The old method of execution of women for treason, as expressed in the

form to the lawes of the country, bot also in contempt of the samen, settis the persons at libertie quhill wer convict of witchcraft, therfor the Assemblie ordaines that in all time coming the presbytery proceid in all severitie with their censures against all such Magistrates as sall sett at libertie any person convict of witchcraft hereafter."

¹ A commission was issued to the provost and bailies of Aberdeen in 1596, and from the records of the Dean of Guild for the years 1596-97, it appears that no fewer than twenty-three women and one man were burned in Aberdeen for witchcraft.

² In 1608, it is recorded that the Erle of Mar "declairit to the Counsall, that sum wemen were tane in Broichtoun as witches; and being put to ane assize and convict, albeit they perseverit constant in their denial to the end, yet they were burnit quick (*i.e.*, alive) eftir sic ane crewell manner, that sum of thame deit in despair renunceand and blasphemend; and utheris half-brunt brak out of the fyre, and wes cast in quick in it agane, quhill they were brunt to the deid." The sentences upon the women convicted of witchcraft at Aberdeen in 1596 were in each case "ordint to be brint quhill she be deid." In 1597 the tenor of the sentences was altered to "orderis tham to be led out betwixt the hills, bund to a stak and wirreit thairat quhill they be deid, and than to be brint in assis."

sentence on Lady Glammis in 1537, was "to be had to the Castell Hill of Edinburgh, and there brynt in ane fyre to the deid as ane traitour."

FOLLOWETH THE CONFESSIONES OF CERTAINE PERSONES INHABITANTS WITHIN THE BURGH OF FORFAR INCARCERAT IN THE PRISON HOUSE THEREOF FOR WITCHCRAFT, SEPTEMBER 1661.

The Confession of Helen Guthrie Spouse to James Houat in Forfar.

1. First, the said Helen Guthrie confesses that shoe has been a verie drunksome woman, a terrible banner and curser and of a very wicked life and conversatione.

2. Shoe confesses hir selfe to be a witch, and that shoe learned to be a witch of one Joanet Galloway who lived neare to Kerymure.

3. That when shoe gave her malisone to any persone or creature it usually lighted.

4. That if shoe sie any witch in Scotland shoe can tell whether they be witches or no after shoe has advysed 24 houres. And that shoe has thrie papers with blood upon them which helpes hir thus to know witches. And that shoe received these 3 bloody papers 14 yeares since from the said Joanet Galloway. And that shoe will nevir part with them until shoe goe to the fire. And that then shoe sall burn them hir selfe. And that if the minister wold take them from hir before hir going to the fire that he wold wrong himselve and the burgh and countrie about.

5. That shoe can tell the malefices which many other witches does though shoe hir selfe be not present with them:—as when Elspet Alexander wronged Baillie David Dickyson, and Helen Alexander wronged David Walker, and Joanet Stout wronged John Couper, and John Tailzour wronged Andrew Watstone, and Ketheren Portour wronged James Peirsonne, toune clerk and George Suttie by witchcraft; that shoe knew assuredly all these things though shoe was not present at the acting of them.

6. That on the 15 of September instant about midnight, the divill cam unto hir prison, and laboured to carry hir away, and that shoe was caried up from the earth thrie or four foot heigh at leist, hir head being among the jesses of the house, and that shoe haid been caried away by the divill, were not the watchmen being stout did opose and strike at hir with their swords, and did prevent it. The treuth of this last confession was testified by thrie men which wer on the watch that night,¹ the fourth watchman being absent in the meantime.

¹ It appears from the burgh records of Forfar that the town was divided into eight districts, each of which furnished a "gaird for the witches" of six men nightly and daily.

7. Shoe declaird that shoe had many other things to confess, and that shoe will confes them befor shoe will goe to the fire.

This confessione was maid before the undersubscribers within some few dayes [after] shee was apprehended, and renewed severall tymes sinsyne, and lastly befor the m[inisters] of the Presbitry of Forfar on the 25th of September 1661 instant.

Mr ALEX. ROBERTSONE, minister.	DA. DICKSON, baillie.
CHARLES DICKESON.	JO. GRAY.
A. SCOTT, provest.	JAMES BENNY, calder.

The Confession of Joanet Huit, daughter to James Huit in Forfar, maid at Forfar on the . . . day of September 1661, Before Mr Alex. Robertstone minister, Chairles Dickyson baillie, Thomas Guthrie lait baillie, John Gray, Thomas Robertson, notars, and William Cuthbert merchand in Forfar.

1. The said Joanet Howit confesseth as followeth, first, that about the beginning of the last oatsied tyme Isabell Syrie did cary hir to the Insch within the Loch of Forfar, and that ther the said Isabell Shyrie presented her to the divill, and that the divill said What sall I doe with such a little bairn as [this]. And that the said Isabell answered shoe is my maiden take hir to you. Further the said Joanet confesses that shoe saw at this tyme about threteen witches with the divill, and that they daunced together, the divill being all in black, and that hir selfe was called by the divill the Pretty Dauncer, and that besyd hir selfe and the said Isabel Syrie, Mary Rind, Helen Alexander, and [Isabel] Durward nicknamed Noblie *alias* Ouglie wer present; as for the rest shoe did not know them.

2. That about four weekes after the foresaid mieting in the Insch the said Isabell Shyrie caried her to ane other mieting to Muryknowes, a little bewest Halcartounmiln, and that at this mieting ther wer about twenty persones present with the divill, and that they daunced together and eat together having bieff bread and ale, and that shoe did eat and drink with them hirselve bot hir bellie was not filled, and that shoe filled the drink to the rest of the company, and that at this mieting the divill kyst hir and niped her upon one of hir shoulders, so as shoe hade great paine for some tyme thereafter. And that the said Mary Rind and Isabell Durward and Helen Alexander wer present amongst the rest.

3. Thirdly, about sex weekes after this second mieting the divill cam to hir, he being all in grien at a place called Lapedub halfe ane myle be-eist Forfar, and that then the divill calling hir his bony bird did kisse her, and straiked hir shoulder which was niped with his hand, and that presently after that shoe was eased of hir former paine.

4. That one tyme shoe was with hir owne mother at a place called Newman-hill hard by Forfar about midnight. And that then shoe saw the divill have carnal copulation with hir mother. And that the divill having done, rode away on ane blacke horse. And that shoe followed him a little way until he directed her to return to hir mother. And that when she was returned to hir mother, hir mother forbade her to tell hir father of what shoe had seen that night.

5. Shoe confesses that at the foirsaid mieting at Muryknowes, the divill spoke to hir, saying that if shoe wold doe his biding shoe should nevir want, and that he bade hir renunce hir God, and shoe answered Mary shall I.

This confession was maid before the undersubscribers and ratified before the ministers of the Presbitry on the 25th of September instant, the said Joanet Howit being confronted with Helen Guthrie hir mother.

Mr ALEXANDER ROBERTSONE, minister.

JO. GRAY.

TH. ROBERTSONE.

WM. CUTHBERT.

CHARLES DICKESON.

TH. GUTHRIE.

The Confession of John Tailzour, made at Forfar, the dayes of September, before Mr Alexander Robertstone minister, Charles Thornton and James Bennie younger, burgesses in Forfar.

John Tailzeour confesseth as followeth (1) That about bearsied tyme last, the devill appeared to him near to Halcarton, that he haid ane broun horse and that upon his apearance the beastes in the pleugh began to feare and that the divill told him that he knew he was going to some mercates, and that he wold len him money. But he refused to medle with his money. (2) He confessed that at ane other tyme the devill appeared to him at Petterden but he refused to have anything to do with him.

Mr ALEXANDER ROBERTSONE.

CHARLES THORNTOUNE.

JAMES BENNY.

A. HEICH.

The Confessione of Isobell Shyrie, made at Forfar on the fyftein day of September 1661, being the Sabbath day between sermones Before David Dickieson baillie whom shoe sent for, Alex. Scott lait baillie, John Dickieson merchant, John Gray, Chairles Thorntoun and William Cuthbert, burgesses of Forfar.

(1) Shoe confesses that she is a witch, and tooke on hir the guilt of witchcraft. (2) That amongst severall other meetings shoe did meet with the devill at the green hill near the Loch of Forfar, within these 20 dayes or ane moneth last past, wher ther were present John Tailzour, Helen Guthrie, Mary Rind,

Elspet Alexander, Joanet Stout and Joanet Howatt. And that the divill haid ther carnall copulatione with hir. (3) That she wronged Baillie Wood¹ by braying to powder two toad's heads and ane peece of ane dead man's scull and ane peece dead man's flesh which the divill perfumed. And having condescended with the divill therewith to be Baillie Wood's death, the divill declared that within a moneth or 20 dayes as shee pleased he sould die. And that shee went therefter to Baillie Wood's house, and inquired for a pan which was before that time pointed fra hir for cess. The baillie called on hir and gave hir a drinke, and before shoe delyvered the cup to him againe shoe put the powder in it, and he died within the timè prescribed. (4) That she hade wronged Thomas Webster in his meanes by casting ane cantrop before his doore, but could not have power of his person.

JO. GRAY.

D. DICKSON, baillie.

JAMES BENNY, ealder.

CHARLES THORNTOUN.

WM. CUTHBERT.

A. HEICH.

A. SCOTT, provest.

The Confessione of Elspet Alexander, spouse to Jon Muffit in Forfar, maid at Forfar on the 17th of September 1661, Befor the minister, Charles and David Dickson baillies, Thomas Guthrie lait baillie, Charles Thorntoun and James Beny burgesses, Thomas and John Robertson notars in Forfar, and William Cuthbert merchant there.

Elspet Alexander confesseth as followeth, First, that about thrie halfe yeares since shoe was at a mieting of witches with the divill at Peterden midway betwixt Forfar and Dondie, and that ther amongst others ther wer present beside hir selfe Isabell Shyrie Helen Guthrie Joanet Howit John Tailzour and Joanet Stout. And that at the said meiting they daunced together and that they received new names from the divill, viz., shoe hir selfe was called Alyson, Isabell Shyrie was called The Horse, Helen Guthrie was called The White Witch, Joanet Howit was called The Pretty Dauncer, John Tailzour was called Beelzebob; further shoe confesses that the divill marked hir selfe that night on the left shoulder. Shoe confesses that about four weekes after this mieting at Petterden she was at ane second mieting at the Muryknowes, and at this

¹ There is an unamended copy of this confession taken "between sermons," and signed by Mr Alexander Robertson, minister, along with the other signatures. It has the words before the third item of the confession:—"And being inquired if shee hade done any malefice to any, shee answered that she wronged Baillie Wood &c." as above; and before the fourth item:—"And having inquired if shee hade done any other malefices shee confessed that she had wronged Thomas Webster," as above.

second mieting the divill and the witches did drinke together, having flesh bread and aile, and that the persones in the first mieting were lykeways present at the second mieting. Further shoe confesses that the divill straked her shoulder with his fingers and that after that she had ease in the place formerly niped by the divell.

Shoe confesses that shoe was present at ane third mieting with the forenamed persones near Kerymure and that the divill and the said witches daunced togidder, and that the divill kissed hir selfe that night and that it was ane cold kisse. Shoe confesses that Mary Rynd was at one of thir mietings, and that shoe was called The Divill's Dau[ghter]. Shoe confesses hir selfe guilty of witchcraft and that shoe is willing to suffer deith for it.

This confession was maid befor the subscribers, and ratified befor the ministers of the Presbitry of Forfar on the 25th of September instant.

Mr ALEX. ROBERTSONE.

J. GUTHRIE.

DA. DICKSON, Baillie.

JAMES BENNY.

CHARLES DICKSON.

J. ROBERTSON, wreitter in Forfar.

CHARLES THORNTOUNE.

WM. CUTBERT.

TH. ROBERTSONE, writer in Forfar.

The Confessione of Jonet Stout.

Joanet Stout confesseth as followeth, First That about thrie halfe yeares since shoe was at a mieting with the divill and other witches at Petterden in the midway betwixt Forfar and Dondie. And that beside hir selfe ther wer present at this mieting Elspet Alexander Isabell Shyrrie Helen Guthrie Joanet Howit and John Tailzour. And that at the said mieting the divill and the said witches daunced togidder and that the divill kissed sundrie of them bot did not kisse hir selfe because shoe stealled behind the backes of the rest. And that they received new names viz. Elspet Alexander was called Alesone, Isabell Shyrrie The Horse, Helen Guthrie The White Witch, Joanet Howit The Pretty Dauncer, John Tailzour Beelzebob, and for hir own name shoe hade forgot it.

(2) That shoe was at ane other meiting with the divill and the said witches at the Mury Knowes about four or six weekes after the first mieting at Petterden and that at this second meeting the divill and the said witches did eat and drinke, having flesch bread and aile upon ane table as shoe thought, and that the said Joanet Huit was capper and filled the drinke.

(3) That shoe was at a third mieting with the divill and the said witches, and that they daunced at the said mieting which was near to Kerymure.

(4) Shoe confesses that the divill appeared to hir two severall tymes at the well of Drungley and told hir that shoe sould not want.

(5) Shoe confesses hir selfe guilty of witchcraft and that shoe is willing to suffer deith for it.

This confession was maid on the 17th September befor the under-subscribers and ratified befor the ministers of the Presbitry of Forfar on the 25th day of the said moneth of September instant.

Mr ALEX. ROBERTSONE.

JAMES BENNY.

DA. DICKSON, Baillie.

J. ROBERTSONE, writter in Forfar.

CHARLES DICKSON.

WM. CUTHBERT.

CHARLES THORNTOUNE.

A. HEICH.

TH. ROBERTSONE, writter in Forfar.

[Another copy of this confession has the following under the signatures:—]

The said Jonet confest befor John Hepburne James Esplen and George Renney that she had carnale copulation with the divill at Petterden.

The Confession of Ketheren Portour, maid at Forfar on the day of September 1661 Befor the subscribers and ratified at severall tymes befor severall other persones.

Ketheren Portour confesseth as followeth First That about hir selfe and two other women who are now both dead did meet at the quarrie near the buter wall and that the divill met them there and haid some discourse with the other two women, bot for hir selfe shoe was feared and did haist away.

(2) Shoe confesses that at ane other tyme the said women being present with hir selfe the divill came to them at the bleachin grien hard by the toune of Forfar and haid discourse with the said two women who are now dead. Bot for hir selfe shoe reproved them and told them if they wold not com away that shoe being blind wold goe be hir selfe allon as shoe could.

(3) That after that, the forsaid two women tooke hir furth to Ferytounfields near to Forfar to get ane sour coug and quhill they wer together in the said Ferytounfields the divill came to them and that although shoe was a blind woman for many yeares before, yit at that time shoe hade some sight so far as that shoe saw the divill and that he hade ane blacke plaid about him and that the divill tooke hir by the hand and that his hand was cold and that ther-upon shoe haistened away.

(4) That shoe hes been a great banner and a terrible curser, and a very wicked woman.

Mr ALEX. ROBERTSONE.

WM. CUTHBERT, merchant.

T. GUTHRIE, Bailie.

A. HEICH.

J. ROBERTSONE, writter in Forfar.

The Confession of Agnes Sparke, maid at Forfar the 26th September 1661, before Mr Alexander Robertson minister, Charles Dickyson baillie, James Webster, Thomas Robertson and Thomas Scot, notars in Forfar.

The said Agnes Sparke confesseth as followeth, first, that in August last Isobel Shirie cam to hir about midnight, and carried her away to Littlemiln or thereabout, and that ther shoe did sie about ane dusson of people dauncing, and that they had suet musicke amongst them and as shoe thought it was the musicke of ane pype, and that shoe hard that people ther present did speake of Isabell Shirie and say that shoe was the divills horse, and that the divill did alwayes ryde upon hir, and that she was shoad like ane mare or ane horse, and that night the said Isabel Shirrie went aside fra hir for some tyme, and that the divill (as shoe supposed), had then carnal copulation with hir. And that shee did see Joanet Howit ther, and that shoe was called the pretty dauncer. And that Isabel Shirie carried hir back again to hir owne house. That the nixt day after, shoe went to see the said Isabell, and that shoe fund hir lying on hir bed, and that shoe did ly all that day. And that hir hands were very sore and that she plucked the skin off them and maid great moan and said that it was no wonder that shoe haid so sore hands seeing shoe was so sore tossed up and doune, and the said Agnes answered hir If you haid not been at such worke yesterevin as you was at, you wold not have been lying in your bed this day. And that Isobell said Have ye nothing to doe with that and speake nothing of it to anie bodie. That the said Isobell used many entysing words to draw hir on to the devill's service, and said it would be ane great joy to hir to be in such service. But she refused to hearken to hir.

Mr ALEX. ROBERTSON.

TH. ROBERTSON writer in Forfar.

CHARLES DICKSON.

A. HEICH.

Ane further Confession made be Helen Guthrie, prisoner in the Tolbooth of Forfar for witchcraft on the 28 of October 1661, before Mr Alexander Robertsons minister, Alexander Scot provost, Thomas Guthrie and David Dickesone baillies, Charles Dickesone lait baillie, Charles Thorntoun, James Benny elder, and James Benny younger, John Auld, William Cuthbert and Alexander Benny, burgesses of the said burgh of Forfar.

First, the said Helen confesses that about the tyme that St Johnstounes bridge wes carried away shoe murdered hir mother's dochter callit Marget Hutchen,¹ being hir halfe-sister about sex or seven yeares of age, and that for

¹ The following is added on the margin :—" Killed her sister named Marget Hutchen, who was mother children with hir, by a stroak she gave hir, to the effusion of hir blood, and of the which she died within few dayes."

the said murder hir mother did give alwayes hir malison to hir, yea and upone hir deathe bed continued to give her malison notwithstanding the said Helens earnest request and beseikings in the contrair, and that she strak hir said sister at that tyme till she bled, whilk stroak was afterwards hir death.

(2) That about thrie years before the last ait seed tyme, shee was at a meitting in the church yeard of Forfar in the holfe thereof and that ther wer present ther the divell himself in the shape of a black iron hewed man, and these persons following Katheren Porter, Mary Rynd, Isobell Shyrrie, Elspet Alexander, Jonet Stout, Cristen Whyte, Andrew Watsone, John Tailzeor, George Ellies, and that they daunced together, and that the ground under them was all fireflaughts, and that the said Andrew Watsone had his usuale staff in his hand altho' he be a blind man yet he daunced else nimblie as any of the company and made also great mirriement by singing his old ballads, and that the said Isabell Shyrrie did sing her song called tinkletum tankletum, and that the divil kist every ane of the women and for herself the divell kist onlie her hand.

(3) That about ane yeare efter the forementioned meitting betwixt the ait-seid and the beir-seid shee was at ane other meitting at the pavilione-holl and that ther wer present the divell himselfe in shape as befor, and the persones of the first meitting, viz. Mary Rynd, Isobell Shyrrie, Elspet Alexander, Jonet Stout, Christen Whyte, Catheren Porter, Andrew Watsone, Johne Tailzeor, George Ellies and besydes these there were also Helen Alexander living in Forfar, Catheren Wallace in the parochin of Forfar, Isobel Smith in the paroch of Oathlaw, and that they daunced a whyle togidder till they were skaired by some people coming by and that thereupon they were fryghted and [fled] suddenly.

(4) That this same year, betwixt the oatseid and bearsied shee was at a thrid meitting in the church yeard of Forfar in the holfe thereof about the same tyme of the nyght [as they used to hold] meittings, viz., at midnyght and that there were present the divell himselfe [and all the] persones mentioned in the first meitting together with Helen Alexander and that they daunced togither a whyle and then went to Mary Rynds house and sat doune at the table the divell being present at the head of it and that some of them went to John Bennyes house he being a brewer and brought ale from thence and that they [went] threw in at a litle hollyk bies and took the substance of the aile, and others of them to Alexander Hieches and brought *aqua vite* from thence and thus made themselves mirrie, and that the divell made much of them all but especiallie of Mary Rynd and that he kist them all except the said Helen herselfe whose hand onlie he kist, and that at the said meitting they agreed togidder to undoe the aforesaid John Benny in his meanes, and that she and Jonet Stout sat opposite ane to another at the table.

(5) That at the first of theis meittings Andrew Watsone, Mary Rynd, Elspet Alexander, Isobell Shyrrie and herselfe, went up to the church wall about the south east doore, and the said Andrew Watsone reased a young bairne unbaptized, and took severall pieces thereof, as the feet the hands a pairt of the head and a pairt of the buttock, and that they made a py thereof that they might eat of it, that by this meanes they might never make a confession (as they thought) of their witchcraft. And that she knowes that Elspet Bruce and Marie Rynd and severall other witches went to see the King's coronatioune.

(6) That the beginning of the last oatsied tyme, Elspet Bruce in Cortaquhie, now prisoner upoun the suspitione of witchcraft, hade a webb of cloath stollen from her and that thereby by turning the sive and the sheires she reased the divell who being werry hard to be laid againe ther was a meiting of witches for laying of him and that amongst others shee hirselle and Janet Stout and the said Elspet Bruce were present; for the rest shee knew them not. And that at this meitting they hade pipe musick and dauncing as they used to have at all other meittings. And that at last they went to the bridge of Cortaquhie with intentione to pull it doune and that for this end shee hirselle, Jonet Stout and others of them did thrust their shoulders aganest the bridge, and that the divell was bussie amang them acting his pairt, and that ther wes ane extraordinary great wind reased so that the boords of the bridge flew to and fro at a great distance and that at this meitting the divill kist them all except herself and that he kist her hand onlie.

(7) That about a week before St James's day last hirselle Isobell Shyrrie and Elspet Alexander did meit togither at an aile-house near to Barrie a little before sunsett and that efter they hade stayed in the said house about the space of ane houre drinking of thrie pints of ale togidder they went forth to the sands, and that ther thrie other women met them and that the divell was ther present with them all in the shape of ane great horse, and that they concludit the sinking of ane shipp lying not farr off from Barrie, and that presentlie the said company appoynted hirselle to tak hold of the cable tow and to hold it fast until they did returne and she hir selfe did presentlie take hold of the cable tow and that the rest with the divill went into the sea upoun the said cable as she thought and that about the space of an houre thereafter they returned all in the same likeness as of before except that the divell was in the shape of a man upoune his returne, and that the rest wer sore traiked and that the divill did kiss them all except herselfe and that he kist her hand onlie, and that then they concludit another meitting to be at the nixt Hallowmes and that they parted so late that night that she could get no lodging and was forced to lie at ane dykesyde all nyght.

(8) That the last summer except one she did sie Johnne Tailzeor sometymes in the shape of a todde and sometimes in the shape of a swyn and that the

said Johne Tailzeor in these shapen went up and doune among William Millne, miller at Hetherstakes, his cornes for the destructione of the same, because the said Williame hade taken the mylne over his head, and that the divell cam to hir and pointed out John Tailzeor in the foresaid shapen unto her and told her that that wes Johne Tailzeor.

That she the said Helen Guthrie knowes assuredlie that Elspet Pigots cleath which wes in wanting laittie, wes taken away by a gentleman's servand who lodgit in the house at ane certane tyme and that shee wes assured of this by a spirit which shee has besyde other folkes yea besyde all the witches in Angus.

Mr ALEX. ROBERTSONE.	A. SCOTT.
CHARLES DICKSON.	DA. DICKSON.
CHARLES THORNTOUNE.	J. GUTHRIE.
JAMES BENNY.	JOHN AULD.

13 Nov. 1661. Helen Guthrie confest befor Jonet Stout that shee was ane witch a long tyme since and that shee went abroad with the Egiptians shee being a witch then.

COMMISSION to the PROVOST and BAILLIES of FORFAR and others for Trial of ISOBEL SHYRRIE 7th November 1661.

Charles be the grace of God King of Great Britane France and Ireland defender of the faith to all and sundry our leidges and subjects whom it efferis to whose knowledge thir our letters shall come greitting Forsameikle as Issobel Syrrie indweller in Forfar hes confest the abominable cryme of witchcraft in entering into paction with the divell renouncing hir baptism and otherwayes as hir depositions in presence of divers famous witnesses beares therefore wee with advyce and consent of the Lords of our Privy Councill have granted and given and by these presents gives and grantes our full power authority expresse bidding and charge to our lovitts Patrick Cairncrosse of Balmishanner Mr Thomas Huntar of Restennett David Huntar of Burnsyde Gideon Guthrie of Halkertoune Alex. Guthry of Carsbank Alex. Scott provest of Forfar Thomas Guthrie and David Dickson baylies there or any fyve of them to meitt at such tymes and places as they shall think most convenient and there to affix and hold courts call suits amerciat absents uplift unlaues and amerciaments and creat clerks sergands demsters and all other members of court neidful. And in their said courts to call the said Issobell Syrrie and to put her to her tryall and to the knowledge of ane assyse and if she shall be found guilty upon volunteer confession without any sort of torture or any other indirect meanes used against her to bring her to ane confession or that

malefices be otherwayes legally instructed and proven that then and in that case and no otherwayes they cause justice be administrat and execute upon her conform to the lawes of this kingdome And to doe all other things necessary to the execution of this [commission according to] the lawes of the kingdome. With power also to the said [Commissioners] or any fyve of them to secure such others as are or shall be delate guilty and to examine them and to use all fair meanes without any sort of torture for their tryall and bringing them to the confession of their sinnes. Given under our Signett at Edinburgh the sevent day of November and of our reigne the threttenth yeare 1661.

GLENCAIRN Cancellarius.	JO. GILMOUR.
ROTHES.	JO. FLETCHER.
LINLITHGOW.	J. LOCKHART.
HOME.	ROBT. MURRAY.

The Confession off Isobell Smith witch, drawn from hir mouth and written by the minister, frequently repeated befor the under subscribers and witness with tears and cryes for mercie and the help of their prayers [2nd Jan. 1662].

First shee confessed adultery twentie years agoe with ane man who is now dead, desyring to pray for hir poor soule.

Secondly shee confessed covenant and pactione with the divell years agoe when shee dwelt in Hillisyd, the conditiones was that shee sould renunce god and hir Baptisme and serve and obey him if he would wrong [the persons] that wronged hir, or she pleased to wrong for And he promised hir three halffpennies a year wages which shee affirmed to be little gaine in respect of hir great [loss] of hir soule.

Thirdly shee confessed many meittings with the divell and hir compacts. Ane on the head off the hill off Fineheaven while shee was alone gathering heather hee appeared to hir alone lik ane braw gentleman when shee was desyring either god or the divell to revenge hir on James Gray, Bowman to my Lord Spynie, and that tyme they made their covenant and he kissed her and lay with her as shee thought and his mouth and breath wer wery cold and his body lyk clay. The second meiting was in the playfield of Forfar wher Hellen Guthrie Mary Rynd Isobell Shyrrie Elspet Bruce, Helen Cothills and the divell danced. The third meitting was at Cadgers Denne coming out of Breichan when the divell appeared to her alone lik ane light gentleman and convoyed hir a piece dating hir and lay with hir and went away. The fourth meiting was at Cortequhy Bridge. Hellen Cothills cam about hir and guyded hir through the bog of Coule and when she cam ther she met with the divell, Helen Guthrie Elspett Bruce, Isobell Sherry pepperpocks or Isobell

Smith and ane old body off called Finlason who could help us nothing quoth shee. Wee all rewed that meitting for we hurt ourselves lifting. The occasion of the meitting was Elspet Bruce wanted ane piece cloath which was drying on the Bridge-revills and therefore the devill and shee concluded ther sould pass nobody mor that bridge. When wee had done quoth shee Elspet Bruce gave the devill ane goose in hir own house. And hee dated hir maist of them all because shee was ane prettie woman. And by these meittings they met with him every quarter at Candlemas Roodday Lambsmas and Hallow [mas] in any place wher hee appointed. Shee confessed ther was ane wholl Army of them at these miettings tho' shee knew but few of them ; and that Hellen Guthrie and Hellen Cothills went on the head of the army. Shee said that Be[ssie] Croket in Tannides was one of the army.

Fourthly shee confessed that because James Gray would not lett hir cow eat on hir own rigge syd, shee was his death by blowing ill in his face, wishing hee might never keep that barne so long as hir husband did, upon which hee died suddainly.

Fifthly shee confessed that shee was the death of John Dargy by laying on hir hand on the small off his back, wishing that hee might never be able to doe so much to any other as hee had done to hir (for hee had strucken hir and drawin hir in ane strip), upon which itt followed that hee dwined long, sweating daily till hee died.

Sixthly shee confessed shee took away Androw Nicolls coves milk out off greed thinking hee might spare it and shee would be the better of it, and yit tho' the cow gave no mor milk shee gat none of it but what his wyff gave her that morning. Shee confessed shee did the lyk to John Dyk because his wyff would not give hir milk and that the calf followed hir. Shee lykwyss confessed Isobell Webster brak hir hens legg and therefore shee prayed Let thee never get mor good off thy cows milk nor I get off my hen's eggs ; and the cow gave no mor milk ; shee confessed shee would have wronged [Isobell Webster] hir selfe if shee could.

Seavently besides hir own confession shee was delated to be ane witch by Hellen Guthrie and Hellen Cothills, and Hellen Guthrie gave in many presumptions on hir as death off John Fyff and Margaret Fyff and tormenting off Jannet Mitchell by keeping hir pictur the casting ill betwixt Alex. Kid and his wyff, and the death of ane horse that eated hir come, the wrong off Androw Peacock by casting som thing at him, disabling him in his hench, because hee feed hir son, and took him not home, and that hir mother caist ill one Robert Dog, and shee took it off and cuist it one his foal which died suddenly and hee recovered of his girneing and foaming at the mouth. These presumptiones tho' shee has not confessed them are many of them probably true because they followed immediately upon som acts of hers.

Thursday, 2nd Jan. 1662.—The above-written confession was ratified,

approven, and acknowledged be the said Isobell Smith before the judges nominat in the Commission.

MR A. STRATONE, minister.
ROBERT LINDSAY.
ALEXANDER HOG.
JAMES BURNE.
DAVID FITCHIE.

TH. ROBERTSONE, clerk.

[5 more illegible].

Ane additione to hir Confession.

Imprimis shoe confesses that at the meitting att Cortequy ther was ther besydes Margeret Nicol Elspet Hebrone, whom Helen Guthry and Hellen guilty lykewyse.

2nd She declares these three to have been at the playfield off Forfar danceing.

Thirdly that witches many times wronges themselves snares for other men and ther goods which will that which comes nearest it be it ther own or

Hellen Guthry confessed to me that ther was ane wyff in the town of Oathlaw who wronged Robert ane old man to hir husband and dwelt at K shee thought that I might know whom shee meant.

Wee have severall presumptiones against som other persones and desyres they may be tryed.

MR A. STRATONE, *minister.*

2nd Jan. Before the Judges in the Session-house.

The said Isobell did confess that Bessie Croket was with them at [a meitting] and that Mary Rynd was with them in the playfield [of Forfar], and that they had four meetings at Candlemas Ruidday, Lambesmas and Hallowmas, and that Elspet Bruce was in the playfield.

Thursday 2nd January 1662.

Conveined James Keith of Caldham Sheriff-Depute of Forfar Patrick Cairncross of Balmishenner, David Hunter of Burnesyde Mr Thomas Hunter of Restennet, Alexander Guthrie of Carsbank as Judges nominat be ane commissiione granted be His Hieghness with consent of the Lords of his Majesteis privie Counsell.

Concludet be the mouth of the said James Keith preces nominat be them that if any of the judges shall feale in keiping of the dyets appointed to be her-after the partie failzier to pay a certane soume to be nominat be those present with consent of the preces.

Helen Cothill after reading of hir confession to hir did acknowledge the samen and declared all wes trew that wes [express] therein.

Isobell Smith in Oathlaw compeared and ratified approved and acknowledged hir confessione as the samen is written and subscrivit.

Helen Guthrie acknowledged hir confessione and that she wold know ony witch when she sies them in the face and that Elspet Bruce raised the great wind at the meeting at the brig of Cortaquhie.

Helen Cothill and Elspet Bruce being confronted togidder the said Helen affirmed that the said Elspet was at the meetings express and given up in hir confessione.

Isobell Smith being also confronted with the said Elspet verified hir delations made and given up in hir confessione against the said Elspet Bruce.

Helen Guthrie being confronted with the said Elspet verified in her face that she was the death of Lady Isobell Ogilvy dochter to the Erle of Airlie and that she was a witche, and that she was the death of John Finnie and that ther was a fyre at the gavill of the said Elspets hous that nycht Lady Isobell Ogilvy was buried, and that John Finnies wyfe Helen Robertsonsone, cam at night to the said Elspet, and saw the fyre and her children dancing about it and that Isabell Bruce servand to the said Elspet knowes something of the fyre. The said Elspet being asked if this were proven against her wold she tak with the guilt of witchcraft on her? She replied she wold doe so.

She also granted that if so be that it wer proven against her that she had committed adulterie she would acknowledge herself a witche, and also that if the things wer found in hir house as wes aledged and to be proven she wold tak the guilt of witchcraft on her. The said Elspet being inquired if she wald tak the guilt of witchcraft on hir if it wer proven against hir that there was ane rossin goose in her house that day the wind was risen and the buirds of the brig of Cortaquhie did flie from it, she replied if it wer so proven she wold tak with the guilt and sin of witchcraft.

Friday, 3d January 1662.

Conveined James Keith of Caldham Sheriff-Deput of Forfar Patrick Cairncross of Balmishenner Mr Thomas Hunter of Restennet David Hunter of Burnesyde Alexander Guthrie of Carsbank Alexander Scott provest, Thomas Guthrie and David Dickisone baillies, as Judges nominat be our Soverayne lord's commissione for putting to tryell of Helen Cothill, Isobell Smith and Elspet Alexander and other persones contained in the commisionne, and having called before them the said Helen Cothill Isobell Smith Elspet Alexander, after reiding of their confessions severallie befor the persons of Inquest following the said thrie persons arraigned did object nothing aganes the assysers, the Judges did put the said three persones to the tryell of the said assyse.

NOMINA ASSYSE.—Alexr. Kyde elder of Birkenbuss, Patrick Pyet in Turing, John Fairweather in Baldardy, George Bellie there, Andrew Dalgatie in Turing, John Dalgatie in Turing, William Sturrock in Barry, Robert Lyndsay in Ravelgie, David Fitchet in Windieage, John Morgoun in Corstoune of Dunichten, James Burne in Blairestedden, Robert Walnin in Kirriemuir, Andrew Smith in Ladywell; Andrew Smith in Baldindery, Robert Bruce in Meikle Coule—*Electi et jurati*.

Quhilk day the heall assyse be the mouth of the said James Burne chancellor to them did find the said Helen Cothill Isobell Smith and Elspet Alexander and either of them guiltie of the said abhominable cryme of witchcraft and malefices done be them, conform to their several confessiones And therefore aught and sould suffer death as witches. And remits the way manner and tyme of their deathes to the judges above-named.

JAMES BURNE.

The judges ordanes the said Isobell Smith Helen Cothill and Elspet Alexander and aither of them to be first strangled and thereafter burnt to ashes the morrow Saturday betwixt 12 aclok in the morning and one aclok in the efternone. Whereupon Donald Mackeynge gave doom.

Confession of Marjorie Ritchie in presence of the Commissioners James Keith Sheriff Deput of Angus Lyon of John Fotheringham of Dinoon, Ogilvy of Quich, Alexander Bonar of Kincaldrum. Guthrie of Halkertoune, Thomas Broune of and the Provest and Bailies of Forfar or any five of them to call the said Marjorie Ritchie and to put her to a legal and judicial tryall and to make ane report to your Lordships of what confessiones should be made be her judiciallie and that at the time of her confessione she was of sound judgement noways distracted tortured or under any to die and what malefices should be legally instructed and proven against her, to the effect your lordships may give further ordour for proceeding against her conforme to the lawes of this realme.

Whilk commission being on this thretten day of Junii 1662 years presented and with reverence received be us within the tolbooth of the burgh of Forfar after reading thereof we did cause call the said Marjorie Ritchie who willingly and freely declared and confesst the particular confession after exprest viz: She confessed that the devill appeared to her thrie severall times in the similitude of a womane, the first time in one Jonet Barries house, the second time while she was pulling up lint in the compynie of the said Janet, and that the devil did take her by the hand at that time and promised that she should never want moneys, and thereafter that the devill appeared to her in the moss of the Newtoun of Airly, where and when she did renounce

her baptism. She also confest at being at ane marcat in Aleth, wher she offering to buy ane cow frae ane certaine man he refusing to sell her upone the pryce she offered him she caused the cow to follow her home. As also confessed that she having ane great grudge at her neighbour John Storrok in the kirktoone of Inneraritie she resolved to be avenged upone him or his wyfe she in ane morning did lay doune a little meall with a threid before the said Johne his door wheroutof his wyfe having come first and passing over the meall and threid immediately thereafter she had ane alteratione in all the members and parts of hir bodie and for the space of ane yeare thereafter shee was not able to turne himself upon hir bed. Shee also confest that shee was the death of one William Keith by casting ane clod at him in the greene of the loane of Inneraritie, and that she did cast evil upon Robert Douglas whereby he was and is distracted, and that she witched ane cow by casting a clod at her who afterwards died. And that she having indignatione at her son-in-law Alexander Meassone, she did lay doune ane little quantitie of oats before his doore thereby thinking to bring him to povertie, and that she was the death of ane horse belonging to Robert Lonnane in Arlie she having malice against the said Robert. After which confession we under writtars having inquired the said Marjorie giff she had been any wayes tortured she answered she was not, and that what she had confessed was friely willingly and of treuth, and that she had no furdre to confess. And this for report of your Lordships commission and discharge of our deutie we mak manifest and notour to your Lordships be ther presentis, written be Thomas Robertsons clerk depute of the burgh of Forfar and clerk to our court. Subscribed be us and him att Forfar the said threetten day of June 1662 years.

[Docketed on back]

Double of the Abstract of the declarations against Elspet Bruice, July 1662.

Followeth the declarationes of the witches afternamed made and givin in against Elspet Bruice in the paroch of Cortachie, prisoner in the wardhouse of Forfar on suspitione of witchcraft, before James Keith of Caldhame, Sheriff-Deput of Forfar, Patrick Cairncross of Balmyshenner, David Hunter of Burnesyde, Mr Thomas Hunter of Restenent, Alexander Guthrie of Carsbank, Alexander Scott provest, Thomas Guthrie and David Dickson baillies of the brugh of Forfar, Judges nominat by the Lords of His Majesties Privy Counsell for putting of the said witches to tryall on the second day of January 1662 years.

Whilk day Helen Guthrie witch in Forfar being confronted with the said Elspet Bruice before the Judges above-named, did declare that the said Elspet Bruice was as reale a witch as the said Helen is, and that she was at severall

meetings with the divill and uther witches, and specialle at ane meeting at the bridge of Cortachie wher the divill and they reased ane greit wind of intentione to pull doune the bridge, and that the said Elspet Bruce was the death of Lady Isobell Ogilvy daughter to the Earle of Airlie, and the night the said Ladie was buried there was ane greit fyre seen at the geavill wall of the said Elspets house whereat the said Elspet and hir children were seen dancing. The said Elspet being inquyred if ther was such a fyre that night and shee and her children about it shoe replied ther was not, and declared that if it could be proven that ther was any such fyre she tuck the guilt of witchcraft upone hir. And it being allaiged that she had committed adulterie, she denyed and declared that if it could be proven against her shoe would also take with the guilt of witchcraft, and which adulterie the said Elspet thereafter did confess. It being also allaiged be the said Helen Guthrie against the said Elspet that that night or the night before ane greit wind was reased at the bridge of Cortachie, the said Elspet had ane rossin goose in her house for the divill and some of her night[bours]. The said Elspet denying that, shoe declared that if it could be provin against her that she hed ane rossin goose in her house or that she was in the toune of Kerymure that day the great wind was reased at the bridge of Cortachy shoe would lykwayes tak upone her the guilt of witchcraft.

The said Helen Guthrie also declared and affirmed that the said Elspet Bruce was a witch and that shoe hed keipit severall metings with the devill [herselfe] and the said Helen Guthrie ; one meting at the bog of Coule, and ane uther at the bridge of Cortachie, wher they did turn the sive and [tried to discover a] wob of gray cloath that the said Elspet had wanted, ane other meting at the brunt heuch, and ane other meting at the said Elspet Bruce's house wher the said Elspet did give the divill a goose to tell [her who had] stolen the gray wob.

The deceist Isobell Smith witch in the paroch of Oathlaw being confronted with the said Elspet Bruce, declared and affirmed the said Elspet to be a witch [and that] she had keipit severall metings with the divill and herself Helen Guthrie, Helen Cothill and severall other witches, one meting on the play-field of Forfar [ane other] meting at the bog of Coule, ane other meting at the bridge of Cortachie, and ane other at the said Elspets own house where she gave the divill the goose.

*Extractit furth of the of the judges above-named
at their be me.*

TH. ROBERTSONE, clerk-depute of the
Burgh of Forfar and Clerk to the said Judges.

First of August 1662, delyverit this extract of the above-written declarations to Williame Bowmane to delyver it to my Lord Airlie.