Heinrich Kramer and Jacob Sprenger, *Malleus Maleficarum* (1486)

The *Malleus maleficarum* ("Hammer of the Witches") was composed by two German Dominican inquisitors, Heinrich Kramer and Jacob Sprenger in 1486. The first manual of its kind, the *Malleus* set out to systematically refute clerical disbelief in the real power of witches and magic (the official Catholic doctrine for over six hundred years had been that those individuals who claimed to practice magic of any kind were deluded and had no real power of any kind), describe the source of a witch’s power, the kinds of diabolical acts (*maleficium*) witches committed, how to recognize them, and how to prosecute them, and how to get them to recant or, failing repentance of their heresy, to dispose of them. Although the manual (which was directed at inquisitors) theoretically received a bull of papal approval, some scholars have speculated that this bull was actually forgery. Nevertheless, the *Malleus* would remain a foundational document for the witch-hunts of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. As you read, particularly note the sources of authority to which the authors make appeal in constructing their argument. Also consider the fundamental assumptions they seem to be making about witches and their practices.

---

**Part I, Question I**

**Question:** Whether the belief that there are such beings as witches is so essential a part of the Catholic faith that obstinately to maintain the opposite opinion manifestly savours of heresy.

And it is argued that a firm belief in witches is not a Catholic doctrine. Whoever believes that any creature can be changed for the better or the worse, or transformed into another kind or likeness, except by the Creator of all things, is worse than a pagan and a heretic. And so when they report such things are done by witches it is not Catholic, but plainly heretical, to maintain this opinion.

Moreover, no operation of witchcraft has a permanent effect among us. And this is the proof thereof: For if it were so, it would be effected by the operation of demons. But to maintain that the devil has power to change human bodies or to do them permanent harm does not seem in accordance with the teaching of the Church. For in this way they could destroy the whole world, and bring it to utter confusion.

Moreover, every alteration that takes place in a human body – for example, a state of health or a state of sickness – can be brought down to a question of natural causes, as Aristotle has shown in his 7th book of *Physics*. And the greatest of these is the influence of the stars. But the devils cannot interfere with the stars. This is the opinion of Dionysius in his epistle to S. Polycarp. For this alone God can do. Therefore it is evident the demons cannot actually effect any permanent transformation in human bodies; that is to say, no real metamorphosis. And so we must refer the appearance of any such change to some dark and occult cause.

And the power of God is stronger than the power of the devil, so divine works are more true than demoniac operations. Whence inasmuch as evil is powerful in the world, then it must be the work of the devil always conflicting with the work of God. Therefore as it is unlawful to hold that the devil's
evil craft can apparently exceed the work of God, so it us unlawful to believe that the noblest works of creation, that is to say, man and beast, can be harmed and spoiled by the power of the devil.

Moreover, that which is under the influence of a material object cannot have power over corporeal objects. But devils are subservient to certain influences of the stars, because magicians observe the course of certain stars in order to evoke the devils. Therefore they have not the power of effecting any change in a corporeal object, and it follows that witches have even less power than the demons possess.

For devils have no power at all save by a certain subtle art. But an art cannot permanently produce a true form. (And a certain author says: Writers on Alchemy know that there is no hope of any real transmutation.) Therefore the devils for their part, making use of the utmost of their craft, cannot bring about any permanent cure – or permanent disease. But if these states exist it is in truth owing to some other cause, which may be unknown, and has nothing to do with the operations of either devils or witches.

But according to the Decretals (33) the contrary is the case. “If by witchcraft or any magic art permitted by the secret but most just will of God, and aided by the power of the devil, etc . . . . ” The reference here is to any act of witchcraft which may hinder the end of marriage, and for this impediment to take effect three things can concur, that is to say, witchcraft, the devil, and the permission of God. Moreover, the stronger can influence that which is less strong. But the power of the devil is stronger than any human power (Job xlix). There is no power upon earth which can be compared to him, who was created so that he fears none.

Answer. Here are three heretical errors which must be met, and when they have been disproved the truth will be plain. For certain writers, pretending to base their opinion upon the words of S. Thomas (iv, 24) when he treats of impediments brought about by magic charms, have tried to maintain that there is not such a thing as magic, that it only exists in the imagination of those men who ascribe natural effects, the cause whereof are not known, to witchcraft and spells. There are others who acknowledge indeed that witches exist, but they declare that the influence of magic and the effects of charms are purely imaginary and phantasmical. A third class of writers maintain that the effects said to be wrought by magic spells are altogether illusory and fanciful, although it may be that the devil does really lend his aid to some witch.

The errors held by each one of these persons may thus be set forth and thus confuted. For in the very first place they are shown to be plainly heretical by many orthodox writers, and especially by S. Thomas, who lays down that such an opinion is altogether contrary to the authority of the saints and is founded upon absolute infidelity. Because the authority of the Holy Scriptures says that devils have power over the bodies and over the minds of men, when God allows them to exercise this power, as is plain from very many passages in the Holy Scriptures. Therefore those err who say that there is no such thing as witchcraft, but that it is purely imaginary, even although they do not believe that devils exist except in the imagination of the ignorant and vulgar, and the natural accidents which happen to a man he wrongly attributes to some supposed devil. For the imagination of some men is so vivid that they think they see actual figures and appearances which are but the reflection of their thoughts, and then these are believed to be the apparitions of evil spirits or even the spectres of witches. But this is contrary to the true faith, which teaches us that certain angels fell from heaven and are now devils, and we are bound to acknowledge that by their very nature they can do many
wonderful things which we cannot do. And those who try to induce others to perform such evil wonders are called witches. And because infidelity in a person who has been baptized is technically called heresy, therefore such persons are plainly heretics.

This then is the reason why the Canonists have so carefully drawn up a table of the various differing penalties, making a distinction between private and open practice of witchcraft, or rather of divination, since this foul superstition has various species and degrees, so that anyone who is notoriously given to it must be refused communion. If it be secretly practised the culprit must do penance for forty days. And if he be a cleric he is to be suspended and confined in a monastery. If he be a layman he shall be excommunicated, wherefore all such infamous persons must be punished, together with all those who resort to them, and no excuse at all is to be allowed.

This then is our proposition: devils by their act do bring about evil effects through witchcraft, yet it is true that without the assistance of some agent they cannot make any form, either substantial or accidental, and we do not maintain that they can inflict damage without the assistance of some agent, but with such an agent diseases, and any other human passions or ailments, can be brought about, and these are real and true. How these agents or how the employment of such means can be rendered effective in co-operation with devils will be made clear in the following chapters.

Part I, Question VI

Concerning Witches who copulate with Devils. Why is it that Women are chiefly addicted to Evil superstitions?

There is also, concerning witches who copulate with devils, much difficulty in considering the methods by which such abominations are consummated. On the part of the devil: first, of what element the body is made that he assumes; secondly, whether the act is always accompanied by the injection of semen received from another; thirdly, as to time and place, whether he commits this act more frequently at one time than at another; fourthly, whether the act is invisible to any who may be standing by. And on the part of the women, it has to be inquired whether only they who were themselves conceived in this filthy manner are often visited by devils; or secondly, whether it is those who were offered to devils by midwives at the time of their birth; and thirdly, whether the actual venereal delectation of such is of a weaker sort. But we cannot here reply to all these questions, both because we are only engaged in a general study, and because in the second part of this work they are all singly explained by their operations, as will appear in the fourth chapter, where mention is made of each separate method. Therefore, let us now chiefly consider women; and first, why this kind of perfidy is found more in so fragile a sex than in men. And our inquiry will first be general, as to the general conditions of women; secondly, particular, as to which sort of women are found to be given to superstition and witchcraft; and thirdly, specifically with regard to midwives, who surpass all others in wickedness.
Why Superstition is chiefly found in Women.

As for the first question, why a greater number of witches is found in the fragile feminine sex than among men; it is indeed a fact that it were idle to contradict, since it is accredited by actual experience, apart from the verbal testimony of credibly witnesses. And without in any way detracting from a sex in which God has always taken great glory that His might should be spread abroad, let us say that various men have assigned various reasons for this fact, which nevertheless agree in principle. Wherefore it is good, for the admonition of women, to speak of this matter; and it has often been proved by experience that they are eager to hear of it, so long as it is set forth with discretion.

Other again have propounded other reasons why there are more superstitious women found than men. And the first is, that they are more credulous; and since the chief aim of the devil is to corrupt faith, therefore he rather attacks them. See Ecclesiasticus xix: He that is quick to believe is light-minded, and shall be diminished. The second reason is, that women are naturally more impressionable, and more ready to receive the influence of a disembodied spirit; and that when they use this quality well they are very good, but when they use it ill they are very evil.

[Another] reason is that they have slippery tongues, and are unable to conceal from the fellow-women those things which by evil arts they know; and, since they are weak, they find an easy and secret manner of vindicating themselves by witchcraft. See Ecclesiasticus as quoted above: I had rather dwell with a lion and a dragon than to keep house with a wicked woman. All wickedness is but little to the wickedness of a woman. And to this may be added that, as they are very impressionable, they act accordingly.

There are also others who bring forward yet other reasons, of which preachers should be very careful how they make use. For it is true that in the Old Testament the Scriptures have much that is evil to say about women, and this because of the first temptress, Eve, and her imitators; yet afterwards in the New Testament we find a change of name, as from Eva to Ave (as S. Jerome says), and the whole sin of Eve taken away by the benediction of Mary. Therefore preachers should always say as much praise of them as possible.

But because in these times this perfidy is more often found in women than in men, as we learn by actual experience, if anyone is curious as to the reason, we may add to what has already been said the following: that since they are feeble both in mind and body, it is not surprising that they come more under the spell of witchcraft.

For as regards intellect, or the understanding of spiritual things, they seem to be of a different nature from men; a fact which is vouched for by the logic of the authorities, backed by various examples from the Scriptures. Terence says: Women are intellectually like children. And Lactantius (Institutiones, III): No woman understood philosophy except Temeste. And Proverbs xi, as it were describing a woman, says: As a jewel of gold in a swine’s snout, so is a fair woman which is without discretion.
But the natural reason is that she is more carnal than a man, as is clear from her many carnal abominations. And it should be noted that there was a defect in the formation of the first woman, since she was formed from a bent rib, that is, a rib of the breast, which is bent as it were in a contrary direction to a man. And since through this defect she is an imperfect animal, she always deceives. For Cato says: When a woman weeps she weaves snares. And again: When a woman weeps, she labours to deceive a man. And this is shown by Samson’s wife, who coaxed him to tell her the riddle he had propounded to the Philistines, and told them the answer, and so deceived him. And it is clear in the case of the first woman that she had little faith; for when the serpent asked why they did not eat of every tree in Paradise, she answered: Of every tree, etc. – lest perchance we die. Thereby she showed that she doubted, and had little in the word of God. And all this is indicated by the etymology of the word; for *Femina* comes from *Fe* and *Minus*, since she is ever weaker to hold and preserve the faith. And this as regards faith is of her very nature; although both by grace and nature faith never failed in the Blessed Virgin, even at the time of Christ’s Passion, when it failed in all men.

Therefore a wicked woman is by her nature quicker to waver in her faith, and consequently quicker to abjure the faith, which is the root of witchcraft.

________________

And indeed, just as through the first defect in their intelligence that are more prone to abjure the faith; so through their second defect of inordinate affections and passions they search for, brood over, and inflict various vengeances, either by witchcraft, or by some other means. Wherefore it is no wonder that so great a number of witches exist in this sex.

Women also have weak memories; and it is a natural vice in them not to be disciplined, but to follow their own impulses without any sense of what is due; this is her whole study, and all that she keeps in her memory. So Theophrastus says: If you hand over the whole management of the house to her, but reserve some minute detail to your own judgement, she will think that you are displaying a great want of faith in her, and will stir up a strife; and unless you quickly take counsel, she will prepare poison for you, and consult seers and soothsayers; and will become a witch.

But as to domination by women, hear what Cicero says in the *Paradoxes*. Can he be called a free man whose wife governs him, imposes laws on him, orders him, and forbids him to do what he wishes, so that he cannot and dare not deny her anything that she asks? I should call him not only a slave, but the vilest of slaves, even if he comes from the noblest family. And Seneca, in the character of the raging *Medea*, says: Why do you cease to follow your happy impulse; how great is that part of vengeance in which you rejoice? Where he adduces many proofs that a woman will not be governed, but will follow her own impulse even to her own destruction. In the same way we read of many woman who have killed themselves either for love or sorrow because they were unable to work their vengeance.

________________

To conclude. All witchcraft comes from carnal lust, which is in women insatiable. See *Proverbs* xxx: There are three things that are never satisfied, yea, a fourth thing which says not, It is enough; that is, the mouth of the womb. Wherefore for the sake of fulfilling their lusts they consort even with
devils. More such reasons could be brought forward, but to the understanding it is sufficiently clear
that it is no matter for wonder that there are more women than men found infected with the heresy
of witchcraft. And in consequence of this, it is better called the heresy of witches than of wizards,
since the name is taken from the more powerful party. And blessed be the Highest Who has so far
preserved the male sex from so great a crime: for since He was willing to be born and to suffer for
us, therefore He has granted to men the privilege.

Part I, Question IX

*Whether Witches may work some Prestidigatory Illusion so that the Male Organ appears to
be entirely removed and separate from the Body.*

Here is declared the truth about diabolic operations with regard to the male organ. And to make
plain the facts in this matter, it is asked whether witches can with the help of devils really and
actually remove the member, or whether they only do so apparently by some glamour or illusion.
And that they can actually do so is argued *a fortiori*; for since devils can do greater things than this, as
killing them or carrying them from place to place – as was shown above in the cases of Job and
Tobias – therefore they can also truly and actually remove men’s members.

Again, an argument is taken from the gloss on the visitations of bad Angels, in the Psalms: God
punishes by means of bad Angels, as He often punished the People of Israel with various diseases,
truly and actually visited upon their bodies. Therefore the member is equally subject to such
visitations.

It may be said that this is done with the Divine permission. And in that case, it has already been said
that God allows more power of witchcraft over the genital functions, on account of the first
corruption of sin which came to us from the act of generation, so also He allows greater power over
the actual genital organ, even to its removal.

*Answer.* There is no doubt that certain witches can do marvelous things with regard to male organs,
for this agrees with what has been seen and heard by many, and with the general account of what
has been known concerning that member through the senses of sight and touch. And as to how this
thing is possible, it is to be said that it can be done in two ways, either actually and in fact, as the first
arguments have said, or through some prestige or glamour. But when it is performed by witches, it is
only a matter of glamour; although it is no illusion in the opinion of the sufferer. For his imagination
can really and actually believe that something is not present, since by none of his exterior sense, such
as sight or touch, can he perceive that it is present.

From this it may be said that there is a true abstraction of the member in imagination, although not
in fact; and several things are to be noted as to how this happens. And first as to two methods by
which it can be done. It is no wonder that the devil can deceive the outer human senses, since, as
has been treated of above, he can illude the inner senses, by bringing to actual perception ideas that
are stored in the imagination. Moreover, he deceives men in their natural functions, causing that
which is visible to be invisible to them, and that which is tangible to be intangible, and the audible
inaudible, and so with the other senses. But such things are not true in actual fact, since they are
caused through some defect introduced in the sense, such as the eyes or the ears, or the touch, by
reason of which defect a man’s judgment is deceived.

And we can illustrate this from certain natural phenomena. For sweet wine appears bitter on the
tongue of the fevered, his taste being deceived not by the actual fact, but through his disease. So also
in the case under consideration, the deception is not due to fact, since the member is still actually in
its place; but it is an illusion of the sense with regard to it.

Again, as has been said above concerning the generative powers, the devil can obstruct that action
by imposing some other body of the same colour and appearance, in such a way that some smoothly
fashioned body in the colour of flesh is interposed between the sight and touch, and between the
true body of the sufferer, so that it seems to him that he can see and feel nothing but a smooth body
with its surface interrupted by no genital organ. See the sayings of S. Thomas (2 dist. 8. artic. 5)
concerning glamours and illusions, and also in the second of the second, 91, and in his questions
concerning Sin; where he frequently quotes that of S. Augustine in Book LXXXIII: This evil of the
devil creeps in through all the sensual approaches; he gives himself to figures, he adapts himself to
colours, he abides in sounds, he lurks in smells, he infuses himself into flavours.

Besides, it is to be considered that such an illusion of the sight and touch can be caused not only by
the interposition of some smooth unmembered body, but also by the summoning to the fancy or
imagination of certain forms and ideas latent in the mind, in such a way that a thing is imagined as
being perceived then for the first time. For, as was shown in the preceding question, devils can by
their own power change bodies locally; and just as the disposition or humour can be affected in this
way, so can the natural functions. I speak of things which appear natural to the imagination or
senses. For Aristotle in the de Somno et Vigilia says, assigning the cause of apparitions in dreams, that
when an animal sleeps much blood flows to the inner consciousness, and thence come ideas or
impressions derived from actual previous experiences stored in the mind. It has already been defined
how thus certain appearance convey the impressions of new experiences. And since this can happen
naturally, much more can the devil call to the imagination the appearance of a smooth body
unprovided with the virile member, in such a way that the sense believe it to be an actual fact.

Wherefore, in a manner of speaking, we may say even of human prestidigitatory art, that it can be
effected in three ways. For the first, it can be done without devils, since it is artificially done by the
agility of men who show things and conceal them, as in the case of the tricks of conjurers and
ventriloquists. The second method is also without the help of devils; as when men can use some
natural virtue in natural bodies or minerals so as to impart to such objects some other appearance
quite different from their true appearance. Wherefore, according to S. Thomas (I, 114, 4), and
several others, men, by the smoke of certain smouldering or lighted herbs, can make rods appear to
be serpents.

The third method of delusion is effected with the help of devils, the permission of God being
granted. For it is clear that devils have, of their nature, some power over certain earthly matters,
which they exercise upon them, when God permits, so that things appear to be other than they are.
And as to this third method, it is to be noted that the devil has five ways in which he can delude anyone so that he thinks a thing to be other than it is. First, by an artificial tricks, as has been said; for that which a man can do by art, the devil can do even better. Second, by a natural method, by the application, as has been said, and interposition of some substance so as to hide the true body, or by confusing it in man's fancy. The third way is when in an assumed body he presents himself as being something which he is not; as witness the story which S. Gregory tells in his First Dialogue of a Nun, who ate a lettuce, which, however, as the devil confessed, was not a lettuce, but the devil in the form of a lettuce, or in the lettuce itself. Or as when he appeared to S. Antony in a lump of gold which he found in the desert. Or as when he触ches a real man, and makes him appear like a brute animal, as will shortly be explained. The fourth method is when he confuses the organ of sight, so that a clear thing seems hazy, or the converse, or when an old woman appears to be a young girl. For even after weeping the light appears different from what it was before. His fifth method is by working in the imaginative power, and, by a disturbance of the humours, effecting a transmutation in the forms perceived by the senses, as has been treated of before, so that the senses then perceive as it were fresh and new images. And accordingly, by the last three of these methods, and even by the second, the devil can cast a glamour over the senses of a man. Wherefore there is no difficulty in his concealing the virile member by some prestige or glamour. And a manifest proof or example of this, which was revealed to us in our Inquisitorial capacity, will be set forth later, where more is recounted of these and other matters in the Second Part of this Treatise.

How a Bewitchment can be Distinguished from a Natural Defect.

An incidental question, with certain other difficulties, follows. Peter's member has been taken off, and he does not know whether it is by witchcraft or in some other way by the devil's power, with the permission of God. Are there any ways of determining or distinguishing between these? It can be answered as follows. First, that those to whom such things most commonly happen are adulterers or fornicators. For when they fail to respond to the demand of their mistress, or if they wish to desert them and attach themselves to other women, then their mistress, out of vengeance, through some other power causes their members to be taken off. Secondly, it can be distinguished by the fact that it is not permanent. For if it is not due to witchcraft, then the loss is not permanent, but it will be restored some time.

But here there arises another doubt, whether it is due to the nature of the witchcraft that it is not permanent. It is answered that it can be permanent, and last until death, just as the Canonists and Theologians judge concerning the impediment of witchcraft in matrimony, that the temporary can become permanent. For Godfrey says in his Summa: A bewitchment cannot always be removed by him who caused it, either because he is dead, or because he does not know how to remove it, or because the charm has been lost. Wherefore we may say in the same way that the charm which has been worked on Peter will be permanent if the witch who did it cannot heal him.

For there are three degrees of witches. For some both heal and harm; some harm, but cannot heal; and some seem able only to heal, that is, to take away injuries, as will be shown later. For thus it happened to us: Two witches were quarreling, and while they were taunting each other one said: I am not so wicked as you, for I know how to heal those whom I injure. The charm will also be permanent if, before it has been healed, the witch departs, either by changing her dwelling or by dying. For S. Thomas also says: Any charm may be permanent when it is such as can have no human
remedy; or if it has a remedy, it is not known to men, or unlawful; although God can find a remedy through a holy Angel who can coerce the devil, if not the witch.

However, the chief remedy against witchcraft is the sacrament of Penitence. For bodily infirmity often proceeds from sin. And how the charms or witches can be removed will be shown in the Second Part of this Treatise, and in the Second Question, chapter VI, where other different matters are treated of and explained.

________________

Part II, Question I

Of the Way whereby a Formal Pact with Evil is made.

The method by which they profess their sacrilege through an open pact of fidelity to devils varies according to the several practices to which different witches are addicted. And to understand this it first must be noted that there are, as was shown in the First Part of this treatise, three kinds of witches; namely, those who injure but cannot cure; those who cure but, through some strange pact with the devil, cannot injure; and those who both injure and cure. And among those who injure, one class in particular stands out, which can perform every sort of witchcraft and spell, comprehending all that all the others individually can do. Wherefore, if we describe the method of profession in their case, it will suffice also for all the other kinds. And this class is made up of those who, against every instinct of human or animal nature, are in the habit of eating and devouring the children of their own species.

And this is the most powerful class of witches, who practice innumerable other harms also. For they raise hailstorms and hurtful tempests and lightnings; cause sterility in men and animals; offer to devils, or otherwise kill, the children whom they do not devour. But these are only the children who have not been re-born by baptism at the font, for they cannot devour those who have been baptized, nor any without God’s permission. They can also, before the eyes of their parents, and when no one is in sight, throw into the water children walking by the water side; they make horses go mad under their riders; they can transport themselves from place to place through the air, either in body or in imagination; they can affect Judges and Magistrates so that they cannot hurt them; they can cause themselves and other to keep silence under torture; they can bring about a great trembling in the hands and horror in the minds of those who would arrest them; they can show to others occult things and certain future events, by the information of devils, though this may sometimes have a natural cause (see the question: Whether devils can foretell the future, in the Second Book of Sentences); they can see absent things as if they were present; they can turn the minds of men to inordinate love or hatred; they can at times strike whom they will with lightning, and even kill some men and animals; they can make of no effect the generative desires, and even the power of copulation, cause abortion, kill infants in the mother’s womb by a mere exterior touch; they can at time bewitch men and animals with a mere look, without touching them, and cause death; they dedicate their own children to devils; and in short, as has been said, they can cause all the plagues which other witches can only cause in part, that is, when the Justice of God permits such things to be. All these things this most powerful of all classes of witches can do, but they cannot undo them.
But it is common to all of them to practice carnal copulation with devils; therefore, if we show the
method used by this chief class in their profession of their sacrilege, anyone may easily understand
the method of the other classes.

Now the method of profession is twofold. One is a solemn ceremony, like a solemn vow. The other
is private, and can be made to the devil at any hour alone. The first method is when witches meet
gether in the conclave on a set day, and the devil appears to them in the assumed body of a man,
and urges them to keep faith with him, promising them worldly prosperity and length of life; and
they recommend a novice to his acceptance. And the devil asks whether she will abjure the Faith,
and forsake the holy Christian religion and the worship of the Anomalous Woman (for so they call
the Most Blessed Virgin MARY), and never venerate the Sacraments; and if he finds the novice or
disciple willing, then the devil stretches out his hand, and so does the novice, and she swears with
upraised hand to keep that covenant. And when this is done, the devil at once adds that this is not
enough; and when the disciple asks what more must be done, the devil demands the following oath
of homage to himself: that she give herself to him, body and soul, for ever, and do her utmost to
bring others of both sexes into his power. He adds, finally, that she is to make certain unguents from
the bones and limbs of children, especially those who have been baptized; by all which means she
will be able to fulfil all her wishes with his help.

We Inquisitors had credible experience of this method in the town of Breisach in the diocese of
Basel, receiving full information from a young girl witch who had been converted, whose aunt also
had been burned in the diocese of Strasburg. And she added that she had become a witch by the
method in which her aunt had first tried to seduce her.

For one day her aunt ordered her to go upstairs with her, and at her command to go into a room
where she found fifteen young men clothed in green garments after the manner of German knights.
And her aunt said to her: Choose whom you wish from these young men, and he will take you for
his wife. And when she said she did not wish or any of them, she was sorely beaten and at last
consented, and was initiated according to the aforesaid ceremony. She said also that she was often
transported by night with her aunt over vast distances, even from Strasburg to Cologne.

And the account of the method of professing the devil’s faith undoubtedly agrees with what has
been written by that most eminent Doctor, John Nider, who even in our times has written very
illuminatingly; and it may be especially remarked that he tells of the following which he had from an
Inquisitor of the diocese of Edua, who held many inquisitions on witches in that diocese, and caused
many to be burned.

For he says that this Inquisitor told him that in the Duchy of Lausanne certain witches had cooked
and eaten their own children, and that the following was the method in which they became initiated
into such practices. The witches met together and, by their art, summoned a devil in the form of a
man, to whom the novice was compelled to swear to deny the Christian religion, never to adore the
Eucharist, and to tread the Cross underfoot whenever she could do so secretly.
The other private method is variously performed. For sometimes when men or women have been involved in some bodily or temporal affliction, the devil comes to them speaking to them in person, and at times speaking to them through the mouth of someone else; and he promises that, if they will agree to his counsels, he will do for them whatever they wish. But he starts from small things, as was said in the first chapter, and leads gradually to the bigger things. We could mention many examples which have come to our knowledge in the Inquisition, but, since this matter presents no difficulty, it can briefly be included with the previous matter.

A Few Points are to be Noticed in the Explanation of their Oath of Homage.

Now there are certain points to be noted concerning the homage which the devil exacts, as, namely, for what reason and in what different ways he does this. It is obvious that his principal motive is to offer the greater offence to the Divine Majesty by usurping to himself a creature dedicated to God, and thus more certainly to ensure his disciple’s future damnation, which is his chief object. Nevertheless, it is often found by us that he has received such homage for a fixed term of years at the time of the profession of perfidy; and sometimes he exacts the profession only, postponing the homage to a later day.

And let us declare that the profession consists in a total or partial abnegation of the Faith: total, as has been said before, when the Faith is entirely abjured; partial, when the original pact makes it incumbent on the witch to observe certain ceremonies in opposition to the decrees of the Church, such as fasting on Sundays, eating meat on Fridays, concealing certain crimes at confession, or some such profane thing. But let us declare that homage consists in the surrender of body and soul.

The truth of this is clear. For if it is asked why some witches will not confess the truth under even the greatest tortures, while other readily confess their crimes when they are questioned (and some of them, after they have confessed, try to kill themselves by hanging), the reason is as follows. It may truly be said that, when it is not due to a Divine impulse conveyed through a holy Angel that a witch is made to confess the truth and abandon the spell of silence, then it is due to the devil whether she preserves silence or confesses her crimes. The former is the case with those whom he knows to have denied the Faith both with their lips and in their hearts, and also to have given him their homage; for he is sure of their constancy. But in the latter case he withdraws his protection, since he knows that they are of no profit to him.

We have often learned from the confessions of those whom we have caused to be burned, that they have not been willing agents of witchcraft. And they have not said this in the hope of escaping damnation, for its truth is witnessed by the blows and stripes which they have received from devils when they have been unwilling to perform their orders, and we have often seen their swollen and livid faces. Similarly, after they have confessed their crimes under torture they always try to hang themselves; and this we know for a fact; for after the confession of their crimes, guards are deputed to watch them all the time, and even then, when the guards have been negligent, they have been found hanged with their shoe-laces or garments. For, as we have said, they devil causes this, lest they should obtain pardon through contrition or sacramental confession; and those whose hearts he
cannot seduce from finding grace with God, he tries to lead into despair through worldly loss and a horrible death. However, through the great grace of God, as it is pious to believe, they can obtain forgiveness by true contrition and pure confession, when they have not been willing participators in those foul and filthy practices.

And there is a forth reason why the devil exacts a varying degree of homage, making it relatively small in some cases because he is more skilful than Astronomers in knowing the length if human life, and so can easily fix a term which he knows will be preceded by death, or can, in the manner already told, forestall natural death with some accident.

All this, in short, can be shown by the actions and behaviour of witches. But first we can deduce the astuteness of the devil in such things. For according to S. Augustine in the de Natura Daemonis seven reasons are assigned why devils can conjecture probable future events, though they cannot know them certainly. The first is that they have a natural subtlety in their understanding, by which they arrive at their knowledge without the process of reasoning which is necessary for us. Secondly, by their long experience and by revelation of supernal spirits, they know more than we do. For S. Isidore says that the Doctors have often affirmed that devils derive their marvellous cunning from three sources, their natural subtlety, their long experience, and the revelation of supernal spirits. The third reason is their rapidity of motion, by which they can with miraculous speed anticipate in the West things which are happening in the East. Fourthly, just as they are able, with God’s permission, to cause disease and famines, so also they can predict them. Fifthly, they can more cunningly read the signs of death than a physician can by looking at the urine or feeling the pulse. For just as a physician sees signs in a sick man which a layman would not notice, so the devil sees what no man can naturally see. Sixthly, they can by signs which proceed from a man’s mind conjecture more astutely than the wisest men what is or will be in that man’s mind. For they know what impulses, and therefore what actions, will probably follow. Seventhly, they understand better than men the acts and writings of the Prophets, and, since on these much of the future depends, they can foretell from them much that will happen. Therefore it is not wonderful that they can know the natural term of a man’s life; though it is different in the case of the accidental term when a witch is burned; for this the devil ultimately causes when, as has been said, he finds a witch reluctant, and fears for her conversion; whereas he protects even up to their natural death others whom he knows to be his willing agents.

Let us give examples of both these cases, which are known to us. There was in the diocese of Basel, in a town called Oberweiler situated on the Rhine, an honest parish priest, who fondly held the opinion, or rather error, that there was no witchcraft in the world, but that it only existed in the imagination of men who attributed such things to witches. And God wished so to purge him of this error that he might even be made aware of the practice of devils in setting a term to the lives of witches. For as he was hastening to cross a bridge, on some business that he had to do, he met a certain old woman in his hurry, and would not give way to her, but pressed on so that he thrust the old woman into the mud. She indignantly broke into a flood of abuse, and said to him, “Father, you will not cross with impunity.” And though he took small notice of those words, in the night, when he wished to get out of his bed, he felt himself bewitched below the waist, so that he always had to be supported by the arms of other men when he wished to go to the church; and so he remained for three years, under the care of his own mother. After that time the old woman fell sick, the hag
whom he had always suspected as being the cause of his witchcraft, owing to the abusive words with which she had threatened him; and it happened that she sent to him to hear her confession. And though the priest angrily said, “Let her confess to the devil her master,” yet, at the instance of his mother, he went to the house supported by two servants, and sat at the head of the bed where the witch lay. And the two servants listened outside the window, so eager were they to know whether she would confess that she had bewitched the priest. Now it happened that, though she made no mention in her confession of having been the cause of his malady, after the confession was finished, she said, “Father, do you know who bewitched you?” And when he gently answered that he did not, she added, “You suspect me, and with reason; for know that I brought it upon you for this reason,” explaining as we have already told. And when he begged to be liberated, she said, “Lo! the set time has come, and I must die; but I will so cause it that in a few days, after my death, you will be healed.” And so it happened. For she died at the time fixed by the devil, and within thirty days the priest found himself completely healed in one night. The name of that priest is Father Hässlin, and he lives yet in the diocese of Strasburg.

________________

Part III, Question XV

Of the Continuing of the Torture, and of the Devices and Signs by which the Judge can Recognize a Witch; and how he ought to Protect himself from their Spells. Also how they are to be Shaved in Parts where they use to Conceal the Devil’s Masks and Tokens; together with the due Setting Forth of Various Means of Overcoming the Obstinacy in Keeping Silence and Refusal to Confess. And it is the Tenth Action.

The Judge should act as follows in the continuation of the torture. First he should bear in mind that, just as the same medicine is not applicable to all the members, but there are various and distinct salves for each several member, so not all heretics or those accused of heresy are to be subjected to the same method of questioning, examination and torture as to the charges laid against them; but various and different means are to be employed according to their various natures and persons. Now a surgeon cuts off rotten limbs; and mangy sheep are isolated from the healthy; but a prudent Judge will not consider it safe to bind himself down to one invariable rule in his method of dealing with a prisoner who is endowed with a witch’s power of taciturnity, and whose silence he is unable to overcome. For if the sons of darkness were to become accustomed to one general rule they would provide means of evading it as a well-known snare set for their destruction.

________________

If he wishes to find out whether she is endowed with a witch’s power of preserving silence, let him take note whether she is able to shed tears when standing in his presence, or when being tortured. For we are taught both by the words of worthy men of old and by our own experience that this is a most certain sign, and it has been found that even if she be urged and exhorted by solemn conjurations to shed tears, if she be a witch she will not be able to weep; although she will assume a tearful aspect and smear her cheeks and eyes with spittle to make it appear that she is weeping; wherefore she must be closely watched by the attendants.
In passing sentence the Judge or priest may use some such method as the following in conjuring her
to true tears if she be innocent, or in restraining false tears. Let him place his hand on the head of
the accused and say: I conjure you by the bitter tears shed on the Cross by our Saviour the Lord
JESUS Christ for the salvation of the world, and by the burning tears poured in the evening hour
over His wounds by the most glorious Virgin MARY, His Mother, and by all the tears which have
been shed here in this world by the Saints and Elect of God, from whose eyes He has now wiped
away all tears, that if you be innocent you do now shed tears, but if you be guilty that you shall by no
means do so. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, Amen.

But it may be objected that it might suit with the devil's cunning, with God's permission, to allow
even a witch to weep; since tearful grieving, weaving and deceiving are said to be proper to women.
We may answer that in this case, since the judgements of God are a mystery, if there is no other way
of convicting the accused, by legitimate witnesses or the evidence of the fact, and if she is not under
a strong or grave suspicion, she is to be discharged; but because she rests under a slight suspicion by
reason of her reputation to which the witnesses have testified, she must be required to abjure the
heresy of witchcraft, as we shall show when we deal with the second method of pronouncing
sentence.

A second precaution is to be observed, not only at this point but during the whole process, by the
Judge and all his assessors; namely, that they must not allow themselves to be touched physically by
the witch, especially in any contract of their bare arms or hands; but they must always carry about
them some salt consecrated on Palm Sunday and some Blessed Herbs. For these can be enclosed
together in Blessed Wax and worn round the neck, as we showed in the Second Part when we
discussed the remedies against illnesses and diseases caused by witchcraft; and that these have a
wonderful protective virtue is known not only from the testimony of witches, but from the use and
practice of the Church, which exorcizes and blesses such objects for this very purpose, as is shown
in the ceremony of exorcism when it is said, For the banishing of all the power of the devil, etc.

But let it not be thought that physical contact of the joints or limbs is the only thing to be guarded
against; for sometimes, with God's permission, they are able with the help of the devil to bewitch
the Judge by the mere sound of the words which they utter, especially at the time when they are
exposed to torture.

And we know from experience that some witches, when detained in prison, have importunately
begged their gaolers to grant them this one thing, that they should be allowed to look at the Judge
before he looks at them; and by so getting the first sight of the Judge they have been able so to alter
the minds of the Judge or his assessors that they have lost all their anger against them and have not
presumed to molest them in any way, but have allowed them to go free. He who knows and has
experienced it gives this true testimony; and would that they were not able to effect such things!

And if it can conveniently be done, the witch should be led backward into the presence of the Judge
and his assessors. And not only at the present point, but in all that has preceded or shall follow it, let
him cross himself and approach her manfully, and with God's help the power of that old Serpent
will be broken. And no one need think that it is superstitious to lead her in backwards; for, as we have often said, the Canonists allow even more than this to be done for the protections against witchcraft, and always say that it is lawful to oppose vanity with vanity.

The third precaution to be observed in this tenth action is that the hair should be shaved from every part of her body. The reason for this is the same as that for stripping her of her clothes, which we have already mentioned; for in order to preserve their power of silence they are in the habit of hiding some superstitious object in their clothes or in their hair, or even in the most secret parts of the their bodies which must not be named.

But it may be objected that the devil might, without the use of such charms, so harden the heart of a

Again, it may be objected that very often criminals who are not witches exhibit the same power of keeping silence. In answer to this it must be said that this power of taciturnity can proceed from three causes. First, from a natural hardness of heart; for some are soft-hearted, or even feeble-minded, so that at the slightest torture they admit everything, even some things which are not true; whereas others are so hard that however much they are tortured the truth is not to be had from them; and this is especially the case with those who have been tortured before, even if their arms are suddenly stretched or twisted.

Secondly, it may proceed from some instrument of witchcraft carried about the person, as has been said, either in the clothes or in the hairs of the body. And thirdly, even if the prisoner has no such object secreted about her person, they are sometimes endowed with this power by other witches, however far they may be removed from them. For a certain witch at Issbrug used to boast that, if she had no more than a thread from the garments of any prisoner, she could so work that however much that prisoner were tortured, even to death, she would be unable to confess anything. So the answer to this objection is clear.

From this it may be seen what a Judge ought to do when such a case happens to him: namely, that he should rely upon the protection of God, and by the prayers and fasting of devout persons drive away this sort of devil's work from witches, in those cases where they cannot be made to confess under torture even after their clothes have been changed and all their hair has been shaved off and abraded.

Now in the parts of Germany such shaving, especially of the secret parts, is not generally considered delicate, and therefore we Inquisitors do not use it; but we cause the hair of their head to be cut off, and placing a morsel of Blessed Wax in a cup of Holy Water and invoking the most Holy Trinity, we give it them to drink three times on a fasting stomach, and by the grace of God we have by this means caused many to break their silence. But in other countries the Inquisitors order the witch to be shaved all over her body. And the Inquisitor of Como has informed us that last year, that is, in 1485, he ordered forty-one witches to be burned, after they had been shaved all over. And this was in the district and county of Burbia, commonly called Wormserbad, in the territory of the Archduke of Austria, towards Milan.