

Now that Halloween is over there is another side to superstition that is less pleasant, but needs to be addressed. We like to think that we live in an enlightened age and that those who came before were more backward and superstitious. After all we hear of the Salem witch trials, and burning heretics and we shudder to think that we could live in a world like that. Surprise!; we do live in a world like that and many of our forbears were far more enlightened than some of us with regard to such superstitions. For instance, on the subject of witchcraft, The Grant County Witness had this to say in 1859 in an article called "WITCHCRAFT":

*"In the course of the century during which the persecution against so-called witchcraft was at its height in Germany - from 1580 to 1680 - it is calculated that more than one hundred thousand individuals, time-tenths of whom were women, were its victims. To the honor of humanity, be it said, some voices were raised against this bloodthirsty practice; but they were drowned in the general clamor. In every part of Germany, Protestant and Catholic, the same atrocities were committed. At length, in the year 1631, the noble-hearted Count Frederic Stein, himself a member of the order of Jesuits - an order which had been among the most violent denouncers of sorcery - ventured to step boldly forward and declare that among the many whom he had conducted to the scaffold, there was not one whom he could confidently declare "guilty." He added, "Treat me so; treat in this manner the judges, or the heads of the church; subject us to the same tortures, and see if you will not discover sorcerers in us all." Despite this burst of generous indignation it was not, until 1604 that this incomprehensible insanity began to*

*abate.*



*The last so-called witch burnt in the German Empire was a poor nun, aged 70, in the year 1749, at Berg. But at Glarus, in Switzerland, an execution of a similar nature took place as late as 1794. This time the victim was it servant girl, accused of having practiced diabolical arts to lame the child of her employers. Germany, indeed, seemed to live in an atmosphere of sorcery. The ground which faith had lost, superstition made her own."*

The Witness article only need be compared with the following from The Dubuque Telegraph Herald and Times Journal of October 8, 1930 titled "WISCONSIN COUNTY PURGED OF WIZARDS":

*"Rock county today was purged of wizards and a warrant was out for Herman Englehardt, Rockford Ill., spiritualist, charged by modern cotton mathers with practicing medicine without a license.*

*A two day John Doe hearing unearthed testimony that Englehardt frightened farmers into believing white-haired Henry Dorn, 64, was a wizard who made cows run dry, caused crops to dwindle and brought all manner of*

***misfortunes to Leyden Township.***

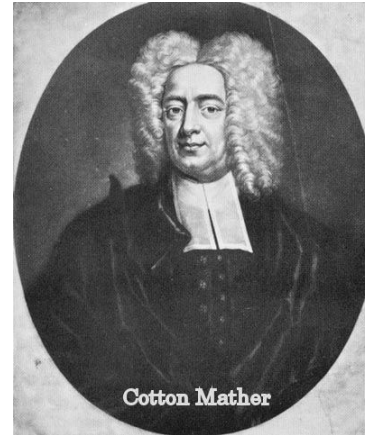


***Assistant District Attorney Harry Fox agreed with “Old Dorn” that the farming ills were caused by drought and that witchcraft had nothing to do with it. The examiners also cleared William Kulzmeyer of charges of having cast spells over hogs and cattle on the Fred Byers farm. That, examiners said, also was a result of the spiritualistic stories.***

***“While I’ve issued a warrant” said Fox, “we hardly expect to extradite Englehardt from Illinois. As far as we’re concerned he can produce all the wizards he wishes if he keeps them out of this state.”***

***“Old Dorn” said he had to leave the home of his sister, where he lived, after Englehardt conducted a séance during which he accused the old farmer of bringing misfortune.”***

It is obvious that no progress in human nature had evolved between 1859 and 1930, and truth be told we are even more exposed to the dangers of superstition today. In the last 30 years accusations of witchcraft and Satanism have exploded. Now that we are an open society, and fear need not rule those who dabble in this base practice, we continually hear of those who let their



rational minds wither and fall back into black superstition. Satan “worshippers” are found in Prairie Du Chien burning symbols into others (1991), and numerous people still torture and kill others, even children to “drive out the devil.” Halloween is now the second largest retailing season, and “zombies” the favorite costumes. All well and fun, but we need to recognize that the curse of superstition is infectious, and we need to keep our faith and rational minds intact, or risk the horrors of another age. Are we less superstitious than our ancestors? Not a bit!



**The number of children accused of being ‘witches’ in parts of Africa is rising, and so is the number of children suffering extreme physical or psychological violence as a result.**