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Author of "The Phantom Farmhouse," "Out of the Long Ago," etc.

**T**HE bleak March wind rushed pell-mell through the narrow, unpaved roadways of Salem Village. It tore at tradesmen's sign-boards with a bellow, it rapped with frozen fingers at the dwellings' tight-barred shutters, then fled with a whoop of maniacal laughter past Salem Village Church to scream and howl round the Putnam homestead like a chained wolf straining at his leash.

In an upper room of the strong, weather-stained house a girl woke with an uneasy whimper, and looked into the darkness of her low-ceiled bedroom with round, fearful eyes, listening to the screeching of the midnight wind. A moment she lay thus, then sat bolt upright, her mouth squared in a cry of mortal terror.

"Ann, child, what ails thee?"

Goodman Putnam swung back the door of his daughter's chamber and flashed the subdued light of his lantern about the room.

"Oh, father," the girl (she was only twelve years old) cried, "the witch-woman, the wicked witch-woman was here!"

"Nonsense, child," her father answered testily. "Thou knowest the

witches are in Ipswich jail. How can they plague thee now?"

"Nathless, father," Ann Putnam replied stubbornly, "the witch was here but a moment ago. I saw her come down the chimney astride her broom handle, looking at me with great, red eyes—"

Goodman Putnam drew his flannel bedgown more tightly about his shoulders and looked fearfully at the fireplace his daughter's shaking forefinger indicated. "Didst recognize her, child?" he asked.

"I—I think," the girl stammered, trying to summon her memory, "I think 'twas Goodwife Corey, father."

"Martha Corey, didst say?" Putnam answered thoughtfully.

He laid a poker across the yawning mouth of the fireplace, for witches were notoriously afraid of iron, since that was the metal which bound our Lord to the Tree; and patted his daughter reassuringly on the shoulder.

"Peace, child," he counseled. "Thou'lt be safe till daylight. I'll see the parson about this in the morn-  
ing."

NEXT day a conference was held in the parsonage of Salem Village Church. The Reverend Samuel Parris, pastor of the congregation, Edward Putnam and Ezekiel Cheever talked earnestly of the state of affairs.

But twelve days ago Sarah Good and Sarah Osburn, both old women of Salem Village, and Tituba, the half-breed Indian slave of Mr. Parris himself, had been remanded to jail as witches, there to await execution on the gallows. Ann Putnam and a number of other young girls and women had been their chief accusers, declaring Goody Good and Goody Osburn had "grievously afflicted" them with pains and torments. With the arrest and imprisonment of the witches, the good citizens of Salem had breathed a sigh of relief, for, though the Devil was mighty, the Lord, aided by the Reverend Samuel Parris and the Salem magistrates, was mightier, and righteousness had triumphed over wickedness. Now, alas! another witch had risen to plague the congregation.

"Didst say 'twas Goodwife Corey?" the minister asked, interest—perhaps something more—in his deep-set eyes.

"Aye," Putnam answered. "Goodwife Corey, the child said, astride her broomstick—"

"This matter needs our service," Mr. Parris interrupted. "My brethren, let us pray; then you must away to Salem Farms to question this wretched woman."

IN Salem Farms, where the town of West Peabody now stands, was the substantial farmhouse of Giles Corey, husbandman. Corey was past his eightieth birthday; but a better man in strength and endurance than many only half his age. Neighbors told wonderingly how he could cut a wider swath with the scythe than any man in the hay field, how he had been known to lift a keg of cider to his mouth and drink from the bunghole

as though from a mug, and how a drunken farmhand, relying on the old man's age to render him feeble, had paid for his folly with his life when he made a murderous assault on his employer. The laborer had attacked Corey with a flail, and the old man had defended himself so stoutly with his bare fists that the other subsequently died of the beating he received.

Several of the neighbors had little cause to love Giles Corey. When some of them had wrongfully accused him of burning another's barn he had an action for slander against them, and won substantial damages.

Corey's wife, Martha, was his third spouse, and a fitting mate for him. Though past sixty, she could turn out more work than any woman in the neighborhood, and the uniform perfection of her butter and constantly healthy condition of her chickens and geese were matters for envious conversation among other farmwives. Some there were who hinted darkly that her good luck came not alone from industry and the "know how", but might be attributed to the sort of help no Christian woman dare accept.

Another cause the neighbors had to regard the Coreys askance was their attitude toward the arrests for witchcraft. When residents of the village and farms alike were crying out upon Goody Osburn and Goody Good, the Coreys stood aloof, Martha Corey declaring she would not convict a dog of egg-sucking on the testimony of hysterical children. As for Tituba, the minister's Indian slave, who had confessed herself a witch and implicated Sarah Good and Sarah Osburn with her, Goodwife Corey had hinted the Indian woman's pious master knew more about that confession than he cared to tell.

Ann Putnam, the twelve-year-old girl whose testimony, without cross-examination, had sworn away the

lives of Mrs. Good and Mrs. Osburn, had heard Martha Corey declare she ought to have been soundly spanked—that she was a tale-inventing jade. Now Ann Putnam had told her father it was Martha Corey who entered her bed chamber, astride a witch's broomstick.

ON THE morning of March 12, 1692, Edward Putnam and Ezekiel Cheever rode into the barnyard of the Corey farmhouse and clamored on the kitchen door with their sword hilts.

"I know why you come," Martha Corey said as she swung the door open and recognized her visitors. "You have come to say I am a witch; but I am none. I am a Gospel woman."

Putnam and Cheever looked knowingly at each other. How came this woman to know their errand before they had opened their lips?

"You have been cried out against," Cheever told her solemnly. "The children of Salem Village say you have appeared unto them—"

"And did they see how I was dressed?" the old lady interrupted. "Did they tell you what clothes I wore?"

Here was a poser. No one had thought to ask Ann Putnam what clothes the witch wore when she appeared, but certainly she must have worn some. Puritans, even when they sold their souls to the devil and became witches, never appeared in public or private save fully dressed.

Straight back to Salem Village rode Ezekiel Cheever and Edward Putnam to question Ann regarding the witch's dress.

When they arrived they found the Evil One's work had preceded them. Ann Putnam had talked with her friends and playmates—now all were undergoing terrible agonies, crying out they were being cruelly pinched and bitten by some invisible person. Between times they were crawling be-

neath chairs and tables, sticking out their tongues at fathers and mothers and acting generally as no well-behaved Puritan children ever acted when not under the spell of some powerful witch or wizard.

"What clothes wore the witch when she appeared last night?" Putnam asked the daughter.

"She—she—" the girl strove to recall, then fell to sobbing bitterly. "I cannot tell," she wailed. "She was all wrapped round with a blaze of hell-fire; I could not see her clothes."

No one asked Ann Putnam how she knew the blaze to be that of hell-fire, or how such fire differed from that commonly seen on the chimney hearth. The wicked witch's scheme was exposed. She had asked if the child could describe her clothes when she well knew her enveloping sheet of hell-fire prevented her clothing from being seen.

A warrant was forthwith issued for the arrest of Martha Corey, housewife, of Salem Farms.

THE Pitmans had not perfected their shorthand system in 1692, and all court reporting which has come down to us from that time consists of abbreviated longhand notes; but the Reverend Samuel Parris, pastor of Salem Village Church, apparently added the duties of court reporter to those of assistant magistrate and prosecutor, since we have the following transcript of Martha Corey's examination preserved in his handwriting:

By Magistrate John Hathorn: *Question.* You are now in the hands of authority. Tell me, now, why do you hurt these children?

*Answer.* I do not.

*Q.* Who doth?

*A.* Pray give me leave to go and pray. (This request was repeated several times.)

Q. We did not send for you to pray, but to tell why you hurt these children.

A. I am an innocent person. I never had to do with witchcraft since I was born. I am a Gospel woman.

Q. How could you tell, then, that the child was bid to observe what clothes you wore when someone came to speak with you?

A. I suspected it.

Q. You dare thus to lie in all this assembly? I expect the truth. Speak, now, and tell who told you what clothes?

A. Nobody.

At this point one of the afflicted children suddenly cried out, "Look, look! There stands a great black man beside her. He is whispering in her ear!" (Mr. Parris records this incident, but fails to give the name of the "afflicted" in his notes.)

Magistrate Hathorn immediately asked the old lady what her invisible counselor said, and she replied: "We must not believe all these distracted children say." Thereupon, to quote Mr. Parris' notes, "there was extreme agony among all the afflicted." "It was noted that when she bit her lip [again quoting the reverend scribe's report] several of the afflicted were bitten.

"The Marshal said, 'She hath bit her lip,' and immediately the afflicted were in uproar."

In such circumstances, it is not surprising that Hathorn and Corwin, the magistrates, should have found sufficient grounds for holding the old lady for the autumn assizes. She was accordingly lodged in jail till the court should convene in September.

Her trial, at the fall term of court, presents little difference from similar hearings, save for one single incident. Among the "afflicted" was a young matron, a Mrs. Pope, wife of a well-to-do citizen of Salem. During the trial this Christian young woman hurled her muff at the ac-

cused as she stood in the prison's dock. Her shot, as is often the way when women throw missiles, went wild; but if she lacked accuracy of aim she certainly was not wanting in spirit. Stooping, she unfastened the buckle of her heavy, rough-weather brogan and flung it with all her might at Martha Corey. Practise had improved her marksmanship. The iron-studded heel of the heavy foot-gear struck the old lady full in the mouth. Tipstaves and court attendants made no move to interfere. With bruised and swollen lips Martha Corey stood to receive sentence of death by hanging.

Another entry in the Reverend Mr. Parris' notes furnishes us with the penultimate chapter of Martha Corey's tragedy: "Accordingly, this 14 September, the 3 aforesaid brethren [Lieutenant Nathaniel Putnam and two deacons of Salem Village Church] went with the pastor to her in Salem Prison; whom we found very obdurate, justifying herself, and condemning all that had done anything to her discovery or condemnation. Whereupon, after a little discourse (for her imperiousness would not suffer much), and after prayer, the dreadful sentence of excommunication was pronounced against her."

SIX days after Martha Corey's arrest on a charge of witchcraft, her husband, Giles Corey, was haled before the magistrates on a similar accusation.

The same "afflicted children" who had sworn away the wife's life appeared in the rôle of prosecuting witnesses against the husband, and so greatly did they suffer that, though the old man stood a good ten yards from them, his hands were lashed behind his back to keep him from pinching the girls by magic.

After the children's tale of hauntings, pinchings, beatings and other

abuses had been told, Giles Corey was permitted to speak in his own behalf. But when he declared himself innocent the "afflicted children" forthwith fell to the floor, some in a dead faint, others writhing and groaning in agony.

"Is it not enough to work magic at other times?" Magistrate Hathorn asked the prisoner sternly as he beheld the sufferings of the "afflicted." "Must you be at it in the face of authority?"

Again the old man denied his guilt and the magistrate interrupted with: "Why do you tell such un-Christian lies against these witnesses?"

Throughout the short hearing of Giles Corey's case the "afflicted" seemed almost beside themselves. If he held his head on one side, the better to hear the judges' words, the heads of the "afflicted" were all held on one side while they cried aloud that his magic compelled them to imitate his movements. He drew in his cheeks, their cheeks instantly were drawn in.

There was little testimony in his case. The cries and general demeanor of the childish accusers were enough to convince the magistrates they had a dangerous and powerful servant of Satan in custody. He was remanded to jail to await the grand jury's action.

September 7, 1692, Giles Corey was led into court to answer an indictment for witchcraft. The court clerk read the document and, as was customary, asked the defendant whether he pleaded guilty or not guilty.

Corey, though past the allotted three score and ten years, was strong in spirit. "'Tis nonsense!" he cried in a clear, ringing voice. "To peril a man's life on the idle tales of children is foolery. I'll not answer to such an indictment!"

Court and spectators sat aghast. Had not the witnesses on whose tes-

timony Giles Corey was indicted been sworn on the Holy Scriptures? Did not those same Scriptures declare witches and wizards existed and must be put to death? Whoever called a trial for witchcraft foolery denied the Bible and mocked at God. This man was a blasphemer as well as a wizard.

What to do? No man could be legally sentenced unless he had previously been found guilty by a jury after a plea of not guilty or had saved the court's time by pleading guilty. The court took counsel upon the case, then decided to apply the terrible penalty of *peine forte et dure*. This was literally "applying pressure" to the accused, since it consisted of laying him on his back and piling upon his chest and abdomen as great a weight of timber, stone or iron as he could bear, and more, till he either died or agreed to answer "guilty" or "not guilty" to the indictment charging him with crime.\*

The English law differed from that of continental European nations in that it strictly forbade torture of accused or witnesses to make them testify. But an ancient statute, dating to the reign of Henry IV, permitted this form of torture for those who delayed justice by refusing to answer an indictment. It mattered not that the accused's conviction was a foregone conclusion—he must have his day in court, and judge and jury would—must, indeed—go through

\*NOTE—While the terrible penalty of *peine forte et dure* was inflicted only once by a court in America, it was by no means unknown in England. Juliana Quick died by it in 1442; Anthony Arrowsmith suffered a like fate in 1598, as did Walter Calverly in 1605 and Major Strangways in 1667. A similar case is recorded at the Cambridge assizes as late as 1741 (though the victim is unnamed). The punishment was abrogated by Act of Parliament in 1772.

the motions of according him a fair trial before sentence could be legally pronounced and executed.

On Monday, September 19, 1692, Giles Corey was taken to a spot near what was later to be the site of the Howard Street burial ground and Brown Street, Salem, laid on his back, and buried under a great pile of timber and rocks.

Puritan conscience battled Puritan conscience. The firmness of purpose which led the conscientious officers, blinded by the crude superstition they mistook for religion, to torture aged Giles Corey was the same firmness of purpose which made the old man refuse to go through the farce of a trial for a crime he knew to be impossible. It was the same uncompromising spirit which had already wrested a new world from red-skinned men of the woods and would later hold it against red-coated men of the king. Giles Corey suffered for being ahead of his time. He denied the existence of witchcraft in a day when nearly every one firmly believed in a personal devil with horns, hoofs and tail.

When the process of applying pressure commenced, Corey begged the officers to pile as much weight on as possible, "that his sufferings might the sooner be ended."

Robert Calef, a liberal-minded merchant of Salem, who did all in his power to stem the rising tide of madness during the witchcraft prosecutions, relates a horrifying incident of Giles Corey's death:

"In pressing, his tongue being pressed out of his mouth, the sheriff with his cane forced it back again while he was dying."

MARTHA COREY was hanged on Gallows Hill, Salem, September 22, 1692, three days after her aged husband suffered the cruelest death ever imposed by civilized men on the North American continent.

An old ballad, written in the contemporary style, tells of Giles Corey's death in these quaint words:

Giles Corey was a Wizzard strong,  
A stubborn Wretch was he.  
And fitt was he to hang on high  
Upon ye Locust Tree.

So when before ye Magistrates  
For Trial he did come,  
He would no true confession make,  
But was compleatlie dumbe.

"Giles Corey," sayeth ye Magistrate,  
"What hast thou here to plead  
To these that now accuse thy Soule  
Of crimes and horrid Deed?"

Giles Corey—he sayeth not a Worde,  
No single Worde spake he;  
"Giles Corey," sayeth ye Magistrate,  
"We'll press it out of thee."

They got them then a heavie Beam,  
They laid it on his Breast;  
They loaded it with heavy Stones,  
And hard upon him prest.

"More Weight," now sayed this wretched  
Man,  
"More Weight," again he cryed,  
And he would no confession make,  
But wickedly he dyed.

The third of Seabury Quinn's true tales of witchcraft, "Rebecca Nurse, Saint of Salem," tells how a Colonial court, in violation of the principle of trial by jury, sent a saintly old woman to the gallows on the testimony of hysterical children. It will appear in WEIRD TALES next month.