THE FATE OF EUFAME MACCALZEAN

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It has been stated that a certain Eufame MacCalzean or McAlyane (Gwathmey, 1914; Keys, 1945) was executed in Scotland in the reign of James VI for attempting to relieve the pains of childbirth. Such a bald statement is misleading, and the more important events which led to her trial and execution deserve some attention. These events are set out in a contemporary pamphlet, printed in 1591 and entitled "Newes from Scotland" (Anon, 1591), the title-page and a woodcut from which are here reproduced (Figs. 1 and 2).

In October 1589, James VI, throwing off his more customary cowardice, braved the terrors of the deep in order to voyage to Norway and bring back his bride, 15-year-old Anne of Denmark. The return journey was made in May of the following year, but the King's ship was beset by storms and there was some danger of shipwreck.

The disclosures of a girl suspected of witchcraft led to the arrest of numerous persons for having been involved in Satanic rites at the Kirk of North Berwick, whither they had sailed in sieves. The Devil attended the church in person and, after a lewd penance had been enjoined, urged the witches to attempt the destruction of the King. Various attempts by poison and witchcraft were made without success, and the witches eventually took a cat, christened it, tied parts of a dead man to it, and then deposited it in the sea off Leith, having sailed thither in their sieves for this
Newes from Scotland,
Declaring the Damnable life and death of Doctor Fian, a notable Sorcerer, who was burned at Edenbrough in January last.
1591.

Which Doctor was registred to the Diuell that sundry times preached at North Bar-rick Kirke, to a number of notorious Witches.

With the true examinations of the saide Doctor and Witches, as they uttered them in the presence of the Scottish King.

Discouering how they pretended to bewitch and drown his Maiestie in the Sea comming from Denmarke, with such other wonderful matters as the like hath not been heard of at any time.

Published according to the Scottish Coppie.

AT LONDON
Printed for William Wright.

FIG. 1
Title-page. Newes from Scotland, 1591.
FIG. 2
Woodcut from Newes from Scotland, 1591.

Top left: The shipwreck.
Top right: The witches prepare the spell.
Bottom left: Satan preaching in the Kirk at North Berwick.
Centre: The congregation; Dr. Fian acts as stenographer.
purpose. This resulted in the springing up of a great storm which sank at least one boat and imperilled the King's ship.

Many of the accused witches, having confessed their crimes under torture, were executed by strangling, their bodies being afterwards burned. One who did not confess was Euphemia MacCalyean (z is often written for y in old Scots manuscripts). This lady was the daughter of Thomas MacCalyean, Lord Cliftonhall, a Senator of the College of Justice and a man distinguished for his erudition and attainments. He had died ten years before these events, having incurred the dislike of the Queen Regent, Mary of Guise, for his spirited defence of the rights of Edinburgh.

Roughead (1919) states of the fair Euphemia that the offences with which this lady was charged are no less astonishing than varied. They embrace the attempted poisoning of her husband in the first year of her marriage to the end that she "mycht gctt anc utheir guidman", as a result of which he "brak out in reid spottis" and was compelled to seek safety in France, his disappointed spouse bidding "the ffiend ga with him"; bribing with her own jewels her daughter's lover to transfer his affections to herself, and, on his declining either to do so or to return the gifts, attempting to recover these by witchcraft; destroying by the same means several persons, including her father-in-law; and, finally, participating in "the Conventicle at North-Berwick Kirk".

From Pitcairn (1833), we learn that Eufame Makcalyane alias Moscrop (her married name) was tried on June 9 to 12, in the twenty-fourth year of James VI. The dittay, or indictment, included twenty-eight counts, all concerning witchcraft and some being for murder as well. The eighteenth count reads thus: "Indicted of consulting and seeking help of the said Annie Sampson, a notorious witch,
for relief of your pain in the time of your birth of your two sons, and the receiving from her to that effect a 'bordstane' [presumably a stone with a natural hole in it and thus thought to have magical powers; a bored-stone] to be laid under the bolster, put under your head; enchanted mould [i.e. soil from a cemetery] and powder put in a piece of paper to be used and 'rowit' [i.e. rolled] in your hair at the time of your 'droweis' [i.e. birth pangs]; your 'guidman's' 'sark' [i.e. shirt] to be presently taken of him and laid 'woumplit' [i.e. rumpled] under your bedside; the which being practised by you as you had received the same from the said Annie. By the information and the use therof, your sickness was cast off you unnaturally in the birth of your first son upon a dog which ran away forthwith and was never seen again. And in the birth of your last son, the same practice aforesaid was used and your natural and kindly pain unnaturally cast off you upon the wanton cat in the house, which likewise was never seen thereafter."

The verdict of the assize (i.e. jury) was returned on June 12 by the chancellor (i.e. foreman), James Johnstone of Elphinstone, who was not "chased from the assize", as is wrongly stated by Roughhead (1919). In the "Articles of Conviction" (or verdict), she was found guilty on ten of the twenty-eight counts, the fifth reading: "Item, for consulting with Annie Sampson, a witch, for getting of moulds from her to be used by the said Effie in relief of her pain in her birth of her two sons."

The doom (or judgment) was passed on her on June 15, all her goods being forfeited to the crown and she herself sentenced to be "brunt in assis, quick" (i.e. to be burnt to ashes alive), without the humanity of previous 'strangling, which sentence was duly carried into effect on Castle Hill.
The Fate of Eufame MacCalzean

The above account reveals the prevalence of witchcraft 350 years ago. Belief in the powers of sorcerers was almost universal. King James VI (1597) himself wrote a highly authoritative book on the subject in which he expressly points out that to obtain good ends by witchcraft is a heinous sin. Even the most outwardly respectable were wont to resort to witches to obtain their ends and this was particularly brought to the notice of the world by the proceedings of the Chambre Ardente in Paris in the 1680s.

It was then shown that nearly all the great ones of the court of "Le Roi Soleil" were either actively engaged in poisoning and witchcraft or were the passive victims of these nefarious machinations (Johnson).

These proceedings likewise disclosed the traditional connexion between midwifery and witchcraft, of which more than a hint comes to us from the trial of the wretched Euphemia and her confrères.

Without in any way wishing to whitewash the justice dispensed by James VI, whose dealings with Arabella Stewart, Raleigh and Robert Carr speak for themselves, it is worth notice that Euphemia suffered the penalty of using witchcraft, and the real charge against her was of attempting the death of the King by her participation in the "Convencetle at the Kirk of North-Berwick". No mention would have been made of her attempts at self-administered obstetrical analgesia, had they been undertaken by legal means; her use of witchcraft on these occasions, however, was a useful point for the prosecution, as showing that she did consort with known witches.

It therefore seems that the statement that she was done to death for attempting to allay the pains of childbirth is a terminological inexactitude, and we may rest content that, whatever the people of an enlightened age may think of
witchcraft and such barbarous punishment, Euphemia Mac-
Calyean was a thoroughly vicious woman, whose death is 
not greatly to be mourned.

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