

110 The Invocation of Spirits

1572 Bacon
 Exhibit

An Act of 1563 laid down the death penalty for the "Invocation of evill and wicked spirites, to or for any Intent or Purpose, and for using witchecrafte Enchantment Charme or Sorcerie whereby any person shall happen to be killed or destroyed." The study of witchcraft and associated activities figures prominently in historical research of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Alan Macfarlane's recent study of the problem suggests that reasons for increasing fear of witches and persons supposedly possessed of supernatural powers can be associated with the breakdown of traditional structures, such as the manor and the church, and the growth of a pauper-class. He considers that in many instances, the village loathing for an accused individual was an expression of inner-guilt at having previously denied him or her neighborly help in time of need.

A letter from Sir Nicholas Bacon in 1572 to his son Nicholas deals with the question of "one Morris" who was condemned at the County Assize for the "Invocation of Spirits." Sir Nicholas had been informed that the case was not absolutely proven against him and that his subsequent behavior warranted a pardon. His son was chastised presumably for failing to note this and for not attending the Assizes.

A Sonne, Sr Ambrose Germyn hath written unto me, for A pardon to be obteyned for one Morris, who was at the last Assises condemned for invocacion of Spirites as it semeth by his wrighting by somewhat to straight A proceading in Lawe, And besides he wrighteth that the prisoner is become A very repentant and sorowfull man for his Offence Nevertheless I have forborne and meane to forbear to proceade in it, untill I heare agayne from you, whether the Contry thinketh the man worthie death or no, And yf you had bene at the Assises as you should have bene, Yf you had done well, You might have enformed me of this of your owne knowledg. But nowe in default thereof you are to speake with Mr Pooley who is best acqwaynted in this matter or with Mr Ashefeild yf he were at the Asises, or els with them both. And ther-vppon to advertise me immediately Because this matter canne Aske no long tyme. I mervayle it is so long sine I hard from you. In the begynnyng of the next Tearme I loke to se you here for the fynysshing of thinges and to knowe what is done for the leatting of Studdie Comend me to your wief and her Mother God blesse the Children and so fare you well From my howse besides Charing Crosse this xviijth of Marche 1572

Your Father
 N Bacon C S

Some, Dr Ambrose Stany has written unto me, for a
pardon to be obtained for one Morris, who was at the last
Assizes condemned for invocation of Spirits as it smyth
by his writing by some what a straight or proceeding
in Lawe. And besides he writteth that the prisoner
is become a very repentant and sorrowfull man for
his Offence. Nevertheless I gave forbearance and intreat
to forbear to proceed in it, untill I hear againe from
you, whether the Countrey smyth the man worthy
death or no. And if you had sent at the Assizes as
you, Justice gave bene, if you had done well, you might
have informed me of his of your own knowledge.
But now in default thereof you are to satisfy us
Mr. Yoolly also is best arguement in his matter
or not. As for as you were at the Assizes, as all
with them both, And therefore to advertise me
immediately. Because his matter runne aske no
long tyme. I marvel it is so long since I
heard from you. In the beginning of the next Terme
I hope to see you here for the furnishing of some and
to knowe what is done for the clearing of the children
Comend me to your wife and her mother. God bless
the children and so fare you well from my house
beside Drury Croft this xxij of Maye 1572

Your Affectionate
Father

Edw. & D

~~If this man be of any
usefulle use, I shall be
of a great service to
you and his Country
I shall be of a great
service to you and his
Country~~

To my friend Mr. G. H. R. at Edgemoor

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