3. Cotton Mather Advises John Richards on Detecting Witches, 1692

I must humbly beg you that in the management of the affair in your most worthy hands, you do not lay more stress upon pure specter testimony than it will bear. When you are satisfied or have good, plain, legal evidence that the demons which molest our poor neighbors do indeed represent such and such people to the sufferers, 'tis be a presumption, yet I suppose you will not reckon it a conviction that the people so represented are witches to be immediately exterminated. It is very certain that the devils have sometimes represented the shapes of persons not only innocent, but also very virtuous, 'tis I believe that the just God then ordinarily provides a way for the speedy vindication of the persons thus abused. Moreover, I do suspect that persons who have too much indulged themselves in malignant, envious, malicious ebullitions of their souls, may unhappily expose themselves to the judgment of being represented by devils, of whom they never had any vision, and with whom they have much less written any covenant. I would say this: if upon the bare supposition of a poor creature's being represented by a specter, too great a progress be made by the authority in ruining a poor neighbor so represented, it may be that a door may be thereby opened for the devils to obtain from the courts in the invisible world a license to proceed unto most hideous desolations upon the reputed and repose of such as have yet been kept from the great transgression. If mankind have thus far once consented unto the credit of diabolical representations, the door is open! Perhaps there are wise and good men that may be ready to style him that shall advance this caution, a witch advocate; but in the winding up, this caution will certainly be wished for.

III. 'Tis probable that the devils may (tho' not often, yet sometimes) make most bloody invasions upon our exterior concerns, without any witchcrafts of our fellow creatures to empower them, and I do expect that as when our Lord was coming in His human nature among us, there was a more sensible annoyance of the destroyer upon our human nature than at other times, thus it will be just before our Lord's coming again in His human nature, when He will also dispossess the devils of their aerial region to make a New Heaven for His raised there. Nevertheless there is cause enough to think that it is a horrible witchcraft which hath given rise to the troubles wherewith Salem Village is at this day harassed; and the indefatigable pains that are used for the tracing [of] this witchcraft are to be thankfully accepted, and applauded among all this people of God.

IV. Albeit the business of this witchcraft be very much transacted upon the stage of imagination, yet we know that, as in treason there is an imagining which is a capital crime, and here also the business thus managed in imagination yet may not be called imaginary. The effects are dreadfully real. Our dear neighbors are most really tormented, really murdered, and really acquainted with hidden things, which are afterwards proved plainly to have been realities. I say, then, as that man is justly executed for an assassin, who in the sight of men shall with a sword in his hand stab his neighbor into the heart, so suppose a long train laid unto a barrel of gunpowder under the floor where a neighbor is, and suppose a man with a match perhaps in his mouth, set fire unto the further end of the train, the never so far off. This man also is to be treated as equally a malefactor. Our neighbors at Salem Village are blown up, after a sort, with an informal gunpowder; the train is laid in the laws of the kingdom of darkness limited by God himself. Now the question is, who gives fire to this train? and by what acts is the match applied? Find out the persons that have done this thing, and be their acts in doing it either mental, or oral, or manual, or what the devil will, I say abeat quo digni sunt.

V. To determine a matter so much in the dark as to know the guilty employers of the devils in this work of darkness, this is a work, this is a labor. Now first a credible confession of the guilty wretches is one of the most hopeful ways of coming at them, and I say a credible confession because even confession itself sometimes is not credible. But a person of a sagacity many times farther longs than yours, will easily perceive what confession may be credible, and what may be the result of only a delirious brain, or a discontented heart. All the difficulty is how to obtain this confession. For this I am far from urging the un-English method of torture, but instead thereof I propound these three things: first, who can tell but when the witches come upon their trials, they may be so forsaken, as to confess all. The Almighty God having heard the appeals of our cries to Heaven, may so thunder-strike their souls, as to make them show their deeds. Moreover, the devils themselves who aim at the entrapping of their own miserable clients, may treacherously depart from them in their examinations, which throws them into such toiling vexations that they'll discover all. Besides, when you come solemnly in God's name to exhibit yourselves as His viceroy, and when you come to form a most awful type of the Last Judgment, whereby the devils of all things tremble most, even they also may be smitten with such terror as may contribute a little to their departure from the miscreants whom they have entangled. An unexpected confession, is that whereunto witches are very often driven. Secondly, I am ready to think that there is usually some expression or behavior whereto the devils do constantly oblige the witches, as a kind of sacrament, upon their least failure wherein the witches presently lose the thus furfetted assistance of the devils, and all comes out. Please then to observe, if you can find any one constant scheme of discourse or action, whereto the suspected seem religiously devoted, and (which may easily be done by the common policies of conversation) cause them to transgress that, a confession will probably then come on space. Thirdly, whatever hath a tendency to put the witches into confusion is likely to bring them unto confession too. Here cross and swift questions have their use, but besides them, for my part, I should not be unwilling that an experiment be made whether accused parties can repeat the Lord's Prayer, or those other systems of Christianity which, it seems, the devils often make the witches unable to repeat without ridiculous deprivations or amputations. The danger of this experiment will be taken away if you make no evidence of it, but only put it to the use I mention, which is that of confounding...
the lisp,ing witches to give a reason why they cannot, even with promptings, repeat those heavenly compositions. The like I would say of some other experiments, only we may venture too far before we are aware.

VI. But what if no confession can be obtained; I say yet the case is far from desperate. For if there have been those words uttered by the witches, either by way of threatening, or of asking, or of bragging, which rationally demonstrate such a knowledge of the woeful circumstances attending the afflicted people, as could not be had without some diabolical communion, the proof of such words is enough to fix the guilt. Moreover, I look upon wounds that have been given unto specters, and received by witches, as intimations broad enough, in concurrence with other things, to bring out the guilty. Th' I am not fond of assaying to give such wounds, yet the proof such when given carries with it what is very palatable.

Once more, can there be no puppets found out? and here I would say thus much, I am thinking that some witches make their own bodies to be their puppets. If therefore you can find that when the witches do anything easy, that is not needful (and it is needful that I put in that clause "not needful" because it is possible that a pious demon may imitate what we do, tho' we are none of his) I say if you find the same thing, presently, and hurtfully, and more violently done by any unseen hand unto the bodies of the sufferers, hold them, for you have caught a witch. I add, why should not witch-marks be searched for? The properties, the qualities of those marks are described by diverse weighty writers. I never saw any of those marks, but it is doubtless not impossible for a chirurgeon, when he sees them, to say what are magical, and if these become once apparent, it is apparent that these witches have gone so far in their wickedness as to admit most cursed succages, whereby the devils have not only fetched out of them, it may be the spirits of which they make vehicles, wherein they visit the afflicted, but also they have infused a venom into them which exalts the malignity of their spirits as well as of their bodies; and it is likely that by means of this ferment they would be found buoyant (if the water-ordal were made upon them).

VII. I begin to fear that the devils do more easily prostrate poor mortals into witchcraft than is commonly conceived. When a sinful child of man distempers himself with some exorbitant motions in his mind (and it is to be feared the murmuring phrenies of late prevailing in the country have this way exposed many to sore temptations) a devil then soon presents himself unto him, and he demands, Are you willing that I should go do this or that for you? If the man once comply, the devil hath him now in a most horrid snare, and by a permission from the just vengeance of God he visits the man with buffets as well as allures them, till the forlorn man at first only for the sake of quietness, but at length out of improved wickedness, will commission the devil to do mischief as often as he requires it. And for this cause 'tis worth considering, whether there be a necessity always by extortions by halter or gagot every wretched creature that shall be hooked into some degrees of witchcraft. What if some of the lesser criminals be only scourged with lesser punishments, and also put upon some solemn, open, public, and explicit renunciation of the devil? I am apt to think that the devils would then cease afflicting the neighborhood whom these wretches have stood them upon, and perhaps they themselves would now suffer some impressions from the devils, which if they do, they must be willing to bear till the God that hears prayer deliver them. Or what if the death of some of the offenders were either diverted or inflicted, according to the success of such their renunciation.

But I find my free thoughts thus freely laid before Your Honor, begin to have too much freedom in them. I shall now therefore add no more but my humble and most fervent prayers to the God who gives wisdom liberally, that you and your honorable brethren may be furnished from on high, with all that wisdom, as well as justice, which is requisite in the thorny affair before you. God will be with you. I am persuaded He will; and with that persuasion I subscribe myself,

Sir, Your very devoted servant

4. Jonathan Edwards Describes the Great Awakening in Northampton, Massachusetts, 1738

Just after my Grandfather's Death, it seemed to be a time of extraordinary Dullness in Religion: Licensiousness for some Years greatly prevailed among the Youth of the Town; they were many of them very much addicted to Nightwalking, and frequenting the Tavern, and lead Practices, wherein some, by their Example exceedingly corrupted others. It was their Manner very Frequently to get together, in Conventions of both Sexes, for Mirth and Jollity, which they called Frolicks; and they would often spend the greater part of the Night in them, without regard to any Order in the Families they belonged to: and indeed Family Government did too much fail in the Town. It was become very customary with many of our young People, to be Indifferent in their Carriage at Meeting, which doubless, would not have prevailed to such a degree, had it not been that my Grandfather, through his great Age, (tho' he retained his Powers surprizingly to the last) was not so able to Observe them....

But in two or three Years after Mr. Stoddard's Death, there began to be a sensible Amendment of these Evils, the young People shewed more of a Disposition to hearken to Counsel, and by degrees left off their Frolicking, and grew observably more Decent in their Attendance on the publick Worship, and there were more that manifested a Religious Concern than there used to be.

At the latter end of the Year 1733, there appeared a very unusual flexibleness, and yielding to Advice, in our young People. It had been too long their manner to make the Evening after the Sabbath, and after our publick Lecture, to be especially the Times of their Mirth, and Company keeping. But a Sermon was now preached on the Sabbath before the Lecture, to shew the Evil Tendency of the Practice, and to persuade them to reform it; and it was urged on Heads of Families, that it should be a thing agreed upon among them to govern their

A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God (Boston: S. Kneeland, 1738).