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978-1-108-04418-9 - Narratives of Sorcery and Magic: Volume 1

Thomas Wright

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### **Narratives of Sorcery and Magic**

The English historian and antiquary Thomas Wright (1810–70) co-founded and joined a number of antiquarian and literary societies. He was greatly interested in Old English, Middle English and Anglo-Norman texts, and in the 1840s and 1850s he published widely within these areas. Gradually his focus shifted to the archaeology of Roman Britain and to Anglo-Saxon cemeteries. Although much of Wright's research has been completely superseded, his work is still considered worth consulting, as he collected material not readily available elsewhere. This two-volume 1851 publication is testimony to Wright's interest in folklore, sorcery and legend. In Volume 1 the author gives accounts of sorcery across Europe, and he considers the legendary Dr Faustus as an archetypal magician who summoned up 'the demon.' Wright also discusses the place of the occult in England during and after the Reformation, writing about magicians such as John Dee, and describing King James I's views on witchcraft.

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# Narratives of Sorcery and Magic

VOLUME 1

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NARRATIVES  
OF  
SORCERY AND MAGIC,

FROM THE MOST AUTHENTIC SOURCES.

BY  
THOMAS WRIGHT, ESQ., M.A., F.S.A., &c.

CORRESPONDING MEMBER OF THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF FRANCE,  
(ACADEMIE DES INSCRIPTIONS ET BELLES LETTRES.)

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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TO  
THE LORD LONDESBOROUGH,  
K.C.H., F.R.S., F.S.A.,  
THESE VOLUMES  
ARE DEDICATED,  
AS A SMALL TRIBUTE OF RESPECT  
FOR A NOBLEMAN WHO HAS ALWAYS BEEN DISTINGUISHED  
BY HIS ATTACHMENT TO, AND PATRONAGE OF,  
HISTORICAL AND ANTIQUARIAN SCIENCE.

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TO

THE LORD LONDESBOROUGH.

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MY LORD,

The interest which your lordship has always taken in historical studies has encouraged me to offer to you two volumes of what may be truly considered as the dark features of history. It appears to me that these are features on which sometimes at least we ought to dwell, and which it has been too much the fashion with historical writers to conceal from view, and I am not sure if we are not at this moment suffering from the results of that concealment. It is true that if, in tracing the history of declining Rome, we pass gently over the crimes of a Caligula or a Commodus, if we show the bright side of the history of the middle

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ages and hide their viciousness and brutality, if we tell the story of Romanism without its arrogance, its persecutions, and its massacres, or if we attempt to trace the progress of society from darkness to light without entering into the details of those strange hallucinations which have at times disfigured and impeded it—such as are related in the following Narratives—in acting thus we spare the reader much that is horrible and revolting to his better feelings, but at the same time we destroy the moral and utility of history itself.

If I mistake not, the history presented in these volumes furnishes more than any other an example of the manner in which the public mind may, under particular circumstances, be acted upon by erroneous views. The paganism of our forefathers, instead of being eradicated by papal Rome, was preserved as a useful instrument of power, and fostered until it grew into a monster far more fearful and degrading than the original from which it sprung, and infinitely more cruel in its influence. It is the object of the following detached histories to exhibit the character and forms under which at various different

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periods the superstitions of sorcery and magic affected the progress, or interfered with the peace of society. At first they appeared as the mere, almost unobserved, fables of the vulgar—then they were seized upon as an arm of the ecclesiastical power, to crush those who dared to question the spiritual doctrines or oppose the temporal power of the papal church. From this time sorcery makes its appearance more frequently in history, until it gained that hold on the minds of all classes which led to the fearful persecutions of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

It is no part of the design of these little volumes to enter into a disquisition on what have been termed the occult sciences, nor do I pretend to give a regular history of witchcraft. I have merely attempted to show the influence which superstition once exercised on the history of the world, by a few narratives taken from the annals of past ages, of events which seemed to place it in its strongest and clearest light. For these sketches, thrown together somewhat hastily, and gathered from a field of research which has always had great attractions for me, I venture to claim from your lordship

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an indulgence which will be the more valued from the appreciation which I know that these studies have always received from you ; and I have only to hope for the same indulgence from the public at large.

I have the honour to be,

My Lord,

With sincere respect,

Your lordship's very faithful servant,

THOMAS WRIGHT.

*24, Sydney Street, Brompton,*

*February 15, 1851.*

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