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Augustin Calmet

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Every age, every nation, every country has its prejudices, its maladies, its customs, its inclinations, which characterize them, and which pass away, and succeed to one another; often that which has appeared admirable at one time, becomes pitiful and ridiculous at another. We have seen that in some ages all was turned towards a certain kind of devotion, of studies and of exercises. It is known that, for more than one century, the prevailing taste of Europe was the journey to Jerusalem. Kings, princes, nobles, bishops, ecclesiastics, monks, all pressed thither in crowds. The pilgrimages to Rome were formerly very frequent and very famous. All that is fallen away. We have seen provinces over-run with flagellants, and now none of them remain except in the brotherhoods of penitents which are still found in several parts.

We have seen in these countries jumpers and dancers, who every moment jumped and danced in the streets, squares or market-places, and even in the churches. The convulsionaries of our own days seem to have revived them; posterity will be surprised at them, as we laugh at them now. Towards the end of the sixteenth and at the beginning of the seventeenth century, nothing was talked of in Lorraine but wizards and witches. For a long time we have heard nothing of them. When the philosophy of M. Descartes appeared, what a vogue it had! The ancient philosophy was despised; nothing was talked of but experiments in physics, new systems, new discoveries. M. Newton appears; all minds turn to him. The system of M. Law, bank notes, the rage of the Rue Quinquampoix, what movements did they not cause in the kingdom? A sort of convulsion had seized on the French. In this age, a new scene presents itself to our eyes, and has done for about sixty years in Hungary, Moravia, Silesia, and Poland: they see, it is said, men who have been dead for several months, come back to earth, talk, walk, infest villages, ill use both men and beasts, suck the blood of their near relations, make them ill, and finally cause their death; so that people can only save themselves from their dangerous visits and their hauntings by exhuming them, impaling them, cutting off their heads, tearing out the heart, or burning them. These revenans are called by the name of oupires or vampires, that is to say, leeches; and such particulars are related of them, so singular, so detailed, and invested with such probable circumstances and such judicial information, that one can hardly refuse to credit the belief which is held in those countries, that these revenans come out of their tombs and produce those effects which are proclaimed of them.

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