

To the Buckley clan:
BOB, GLAD, BARB, JOYCE,
MAUREEN, VIC, PHIL,
SUE, JASON,
and
BECKY

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things long before they were written about in the travel books that poured off the printing presses. The people who craved vicarious adventure and escapism such as that offered by travelogues were mainly the well-to-do. Although European craftsmen and businessmen used enormous quantities of hemp, their familiarity with the cannabis plant was totally related to its fiber. Even the Italian hemp dealers and artisans who were so expert in evaluating the different grades of hemp fiber were totally unaware of the plant's other properties. The *Decameron*, Giovanni Boccaccio's ribald masterpiece of the Fourteenth century, refers at one point to the "Old Man of the Mountain," and to some mysterious potion, but Boccaccio never identifies the drug by name: "He sought out a powder of marvelous virtue which he had gotten in the parts of the Levant of a great prince who avouched it to be that which was wont to be used by the 'Old Man of the Mountain' when he would fain send anyone sleeping into Paradise."¹

In the next century, the French writer and physician François Rabelais wrote at length about cannabis, calling it Pantagruelion. Pantagruelion, says Rabelais, "is sown at the first coming of the swallows, and is taken out of the ground when the grasshoppers begin to get hoarse." Its stalk is "*full of fibers, in which consists the whole value of the herb*" (italics mine). Following Pliny, he declares that the seeds produced by the male plant "destroy the procreative germs in whosoever should eat much of it often." Referring to Galen, he says, "still is it of difficult concoction, offends the stomach, engenders bad blood, and by its excessive heat acts upon the brain and fills the head with noxious and painful vapors."²

If Rabelais knew anything more about the effects of cannabis, he did not record them. Probably he did not. Beyond what he recorded from these classical sources, it is unlikely that Rabelais was in any way familiar with cannabis as a medicament or as a psychoactive agent.

THE WITCHES' BREW

Away from the hustle and bustle of the major urban centers, in the relative peace and serenity of the countryside, or in the wretched shacks that housed the unskilled city dwellers, where superstition passed for truth, where magic and sorcery were a way of life, where witches revelled with the devil in hallucinatory stupor, hemp was appreciated for marvelous powers unknown to Boccaccio and Rabelais.

¹G. Boccaccio, *Decameron* (New York: Blue Ribbon Books, (1931), bk. 3.8.

²F. Rabelais, *Pantagruel*.

"During the whole time that Catholicism had the spiritual direction of Europe," writes Émile Grillo de Givry, "a veritable Church of Evil opposed . . . the Church of God, a Church of the devil defying the Church of God. . . like the latter [it possessed] its priests, its rites, its cult, its books, its congregations, and its supernatural visitants."³

The Church of Evil was the church of the discontented and the ungratified, men and women who looked upon the glories to God—his splendid churches, his powerful clergy, the pomp and ceremony dedicated to his worship—with awe and envy. Condemned to poverty and destitution through no fault of their own, they questioned the fairness of their plight and decided that if God were not on their side, then maybe they would be better off serving Satan. After all, Satan was the renowned master of mortal wealth. Serving him could lead to no worse adversity than that which they were already experiencing.

Many were content simply to worship the devil. Others aspired to higher satanic office and proclaimed themselves sorcerers (priests) and witches (priestesses). The main duties of these servants of the devil was to cast spells on those whose misfortune they desired. In so doing, they called upon the Prince of Darkness to do their bidding. Sorcerers and witches also officiated at the Black Mass—the Witches' Sabbath—an assemblage of worshippers of the devil presided over by Satan himself.

Invariably, whenever medieval artists turned to the subject of the Witches' Sabbath, they depicted a group of women, who were usually naked, compounding a mysterious drug in a large cauldron. As early as the fifteenth century, demonologists declared that one of the main constituents that the witches compounded for their heinous ceremony was hemp.

In 1484, Pope Innocent VIII issued a papal fiat condemning witchcraft and the use of hemp in the Satanic mass.⁴ In 1615, an Italian physician and demonologist, Giovanni De Ninault, listed hemp as the main ingredient in the ointments and unguents used by the devil's followers.⁵ Hemp, along with opium, belladonna, henbane, and hemlock, the demonologists believed, were commonly resorted to during the Witches' Sabbath to produce the hunger, ecstasy, intoxication, and aphrodisia responsible for the glutinous banquets, the frenzied dancing, and the orgies that characterized the celebration of the Black Mass.

³E. G. De Givry, *Illustrated Anthology of Sorcery, Magic and Alchemy* (New York: Causeway Books, 1973), p. 25.

⁴A. De Pasquale, "Farmacognosia della 'Canape Indiana,'" *Estratto dai Lavori dell'Istituto di Farmacognosia dell'Università di Messina* 5 (1967): 24.

⁵*Ibid.* Cf. also, Cornelius Agrippa, *De Occulta Philosophia* (n.d.), vol. 43; and Pierre d'Alban, *Heptameron seu Elementa Magica* (1567), p. 142.