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*King James and the Witches of Pendle Hill*  
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This fall I am writing and researching in Great Britain. At the moment, I'm staying in a small Lancashire village in the shadow of Pendle Hill. Pendle Hill is best known for a group of witches who were captured, tried, and hanged in 1612. That episode resulted directly from the beliefs and the laws enacted by King James, for whom the King James Bible was named. In 1597, James published a book called *Daemonology*, in which he described how to find evidence of a person practicing witchcraft, while in 1603, James passed a law that ordered the death of anyone who acted "to consult, covenant with, entertain, employ, feed, or reward any evil and wicked spirit, or to utter spells."

It was this law that was first used in the trial of the Pendle witches. The defendants were members of two, poor families who had a long history of rivalry. Once one family member was accused, the matter quickly deteriorated in each family accusing the other (and ultimately themselves as well) of casting spells to injure people and goods, using "voodoo" dolls to cause sickness and death, and associating with the devil. Nine people were convicted and hanged as witches at the trial's end. This trial initiated several decades of witch hunts in England and the deaths of hundreds of "convicted" witches.

This long-lived interest in witchcraft comes from religion—at both the personal and political levels. The personal level concerns King James himself, who is most accurately titled James the Sixth and First: King James the Sixth of Scotland and King James the First of England. James was born to Mary, Queen of Scots, a devout Catholic, at a time when Scotland as a whole followed the strict Presbyterianism of John Knox. When James was barely a year old, his mother was imprisoned in

England. James became King and was raised by the Protestant nobles. To counteract his mother's Catholicism, the nobles provided James an extensive education in Presbyterian theology and divinity. This son of a proud Catholic mother thus became a learned Presbyterian divine. His strict belief in Scripture caused him to believe in the activities of witches. When a storm wrecked his ship while sailing to Norway to meet his bride, he deduced that witches who were opposed to him personally had raised the storm.

At the political level, upon the death of Queen Elizabeth I, James became King of England. At that time, England was struggling with the division between Catholic and Protestant even more vigorously than Scotland. (These struggles continued for several decades, leading to the English Civil War.) Although the Protestants had political power, the people were still divided. The hunt for witches became a tool in this struggle, for the Protestant authorities usually hunted for witches in Catholic areas. Protestants were uneasy about Catholic worship and often likened its practices to conjuring and charms. The failed attempt, in 1605, of a band of Catholic plotters to blow up the Houses of Parliament led to outright oppression of Catholicism. It was only following the Civil War and its aftermath, that interest in witchcraft dissipated.

Given this religious and political climate, it is not surprising that Lancashire in 1612 was not only a Catholic area, but was considered to be a hotbed of rebellion. The persecution of witches served not only a religious end, but also a political one. Today, the villages around Pendle Hill are quiet and peaceful. The story of the witches provides only a trail for a day's ramble through the countryside.