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HALF-HOURS WITH THE HIGHWAYMEN

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SIXTEEN-STRING JACK.

HALF-HOURS WITH THE HIGHWAYMEN

PICTURESQUE BIOGRAPHIES AND TRADITIONS OF THE "KNIGHTS OF THE ROAD"

By CHARLES G. HARPER

VOL. II



Illustrated by Paul Hardy and by the Author, and from Old Prints

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NEVISON: "SWIFT NICKS"

WHEN Harrison Ainsworth wrote *Rookwood*, that fantastic romance of highway robbery and the impossible exploits of the Rookwood family, he did a singular injustice to a most distinguished seventeenth-century highwayman, John Nevison by name, and transferred the glory of his wonderful ride to York to Dick Turpin, who never owned a "Black Bess," and who never did anything of the kind. Turpin, by virtue of Ainsworth's glowing pages, has become a popular hero and stands full in the limelight, while the real gallant figure is only dimly seen in the cold shade of neglect.

John or "William" Nevison, by some accounts, was born at Pontefract, in 1639, of "honest and reasonably-estimated parents." Sometimes we find him styled Nevison, at other times he is "alias Clerk" in the proclamations issued, offering rewards for his arrest. Occasionally, in the chap-books, we find John Nevison and William Nevison treated as two separate and distinct persons, no doubt because the recorded adventures of this truly eminent man were [\[Pg 2\]](#) widely distributed over the country, that it was difficult to believe them the doings of one person. But there seems to be no reasonable doubt that one and the same man was the hero of all these doings, as also of the famous Ride to York. Of course it is now by far too late to snatch from Turpin the false glory bestowed upon him. A hundred romances, a century of popular plays, have for ever in the popular mind identified him with the Ride to York, and with all manner of achievements and graces that were never his. Lies are brazen and immortal; truth is modest; and the Great Turpin Myth is too fully established to be thoroughly scotched.

But let us to the career of Nevison, as told in the pages of what few authorities exist. He seems to have been a precocious boy: precocious in things evil. Indeed we must needs regard him as a *wunderkind* in that sort, for between the ages of thirteen and fourteen, and when still at school, he is reported to have been the "ringleader in rudeness and debauchery." He stole a silver spoon from his father, who delegated the thrashing so richly deserved to the schoolmaster, who seems to have "laid on" in the thorough manner suggested to Macduff. A vivid picture presents itself to us, of William (or John) occupying a sleepless night, rubbing the parts and meditating revenge. As a result of his deliberations, he arose before peep of day and, cautiously taking his father's keys, stole to the domestic [\[Pg 3\]](#) and helped himself to the ten pounds he found there. Then, taking a saddle and bridle from his father's stable, he hastened to the paddock where the schoolmaster had a horse out to graze. Saddling it, he made off for London, which he reached in four days. He dared not sell the horse, for by that means he might have been traced, so he killed the unfortunate animal when within one or two miles of London.

Buying a new suit of clothes and changing his name, he soon found employment with a brewer. In that situation he remained nearly three years, and then left suddenly for the Continent, incidentally with £200 belonging to the brewer. Holland was the country he honoured with his presence, and there he found a fellow-mind in the person of a young Dutch woman who, robbing her father of all the money and jewels she could lay hands upon, eloped with him. They were soon arrested, but Nevison broke prison, and with some difficulty, made his way into Flanders, and enlisted in the troops stationed there under command of the Duke of York. It is not to be supposed that such a restless temperament as his would allow him long to remain subject to restrictions and the word of command, and accordingly he deserted, made across to England, and, purchasing a horse and arms, and "resolving for the Road," blossomed out as a full-blown highwayman. As his original biographer prettily puts it, he embarked upon "a pleasant life at the hazard of [\[Pg 4\]](#) neck, rather than toil out a long remainder of unhappy days in want and poverty, which he was always averse to." Who, for that matter, is not? Let us sigh for the days that were, the days that are no more, when such adventures as the highwaymen sought were to be found on every highway. A short life, so long as it was a merry, was sufficient for these fine fellows, who desired nothing so little as a gnarled and crabbed age, and nothing so much as a life filled with excitement, wine, and the smiles of the fair. Those smiles were apt to be purchased, and generally purchased dear, but in that respect the highwaymen were never disposed to be critical.

Nevison's success, immediate and complete, proclaimed his fitness for the career himself had with due thought and deliberation chosen. At first he kept his own counsel and haunted the roads alone. Sometimes he went by the name of Johnson.

At this early stage he met one evening on the high road two farmers, who told him it was dangerous to go forward, themselves having only a few minutes before been robbed of forty pounds by three highwaymen, scarce more than half a mile off.

"Turn back with me," he said, "and show me the way they went, and, my life to a farthing if I do not make them return your money."

They accordingly rode back with him until they had come within sight of the three robbers, when Nevison, ordering the two farmers to stand behind, rode up and spoke to the foremost of the three.

"Sir," said he, "by your garb and the colour of your horse, you should be one of those I look after, and, [\[Pg 5\]](#), my business is to tell you that you borrowed of two friends of mine forty pounds, which they desired me to demand of you, and which, before we part, you must restore."

Two of the men then made haste to ride off.

"How?" quoth the remaining highwayman. "Forty pounds; d—n me, is the fellow mad?"

"So mad," replied Nevison, "that your life shall answer me, if you do not give me better satisfaction."

With that Nevison drew his pistol and suddenly clapped it to the man's chest; at the same time seizing his horse's reins, in such a manner that he could not draw either sword or pistols.

"My life is at your mercy," he confessed.

"No," said Nevison, "'tis not that I seek, but the money you have robbed those two men of. You must refund it."

With the best grace he could, the highwayman parted with what he had, saying his companions had the rest.

Nevison then, making him dismount, and taking his pistols, desired the countrymen to secure him, while he pursued the others. In the gathering twilight, as he galloped up, they, thinking it was their friend, drew rein.

"Jack," said one to him, "why did you stop to argue with that fellow?"

"No, gentlemen," said Nevison, "you are mistaken in your man; though, by token of his horse that I ride and [Pg 6]rms I carry, he hath sent me to you, to ransom his life. The ransom, sirs, is nothing less than your shares of the prize of the day, which if you presently surrender, you may go about your business. If not, I must have a little dispute with you, at sword and pistol."

One of them then let fly at him, but his aim missing, Nevison's bullet in reply took him in the right shoulder. He then called for quarter and came to a parley, which ended in the two surrendering not only their share of the two travellers' money, but a total amount of a hundred and fifty guineas. Nevison thereupon returned to the farmers and, handing them their money, went his way with the balance of one hundred and ten guineas.

This, it will at once be conceded, was by no means professional conduct; and was indeed, we may say, a serious breach of the highway law, by which thieves should at any rate stand by one another, shoulder to shoulder against the world.

Nevison, however, like a true philosopher and a false comrade, improved any occasion to his own advantage, without scruple. You figure him thus, rather of a saturnine humour, with an ugly grin on his face, instead of a frank smile; but probably you would be quite wrong in so doing. At any rate, the ladies appear to have loved him, for we learn that, "in all his pranks, he was very favourable to the female sex, who generally gave him the character of a civil, obliging robber." He was also charitable to the poor, and, being a true Royalist, he never attempted anything against [Pg 9]se of that party.

After many adventures, our William, or John, as the case may be, one day secured no less a sum than £450 by a fortunate meeting on the road with a rich grazier who had just sold, and been paid for, some cattle. He resolved to let the road lie fallow, as it were, for a while, and to seek, in a temporary retirement in his native place, that repose which comes doubly welcome after a period of strenuous professional endeavour.

He was joyfully received by his father, who still was living in the old town of Pontefract, although some seven or eight years had passed since his son had levanted and disappeared utterly from the parental ken. He had long given up all hopes of seeing his boy again; and now he was returned, a young man of twenty-one years of age, and with a respectable sum of money; the savings of a frugal and industrious life in London, according to his own account.

Here is an idyllic picture: the highwayman returned home, soothing the declining days of his father, and living as quietly and soberly as though he had never emptied a pocket on the King's highway!

After the death of his father, he left the quiet existence at Pontefract, and opened the second part of his career upon the road. He now so far departed from his former practice as to become the moving spirit in a numerous band [Pg 10]hose headquarters were long situated at Newark. They particularly affected Yorkshire, and inspired the drovers and graziers who used the Great North Road with dread.

At times, however, he would range southward again, by himself, and one of these expeditions resulted in the marvellous feat that made him famous at the time, and should have kept him so for all time. His well-earned laurels, unhappily, have been snatched by a heedless hand from his brow, and placed on the unworthy head of Turpin. Such are the strange vagaries of fame!

Nevison's all-eclipsing exploit originated in a four-o'clock-in-the-morning robbery upon Gad's Hill, near Rochester.

For some reason, Nevison appears to have been particularly afraid of being recognised by the traveller whom he stopped and relieved of his purse on that May morning, and he immediately, for the establishment of an *alibi*, conceived the idea of riding such a distance that day as to make it appear humanly impossible he could have been near Rochester at that hour. He proposed to ride to no less distant a place than the city of York, two hundred and thirty miles away from that "high old robbing hill." To the modern commentator, writing with even pulse, it would seem that, unless that traveller's purse had been very well lined, the proceeds of the robbery would not be nearly worth this tremendous effort, after the taking of it.

It would seem that in being so rash as to rob a traveller in the dawning of that May day, he had indeed [Pg 11]en so unfortunate as to happen upon some one who knew him; and there was nothing else but to put as many miles as he could between the dawn and the setting of the sun. So behold him, mounted upon his "blood bay" mare, galloping away for Gravesend. He crossed the Thames to Tilbury, and so went, by way of Horndon and Billericay, to Chelmsford, where he halted an hour and gave his gallant steed some balls. Thence through Braintree, Bocking, Wethersfield, Fenny Stanton, Godmanchester, and Huntingdon, where he halted another half-hour; and so, straight down the Great North Road (but avoiding the towns) to York. Of course he must needs have had several remounts on the way. It is unthinkable that one horse could have performed such a journey. But Nevison was no lone unfriended knight of the road, and, in his extensive operations, had excellent friends in different parts of the country, who could help him on occasion to a good horse.



NEVISON'S RIDE TO YORK.

Arrived at York, he halted only to put up his horse, and to remove the travel-stains and signs of haste from his person, and then made his way to the nearest bowling-green, where it chanced that so important a personage as the Lord Mayor was playing bowls with some friends.

Nevison took an early opportunity of asking the time, and was told it was just a quarter to eight. Having done this, and thus fixed the time and the incident in the Lord Mayor's mind, he was satisfied, and after-events proved the wisdom of his flight; for he was shortly afterwards arrested on another charge of highway robbery, and, among those who were present, in an effort to identify him with other charges, was none other than the early morning traveller upon Gad's Hill.

The *alibi* on that count was triumphantly established. Nevison called his York acquaintances, and the Lord Mayor was appealed to. That civic dignitary readily deposed to the fact that this falsely-accused gentleman was on the York bowling-green on the evening of that day: and in the end, Nevison was acquitted on all charges.

But the highwaymen of that age had a good deal of the braggart in their composition. They could not do a clever thing without taking the world into their confidence; and so, heedless of the danger to his career, Nevison told the story of the ride to delighted ears. Instead of being arrested on what was practically a confession, he became the hero of the hour. The tale even reached the ears of Charles the Second, who had him presented, and, loving a clever rogue as he did (and possibly with some fellow-feeling, in the recollection of how himself had been a harassed fugitive), pardoned him, and christened him "Swift Nicks."

Elsewhere, we read that the robbery took place at Barnet, and that it was thence Nevison rode to York. The traveller, it seems in this version, had set out from the "Blossoms" inn, Lawrence Lane, in the city of London, and carried five hundred and sixty guineas on this monumental occasion.

According to one account, this was "in or about" May 1676; but it is difficult to fix the dates of many of the seventeenth-century highwaymen's doings within a few years, and this would certainly appear to be an error, for it can be proved that he bore the nickname "Swift Nicks" years before. For example, we find in December 1668 a proclamation offering £20 reward for the arrest of several specified highwaymen, including Swift Nicks; and another in the *London Gazette* of November 18th, 1669, in which "Swift Nix" is again mentioned. This proclamation is in itself an interesting and valuable sidelight upon the social conditions of that age:

WHITEHALL, Nov. 17th.

His Majesty having been informed that divers lewd and disorderly persons have committed great and heinous Robberies, Murders, and Burglaries, imboldened thereto either out of hope to escape the hand of Justice, or by the carelessness and negligence in keeping due Watches and Wards, and the pursuit of them by Hue and cry, or the concealment of them and their Horses by Inn-keepers, Ostlers, and others, and that some which have been indicted for these offences, and others not indicted but guilty of the same, continue their wicked practices in spoiling his good subjects, of which number are said to be Lewis, alias Lodowick, alias Claude de Val, alias Brown, Swift Nix, alias Clerk, Humble Ashenhurst, Martin Bringhurst, John Spencer, William Stavely, William Stanesby, Thomas Stanley, Nicholas Greenbury, William Talbot, Richard Wild,

William Connel, Nicholas James, and Herman Atkins, are notoriously known to be such, and of one party and knot, etc. His Majesty minding to preserve all His loving Subjects in their Lives and Estates from all Rapine and Violence, was thus pleased to order His Proclamation to be issued out, Commanding all His Subjects and Officers of Justice to use their endeavours for the apprehension of the said persons, and all others who have been, or shall be guilty of the offences aforesaid, that they may be proceeded against according to Law and Justice, declaring His Will and Pleasure,

That all Justices take Order, that due Watches and Wards be kept by Horse and Foot for the apprehension of such offenders; Commanding all Vintners, keepers of Common Ordinaries, Gaming Houses, Inn-keepers, Horse-keepers, and other persons where such persons shall be or resort, to apprehend or cause them to be apprehended, etc., or otherwise themselves to be proceeded against as far as by due course of Law they may, declaring that whosoever shall before the 20th of *June* next, apprehend or cause to be apprehended any of the said persons above-named, and brought into custody, and prosecute them to a Conviction, shall have a reward of Twenty pounds for every such offender, and for every other notorious Robber, Burglar, or Murderer, the sum of Ten pounds within 15 days after their Conviction, to be paid by the respective Sheriff of the County where such conviction shall be had, upon the Certificate of the Judge, or under the hands of two or more Justices of the Peace before whom they were convicted.

And so forth. This official proclamation clashes discordantly with the kindly, forgiving character of the King's interview with Nevison. Of course, there would naturally be all the difference between a proclamation and a private act of clemency; and not even in those days, when a King might do strange things, was it possible, or thinkable^[Pg 17] give a highwayman liberty to rob as he pleased. We may, perhaps, not without justification, surmise that this highwayman's continued and notorious activity wore out the easy-going monarch's patience.



"SWIFT NICKS" BEFORE CHARLES THE SECOND.

Nevison was arrested on one occasion and lodged in Wakefield prison, but he broke out, and was again holding up the lieges. At another time he was released on giving a promise that he would volunteer to serve in our newly acquired colony, Tangier; but he promptly deserted. Once he was thrown into Leicester gaol, heavily ironed, and strictly guarded; so well-advised were the authorities of his slippery character. Among those who visited him in his cell was a friend in the disguise of a doctor. This person, affecting to be struck with horror at the sight of him, declared he was infected with the plague; and added that, so far as the prisoner himself was concerned, he might die and be d—d for a rogue, and welcome; but a more serious thing was that, unless he were removed to a larger room, not only would he die, but he would also spread the infection over the entire prison.

Nevison was very speedily removed to another room, and the gaoler, implored by his wife, went no further than the door. The physician, meanwhile, came twice or thrice a day to see the patient, and at last declared his case to be hopeless. The highwayman's body was then artfully painted over with blue spots, and he was given a powerful sleeping draught. The physician was shocked, the next time he called, to find him dead. An inquest was hurriedly held^[Pg 18], jury keeping a considerable distance away, with vinegar-saturated handkerchiefs to noses. "Dead of the plague," they declared; and hurried home to make their wills.

The friends of the dead highwayman proved to the local world the strength and fearlessness of their friendship by claiming the body, and were allowed to coffin it and remove it. The coffin was duly interred, but not Nevison, for he

stepped out at the first opportunity, and that very night, in the character of his own ghost, was robbing wayfarers, doubly terrified at this "supernatural" reappearance.

It was not long before the whole story leaked out. Then ensued perhaps the busiest period of his career. The drovers and farmers of Yorkshire were put under regular contribution by him and his gang: the carriers paid a recognised toll, in the form of a quarterly allowance, which at one and the same time cleared the road for them, and offered protection against any other highway marauders. Indeed, Nevison was in this respect almost a counterpart of those old German barons of the Rhine who levied dues on travellers, or in default hanged or imprisoned them. The parallel goes no greater distance than that, for those picturesque nobles were anything but the idols of the people; while Nevison was sufficiently popular to have become the hero of a rural ballad, still occasionally to be heard in the neighbour^[Pg 19]hood of his haunts at Knaresborough, Ferrybridge, York, or Newark. Here are two verses of it, not perhaps distinguished by wealth of fancy or resourcefulness of rhyme:

Did you ever hear tell of that hero,
Bold Nevison, that was his name?
He rode about like a bold hero,
And with that he gained great fame.

He maintained himself like a gentleman,
Besides, he was good to the poor;
He rode about like a great hero,
And he gained himself favour therefor.

A curious pamphlet survives, entitled *Bloody News from Yorkshire*, dated 1674, and telling how Nevison and twenty of his men attacked fifteen butchers, who were riding to Northallerton Fair, and engaged in a furious battle with them.

As an interlude to these more serious affairs, there is the story of how Nevison alone, going on a southerly expedition, met a company of canting beggars, mumpers, and idle vagrants, and proposed to join their "merry" life. Their leader welcomed his proposal, and indicated their course of life. "Do we not come into the world arrant beggars, without a rag upon us? And do we not all go out of the world like beggars, saving only an old sheet over us? Very well, then: shall we be ashamed to walk up and down the world like beggars, with old blankets pinned about us? No, no: that would be a shame to us indeed. Have we not the whole kingdom to walk in, at our pleasure? Are we afraid of the a^[Pg 20]ll of a quarter-day? Do we walk in fear of sheriffs, sergeants, and catchpoles? Who ever knew an arrant beggar arrested for debt? Is not our meat dressed in every man's kitchen? Does not every man's cellar afford us beer? And the best men's purses keep a penny for us to spend."

As a preliminary to electing him of their band, they asked him if he had any *loure* in his *bung*. Seeing his ignorance of their cant phrases, they said the question was, "Had he any money in his purse?"

"Eighteenpence," said he, "and you're welcome to it."

This modest sum was, by unanimous vote, allocated for the purpose of a general booze, in celebration of his admission. The ceremony, the "gage of booze," as the historian of these things terms it, consisted in pouring a quart of beer over the head of the initiate, and the captain saying, "I do, by virtue of this sovereign liquor, install thee in the Roage, and make thee a free denizen of our ragged regiment, so that henceforth it shall be lawful for thee to cant, and to carry a doxy, or mort, along with thee, only observing these rules: first, that thou art not to wander up and down all countries, but to keep to that quarter which is allotted to thee; and, secondly, thou art to give way to any of us that have borne all the offices of the wallet before; and, upon holding up a finger, to avoid any town or country village where thou seest we are foraging for victuals for our army that march along with us. Observing these two rules, we tak^[Pg 21]e thee into our protection, and adopt thee a brother of our numerous society."

Having ended his oration, the captain bade Nevison rise, when he was congratulated by all the company hanging about him, like so many dogs about a bear, and making a hideous noise. The chief, silencing them, continued: "Now that thou art entered into our fraternity, thou must not scruple to act any villainies, whether it be to cut a purse, steal a cloak-bag or portmanteau, convey all manner of things, whether a chicken, sucking-pig, duck, goose, hen, or steal a shirt from the hedge; for he that will be a *quier cove* (a professed rogue) must observe these rules. And because thou art but a novice in begging, and understandest not the mysteries of the canting language, thou shalt have a doxy to be thy companion, by whom thou mayest receive instructions."

Thereupon, he singled out a girl of about fourteen years of age, which tickled his fancy very much; but he must presently be married to her, after the fashion of their *patrico*, the priest of the beggars. The ceremony consisted of taking a hen, and having cut off the head, laying the dead body on the ground; placing him on one side and his doxy on the other. This being done, the "priest," standing by, with a loud voice bade them live together till death did them part. Then, shaking hands and kissing each other, the ceremony of the wedding was over, and the whole group^[Pg 22] was intoxicated with joy. They could hardly, at any rate, be intoxicated with booze, if eighteenpence had been all they had to spend on liquor, and a quart of that wasted.

Night approaching, they all resorted to a neighbouring barn, where they slept: Nevison slipping out secretly before morning, and continuing his journey.

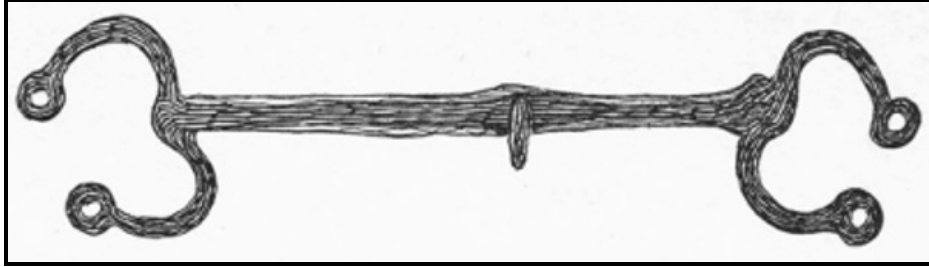
Butchers and Nevison were antipathetic, and he and his gang had levied much tribute in Yorkshire upon their kind. In 1684, two butchers, brothers, Fletcher by name, tried to capture him near Howley Hall, Morley.

He shot one dead, and escaped. The spot is still marked by a stone near Howley Farm. Not long after this he was arrested at the "Three Houses" inn, at Sandal, near Wakefield.

He was at the time, and for long after, a popular hero. The butchers, the graziers, the farmers, the carriers might owe him a grudge, but the peasantry dwelt upon his real or his fancied generosity to the poor, and ballads about him always commanded a ready sale. According to a very popular example, entitled *Nevison's Garland*, he pleaded "Not Guilty":

And when then he came to the Bench,
"Guilty or not Guilty," they to him did cry,
"Not Guilty," then Nevison said,
"I'm clear e'er since the same Day,
That the King did my Pardon Grant,
I ne'er did rob anyone, nor kill
But that Fletcher in all my life,
'Twas in my Defence, I say still."

To commit murder in endeavouring to escape arrest was ever regarded by the highwaymen as a venial sin: [Pg 23]w not shared by the law, and he was found guilty, sentenced to death, and hanged within a week from his trial. He suffered at Knavesmire, York, May 4th, 1685, in the forty-fifth year of his age.



NEVISON'S LEG-IRONS, IN YORK MUSEUM.

"He was something stupid at the gallows," says the old chronicler ("probably drunk," adds a later commentator), "yet he confess'd everything."

The older Nevison ballads, which had some little literary merit, as well as quaintness, to recommend them, have given place to vilely re-written verses that have not the merit of truth or of rhyme. This is how a typical example goes:

Oh! the Twenty-first day of last month,
Proved an unfortunate day;
Captain Milton was riding to London,
And by mischance he rode out of his way.

He call'd at a house by the roadside,
It was the sign of the Magpie,
Where Nevison had been drinking,
And the captain soon did he espy.

[Pg 24]

Then a constable very soon was sent for,
And a constable very soon came;
With three or four more in attendance,
With pistols charged in the King's name.

They demanded the name of this hero,
"My name it is Johnson," said he,
When the captain laid hold of his shoulder,
Saying "Nevison, thou goeth with me."

Oh! then in this very same speech,
They hastened him fast away,
To a place called Swinington Bridge,
A place where he used for to stay.

They call'd for a quart of good liquor,
It was the sign of the Black Horse,
Where there was all sorts of attendance,
But for Nevison it was the worst.

He called for a pen, ink, and paper,
And these were the words that he said,
"I will write for some boots, shoes, and stockings,
For of them I have very great need."

'Tis now before my lord judge,
Oh! guilty or not do you plead;
He smiled into the judge and jury,
And these were the words that he said:

"I've now robbed a gentleman of two pence,
I've neither done murder nor kill'd,
But guilty I've been all my life time,
So, gentlemen, do as you will.

"It's when that I rode on the highway,
I've always had money in great store;
And whatever I took from the rich
I freely gave it to the poor.

[Pg 25]

"But my peace I have made with my Maker,
And with you I'm quite ready to go;
So here's adieu! to this world and its vanities,
For I'm ready to suffer the law."

[Pg 26]

JOHN COTTINGTON, *alias* "MULLED SACK"

JOHN COTTINGTON, commonly known as "Mulled Sack," was the son of a drunken haberdasher in Cheapside, who wasted his substance to such an extent in drinking with fellow-tradesmen of like tastes, that he died in poverty and was buried by the parish. He seems to have been in every way an improvident person, for it is recorded that he left fifteen daughters and four sons. John, our present hero, was the youngest of these. At eight years of age he was bound apprentice by the overseers of the poor of the parish of St. Mary-le-Bow to a chimney-sweep, and served his master in the chimney-sweeping for five years. He then ran away, for he was by this time thirteen years of age, and considered himself grown up, and as fully informed in the art and mystery of chimney-sweeping as his instructor.

He soon acquired the nickname by which he is best known, from his fondness for mulled sack, morning, noon, and night. His earlier activities were exercised in that inferior branch of robbery known as pocket-picking, which does not, however, demand less skill and nerve (perhaps, indeed, it requires more) than was necessary in the no[[Pg 27](#)]rt of collecting upon the roads. He was one of the most expert cly-fakers and bung-snatchers in London, frequenting Cheapside and Ludgate Hill by preference; and is said to have been so successful that he stole "almost enough to have built St. Paul's Cathedral." This is, of course, an amiable, but extravagant exaggeration; but the exploits of all heroes, in all ages, have been similarly magnified, and why not those of "Mulled Sack"?

Among the most robust and uncompromising of the Royalists, he remained in England to war with the usurpers in his own way, while the Cavaliers had fled across the Channel. His warfare was happy, inasmuch as it emptied the pockets of the Commonwealth leaders, while it filled those of himself and his confederates. If he could not meet the enemies of the monarchy on the field, he could, and did, slip a sly hand into their pockets, and lighten them by many a gold watch and a guinea. One of his greatest achievements was the robbing of Lady Fairfax as she—wife of the famous general—was stepping from her carriage into the church of St. Martin, Ludgate, come to hear a famous preacher of that age.

"Mulled Sack" was that day dressed as a gentleman. He did not often affect the part, being a homespun fellow, and subdued from essaying fine flights by those easy experiences of swarming up the chimney-flues. But on this day he was unrecognisable for himself, in quiet, but rich dress. His associates were working with him, and had removed [[Pg 28](#)]n out of the axle of her ladyship's coach, so that the heavy vehicle fell as it neared the church door. "Mulled Sack" pressed forward politely, to help her alight, and at the moment of her setting foot to pavement cut her watch-chain with a sharp pair of scissors, and gently removing the watch itself—a handsome gold one, set with diamonds—escorted her to the church door, raised his hat as gracefully as he could, and then disappeared in the crowd.

It was not until, wearied with an inordinately long sermon, she sought to discover the time, that she missed the watch.

"Mulled Sack" was less fortunate in an attempt he made to pick the august pocket of the Lord Protector, His Highness, Oliver, by the Grace of God—Oliver Cromwell, none other—as he was leaving the House of Parliament. He was caught in the attempt, and came near to being hanged for it. This put him so sadly out of conceit with the art to which he had given his best time, that he determined to forsake it for the sister craft of highway robbery, where a man was under no craven necessity to sneak, and crawl, and cringe, but boldly confronted his quarry, and with an oath, or with a jest—entirely according to temperament—rode up and demanded or "requested," or even, as was the fashion among the most flamboyantly politeful, "begged the favour of," the traveller's purse.

He at first worked the roads in company with one Tom Cheney, with whom, robbing upon Hounslow [[Pg 29](#)]h, he encountered Colonel Hewson, a warrior of those times who had by his military genius raised himself from the humble station of a cobbler. The Colonel was upon the Heath with his regiment, riding some considerable distance away, but still within sight of his men, when the two highwaymen robbed him. A troop instantly gave chase; Cheney desperately defended himself, against eighteen, and was then overpowered and captured, but "Mulled Sack," flying like the wind upon his trusty horse, escaped. Cheney was severely wounded in the affray, and begged that his trial might be postponed on that account, but, as it was feared he might die of his wounds, and so escape hanging after all, he was hurriedly—and no doubt also illegally—condemned on the spot, and hanged there that same evening.

A certain Captain Horne was the next partner "Mulled Sack" took, and he too was similarly unfortunate in a like affair with that already described. An early and ignominious fate seemed to be the inevitable lot of those who worked with our heroic pickpocket turned highwayman, and either because the survivors grew shy of him in consequence, or because he thought it best to play a lone hand, he ever afterwards pursued a solitary career.

It was a successful career, so long as it was continued, and affords an example to the young of the substantial advantages to be derived from an industrious disposition, enthusiasm in the profession of one's adoptio[[Pg 30](#)] that thoroughness in leaving no stone unturned which should bring even only a moderately-equipped young man to the front rank of his profession. "Mulled Sack" left no unturned stone, no pocket (that was likely to contain anything worth having) unpicked, and no promising wayfarer unchallenged within the marches of the districts he affected. And what was the result of this early and late application to to business? Why, nothing less than the proud admission made by his admiring biographer, that "he constantly wore a watchmaker's and jeweller's shop in his pocket, and could at any time command a thousand pounds." How few are those who, in our own slack times, could say as much!

He wore the watches and jewellery he had taken on his rides just as old soldiers display the medals won in their arduous campaigns, and they implied not only the energy of the business man, but the pluck of the soldier on the battlefield. As the soldier fights for his medals, so "Mulled Sack" warred for his—or, rather, other people's—watches.

His greatest deed as a highwayman is that told by Johnson, of his waylaying the Army pay-waggon on Shotover Hill. Fully advised of the approach of this treasure-laden wain, he lurked on the scrubby side of that ill-omened hill overlooking Oxford—it was ever a place for robbers—and, just as the waggon started to toil painfully up, ros[[Pg 33](#)]n his ambuscade with pistols presented to the head of the waggoner and to those of the three soldiers acting as escort.



"MULLED SACK" ROBBS THE ARMY PAY-WAGGON.

It seems that there were also two or three passengers in the waggon, but "Mulled Sack" was as generous as the liquor whence he obtained his name, for he "told them he had no design upon them."

"'This,' says he, 'that I have taken, is as much mine as theirs who own it, being all extorted from the Publick by the rapacious Members of our Commonwealth to enrich themselves, maintain their Janizaries, and keep honest people in subjection.'"

The escort, never for a moment thinking it possible that one highwayman would have the daring to act thus, and dreading the onset of others, bolted like rabbits.

The Republican treasure thus secured by the enterprising "Mulled Sack" totalled £4000, and by so much the expectant garrison of Gloucester, for whom it was intended, for a while went short. Cottington was at this time but twenty years of age. Youth will be served!

It is sad to record a vulgar declension in the practice of "Mulled Sack." He stooped to shed blood, and murdered, as well as robbed a gentleman. With the guilt of Cain heavy on him, he fled to the Continent, and, by some specious pretence gaining access to the Court held by the fugitive Charles the Second, stole a quantity of valuable plate. Returning to England, a little later, he fell into the hands of the sheriff's officers who were keenly av[^[Pg 34]]g his reappearance, and he was executed at Smithfield Rounds in 1656, for the crime of murder, aged forty-five.



THOMAS RUMBOLD

THOMAS RUMBOLD, born about 1643, at Ipswich, was the son of the usual "poor but honest" parents, and was early apprenticed to a bricklayer in that town. But highly coloured stories of the wonders of London fired his imagination and set him to run away from home before little more than a quarter of his time had been served. He entered upon another kind of apprenticeship in London: nothing less than a voluntary pupilage with a thieves' fraternity; but very shortly left that also and set up for himself as a highwayman. He would seem to have had a career of about twenty-six years in this craft, before the gallows claimed him; so it is quite evident he had found his true vocation. A complete account of his transactions would doubtless make a goodly volume, but they are not recorded at proper length. The earlier years of his highway career seem to be completely lost, and the painstaking Smith, instead of showing us how he advanced from small and timid successes to larger and bolder issues, is obliged to plunge into the midst of his life and begin with an adventure which, if it is not indeed entirely apocryphal, can only have been the extravagant and stupid whirl^[Pg 36] very impudent and ingenious fellow, long used to wayside escapades.

Rumbold travelled, says Smith, from London towards Canterbury, along the Dover Road, with the intention of waylaying no less a personage than Dr. Sancroft, the Archbishop, who was coming to London, as Rumbold had been advised, in his travelling chariot. Between Rochester and Sittingbourne he espied the carriage and its attendant servants in the distance, and, tying his horse to a tree, and spreading a tablecloth on the grass of a field open to the road, he sat himself down and began playing hazard with dice-box and dice, all by himself, for some heaps of gold and silver he placed conspicuously on the cloth. Presently the Archbishop's carriage creaked and rumbled ponderously by, in the manner of the clumsy vehicles of that time; and His Grace, curiously observing a man acting so strangely as to play hazard by himself, sent a servant to see what could be the meaning of it.

The servant, coming near, could hear Rumbold swearing at every cast of the dice, about his losses, and asked him what was the meaning of it. To this Rumbold made no reply, and the servant returned to the Right Reverend and informed him the man must surely be out of his wits.

Then the Archbishop himself alighted, and, looking curiously around, and seeing none but Rumbold, asked him whom he played with.

"D—n it, sir!" exclaimed the player, "there's five hundred pounds gone." Then, as His Grace was about^[Pg 37] speak again, casting the dice once more, "There goes a hundred more."

"Pr'ythee," exclaimed the Archbishop, "do tell me whom you play with?"

"With the devil," replied Rumbold.

"And how will you send the money to him?"

"By his ambassadors, and considering your Grace as one of them extraordinary, I shall beg the favour of you to carry it to him." He rose, and walking to the carriage, placed six hundred guineas in it, mounted his horse, and rode off along the way he knew the Archbishop had to travel; and, both he and His Grace having refreshed at Sittingbourne, in different houses of entertainment, Rumbold afterwards took the road to London a little in advance of the carriage.

Halting at a convenient place, and placing himself on the grass, in the same manner as before, he again awaited the carriage, this time with but little money spread on the cloth.

The Archbishop again observed him, and this time really believing him to be a mad gamester, was about to make some remark, when Rumbold suddenly cried out joyfully, throwing the dice, "Six hundred pounds!"

"What!" exclaimed the Archbishop, "losing again?"

"No, by G—d!" returned Rumbold, "won six hundred pounds this time. I'll play this hand out, and then leave off, while I'm well."

"And whom have you won of?"

"Of the same person that I left the six hundred pounds for with you, before dinner."^[Pg 38]

"And how will you get your winnings, my friend?"

"Of his ambassador, to be sure," said Rumbold, drawing his sword. Thereupon, he advanced to the carriage with pistols and drawn sword, and, searching under the carriage-seat, found his own six hundred guineas, and fourteen hundred besides; with which forty pounds weight avoirdupois of bullion, we are gravely told, he got clear off.

The incident is, without a doubt, one of Smith's own inventions—and not one of the best. It serves to show us how entirely lacking in criticism he thought his public, to set before them, without any criticism of his own, such a tale, in which a highwayman who certainly could in real life have been no fool, to have held his own so long on the road, is made to act like an idiot without any advantage likely to be gained by so doing. We see him, in this preposterous story, taking the trouble to carry six hundred guineas with him and playing the fool needlessly, when he might just as well have gone with empty pockets and searched and robbed the carriage with equal success.

More easily to be credited is his robbing of the Earl of Oxford at Maidenhead Thicket. Rumbold was no exquisite, having, as we have already learnt, been merely a bricklayer's apprentice before he assumed the crape mask, and, mounting a horse and sticking a pair of pistols in his belt, took to the road. He often assumed the appearance^[Pg 39] rough country farmer; but he was, at the same time, always a man of expedient. To say of him that he had ostlers and chambermaids in his pay, to give him information of likely travellers, is but to repeat the practice of every eminent hand in the high-toby craft. On the occasion which led to his great exploit here, he had been lurking for some well-laden travellers, who, luckily for them, took some other route, and he was just on the point of riding moodily off when two horsemen rode up the hill. As they drew near he perceived that they were the Earl of Oxford and a servant. That nobleman knew Rumbold (how the acquaintance had been made we are not told), and so it was necessary for the

highwayman to assume some sort of disguise. Here we perceive Rumbold's readiness of resource. He threw his long hair over his face, and, holding it in his teeth, rode up in this extraordinary guise and demanded the Earl's purse, with threats to shoot both if it was not immediately forth-coming.

That nobleman was Aubrey De Vere, twentieth and last Earl, the descendant of the old "fighting Veres" and colonel of the Oxford Blues, a regiment named after him, and not after the city of Oxford. Despite all these things, which might have made for valiance, he surrendered like the veriest woman, and submitted to the indignity of being searched. Rumbold rifled him, and at first found only dice and cards, until, coming to his breeches pockets, he turned [Pg 40]"nest of goldfinches"; that is to say, a heap of guineas. Saying he would take them home and cage them, Rumbold recommended the Earl to return to his regiment and attend to his duty, giving him eighteenpence as an encouragement.

From these examples, it will readily be seen that Maidenhead Thicket did not obtain its ill repute without due cause.

A number of incredible stories of Rumbold are told, both by Smith and Johnson, who seem to have made up for the little real information we have of his more than twenty years' career by writing absolutely unconvincing fiction around him. He was at last executed at Tyburn in 1689.

"CAPTAIN" JAMES WHITNEY

THERE is much uncertainty about the parentage and the career of James Whitney. The small quarto tract entitled *The Jacobite Robber*, which professes to give a life of Whitney by one who was acquainted with him, says he was born "in Hertfordshire, of mean, contemptible parentage, about two years after the Restauration of King Charles." Smith particularises Stevenage as the place in Hertfordshire, and Johnson, who copies almost everything in Smith, also adopts Stevenage. Waylen, on the other hand, who wrote a singularly good and well-informed book on the highwaymen of Wiltshire, believed Whitney to have been a son of the Reverend James Whitney, of Donhead St. Andrews, and says the highwayman practised largely on Salisbury Plain.

The majority, believing in the Hertfordshire origin of Whitney, fortify their statements by very full and particular accounts of how he was apprenticed to a butcher at Hitchin. We have here an interpolated story of how he and his master went to Romford to purchase calves (Essex calves were so famous that a native of Essex nowadays is still an "Essex calf"). The owner of one particularly fine calf they greatly desired to purchase required too much [Pg 42]t. He happened to be also the keeper of an alehouse, as well as a stock-raiser. While the butcher and Whitney were refreshing themselves in the house and the butcher was grumbling because he could not buy the calf at what he considered a fair price, Whitney thought of an easier way, and whispered to his master that it would be foolish to give good money for the calf when it could be had for nothing. The butcher and Whitney thereupon exchanged knowing winks, and agreed to steal the calf that very night.

Unhappily for them, a man with a performing bear had in the meanwhile arrived, and the landlord, removing the calf from the stable where it had been placed, installed the bear in its place.

At last, night having fallen, master-butcher and apprentice paid their reckoning and prepared to go. Leaving the house, they loitered about until all was quiet, and then, the two approaching the outhouse where the calf had been, Whitney went in to fetch it. The bear was resting its wearied limbs when Whitney's touch roused it. He was astonished in the dark to feel the calf's hair was so long, and was still more astonished when he felt the animal rear itself up on its hind legs and put its arms lovingly round him. Meanwhile the butcher, wondering what could keep Whitney so long, began softly through the doorway to bid him be quick.



WHITNEY HUGGED BY THE BEAR.

Whitney cried out that he could not get away, and he believed the devil himself had hold of him. [Pg 45]

"If it *is* the old boy," rejoined his master, with a chuckle, "bring him out. I should like to see what kind of an animal he is."

But Whitney's evident terror and distress soon brought him to the rescue, and the bear was made to release her prey.

Before Whitney had served his full time with the butcher, his master cashiered him for idleness. After some little intervening time he became landlord of a small inn at Cheshunt. He was ever, says the author of *The Jacobite Robber*, a passionate admirer of good eating and drinking, especially at other people's expense. The inn, says our author, was the "Bell" or the "White Bear," he would not be sure which. If the "Bell," it was a sign he should presently make a noise over all England; if the "White Bear," a token that the landlord was of as savage a nature as any wild beast.

As a matter of fact, it appears to have been the "George"; but what significance may be extracted from that I do not know.

The inn did not pay its way on legitimate trading, and the people of Cheshunt wondered how Whitney could keep the pot boiling. Yet they need not have wondered, while they could see and hear, three or four times a week, a knot of roaring gentlemen, who sang, drank, swore, and revelled, the landlord himself joining in, until it seemed as if the place were thronged with old Lucifer and his club-footed emissaries. These guests were, in fact, highwaymen, ^[Pg 46] one might have perceived, from their extravagant living and the unseasonable hours they kept.

At first Whitney had no hand in his customers' doings. As the quaint author of the tract already referred to says:

"It seems the conscientious Mr. Whitney, for all he was a well-wisher to the mathematicks and a friend to the tribe, did not at first care to expose his own dear person on the road; not that any one can justly tax him at the same time with cowardice, or want of valour (for had he been as plentifully stock'd with grace as he was with valour, he had never taken that employment upon him); but he prudently considered with himself that at present he ran no Risque of hanging for harbouring such people, and besides made a comfortable penny of them: Whereas, should he trade for himself, and scour the Highways to the Tune of *Dammee, Stand and Deliver*, he must certainly at one time or another make a Pilgrimage to *Tybourn*, and swinging in a Rope he had a Mortal Aversion to, because his Prophetical Grand-Mother had formerly told him it was a dry sort of a death.

"But at last an Old Experienced Brother of the Pad won him over to his Party, for, finding our Inn-keeper to be notably stored with all those ingredients and qualifications that are requisite to fit a Man for such a Vocation, he was resolved to leave no method unattempted till he had made an absolute conquest of him. In order to effect this, he re^[Pg 47]nts to him the meanness and servile condition of his present calling, how he was obliged to stand cap in hand to every pitiful Rascal that came to spend Six-pence in his house; that with all his care and diligence he only got a little poor contemptible Pittance, scarce sufficient to pay his Brewer and Baker, but on the other hand, if he would be adopted into their society, he would find Money come flowing in like a Spring Tide upon him; he would live delicately, eat and drink of the Best, and in short, get more in an hour than now he did by Nicking, and Frothing and wrong Reckonings for a whole Twelve Month together. That, as for the Gallows, a Man of Courage and Bravery ought never to be afraid of it, and, should the worst come to the worst, better Gentleman by far than himself had made a Journey to the other World in their Shoes and Stockings."

Thus admonished, Whitney stripped off the inn-keeper's apron, sold off his inn, and took to the road, where he distinguished himself among the foremost highway gentry of his time. As his biographer is fain to acknowledge, he proved to have "inherited all the Courage, Boldness, and Dexterity of the famous Claude Du Vall and the Golden Farmer, and the rest of his other noble Predecessors of the Pad."

This admiring authority then proceeds to give us an account of Whitney's first action, and tells how "he encountered a Jolly Red-fac'd Son of the Church bravely Mounted, with a large Canonical Rose in his Ecclesiastical Hat and ^[Pg 48]own fluttering in the Wind. He looked as if he had been hung round with Bladders. Him, within two miles of St. Albans, he accosts after this manner, 'Reverend Sir, the Gentlemen of your Coat having, in all conscience, enough preached up the edifying Doctrine of Passive Obedience and Non-Resistance, and now I am fully resolved to try the experiment, whether you Believe your own Doctrine, and whether you are able to Practise it. Therefore, worthy sir, in the name of the above-mentioned Passive Obedience and Non-Resistance, make no opposition, I beseech you, but deliver up the filthy Lucre you carry about you.'

"Now you must know that this rosy-gilled Levite had the wicked sum of six-score and ten guineas clos'd up in the waistband of his breeches, designed as a present to a worthy gentleman that lately helped him to a fat living (for you must not call it Symony for all the world, but christen it by the name of Gratitude, and so forth) but Captain Whitney, who, it seems, did not understand any of these softening distinctions, soon eased him of his Mammon, but not without a great deal of expostulation on the Levite's part, and, what was more barbarous, stript him of his spick-and-span new sacerdotal habit, sent his Horse home before him, to prepare his family, and having bound him to his good behaviour, left him all alone to his contemplations in an adjoining wood."

He then met a poor clergyman in threadbare gown, riding a sorry Rosinante, whose poor ribs in a starved b^[Pg 49]oked like the bars of a bird-cage. What would the typical outlaw, from the days of Robin Hood, onwards, have done in such a rencounter? Why, he would have given the poor divine the new robe and some money; and this Whitney did; handing him four or five bags of the best, saying: "Here is that will buy you a dozen or so of clean bands!" "Thus," says the biographer, "our brave Captain dispensed charities with one hand and plundered with the other."

One day, patrolling Bagshot Heath, he met a gentleman, and desired his purse and watch.

"Sir," said the gentleman, "'tis well you spoke first, for I was just going to say the same thing to you."

"Why then," quoth Whitney, "are you a gentleman-thief?"

"Yes," replied the stranger, "but I have had very bad success to-day, for I have been riding up and down all this morning, without meeting with any prize."

Whitney, upon hearing this doleful tale, wished him better luck, and took his leave.

That night, Whitney and this strange traveller chanced to stay at the same inn, but Whitney had so changed his dress in the meanwhile, and altered his manner, that he was not recognised. He heard his acquaintance of that morning telling another guest how smartly he had outwitted a highwayman that day, and had saved a hundred pou^[Pg 50]y his ready wit; and this revelation of how easily he had been hoodwinked made him determined, if it were at all possible, to take his revenge on the morrow. Meanwhile, he listened to the conversation.

The guest, who had been told of the adventure, replied that he also had a considerable sum upon him, and that he would like, if it were agreeable, to travel next day in company with so ready-witted a traveller.

Accordingly, the next morning they set forth together, and Whitney followed, a quarter of an hour later. He soon overtook them, and then, wheeling suddenly about, demanded their purses.

"We were going to say the same to you, sir," replied the ready-witted one.

"Were you so?" asked our hero; "and are you of my profession, then?"

"Yes," they both chorused.

"If you are," said Whitney, "I suppose you remember the old proverb, 'Two of a trade can never agree'; so you must not expect any favour on that score. But to be plain, gentlemen, the trick will do no longer: I know you very well, and must have your hundred pounds, sir; and your 'considerable sum,' sir," turning to the other; "let it be what it will, or I shall make bold to send a brace of bullets through each of your heads. You, Mr. Highwayman, should have kept your secret a little longer, and not have boasted so soon of having outwitted a thief. There is now nothing for you to [Pg 51] but to deliver or die!"

These terrible words threw them into a sad state of consternation. They were unwilling enough to lose their money, but even more unwilling to forfeit their lives; therefore, of two evils they promptly chose the least, and resigned their wealth.

Whitney then met on Hounslow Heath, one Mr. Hull, a notorious usurer, who lived in the Strand. He could hardly have chosen a wretch more in love with money, and therefore less willing to part with it. When the dreadful words, "Stand and deliver!" were spoken, he trembled like a paralytic and began arguing that he was a very poor man, had a large family of children, and would be utterly ruined if the highwayman were so hard-hearted as to take his money. Besides, it was a most illegal, also dangerous, action, to steal; to say nothing of the moral obliquity of those who did so.

"You dog in a doublet," exclaimed the now angered Whitney, "do you pretend to preach morality to an honest man than yourself. You make a prey of all mankind, and grind to death with eight and ten per cent. This once, however, sir, I shall oblige you to lend me what you have, without bond, consequently without interest: so make no more words."

The usurer thereupon reluctantly produced eighteen guineas, and handed them over with an ill grace, scowling darkly at the highwayman, and telling him he hoped one day to have the pleasure of seeing him riding up Ho [Pg 52] Hill, backwards.

It was a foolish thing to remind a gentleman of the road that he would probably some day be an occupant of the cart, travelling to Tyburn. Whitney had already turned to go when these words fell upon his ear; but he now turned back, thoroughly enraged.

"Now, you old rogue," said he, "let me see what a figure a man makes when he rides backwards, and let me have the pleasure, at least, of beholding you first in that posture."

With that, he pulled Hull off his horse, and then setting him on the animal's back again, face to tail, tied his legs together, and then gave the horse two or three cuts, so that it cantered smartly away and never stopped until Hounslow was reached; where the people, who knew the money-lender well and liked him little, had a hearty laugh at his expense before they untied him.

Whitney always affected to appear generous and noble. Meeting one day with a gentleman named Long, on Newmarket Heath, and having robbed him of a hundred pounds in silver, which he found in the traveller's portmanteau, tied up in a great bag, the gentleman told him he had a great way yet to go, and, as he was unknown upon the road, was likely to suffer great inconvenience and hardship, if he had not at least some small sum. Would he not give him back a trifle, to meet his travelling expenses?



WHITNEY AND THE USURER.

Whitney opened the bag of silver, and held it out at arm's length towards him, saying: "Here, take what [Pg 55] have occasion for."

Mr. Long then put in his hand, and took out a handful, as much as he could hold; to which Whitney made no sort of objection, but only said, with a laugh: "I thought you would have had more conscience."

Smith tells a long story of how Whitney and his band one day met a well-known preacher, a Mr. Wawen, lecturer at Greenwich Church, and, easing him of his purse, made him preach a sermon on the subject of thieving. A very similar story is told of Sir Gosselin (?Joscelyn) Denville and his outlaws, who in the reign of Edward the Second did surprising things all over England, not least among them the waylaying and robbing of a Dominican monk, Bernard Sympton by name, in a wood between Henley-on-Thames and Marlow, and afterwards compelling him to preach a sermon to like effect. Captain Dudley is said to have done the same; and indeed, whether it were the slitting of a weasand ("*couper gorge, par ma foy*," as Pistol might say), the taking of a purse, or the kissing a pretty woman, the highwaymen of old were all-round experts. But that they should have so insatiable a taste for "firstly, secondly, and thirdly, and then finally, dear brethren," I will not believe. Some ancient traditional highway robber once did so much, no doubt, and the freak has been duly fathered on others of later generations: just as the antique jests at the expense of College don [Pg 56]xford and Cambridge are refurbished up anew to fit the present age.

The Reverend Mr. Wawen responded as well as he could manage to Whitney's invitation, and, whether it be genuine or a sheer invention of Alexander Smith's, it is certainly ingenious, and much better reading than that said to have been preached by the Dominican monk, some three hundred and fifty years earlier.

"Gentlemen," began the lecturer from Greenwich church, "my text is THEFT; which, not to be divided into sentences or syllables, being but one word, which itself is only a monosyllable, necessity therefore obliges me to divide it into letters, which I find to be these five, T. H. E. F. T., Theft. Now T, my beloved, is Theological; H is Historical; E is Exegetical; F is Figurative; and T is Tropological.

"Now the theological part of my text is in two portions, firstly, in this world, and secondly, in the world to come. In this world, the effects it works are T, tribulation; H, hatred; E, envy; F, fear; and T, torment. For what greater tribulation can befall a man than to be debarred from sweet liberty, by a close confinement in a nasty prison, which must needs be a perfect representation of the Iron Age, since nothing is heard there but the jingling of shackles, bolts, grates, and keys; these last, my beloved, as large as that put up for a weathercock on St. Peter's steeple in Cornhill.

"However, I must own that you highwaymen may be a sort of Christians whilst under this tribulation, because [Pg 57] are a kind of martyrs, and suffer really for the truth. Again, ye have the hatred of all honest people, as well as the envy of gaolers if you go under their jurisdiction without money in your pockets. I am sure all of your profession are very sensible that a gaoler expects, not only to distil money out of your irregularities, but also to grow fat by your curses; wherefore his ears are stopped to the cries of others, as God's are to his, and good reason too; for, lay the life of a man in one scale, and his fees in the other, he would lose the first to obtain the second.

"Next, ye are always in as much fear of being apprehended as poor tradesmen in debt are of the Serjeant, who goes muffled like a thief too, and always carries the marks of one, for he steals upon a man cowardly, plucks him by the throat, and makes him stand till he fleeces him. Only the thief is more valiant and the honest man of the two.

"And then, when ye are apprehended, nothing but torment ensues; for when ye are once clapt up in gaol, as I have hinted before, you soon come under the hangman's clutches, and he hangs you up, like so many dogs, for using those scaring words, 'Stand and deliver!'

"The effect which theft works in the world to come is eternal, and there is no helping it. I shall therefore proceed to the historical part of my text, which will prove, from ancient history, that the art of Theft is of some antiquity, inasmuch as that Paris stole Helen, Theseus stole Ariadne, and Jason stole Medea. However, antiquity ought to be no pl^[Pg 58] vice, since laws, both Divine and human, forbid base actions, especially theft. For history again informs us that Sciron was thrown headlong into the sea for thieving: Cacus was killed by Hercules: Sisyphus was cut in pieces; Brunellus was hanged for stealing the ring of Angelicus; and the Emperor Frederick the Third condemned all thieves to the galleys.

"The Exegetical part of my text is a sort of commentary on what was first said, when I set forth that your transgressions were a breach of both divine and humane ordinances, which are utterly repugnant to all manner of theft; wherefore, if ye are resolved to pursue these courses still, note, my respect is such to you, although you have robbed me, that if you can but keep yourselves from being ever taken, I'll engage to keep you always from being hanged.

"The figurative part of my text is still to be set forth. Though I call you 'gentlemen,' yet in my heart I think ye to be all rogues; but I mollify my spleen by a *Charientismus*, which is a figure or form of speech mitigating hard matters with pleasant words. Thus, a certain man being apprehended, and brought before Alexander the Great, King of Macedon, for railing against him, and being demanded by Alexander why he and his company had so done, he made answer: 'Had not the wine been all drunk, we had spoken much worse.' Whereby he signified that those words proceeded rather from wine than malice, by which free and pleasant confession he assuaged Alexander's great displeasure, and ^[Pg 59]ained remission.

"But now, coming to the Tropological part of my text, which signifies drawing a word from its proper and genuine signification to another sense, as, in calling you most famous thieves; I desire your most serious attention, and that you will embrace this exhortation of St. Paul the apostle. 'Let him that stole, steal no more.' Or else the letters of my text point towards a tragical conclusion; for T, 'take care;' H, 'hanging;' E, 'ends not'; F, 'felony;' T, 'at Tyburn.'"

The parson having ended his sermon, which some of Whitney's gang took down in shorthand, they were so well pleased with what he had preached, that they were contented to pay him tithes; so, counting over the money they had taken from him, and finding it to be just ten pounds, they gave him ten shillings for his pains, and then rode away to seek whom they might next devour.

He then met Lord L—— shortly afterwards, near London, and robbed him single-handed. Knowing that his lordship moved in close attendance upon the King, William the Third, and perhaps being keenly conscious that the many serious robberies committed by himself and his men were drawing the net uncomfortably close around them, he made an offer to compound with the authorities. He said if the King would give him an indemnity for past offences, he wou^[Pg 60]ng in thirty of his gang, for military service in Flanders. So saying, he whistled, and, quite in the Roderick Dhu style, twenty or thirty mounted bandits at once appeared.

Whitney, having thus given proofs of his words, continued that, if the King refused his offer, His Majesty might send a troop of Dutchmen to apprehend him and his, but they would find it a hard task to take any, and that he and his men would stand on their defence, and bid them defiance.

There is little or nothing of the "Jacobite Robber" in the stories told of Whitney; but it seems to have been fully recognised that he was a somewhat belated adherent of James the Second. He gathered around him a gang that varied in numbers according to circumstances, but was occasionally about thirty strong. These he was enabled by his superior courage and resource to captain; and with the imposing mounted force they presented, he laid many important and wealthy personages under contribution near London. It was doubtless his gang that stopped and robbed the great Duke of Marlborough of five hundred guineas near London Colney, on the night of August 23rd, 1692, and as a Jacobite, Whitney would be particularly pleased at the doing of it. It is almost equally certain that the numerous other rich hauls about that time on the St. Albans road were the handiwork of Whitney's party. On December 6th, 1692, there was a pitched battle between Whitney's force and a troop of dragoon patrols, near Barnet. One dragoon was ^[Pg 61], and several wounded, and Whitney is most circumstantially said to have then been captured; but as an even more circumstantial account tells us, with a wealth of detail, how he was finally captured in Bishopsgate Street, on December 31st, this cannot be altogether correct.

Was it, we wonder, his professed Jacobite views that made many travellers so good-humoured with him as they are said to have been when he lightened their pockets? A fellowship in political views does not in our own days necessarily make a stranger free of our purse. Whitney, for example, meeting Sir Richard B—— between Stafford and Newport, accosted him with a "How now? whither away?"

"To London," replied the knight; whereupon Whitney troubled him for £4.

Then, much to our surprise, we read of Sir Richard, who appears to have known Whitney very well by sight, saying, "Captain, I'll give you a breakfast, with a fowl or two." It would have come more naturally to read that he offered to give him in charge!

Whitney politely declined, but said he would drink to the knight's health then and there; and, halting a passing wagon, broached a cask out of it on the spot.

In spite of a conflict of testimony, it seems to be clearly established that Whitney was finally captured on December 31st, 1692. He appears to have at some earlier time been taken, after a desperate fight with a "bagonet," and ^[Pg 62]ed in Newgate, whence he broke out with a four-pound weight on each leg. On this last occasion he made a determined resistance at the door of the house in which he was beset, fighting for over an hour with the officers and the mob. Most of his gang were afterwards captured; including a livery-stable keeper, a goldsmith, and a man-milliner.

Whitney appears to have been a man of medium height, to have had a scarred face, and to have lost one thumb: sliced off, probably, in one of his encounters with the patrols.

He endeavoured to purchase his liberty by "offering to discover his accomplices, and those that give notice where and when money is conveyed on the road in coaches and waggons." This offer was not accepted, and the order went forth that he was to be hanged at the Maypole in the Strand. Then he shifted his ground to include more startling secrets that he was ready to divulge, "if he may have his pardon." Jacobite plots were the commonplaces of that day. King James was not greatly liked by even the most ardent Jacobite, but King William was detested, and even those who had placed William on the throne did so merely as a political expedient. Thus the personally unpopular King was for ever harassed with plots hatched to assassinate him; and when Whitney hinted, not obscurely, that he could tell terrible tales if he would, it was thought advisable to have the highwayman out in a sedan-chair and to take him to Kensing^[Pg 63] under escort, that he might be examined, touching these plots. But it was soon discovered that he really knew nothing and that his idle "confessions" and "revelations" had no basis in fact.

He was not content to remain in Newgate in worn and shabby clothes.

"He had his taylor," says Luttrell, "make him a rich embroidered suit, with perug and hat, worth £100; but the keeper refused to let him wear them, because they would disguise him from being known."

That somewhat obscure phrase seems to mean that Whitney intended, under cover of his fine new suit, to make a dash for liberty.

His execution was finally fixed for February 1st, 1693, at Porter's Block, Smithfield. He made a very proper and a singularly restrained and well-chosen speech at the fatal spot:

"I have been a very great offender, both against God and my country, by transgressing all laws, human and divine. I believe there is not one here present but has often heard my name before my confinement, and have seen a large catalogue of my crimes, which have been made public since. Why should I then pretend to vindicate a life stained with deeds of violence? The sentence passed on me is just, and I can see the footsteps of Providence, which I had before profanely laughed at, in my apprehension and conviction. I hope the sense which I have of these things has enabled me to make my peace with Heaven, the only thing that is now of any concern to me. Join in your prayers with m^[Pg 64] dear countrymen, that God will not forsake me in my last moments."

"He seem to dye very penitent," says the original chronicler of these things: "and was an hour and a halfe in the cart before being turned off."

TWM SHON CATTI

A SINGULAR character, half mythical, and his exploits almost wholly so, is Twm Shon Catti; a prankish creature whom, nevertheless, the people of Carmarthenshire and Cardiganshire will not willingly let die.

Twm, it need hardly be said, was a Welshman. His name, duly translated from Cymraeg into English, means "Tom John Kate," *i.e.* "Tom, the son of Kate." Who was his other parent remains a matter of uncertainty, but he is thought to have been a local magnate, Sir John Wynne of Gwydir. Kate, his mother, was a country girl, of Tregaron, and Twm himself was born apparently about the third quarter of the seventeenth century; that is to say, if the half sprite and half human being of the legends can be said to belong to any easily-ascertained span of years. Some of his exploits certainly seem to belong to a later period.

But however that may be, he is yet the hero of a very wide countryside, in which any peasant is still able to give a very fair biography of him to the passing stranger, and is also quite competent to show him Twm's cave, in Din^[Pg 66]ll, or "Lliadiard-y-Ffin," overlooking the river Towy, near Ystrad Ffin. Composed in equal parts of Will-o'-Wisp, Dick Turpin (the idealised Turpin of legend, not the cowardly brute of cold-drawn fact), and Robin Hood, his career is one of marvels. Horse-thief, highwayman at one time and out-witter of highwaymen at another, special providence to the deserving, and scourge of the wicked, he always comes successfully out of encounters and difficulties. If for that peculiarity alone, he might reasonably be held mythical.

Starting in life as a farmer's boy, he afterwards found a place in the service of the local lord of the manor, in which his Puck-like pranks were first developed. As the secret of his birth was more or less an open one, these escapades were not often visited with the punishment another would almost certainly have incurred; and, besides, he was generally looked upon as a "natural": as one, that is to say, who is not more than half-witted. Thus, when he would steal the parson's horse in Llandovery and sell it to a squire some twenty miles off, he proved the truth of that old law which says one man may with impunity steal a horse, while another may not safely even look over the fence.

It all depends upon the man. In Twm's case, such an exploit was not the criminal business that would have brought an ordinary man to the gallows, but merely an escapade serving, like Prince Hal and Poins' fooling of Falstaff with the men in buckram, as "argument for a week, laughter for a month, and a good jest for ever." ^[Pg 67]

At the rather uncertain period in which Twm flourished there also flourished a highwayman in the locality, who, from his daring and savage disposition, was known as "Dio the Devil." This terrific person had carried off the young and beautiful wife of Sir John Devereux, lord of Ystrad Ffin, and Twm was successful in rescuing her. The obvious reward for this service was, bearing Twm's almost gentle origin in mind, to receive him in his house on equal terms: or, as some accounts have it, he entered the service of Sir John as jester. But whether he went as such, or not, he certainly acted the part very thoroughly, and kept the establishment always well entertained.

Twm was a perfect centaur of a horseman, and Sir John Devereux was almost as good in the saddle. Twm's custom was to back himself in heavy wagers to perform extraordinary feats of horsemanship, and then proceed, by hair-raising doings, to win the bets. Not only the physical, but the mental agility of these things took strangers at an utterly dumbfounded disadvantage; but the most astonishing of all was the one now to be related. An English guest who was staying with Sir John happened also to be a remarkable horseman, and had the advantage his Welsh host had not, of owning a thoroughbred. The talk ran high one day on the subject of horses and equitation, and the whimsical Twm promptly wagered twenty pounds he would put his horse to a jump where the Englishman dare not follow. ^[Pg 68]rsant with the not very fine specimens of horses to be found in his host's stable, the Englishman with contempt accepted the bet, quite easy in his mind that he must win.

A "numerous and distinguished company," as a modern chronicler of fashionable doings might say, assembled on the mountain-side on the appointed day, to see the challenger take this as yet unknown leap, and the stranger follow if he dared. They knew their Twm well enough to be quite convinced he had some mad project in view, to discomfit the Englishman; and what Welshman was there who would not have travelled far, and at much discomfort, to witness the humiliation of the "Saxon."

Twm was last upon the to-be-contested field, and a great shout of laughter went up as he was seen riding along upon a wretched horse, in the last stage of decrepitude. The Englishman did not quite know whether to feel insulted or amused, but Twm, once arrived on the scene, did not linger. Quickly he took a thick cloth and bound it over the head of his horse; and then, bidding the Englishman follow him, put his mount at a rift in the mountain-side some hundreds of feet deep. Over leapt the horse, and was in another half a minute lying dead, shattered in its fall on the rocks below.

Even those of his countrymen who knew the resourcefulness of their hero, and had backed him heavily^[Pg 69] lost heart; but in another minute up rose the head and shoulders of Twm above the edge, and he presently leapt among them unhurt, to receive his winnings from the astounded Englishman. He had adroitly slipped from the horse's back at the moment of his taking off, and leapt into the bushes that grew out of the face of the cliff. The horse itself merely met its end in a different manner from that already ordained for it that day, when it was to have been slaughtered, as being past work.

His friend and patron, Sir John Devereux, perceiving how well able Twm was to take care of himself, and being under the necessity of despatching a considerable amount of money in gold to London, and obliged at the same time to remain at home, he entrusted him with the commission. He would have given Twm an escort of one or two servants, but that worthy, shrewdly remarking that it would be as much worth their while as that of a highwayman to rob him, declined all company, and, in the oldest clothes he could find, set out alone on a shaggy Welsh pony. He had gone two-thirds of his journey without adventure, and put up one night, contentedly enough, at what is described as the "Hop Pole," a "lonely inn on the bleak downs near Marlborough"—although there really seems never to have been a house of that name near: perhaps "Shepherd's Shore," or the "Waggon and Horses" at Beckhampton would serve better. When he retired for the night, and was lying still and wakeful, he overheard the landlady and a strange man discussing him. The la^[Pg 70] was saying she did not suppose a traveller like our Twm, "dressed like a scarecrow and mounted on a piece of animated carrion, for which the rooks cawed as he rode along," was worth robbing.

"I don't know so much about that," he heard the other—obviously a highwayman—reply. "Very often these miserable-looking people you see on the roads disguise their wealth in this way, and are in reality carrying a great deal of money about with them: sometimes half a year's rent of a considerable estate. This fellow seems to be one of that kind. We shall see to-morrow."

Twm remembered having seen a plaguey ill-looking fellow in the house, and lay long awake, wondering what he should be at, and pleased that, anyhow, he was not to be interfered with that night. But he felt sure of being followed as soon as ever he left the house, and bethought him, there and then, of an ingenious plan. Before their very eyes next morning, he rummaged in the peak of his saddle, as if to arrange it more comfortably, and in so doing managed to disclose some gold to their covetous gaze. Then he was soon off; not travelling very fast, as may be supposed, on his laden pony. So soon as he was out of sight of the inn, he hopped off and transferred the money from the saddle to his pockets. Then he resumed his way.

Presently, as he had expected, he heard the highwayman thundering along in his rear. When the pursuer came in sight, Twm hurriedly dismounted again, and, unloosening the saddle, flung it as far as he was able into a pond that spread by the wayside. Dismounting himself, the highwayman, leaving Twm for the moment, plunged knee-deep into the pond for the treasure, as he supposed, and Twm leapt nimbly on his thoroughbred horse: no highwayman of tradition ever riding a horse that was not thoroughbred, whatever the sorry jades the real ones had often to bestride.

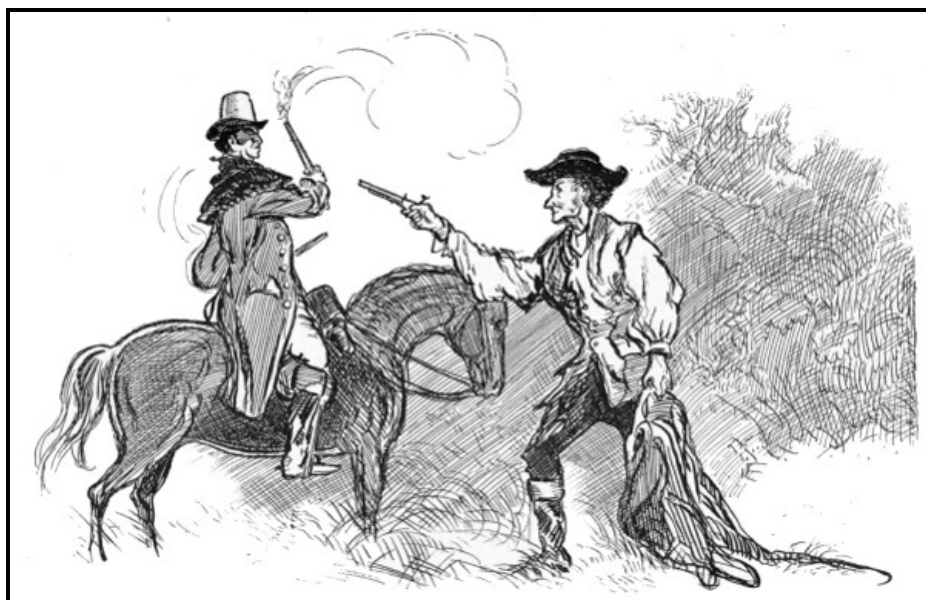
When Twm cantered happily into Marlborough on the highwayman's steed, and told his story, the townspeople, who it appears had suffered much from the knights of the road, welcomed him as a hero, and entertained him at the Town Hall. If he had not been in a hurry, they might perhaps have presented him with the freedom of the borough. Perhaps they did so on his return. He sold his horse for a good round sum, for he thought it dangerous to ride up to London on so fine a mount. Therefore, armed with one pistol, he resumed the journey on foot, and to my mind it seems either a testimony to the honesty or the lack of enterprise among the burgesses of Marlborough, that some one or other of them did not follow him into the secluded glades of Savernake Forest, through which his road lay, and do for him.

But he neared London without other encounters, until he came upon Hounslow Heath. Here the tale of the confiding highwayman and the apparently stupid countryman, often told, but always fresh, had its origin. Twm was duly picked up on the Heath by a robber, who appears to have been none other than Tom Dorbel, famous in his day. Dorbel was bristling with an armoury of pistols. Our ingenious Twm, affecting to be seized with the abject terror of a country lout, earnestly begged the ruffian, before he robbed him, to put half-a-dozen bullets through his coat, so that his master might easily see how good a fight he had made of it, before yielding his treasure. He took off his coat for the purpose, and the highwayman very obligingly complied with this very reasonable request.

Twm capered about like the idiot he pretended to be. "That wass ferry coot of you—yess, inteet," he said; "and if you wass put another look you, through my hat, it wass pe petter still, whateffer."

The highwayman, wondering what special kind of lunatic he had happened upon, fired his last pistol through the hat as desired, when "Now," said Twm, himself producing a pistol, "it iss my turn. Out with your coin, or I will put a pig hole through your pody." And Twm not only saved his master's coin, but robbed the highwayman as well.

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TWM SHON CATTI AND THE HIGHWAYMAN.

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JOHN WITHERS AND WILLIAM EDWARDS

JOHN WITHERS, one of the most ferocious of those highwaymen who did not scruple to add murder to their crimes, was born in the last quarter of the seventeenth century, at Lichfield. He was the son of a butcher, in so small a way of business that his father could not find employment for him; and so, in order to get a start in life, he set off for London. Arrived there, he was drawn by his natural bent into the company of criminals, and, throwing in his lot with them, was soon arrested and found guilty on charges of larceny, with violence. He escaped punishment by accepting the offer, generally made at that time, of enlisting in the army, and was sent out to the Flanders expedition. Here, perhaps, we see an explanation of the well-known expression, "Our armies swore terribly in Flanders." If it was composed largely of reprieved criminals, there can be no doubt that its language could not have been choice, nor its conduct exemplary. "My blackguards," the Duke of Wellington styled his men, who fought so well and endured so greatly in the Peninsula; for even so lately as that period the rank-and-file were composed of the offscourings of society; but they must [Pg 76] been well-mannered gentlemen, compared with the soldiers of a century earlier.

Sacrilege presently engaged the attention of Withers in Flanders. Entering a church in Ghent during high mass, and observing the people placing money in a box that stood in front of a figure of the Virgin, he awaited a favourable opportunity, picked the lock, and filled his pockets with the contents. "Unfortunately," says his sympathetic biographer, "in haste to carry off his plunder, some of the money fell upon the pavement, ringing out sharply in the stillness of the church; so that he was detected in the act."

Taken before the venerable Cardinal, and examined, he was about to be taken off in custody; when, falling upon his knees, with uplifted hands he begged the Cardinal to listen to him. He then declared with ready lies, that, brought up as a heretic, and falling into evil ways that had brought him to want and misery, he had seen the folly of his life, and offered prayers before the effigy of the Virgin Mary. While he was thus praying, he continued, the figure pointed to the box, as if it were giving him leave to take what was necessary to supply his wants. In consequence of this singular interposition on his behalf, he concluded he had made up his mind to become a Roman Catholic, but at the moment of this decision he had been arrested.

This singular narrative was heard by the Cardinal with much surprise, and at the close of it he exclaimed [Pg 77] ently, "A miracle indeed!" All who had heard it also shared the same opinion and "it being justly concluded that none had a better right to dispose of the money than the Virgin herself, to whom it was devoted," Withers was carried in solemn procession, as a convert singularly honoured, and placed before the high altar while an Ave Maria was sung.

It is not, it may be added, necessary to believe this precious story in its entirety. Withers was, of course, as we shall see, capable of worse than this, and the probability is that the actual theft was committed by him; but we can hardly believe the Roman Catholic clergy quite such fools as they figure here.

At Antwerp, Withers made a second essay in sacrilege. There he stole a great silver crucifix. But he felt that there was really no career for him in these enterprises, and so, deserting from the army, he crossed to England, and took up the profession of highwayman.

It would be of little interest to follow Withers in all his highway doings, but the adventure of himself and two companions with an actor on the road is perhaps worth repeating. They espied one morning a gentleman walking alone and displaying all the gestures of passion, distraction, and fury to excess; casting his eyes to heaven, stretching forth his arms imploringly, or folding them moodily upon his breast. Near by was a pond.

"Make haste!" exclaimed Withers to his companions, "'tis even as we thought; the poor gentleman is just g [Pg 78] o kill himself for love." Then, rushing towards him, two of them taking an arm each, Withers addressed him earnestly: "Pray, sir, consider what you do! what a sad thing it would be to drown yourself here. Be better advised and consider, before it is too late."

The actor was indignant. "What a plague is all this for?" he asked. "I am not going to hang, stab, or drown myself. I am not in love, but only a player, learning a part."

"A player, are you?" rejoined Withers. "If I had thought that, you should have drowned yourself, or hanged yourself indeed, before we had taken the pains to follow you up and down. But, to make amends for our trouble, the least you can do will be to give us what money you have."

So saying, they bound his hands and legs together, emptied his pockets of ten shillings, and took away a silver-hilted sword he carried.

It is, in this connection, curious to observe the animus displayed against the stage. It is met largely in the satire of the time, and not merely in the literature inspired by the Puritans, but even in those by no means puritanical books and plays in which the highwaymen figure as heroes. Thus, in the play, the *Prince of Priggs*, written around the career of Captain Hind, but not intended to be staged, we find the prologue chiefly concerned with a sneer at those [Pg 79] and parrots," silenced under the sour rule of the Commonwealth:

Since that the Apes and Parrots of the Stage,
Are silenc'd by the Clamours of the Age;
Like Conies forc'd to feed on bran and grass,
(The true Disciples of *Pithagoras*)
Whose Copper-Lace, [1] and Copper-Noses once
Made them to think themselves great *Prester-Johns*:
You'l (sure) have cause to praise, and thank that man,
Can make each thief a compleat *Roscian*:
Then much good doe't you (Sirs) fall to and eat,
You ne're had cheaper (perhaps) better meat.

[1] *i.e.* imitation gold-lace.

The last adventure of Withers was that in which he and a companion, William Edwards by name, near Beaconsfield beset a nobleman and his servant. Withers' horse was shot in the resistance they made, and, mounting behind his friend, they took to flight. But the horse with two riders was no match for the others, not so heavily burdened; and, being hard pressed along the road, the two fugitives dismounted and ran across country in the direction of London. Sleeping in the hedges overnight, the next morning they continued their flight. Meeting, one mile on the London side of Uxbridge, with a penny postman, they robbed him of eight shillings; and Withers, to prevent their being identified, drew a large butcher's knife he carried, and barbarously cut his throat. They then ripped up his body, filled his stomach with stones, and flung him into the little stream that here flows across the road. The burial registers of Hillingdon church bear witness to this and to another murder they appear to have committed at, or near, the same place [Pg 80] 1702, November 13. Will Harrison, Postman, murdered near the Great Bridge between Hillingdon and Uxbridge. November 28. Edward Symonds, Drover, murdered at the same time, and about the same place, and by the same hands."

Withers and Edwards were arrested the following January in Norfolk, for a highway robbery committed there, and were tried and executed at Thetford, April 16th, 1703.

PATRICK O'BRIAN

"PATRICK O'BRIAN," says Captain Alexander Smith, "was a native of Ireland." Perhaps we might, without undue stress of mind, have guessed as much. It seems that his parents were very indigent natives of Loughrea, and so Patrick left his native land for England, and presently enlisted in the Coldstream Guards. But he was not a good soldier; or, at any rate, if good in that profession, infinitely better in the practice of all kinds of vice. He was resolved not to want money, if there were any to be obtained, no matter the means to it; but began cautiously by running into debt at public-houses and shops; and then followed up that first step by borrowing from every acquaintance, until that source was dried up.

When all these means to existence were exhausted, O'Brian went upon the road. The first person whom he met was, strange to say, another unmitigated scoundrel: none other, in fact, than the Reverend William Clewer, vicar of Croydon, who here demands a little paragraph entirely to himself.

William Clewer, who was collated to the living of Croydon in 1660, was notorious, we are told, for his singular^[Pg 82] life of litigation, unparalleled extortions, and criminal and disgraceful conduct. His character became so bad, and his ways of life so notorious, that he was eventually ejected in 1684. He must have been, indeed, pre-eminently bad, to have been ejected in that easy-going age. Dispossessed of his living, on these substantial grounds, he at last died, in 1702, and was buried in St. Bride's, Fleet Street.

We are indebted to Smith for the account of the meeting of O'Brian and this shining light of the clerical profession:

"O'Brian, meeting with Dr. Clewer, who was try'd once and burnt in the hand at the Old Bailey for stealing a silver cup, coming along the road from Acton, he demanded his money; but the reverend doctor having not a farthing about him, O'Brian was for taking his gown. At this our divine was much dissatisfied; but, perceiving his enemy would plunder him, quoth he: 'Pray, sir, let me have a chance for my gown'; so, pulling a pack of cards out of his pocket, he further said: 'We'll have, if you please, one game of all-fours for it, and if you win it, take it and wear it.' This challenge was readily accepted by the footpad; but, being more cunning than his antagonist at slipping and palming the cards, he won the game, and the doctor went contentedly home without his canonicals."

On one memorable occasion, O'Brian happened, in his lurkings upon the road, to stop a man who prove^[Pg 83] to be an acrobat, and who, when Patrick bade him "stand and deliver!" instantly jumped over his head. The ignorant and superstitious Irishman thought he had chanced upon the devil himself, come to sport with him before his time, and while he was trembling and crossing himself, the acrobat, rolling along the road in a series of somersaults and cartwheels, got clear away.

These adventures appear to have been mere tentative experiments, for we learn that O'Brian then deserted from the army and commenced highwayman in earnest. He one day stopped the carriage of none other than Nell Gwynne and addressed her thus: "Madam, I am a gentleman. I have done a great many signal services to the fair sex, and have, in return, been all my life maintained by them. Now, as I know you to be a charitable woman, I make bold to ask you for a little money; though I never had the honour of serving you in particular. However, if any opportunity shall ever fall in my way, you may depend upon it I will not be ungrateful."

Nell, we are told, made this mercenary knight-errant a present of ten guineas.

It was the same with O'Brian as with every other wicked man, says Smith; he was eager to lead others into the evil path himself had chosen. In particular, he induced a young man named Wilt to become a highwayman; and Wilt was unfortunate enough to be apprehended in his first experiment and to be hanged for it.

O'Brian was also arrested, and hanged at Gloucester. After his body had swung the usual time, it was cut^[Pg 84] and his friends were allowed to carry it off. When it was taken indoors, it was observed to move slightly, strange to say; upon which a surgeon was hurriedly called; and, what with being bled and his limbs being exercised, O'Brian was presently restored to life.

This marvellous recovery was kept a strict secret for a time, and it was hoped the experience would have a salutary effect, the more especially as his friends were willing to contribute towards his support in some retired employment. He agreed to reform his life, and, indeed, while the memory of the bitterness of death was fresh upon him, kept his promise; but as that dreadful impression wore off by degrees, he returned to his former ways. Abandoning an honest life, he procured a horse (Smith says he purchased one, but we may be allowed our doubts upon that matter) "and other necessaries": *i.e.* pistols, powder and ball, and sword, and again visited the road.

This was about one year after his execution and supposed death, and the travelling public of the districts he had principally affected had long grown tired of congratulating themselves upon his disappearance, and were quite accustomed to thinking of him as a memory. It was, therefore, a bad shock to the gentleman whom he had last robbed, and for plundering whom he had been, to all appearance, satisfactorily turned off, when he was the first pe^[Pg 85] to be stopped by O'Brian in this second series of his adventures.

His consternation, we are told, and may readily believe, was great. "Wher—why?" he asked, with chattering teeth, "I ther—thought you had been hanged a twelvemonth ago."

"So I was," rejoined O'Brian, "and therefore you ought to imagine that what you see now is only my ghost. However, lest you should be so uncivil as to hang my ghost too, I think the best way is to secure you." So saying, he discharged a pistol through the gentleman's head, and, alighting from his horse, in a fury hewed the body to pieces with his hanger.

Later, he committed a fearful atrocity in Wiltshire, which, although fully detailed in contemporary literature, cannot be set forth here. He carried off at the same time no less a sum of money than £2,500; but was fortunately brought to justice after a further two years of miscellaneous plundering, chiefly through the evidence of an accomplice lying under sentence of death in Bedford gaol. He was taken at his lodgings in Little Suffolk Street, by the Haymarket, and then sent down to Salisbury, to be tried for his Wiltshire enormity. Once lodged in gaol there, he confessed a series of crimes, for which he was executed on April 30th, 1689, aged thirty-one.

JACK BIRD

JACK BIRD was humbly born and as humbly educated. When it is added that he was born in the second half of the seventeenth century, it will rightly be supposed that his education did not include any of the sciences, and that it probably did not go far beyond teaching him to write his own name. He had no use for even that small accomplishment, for he was apprenticed to a baker, and before his indentures were expired had run away and 'listed for a soldier in the foot-guards; being almost immediately sent out to the Low Countries. He served under the Duke of Monmouth at the siege of Maestricht, but found too many masters in the army, and so deserted and made his way to Amsterdam, where he commenced a new career by stealing a piece of silk. He was detected in the act, taken before a magistrate, and condemned to a term of hard labour in the "rasp-house," where he was set to rasping log-wood, and to other severe drudgeries, for the term of twelve months. Unaccustomed to such hard labour, Jack fainted at his tasks, but the labour-master set it down to laziness, and to cure it, chained him in the bottom of an empty cistern by one foot, and used a number of taps to be turned on, so that the cistern began rapidly to fill and the prisoner to be obliged, as the cistern was deeper than his own height, to work vigorously at a pump fixed in it, lest the water should gain upon, and drown, him. An hour's experience of this ingenious punishment rendered him quite anxious to return to the labour that had before been too much for him.

At the end of his term of bondage he hastened to take leave of Holland and the Hollanders, who had proved themselves such connoisseurs in quaint punishments. In England, justice certainly was more severe, and hanged men who stole quite trivial things, but it did not make people perform such hard labour, and Jack was one of those who would rather die than work. There are many of his kind even now.

Although hard labour was distasteful to our hero, he was by no means satisfied to live as humbly as he had been born, and his thoughts turned lightly to the road, as a likely place on which to pick up a good living without over-exertion. There was the choice of footpad or highwayman, and of course he chose the higher branch of the profession; for a footpad had to pad the hoof and be content, after all, with robbing the comparatively poor; while a highwayman could cut a fine figure on horseback, plunder the best, and be at little personal fatigue in doing so. Many foolish fellows, commencing highwayman, would hire, or even purchase, a horse; not so Jack Bird. "Thorough" was his motto and he began business by stealing the mount he fancied. At the same time he took excellent good care to go fully armed, for we read that he provided himself with six good pistols and a broadsword. In this fortified condition, and in the dress of a gentleman, he opened his campaign. His first few attempts were highly successful, but he soon learned, in a painful adventure on the Dover Road, between Gravesend and Chatham, that fortune is fickle. There he encountered one Joseph Pinnis, a pilot, who was returning from London, where he had received ten or twelve pounds for piloting a Dutch ship up-river. He had been so unfortunate as to lose both hands during an engagement in the Dutch war, some years earlier, and it seemed to our callous highwayman an easy task to rob him.

Summoned to "Stand and deliver!" the pilot replied, "You see, sir, that I have never a hand, so cannot take my money out of my pocket. Be so kind, therefore, as to take the trouble to search me."

The highwayman, without the slightest misgiving, complied with this very reasonable request, and securing the pilot's purse, began to examine its contents, when he found himself suddenly seized around the waist by the traveller, who appeared to have enormous strength in his arms, even though he had no hands. He succeeded in overthrowing the highwayman, and falling upon him, beat him fearfully about the face with his metal-shod wrists. [Pg 89]

Presently some other travellers approached, and, asking the cause of the struggle, Pinnis told them: asking them to take a hand and give the ruffian a further drubbing, and adding that he was almost out of breath with what he had done already.

The travellers then, informed of the whole affair, conducted Bird in custody to a magistrate, who committed him to Maidstone gaol, where he was tried and condemned to death, but was afterwards, for some reason that has escaped the historian, pardoned and set at liberty, to work more outrages upon unarmed and inoffensive folk.

At first, however, the danger and indignity he had passed through, of being so completely vanquished by a handless man, whom he had at first foolishly despised, quite put him out of conceit with himself and the road, and he resolved to abandon an employment which had at first promised so well, only to turn out so ill. But work—real work—was uncongenial as ever, and as he had to exist somehow, it happened that the road called him successfully again, after all.

The first person he encountered in his new series of adventures was a Welsh drover, who proved to be a muscular man, and the very devil of a fellow with that nasty weapon, the quarter-staff. "Once bit, twice shy," murmured Jack, withdrawing swiftly out of reach. "If a villain of a sailor without hands can overthrow me, I shall not venture in reach of one that has hands, for fear of something worse." So, he pulled a pistol from the armoury he carried in his belt, and from a safe distance shot the drover through the head. He then searched the body and found, to his disgust, only eighteenpence. But he summoned what philosophy he could over this disappointment, and, cynically remarking that "'Tis a price worth killing a man for, any time," rode off without the least remorse.

On another occasion he met the original "Poor Robin," the almanac-writer and humorous prognosticator; and as he did not disdain to exact contributions from the poor, as well as the rich (although "Poor Robin" probably was by no means so poor as his name would imply), he desired the calendar-maker to halt and surrender. As this was the first time Poor Robin had heard such language, and as he had received no hint of this occasion from the stars, he stood and stared, as if himself had been planet-struck.

"Come now," said Jack, "this is no child's play: I am in earnest."

Robin pleaded the poverty to which, he said, his nickname bore witness.

"That," returned Bird, "is a miserable, threadbare excuse, and will not save your bacon."

"But," pleaded the almanac-maker, "as author of those calendars that yearly come out in my name, I have canonised a great many gentlemen of your profession; look in them for their names, and let this be my protection."

But all in vain; Bird ransacked his pockets, and from them extracted fifteen shillings, took a new hat from [Pg 91] head, and requested him, as he had now given him cause, to canonise him also.

"Ay!" exclaimed Poor Robin grimly, "that will I, when you have suffered martyrdom at Tyburn, which will not be long hence."

"Poor Robin's" publications, it may be said, in this connection, are well worth examination. In an age when Lilly, Perkins, and a host of others issued prophetic almanacs, divining future events from the stars, and were extensively believed in, "Poor Robin's" almanac, year by year, made much fun out of those pretensions; fun that sometimes reads curiously modern. Seventeenth-century humour is, as a rule, as flat to the modern taste as champagne opened and left to stand, but much of "Poor Robin's" wit and humour still sparkles. While Perkins, with a provoking solemnity, would give a chronological table of events from the Year One and would proceed by degrees from "Adam, created 1, B.C., 3962," and would continue by way of "Methuselah, born 687, B.C., 2306," to "The Tyrant Oliver began his government, December 16th, 1653"; "Poor Robin" would devote his attention largely to the days when highwaymen were hanged, and would draw farcical conclusions from planetary dispositions. Thus we find him saying:

"Now the effects of the conjunction of Saturn and Mars will much operate: such conjunctions are always attended with remarkable accidents. There was one in the year 1672, and the German Princess rode up Holborn Hill; [Pg 92] her in 1673, and Du Vail visited the three-legged tenement at Hyde Park Corner. I might instance in divers other examples, but these shall suffice."

The so-called "German Princess" was an adventuress, really a native of Canterbury, and a daughter of one of the choristers in the Cathedral there, named Moders. She was hanged at Tyburn, in 1678 (not in 1672), and so was Du Vall (not at Hyde Park Corner, and not in 1673).

In his burlesque monthly forecasts of the weather and public events, he evidently reflects upon his serious contemporaries, whose predictions would occasionally go wrong, and who, like our modern "Old Moore," would in consequence grow less cocksure and more cautious, and would then more or less cleverly tell readers to "expect" something or other, together with such eminently safe remarks for February and March as, "Wind and rainstorms are to be looked for by the farmer."

In February 1664, for example, "Poor Robin," in burlesque of this kind of thing, warns his readers to "expect some showers of rain, either this month or the next, or the next after that, or else we shall have a very dry spring.... The twenty-seventh day of this month died Cardinal Mazarine, and if you would know the reason why he died, then, I answer, it was because he could live no longer."

Under June, he declares that, "If the frost nips the fruit trees, there will be no apples." In July, "Fleas [Pg 93] grow troublesome, and will lie with you without leave," and elsewhere we find that "Tyburn shall be a great eye-sore to Highway men and cut-purses," and that "The leafless tree betwixt London and Paddington will this month bear fruit, but it will be only Medlers, and they are stark naught until they are rotten." The which extracts fully illustrate the allusions in the short life of Jack Bird.

Made bold by a long series of successes, Bird procured a good horse and determined never again to stoop to robbing for mere shillings. A meeting with the Earl of —, rolling along in his carriage, accompanied by his chaplain, and attended by two servants, gave him his first opportunity of putting this excellent determination into practice.

"You must stop, my lord!" exclaimed Bird, threatening him with one pistol, and the coachman with the other.

"The devil I must!" said his lordship; "who the——"—here the chaplain gave a loud cough, and the word was lost in the throaty rasp he produced—"what the——" ("ahem!" from the chaplain) "are you then, fellow, that you bid me pull up on the roadway for you, you——?"

"An honest collector of tolls, your lordship," said Bird: "your purse this instant!"

"So! that is the way of it?" replied his lordship. "I am very little anxious about the small sum I have about me, but I intend you shall fight for it."

Bird then flew into a passion, and swore terribly, after the low fashion then proverbially prevalent among o [Pg 94] diers in the Low Countries. He waved his pistols excitedly.

"Don't lose your temper," said my lord. "When I said 'fight,' I meant boxing, and not shooting, and I will fight you fairly for all the money I have, against nothing."

"That is an honourable challenge, my lord," replied Bird, "provided none of your servants be near us."

His lordship then commanded them to withdraw to a distance. The chaplain, however, could not endure the thought of the Earl fighting while he was but an idle spectator, and requested the honour of being his patron's champion.

Matters were arranged: the divine stripped off his gown, and in another half a minute the scene resounded with the thuds and grunts of the combatants, as they planted blows home on each other's faces and bodies. In less than a quarter of an hour the chaplain was knocked out of time, with only breath enough remaining to exclaim, "I'll fight no more!" Bird was unquestioned victor. "Now, my lord," said he, turning to the carriage, "if it please your lordship, I will take a turn with you."

"Not I!" earnestly replied the Earl, "for if you can beat my chaplain, you will surely beat me, for we have tried it out before." So saying, he handed the highwayman the sum of twenty guineas he was carrying.



JACK BIRD FIGHTS THE CHAPLAIN.

Bird's career was closed by a foolish act. He, in company with a woman, knocked down and robbed a ma^[Pg 97] Drury Lane. The woman was seized on the spot, but Bird escaped. Going, however, to visit her in prison, he himself was arrested; and, being found guilty, he was executed at Tyburn, March 12th, 1690, aged forty-two.

WILL OGDEN, JACK BRADSHAW, AND TOM REYNOLDS

WILL OGDEN, who was born in Walnut Tree Alley, Tooley Street, Southwark, now claims our attention. He was a waterman by trade and a highwayman by inclination, so that he presently exchanged the river for the road. But he did not blossom out all at once as a fully-equipped highwayman. He passed a kind of transition period of about two years in the plundering of ships lying in the Pool, between Southwark and Billingsgate, and in the rifling of waterside shops. In these activities he was associated with one Tom Reynolds, a native of Cross Key Alley, Barnaby Street, and admiral of a sludge-barge. Being apprehended in the burglary of a watch-maker's shop, they were lodged in Newgate, and tried and convicted at the Old Bailey; but received a pardon, on what grounds does not appear.

This ended their burgling experiences, and they then agreed to go upon the road, in the humbler, padding form of the highwayman's trade.

Early in their experiences, Ogden one evening met a parson walking home by the light of the moon, and a [Pg 99]ched him in the character of a distressed seaman walking the highway to the nearest port, where he might chance to get a ship. His dismal story excited the compassion of the parson, who gave him sixpence and passed on.

He had not proceeded far when Ogden, who had hurried round in advance of him by a side lane, approached him again, and renewed his story.

"You are the most impudent beggar I ever met," exclaimed the parson; but Ogden told him he was in very great want, and that the sixpence he had received would not carry him very far. The parson then gave him half-a-crown, which Ogden gratefully accepted, adding: "These are very sad times, and there's horrid robbing abroad; so, if you have any more money about you, you may as well let me have it, as another who don't deserve it so much, and may perhaps even ill-use you, and, binding you hand and foot, make you lie in the cold all night. If you'll give me your money, I'll take care of you, and conduct you safely home."

An offer of this kind, so delicately and yet so significantly framed, had only to be made to be accepted by any prudent man, who did not feel himself equal to knocking that impudent humorist on the head; and so the parson made a virtue of necessity, and, as cheerfully as he could, handed him all his money; about forty shillings.

Ogden then remarked, "I see you have a watch, sir; you may as well let me have that too." Whereupon the [Pg 100] also changed hands.

As they were thus plodding along two or three men, accomplices of the ingenious Ogden, came out of the wayside bushes; but Ogden calling out their pass-words, "The moon shines bright," they let them proceed. A little further on, the same incident was repeated, by which the parson could clearly see that, had he not met with the gentle and persuasive Ogden, he might in all likelihood have fallen into far worse hands, and have been ill-used and tied up, even as he had been warned.

The clergyman was at last brought safely to his own door, and so greatly appreciated this safe-conduct—though at the loss of some forty shillings and a watch—that he invited Ogden in; but that person was as cautious as ingenious, and declined. He thought the clergyman was laying a trap for him; but he said he had no objection to taking a drink outside. The good parson then brought a bottle of wine, and, drinking to Ogden, gave him the bottle and the glass to help himself, upon which he ran off with both.

A little later, Ogden met a well-known dandy of that time, Beau Medlicott by name. He commanded the Beau to stand and empty his pockets, but instead of doing so, he drew his sword and made some half-hearted passes with it. Ogden thereupon drew his pistols, and the Beau was obliged to yield to superior armament. But Ogden might have left that fashionable person alone, for he had little about him. Like the more or less famous music-hall character, "I [Pg 101]a," of whom he must surely have been the ancestor, he was scarcely worth robbing. Of what was that music-hall celebrity possessed?

He'd a penny papah collah round his throat, la-di-da;
A penny papah flowah in his coat, la-di-da;
In his mouth a penny pick, in his hand a penny stick,
And a penny in his pocket, la-di-da, la-di-da,
And a penny in his pocket, la-di-da!

The contents of Beau Medlicott's pockets were pitiful enough to draw tears of rage from any self-respecting highwayman: consisting only of two half-crowns; and one of them was a brass counterfeit!

Ogden very rightly gave that cheap toff a good thrashing.

Reynolds does not appear in the stories just narrated; but in addition to another ally, Bradshaw by name, said to have been a grandson of that Serjeant Bradshaw who was one of the regicides, he now appears lurking in the woods on Shooter's Hill, one night in 1714, for whatever fortune might be pleased to send them. It was poor sport that evening, for only a servant-girl, one Cecilia Fowley, came along the road, carrying her box; but these low-down footpads despised nothing, and were ready to rob any one.

It was not worth the while of the three, they thought, to rush out of their lurking-place for the sake of one servant-girl, and so they deputed Bradshaw for the job. He accordingly sprang into the road, seized the box, and b [Pg 102] into fragments. It contained the girl's clothes, "and fifteen shillings, being all her wages for three months' service." (Servants were cheap then, it seems.)

Turning over these things, Bradshaw turned out a hammer, which the girl seized, and suddenly dealt him a blow with it upon the temple, followed by another with the claw of the hammer upon his neck, which tore his throat open. He fell down in the road, and died there.

At that moment, up came a gentleman, to whom the girl narrated the circumstances. He searched the dead man's

pockets, and found in them a large sum of money and a whistle. Putting the whistle to his mouth, he blew upon it—a rash enough thing to do—and thereupon Ogden and Reynolds leapt out from the wayside coverts. Finding, however, that something disastrous had happened, and that it was a stranger who had whistled them, they fled.

Ogden and Reynolds at a later date met a tallyman, who was a well-known trader in St. Giles, and demanded his money. "Money!" he exclaimed; he was merely a poor man, who had the greatest difficulty in earning his daily bread.

"Thou spawn of h—ll!" exclaimed Ogden, in a violent passion—or, at least, an excellent imitation of it—"have pity on thee, shall I? No, sirrah, I know thee too well, and I would almost as soon be kind to a bailiff or an informing constable, as to you. A tallyman and a rogue are terms of similar import. Every Friday you set up a tenter in the Marsh^[Pg 103]court, upon which you rack and stretch poor prisoners like English broadcloth, beyond the staple of the wool, till the threads crack; which causes them, with the least wet, to shrink, and presently to wear threadbare. I say that you, and all your calling, are worse rogues than ever were hanged at Tyburn."

After this abominable abuse, Ogden went over his pockets, stripped him naked, and bound him hand and foot, and left him in a ditch, "to ruminate on his former villainies." By which it would seem quite evident that tallymen shared the hatred felt for attorneys.

Ogden and Reynolds were the particular friends of Thomas Jones and John Richardson, the one a butler and the other a footman, in the employ of a gentleman living at Eltham. They instructed the footman and the butler in their own business, and it was not long before they took to robbing on Blackheath, whenever their master was away from home. On one of these occasions, they plundered a gentleman, and left him bound on the heath, and, their master coming home unexpectedly, found him there, and after the manner of a Good Samaritan, took him to his own house, and gave him a glass of wine, to recruit his spirits. The butler no sooner appeared, than the ill-used traveller, much to the astonishment of himself and his master, recognised him as one of the men who had attacked and robbed him^[Pg 104]; guilty pair were eventually hanged at Rochester, on April 2nd, 1714.

Ogden and Reynolds ended at last at Kingston, on April 23rd, 1714; Ogden himself dying with an air of complete indifference. He threw a handful of small change among the crowd, with the remark: "Gentlemen, here is a poor Will's farewell."

JACK OVET

JACK OVET was born at Nottingham, and after serving his time as apprentice to a shoemaker, took up that useful employment for a livelihood. But he soon grew tired of his awl and his cobblers'-wax, and disregarding the old saw which advises cobblers (and, no doubt, also boot and shoe makers) to "stick to their last," deserted his last and his bench, and took to the highway. A shoemaker newly emancipated from his useful, but not romantic, trade does not impress us as a figure of romance; but that is merely prejudice; and really he started off at score, and at his first essay robbed a gentleman of twenty of the best, without a moment's hesitation. The dispute as to whom the guineas should belong took place on the road to London from his native Nottingham, so you will perceive how quickly Ovet fell into his stride. Ovet argued that the guineas were rightly his, "by the law of capture"; thus following the theory of the poet who put the law of ownership in property so neatly in declaring it:

His to take who has the power,
And his to keep who can.

"Yours, you impudent scoundrel!" bellowed the traveller; "if I had not been taken unawares, we would [Pg 106] seen about that."

Ovet, already prepared to take the ancient traditional line of chivalric consideration, said he would fight fairly for the money. "Here it is again, and whoever is best man, let him keep it." The enraged traveller agreed to this proposal, and they fell to fighting with swords, with the result that the gentleman was mortally wounded, and Ovet went off with the purse.

Our ex-shoemaker was a quarrelsome fellow, and soon after this killed another man in a heated dispute, but escaped capture. Skulking in remote places, afraid of being taken at a disadvantage, he soon found himself short of money, and waylaid a train of pack-horses. Cutting open their packs, he discovered a number of guineas among the goods, and finally went off with a hundred and eighty, and three dozen silver knives, forks, and spoons.

One day Jack Ovet, drinking at a wayside inn, overheard a soapboiler and a carrier consulting how the carrier could most securely carry a hundred pounds to a friend in the country. It was finally decided to convey the money in a barrel of soap. The carrier was highly pleased with the notion, and laughingly remarked that if any rogue were to rob his waggon, "the devil's cunning must be in him if he looks for any money in the soap-barrel."

Jack Ovet, later in the day, overtook him upon the road and commanded him to stop, else he would shoot both him and his horses.

"I must make bold to borrow a little money out of your waggon," he said; "therefore, if you have any, dir[e] [Pg 107] to it, that I may not lose any time, which, you know, is always precious."

The carrier, quite unmoved in his fancied security, replied that he had none, and if he did not believe him, he might, if he would, search every box and bundle in his waggon.

Ovet then, simulating a violent passion, began to toss down every box, parcel, and barrel in the waggon, until at last, coming to the soap-barrel, he flung it down with all his force, so that it broke in pieces, the money-bag appearing in midst of the soap scattered on the road.

Then, jumping down, he exclaimed, "Is not he that sells this soap a cheating villain, to put this bag of lead into it, to make the barrel weigh heavier? However, that he may not succeed in his roguery, I'll take it and sell it in the next house I come to, for it will wet my whistle to the tune of two or three shillings."

So saying, he was making off, when the poor carrier cried out, "Hold, hold, sir! that is not lead. It is a bag with a hundred pounds in it, for which I must be accountable."

"No, no," returned Ovet, "this can't be money; but if it is, tell the owner that I'll be answerable for it, if he'll come to me."

"To you! Where, then, sir, may one find you?"

"Why, truly," rejoined Ovet, with a chuckle, "that's a question soon asked, but not so soon answered. The [Pg 108] answer I can give you is that you'll probably find me in a gaol before night, and then perhaps you may have what I have taken, and forty pounds more."

The highwaymen were generally susceptible creatures, and Ovet not less so than his brethren. One day, robbing the Worcester stage-coach, filled on that occasion with young women, he was violently smitten with one in particular.

"Madam," he declared, "your charms have softened my temper. Cast not your eyes down, nor cover your face with those modest blushes; and, believe me, what I have taken from necessity is only borrowed, and shall be honourably restored, if you will let me know where you may be found."

The young woman gave him her address, and a week later, overcome by the most violent passion, he wrote her a love-letter in which, in the most bombastic and ridiculous style, he expressed his love. "Although I had the cruelty to rob you of twenty guineas," he concluded, "you committed at the same time a greater robbery, by taking my heart. Do, I implore you, direct a favourable answer."

But this was the discouraging reply:

"SIR,—

"Yours I received with as great dissatisfaction as when you robbed me. I admire your impudence in offering yourself to me as a husband, when I am sensible it would not be long ere you made me a hempen widow. Perhaps some foolish girl or another may be so bewitched as to go in white, to beg the favour of marryi [Pg 109]

under the gallows; but, indeed, I shall neither venture there, nor in a church, to marry one of your profession, whose vows are treacherous, and whose smiles, words, and actions, like small rivulets, through a thousand turnings of loose passions, at last arrive at the dead sea of sin.

"Should you, therefore, dissolve your eyes into tears; were every accent in your speech a sigh; had you all the spells and magic charms of love, I should seal up my ears. You have already broken your word, in not sending what you villainously took from me; but, not valuing that, let me tell you, for fear you should have too great a conceit of yourself, that you are the first, to my recollection, whom I ever hated; and, sealing my hatred with the hopes of quickly reading your dying speech, in case you die in London, I presume to subscribe myself."

"Yours, never to command."

Soon after this harrowing dismissal, Jack Ovet was taken, tried, and executed, ending in May 1708, in the thirty-second year of his age.

JOHN HALL, RICHARD LOW, AND STEPHEN BUNCE

JOHN HALL, born in 1675 of poor parents in Bishop's Head Court, off Gray's Inn Lane, was one of those late seventeenth and very early eighteenth-century evil-doers, who anticipated the sordid career of the modern thief, without any redeeming qualities. A chimney-sweep by trade, he was, among other things, a highwayman, but he more often padded the hoof upon the highway than rode along it, and he would turn his hand, according to what he deemed the necessities of the moment, to pocket-picking, shop-lifting, or ringing the changes, with equal facility. At the same time, he was not altogether a fortunate malefactor. As a pickpocket, he was frequently detected and, we learn, "treated in the usual manner, by ducking in the horsepond," by those who did not want the trouble of prosecuting him. Happening upon more vindictive persons, he was arrested, time after time, and thrown into Bridewell and often whipped. Which was the more desirable, to be flung into a horsepond, or be whipped, it must be left to individual tastes to decide. It depends largely, no doubt, upon the comparative filthiness of the pond and the kind of lash in use by the brawny warders of B [Pg 111]ll.

He was eminently versatile, but the public has ever looked with suspicion upon versatility; and perhaps for this, among other reasons, his name is scarcely famous: only notorious in a small way as a jack-of-all-trades, except honest ones, and a great master in no particular one.

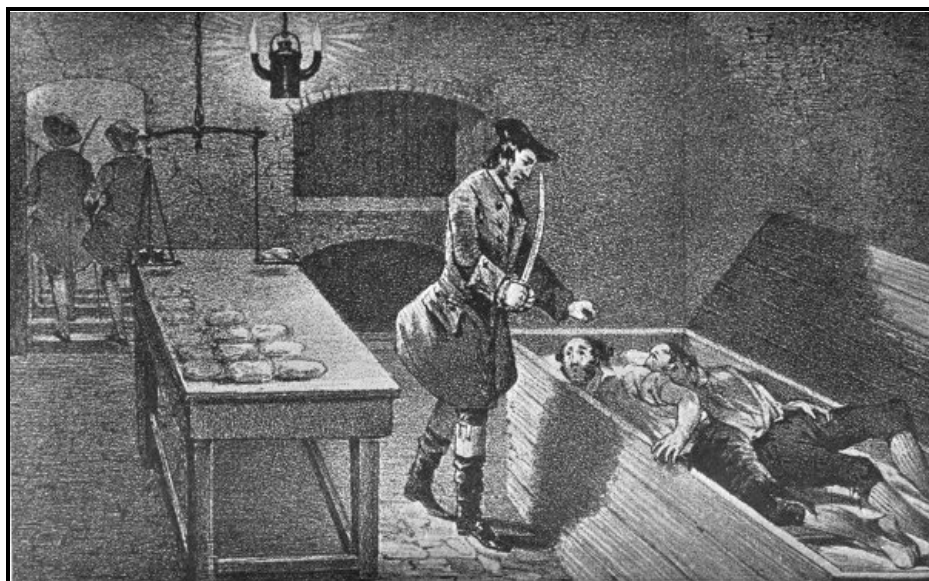
He was, it may be at once granted, industrious enough in his perverted way, and was for always frequenting churches, fairs, markets, and public assemblies: he had also generally a confederate at hand, to whom he would swiftly pass on the swag, to be himself found empty-handed when searched, and with nothing on him to prove his guilt; quite in the modern style.

He had, as a shoplifter, the same painfully chequered fortunes that studded his pocket-picking career with deplorable incidents. In January 1682 he was convicted at the Old Bailey of stealing a pair of shoes, and was whipped at the cart's tail. A little later, still smarting from that correction, he was back at the same trade, and in the long span of eighteen years suffered a series of duckings, whippings, and the distressing indignities that are the common rewards of clumsy rogues, sufficient to have cured many an one. But Jack Hall was clearly an "habitual." The delight of sport gilded his occupation, and salved his moral and physical hurts; and, after all, although he was a more than commonly blundering criminal, it was in itself no mean feat in those severe times to follow the course he steered, and yet for so long keep his neck out of the noose.

After eighteen years of miscellaneous villainy, he was convicted of breaking into the house of one Jonathan Bretail, and for this was sentenced to be hanged. With so lengthy a record as this, he was fortunate indeed in receiving a pardon conditional upon his being transported within six months to the American colonies. Fortunate colonies! But he escaped at the last moment from the convict ship, and England therefore did not lose her Hall.

Having tried many kinds of petty robbery with no very great or continued success, and being too well known as a pickpocket and shoplifter, against whom every pocket was buttoned, all tills locked, and goods carefully secured, he struck out a new line; robbing country waggons and stealing portmanteaus off coaches. But even here, in this arduous branch of a thief's varied business, ill-luck malevolently pursued him; for he was caught in the act and convicted in 1702. This brought him a period of two years' enforced seclusion in Bridewell, and the painful and disfiguring sentence of branding in the cheek, by which all men might know him on sight for a convicted felon, and be warned accordingly. This inevitable carrying his own condemnation with him wherever he went severely handicapped him when he was again at liberty; and it was probably for this reason that he returned to burglary, which, conducted at night, might reasonably offer inducements to a man with a scarred face.

With Stephen Bunce, Dick Low, and others, he broke into the shop of a baker named Clare, at Hackney, soon after midnight. They proceeded at once to the bakehouse, where they surprised the journeyman and apprentice at work, and, tying them neck and heels, threw them into the kneading-trough. One stood guard over them with a drawn sword, while the others went upstairs to rob the house.



THE ROBBERY AT THE HACKNEY BAKER'S.

The elderly Mr. Clare was awakened from sleep and bidden disclose where his money lay, but he stoutly refused, in spite of all their threats, until Hall seized a little girl, the baker's granddaughter. "D—n me!" he said, "if I won't bake the child in a pie and eat it, if the old rogue won't be civil."

Mr. Clare seems to have been alarmed by this extravagant threat. Perhaps the flaming "F" for felon, or "T" for thief, on Hall's cheek, made him appear exceptionally terrible. At any rate, Mr. Clare then revealed his hoard of gold, which amounted to between seventy and eighty guineas; and with that, very satisfied, the midnight band departed.

Although this daring raid was naturally the subject of much excited comment, the robbers were not captured, and they were presently bold enough to break into the house of a man named Saunders, a chairman in the sar[Pg 116]ality. Saunders was informed that Hall was one of the thieves, and, knowing him well by sight, he pursued him and his gang at three o'clock in the morning, accompanied by a watchman. The gang fired at their pursuers, and the watchman fell, wounded in the thigh. Hall escaped altogether, and although some of his accomplices were captured, they were acquitted, from lack of sufficient evidence.

In 1705 Hall was again in trouble, under the alias of "Price," but was acquitted on the charge of housebreaking then brought against him. He was similarly fortunate in October 1706, when he was charged in company with Arthur Chambers with being concerned in stealing a handkerchief. Such a trivial theft would seem hardly to need collaboration.

Later on, he was again in custody, but meanly obtained his liberty by turning evidence against two accomplices.

Finally, in 1707 he was arrested with his old pals, Stephen Bunce and Dick Low, for a burglary committed at the house of Captain Guyon, near Stepney. All three were convicted, and suffered in company at Tyburn, on December 7th, 1707.

Dick Low was a not very distinguished person, and indeed his name, except in association with Hall and Bunce, is utterly unworthy of record in these annals. He was more expert at stealing from shops and emptying tills than in any other branch of the thieving profession, and would have made an expert area-sneak had areas been then in[Pg 117]ence. Unfortunately they came in about a century later. But he was an expert at the "running-smobble," which consisted in two or three confederates planning to rob a shop after dark: one going in with an exaggerated pretence of drunkenness and creating a disturbance; while the others would enter on the excuse of seeing what the matter could be, and then, turning out the lights, clearing out the till, and laying hands on any light articles of value that might be within reach. One of them would come provided with pepper, or handfuls of mud and throw it in the faces of the shopkeeper and his assistants, when they began to cry "Stop, thief!"

For the rest, Dick Low was a violent, sullen brute, often, like his two allies, in Newgate, and when there generally in the bilboes for savage assaults on his fellow-prisoners.

Stephen Bunce, or Bunch, began his iniquities as soon as he could toddle, and, according to the Reverend Mr. Thomas Pureney, the Ordinary of Newgate, was old in crime while he was yet an infant in years. Another biographer picturesquely says he was "born a thief," which, as his parents were the inevitably "poor but honest" folk of the conventional type of biography, seems an extreme criticism.

The depravity of Stephen Bunce was, however, so precocious that, as a child, he would go and play with the children of a charcoal-man, who lived near his native London alley, for the express purpose of filling his pockets with the charcoal, and then selling it, for hot codlins, to a woman who kept an apple-stall. One day, when the codlins[Pg 118]more than ever tempting and the charcoal not so easily to be stolen, he asked the woman for some apples on trust, but she refused, and Stephen resolved upon revenge.

On the next opportunity, pocketing a larger quantity of charcoal than usual, he filled the holes in it with gunpowder and then stopping them with black sealing-wax, sold the charcoal to the unsuspecting woman, who presently replenished her fire with it, with the natural result that her brazier was blown to pieces and herself almost frightened out of her wits.

Graduating in crime as he grew up, Stephen naturally worked his way through picking and stealing at the coffee-houses to practising on the road. "Amongst others of his notorious pranks, he often played several comical tricks, the most remarkable whereof is this, viz.: One day being upon some prospect in Essex, and destitute of money, as he was coming along a footpath from Brentwood to London, he espied over the hedges a gentleman mounted upon a very fine gelding, valued at above forty pounds. Bunce presently gets the length of two or three fields before the gentleman, and going over a stile at the turning of a lane, he there lays himself down by a ditch-side, with his ear close to the ground, till the gentleman was come up with him. Seeing him lie in that posture, he asked him the meaning of it.

"Bunce, in a sort of admiration, holding up his hands, as much as to say, 'Don't disturb me,' gave no answer[Pg 119]some time, and then, rising, said, 'Sir, I have heard much talk of fairies, but could never believe there were any till now; for, upon my word, under this spot of ground there is such a fine harmony of melodious tunes playing, upon all sorts of charming instruments, so ravishing to the ears, that a man with the great transports thereof (providing they were continually to play) could lie here for ever.'

"The gentleman, eager to hear these fine raptures, alights from his gelding, and lays his ear to the ground, with his face towards Bunce, but told him he could hear nothing.

"'Oh! sir,' replied Bunce, 'lay the other ear to it.' With that the gentleman very attentively lays his other ear to the ground, to hear these harmonious sounds, and his back being then towards Bunce, he presently mounts the gelding, and rid as fast as he could away.

"When being come within a quarter of a mile of Romford, he alights and turns the gelding loose, thinking if the gentleman used any inn in that town, the gelding would make to it; and it did accordingly run into the 'Red Lion.' At the same time, the ostler happened to come out, and, seeing the gelding running in without a rider, cried out, 'O! master, master; here's Mr. What-d'ye-call-him's gelding come without him' (calling him by his name).

"Bunce being just by, takes the advantage of hearing what the gentleman's name was, and replied t[Pg 120] was engaged with some gentleman at Brentwood, desiring the innkeeper to send him £10, and had sent his gelding for pledge, as designing to be there himself in two or three hours' time.

"Ay, ay,' quoth the innkeeper, a hundred pounds was at his service, if he had sent for it, and accordingly gave Bunch £10, with which he came up to London.

"About four or five hours later, the gentleman came up to the inn, puffing and blowing, in his jack-boots, asking the innkeeper if he had seen any one with his gelding.

"The innkeeper bid him not fret, for his man had left his gelding there, and he had given him £10, according to his desire.

"'Rat him for a dog,' quoth the gentleman, 'he's none of my man; but I'm glad he's left my gelding here and raised no more money than that upon him. However, it shall be a warning to me for ever, alighting from my horse to hear fairies play upon musick.'"

"MR." AVERY AND DICK ADAMS

THEN there was Avery, who appears in the chronicles as "Mr." Avery. He had in his youth been apprenticed to a bricklayer, and followed that trade when out of his indentures. He also followed that of a highwayman, and it is recorded, in sub-acid manner, that he worked so hard at it that it killed him at last, against his will: which is an oblique way of saying that it finally brought him to Tyburn tree.

Questing one day up and down the road, like the ravens in search of food, he met an honest tradesman. They rode together for some time, when Avery asked him what trade he followed. The man replied that he was a fishmonger, and, with a polite show of interest, asked Avery's trade.

"Why," said the highwayman, "I am a limb of St. Peter also."

"What!" exclaimed the other, astonished, "are you a fishmonger too? Indeed, I don't understand your meaning, sir."

Whereupon Avery, pulling out his pistol, coolly observed: "My meaning may soon be comprehended, for there's not a finger upon my hand but will catch gold or silver, without any bait at all." So, taking all the unfortunate man [\[Pg 122\]](#)ssed, and cutting the girth and bridle of his horse, to delay any likelihood of pursuit, he rode off for London.

On another occasion he met an exciseman on Finchley Common. The exciseman would not deliver his money until Avery had shot his horse dead and threatened to do the like to him. Then, daunted by Avery's terribly high words, and almost frightened out of his wits to hear what dreadful volleys of oaths came out of his mouth, he stopped it as soon as he could with twelve pounds, saying: "Here, take what I have, for if there be a devil, certainly thou art one."

"It may be so," replied Avery, "but yet much of a devil though I am, I see an exciseman is not so good a bait to catch him as some people would make out."

"No, he is not," returned the exciseman; "the hangman is the only bait to catch such devils as you."

It was ill work, as a rule, exchanging insults with a highway gentleman, but Avery, content with the main thing, rode off unmoved. He was hanged at last, at Tyburn, January 31st, 1713.

Dick Adams, who derived from Gloucestershire and at an early age was in the service of a respectable Duchess (their Graces, you know, were not all what they might have been, in the way of personal character, in the seventeenth century), at last found his way into the Life Guards, but as his pay did not suffice to support his extrav [\[Pg 123\]](#), he sometimes collected upon the highway. With some of his companions of the road, he on one occasion robbed a gentleman of a gold watch and a purse of a hundred and twenty guineas. Now observe how the greedy are made to suffer for their greediness! Not content with their fine booty, he must needs covet the gentleman's coat; and so cantered after him, saying: "Sir, you have got a very fine coat on; I must make bold to exchange with you;" and off the coat had to come, and the traveller went angry away. Presently however, as he was riding along in that shabby misfit, he thought he heard something jingling in a pocket; something that sounded very differently from the jingling of his horse's bridle. Thrusting in his hand, he, to his astonishment, found his watch and all his money that Adams in his hurry had forgotten to remove out of the pockets of his own coat when this exchange, which certainly proved, after all, to be no robbery, was made.

We may dwell a moment upon the rage of Adams and his party, when they came to the next hedgside inn and sat down to examine their gains, which had thus vanished away, like the early dews of morning.

It is pleasant to read of honest men occasionally coming to their own again, and of incidents of painful retribution. Such an incident as that recorded above deserves a fellow, and we find it in the painful adventure in which Tom Taylor was the luckless sufferer. We do not hear much of Tom Taylor, who was, indeed, more of a pickpoc [\[Pg 124\]](#)an a highwayman. We do learn, however, that he was the son of a clergyman, and that "he was executed along with Moll Jones." Clearly, Tom Taylor was an undesirable and the companion of undesirables. He was accustomed to dress himself in smart clothes and attend theatres and public entertainments, and there—an unsuspected fine gentleman—to pick pockets. On one such occasion he emptied a gentleman's pocket of forty guineas, and we are told that, in a disguise, he seated himself the next night beside the same person, who recognised him but made no sign, having this time come prepared. He had, in fact, baited his pocket with a handful of guineas, which set up a pleasant jingling and made poor Tom's mouth water. Poor Tom, we say advisedly, bearing in mind the sequel. He began presently to "dive" for those guineas and found, to his dismay, that the gentleman had really in the truest sense, "baited" his pocket, for it had been sewn all round with fish-hooks, and the wretched Taylor's hand was held fast.

Having in vain attempted to disentangle himself, he said to the gentleman: "Sir, by a mistake, I have somehow put my hand into your pocket, instead of into my own"; but, without taking the least notice, that merciless person rose from his seat and made for the "Rose" tavern, Tom helplessly along with him, his hand all the while remaining in the pocket. Arrived there, it was no difficult matter to make him cry "Mercy!" and to induce him to send for one of his c [\[Pg 125\]](#)es, to bail him out, so to say. It cost the unfortunate Tom Taylor eighty guineas to get free again. The account of these things then concludes on the proper note of poetic justice: "Nor was the gentleman satisfied with this, but caned him in a most unmerciful manner, and then turned him out to the mob, who ducked him in a pond, and broke one of his legs."

The succeeding chapters of Tom Taylor's chequered career do not concern us, but we learn, without surprise, that this ferocious buffeting and bruising—to say nothing of the fish-hooks—determined him to abandon the "diving" trade.

To cheat that arch-rogue and cunning friend and betrayer of rogues, Jonathan Wild, out of a place in these pages would be too mean an action. He towers above the ordinary run of bad men as a very giant in wickedness. Although he was himself no highwayman, he was friend of and associate with all of their trade, and as such has a right here.

Jonathan Wild was a native of Wolverhampton, the son, according to some, of a carpenter; but, by more trustworthy records, his father was a wig-maker. He was born about 1682. His father apprenticed him to a Birmingham buckle-maker. While at Birmingham he married, but, deserting his wife and child, he made for London, and was for a short period a gentleman's servant. Returning for a brief space to the buckle-making trade, he soon found himself in debt, and then, by what was a natural transition in those times, lodged in the Poultry Compter. The Compter (it is also styled the Wood Street Compter) was something over and above a prison for debtors and others: and was indeed nothing less than an academy and forcing-house of villainies, where incipient scoundrels were brought on early in [\[Pg 127\]](#), like cucumbers under glass. It was not singular in this, for all the prisons of that age shared the like well-earned reputation. Something of the horrors of imprisonment for debt, as then practised, may be judged by the fact that Wild was here for four years; but for a portion of the time he had the advantage over his fellow-prisoners of being appointed assistant-gaoler. Wild never at any time lacked address and tact, and these qualities here stood him in good stead.

It was in this abode of despair that he first met Mary Milliner, who was ever afterwards associated with him. She was already old in crime, though not in years, and was his initiator into the first practical rogueries he knew. But he was a criminal by instinct, and needed only introductions to the world of crime. Once shown the methods in vogue, he not only became a master in their use, but speedily improved upon them, to the wonderment and admiration of all the cross-coves in London.

Released at length from durance, he and Mary Milliner set up a vile establishment in Lewkenor's Lane, and later took a low public-house, a resort of the padding-culls of the City—the sign of the "Cock," in Cock Alley, Cripplegate.

Wild had also made acquaintance, while in the Wood Street Compter, of a deep-dyed scoundrel, a certain Charles Hitchen, an ex-City marshal, who had lost his post through irregular practices, and had become an associa[\[Pg 128\]](#) and director of thieves, and an expert blackmailer. Hitchen was his early instructor in the curious art of acting as intermediary between the thieves and those persons who had been robbed of goods, or had had their pockets picked of watches and other valuable jewellery; but Wild was a genius in his own way, with a talent for organisation never equalled in his line, before or since, except perhaps by Moll Cutpurse, who flourished a century earlier. Moll, however, was ever staunch to her friends and accomplices, but Wild was always ready to sell his intimates and to send them to the cart, if it were made worth his while. So their careers run parallel for only a little distance and then widely separate.

Wild in a very little time broke with Hitchen. He left his instructor far behind, and did business on so Napoleonic a scale that he speedily aroused the furious jealousy of his sometime associate, who, unable to contain himself at the thought of Wild, once his pupil, taking nearly all his profitable business away, published a singular pamphlet, intended to expose the trade. This was styled "The Regulator; or, a Discovery of Thieves, Thief-takers, and Locks": "locks" being receivers of stolen property. It had not the desired effect of spoiling his rival's trade; and Jonathan continued to thrive amazingly. As a broker and go-between in nearly all the felonies of his time committed in and immediately around London, he speedily came to the front, and he was exceptional in that he most adroitly and astonishingly [\[Pg 129\]](#)d the parts of Receiver-General of stolen property and self-styled "Thief-catcher-General of Great Britain and Ireland."

It might at the first blush, and indeed even after long consideration, seem impossible to pose with success at one and the same time as the friend and the enemy of all who get their living on the cross, but Jonathan Wild achieved the apparently impossible and flourished exceedingly on the amazing paradox.

The first steps in this mesh of scoundrelism that Wild drew are not sufficiently detailed, and Fielding's "History of the Late Mr. Jonathan Wild the Great" is rather an effort in whimsical, satirical imagination than in sheer biography. The considerable number of chap-book "Lives" of this arch-villain are also absolutely untrustworthy. But it is abundantly evident that he was a man of imagination and a master at organising, for we find him the brain-centre of all the robberies committed at that time in and around London, himself the secret, supreme director of them all, and at the same time the apparently "honest broker" who, for a consideration (quite after the old manner of Moll Cutpurse), would undertake to restore missing property. This self-appointed "Thief-taker" had numerous contingents, to each of which was allotted its special work. One attended churches, another visited the theatres, yet another detachment devoted their best energies to the art of shop-lifting, and another still took situations as domestic servants, and in th[\[Pg 130\]](#)acity made away with their employers' plate and jewellery. It all seems like the fantastic imagining of a novelist, but it is sufficiently real, and the theory of mutual benefits accruing to Wild and his gang by this unnatural alliance is quite sound. He received the stolen property and held it to ransom, dividing (more or less unfairly) the amounts received with his thieves, who could not, without running great risks, sell it. All concerned benefited: the plundered citizens repurchased their valuables cheaply, Wild took an excellent commission, and the thieves, pickpockets, and highwaymen made a good living without much risk. The reverse of this charming picture of distributed benefits was the alarming increase of robberies and the decrease of arrests and convictions; and another serious outcome of Wild's organisation was that he absolutely commanded the lives of those who worked with him. None with impunity offended the great man, who was merciless in his revenge, swearing away the lives of those who dared cross him. Among the numerous satirical old prints relating to Jonathan Wild there is a gruesome picture of devils lighting him with flaring torches on the red way to Hell, together with a trophy of twenty-five hanging persons, men and women, all duly named, whom he brought to the gallows as a result of differences of opinion in the business matters between them, or merely for the reason that they had outlasted their use and had become inefficient thieves, and it would pay him better to [\[Pg 131\]](#)their conviction. And it is to be observed that in all this while he was well known to be a director of robberies and receiver of stolen goods. It was scandalously notorious that, while he advertised himself in the newspapers as "Thief-catcher-General of Great Britain and Ireland," he was colleague of those he professed to catch. And, as the law then stood, he could not be brought to book. Everything was possible to the cunning and daring of Jonathan Wild, who could not merely bring a man to trial, but could snatch him from the very jaws of death by making the prosecutor so drunk that he was not present to give evidence at the trial; whereupon the accused was discharged.

In fifteen years' activities of this kind, Wild amassed enormous sums. He established himself in a fine house in the Old Bailey, conveniently opposite Newgate, and there lived in fine style with his Molly, the widow of a criminal who had been hanged at Tyburn. A footman followed him in livery; he dined in state: "His table was very splendid, he seldom dining under five Dishes, the Reversions whereof were generally charitably bestow'd on the Commonsides felons." Jewellery and valuables not ransomed were shipped by him to Holland, in a sloop he regularly maintained for the purpose, bringing contraband goods on the return voyage.

There is this undoubted tribute to Jonathan Wild's greatness, that Parliament was at last moved to [\[Pg 132\]](#) Act especially designed to cope with his villainies, and to lay him by the heels. This was the Act of 1718, "For the farther preventing Robberies, Burglaries, and other Felonies, and for the more effectual transportation of Felons." A portion of this measure constituted it a felony for any one to solicit or to accept a reward on the pretence of restoring stolen property to the owners, unless they prosecuted the thieves.

But this clause was evaded without much difficulty by the astute Wild. He merely reconstituted his business, and made it an Enquiry Office, where no money was accepted. Clients still came in numbers to him, seeking their lost property, for it was certain, all the while, that he had really a guilty knowledge of at least three-quarters of the robberies committed in London. This revised procedure was for the owners who called upon him to be informed that he had made enquiries, and that he had heard the articles might be recovered if a reward was despatched to a place named. The owners would then generally, acting on his advice, send out, by the hands of a ticket-porter (ticket-porters were the "commissionaires" of that period) the reward agreed upon. The porter was instructed to wait at a street-corner until a person delivered a package into his hands, whereupon he was to hand over the reward. The celerity attending these transactions was remarkable.

In other instances Wild would advise his clients to advertise their loss and to offer a reward payable to [\[Pg 133\]](#) person who should deliver the lost property to Mr. Jonathan Wild, or at his office; and no questions asked. Perhaps the most marvellous thing in these negotiations was the assumed disinterestedness of Mr. Jonathan Wild himself, who, although the most notorious evil-doer in London, posed delightfully as the instrument of good, restoring the lost valuables of utter strangers entirely without fee or reward, from the Christian love he bore the human race. Fielding truly styled him "the Great Man."

Wild's impudence increased with his success, and he is found petitioning the Corporation for the freedom of the City to be conferred upon him, in recognition of his great services in bringing criminals to justice. It does not appear that the City responded.

Wild's career first became seriously threatened early in 1724, when, greatly alarmed for his own safety, he is found imploring the Earl of Dartmouth to shield him from what he styles the "persecution" of the magistrates, who, he declares, had procured thieves and other bad characters to swear false evidence against him. The scandal of Wild's continued existence had at last become too gross for even that age. But his time was not yet come, and he continued as before; mindful perhaps of the old adage, "threatened men live long." He nearly ended, however, by a more summary process than any known to the law; and entirely through his own bloodthirsty treatment of "Blueskin," one [\[Pg 134\]](#) own associates.

Joseph Blake, better known in all the stories of the highwaymen as "Blueskin," who was hanged at Tyburn on November 11th, 1724, was an expert highwayman, thief, and pickpocket—or, to speak in the professional terms then in use among these fraternities, a "bridle-cull," a "boman," and a "diver." He had long been a busy servant of Jonathan, and frequently worked in company with Jack Sheppard, but he would perhaps be little known in these later times were it not for his having come very near sending the Great Man out of the world, and thus cheating the gallows, already growing ripe for him.

"Blueskin," rebelling, it may be presumed, against Wild on some question of money, was promptly arrested by that astute Director-General of Thieves, in his character of thief-taker, and committed to Newgate on a charge of house-breaking. It was almost invariably fatal to quarrel, or even to have a mere difference of opinion, with that powerful and revengeful man. Wild was in court at the Old Bailey, to give evidence, when "Blueskin" beckoned him over to the dock. Inclining his ear to gather what the prisoner was pretending to whisper, Wild instantly found himself seized in "Blueskin's" frenzied grasp, and the court with horror saw his throat cut from ear to ear. The deed was done with a penknife, and the wound was severe and dangerous, but Wild eventually recovered, much to the surprise of [\[Pg 136\]](#), who saw the ferocity of the attack, and greatly to the sorrow of the criminal classes of London, who knew right well that they were suffered to live only as long as they were useful and profitable to Wild, and careful to exercise a due subservience to him.



JONATHAN WILD IN THE CONDEMNED CELL.
From an old Print.

Indeed, it was at first thought that Wild must certainly die, and Swift at that moment wrote the famous *Blueskin's Ballad*, of which here are two verses:

Then, hopeless of life,
He drew his penknife,
And made a sad widow of Jonathan's wife.
But forty pounds paid her, her grief shall appease,
And ev'ry man round me may rob, if he please.

Some rob in the customs, some cheat in the 'xcise,
But he who robs both is esteemèd most wise.
Churchwardens, who always have dreaded the halter,
As yet only venture to steal from the altar.
But now to get gold
They may be more bold
And rob on the highway, since honest Wild's cold;
For Blueskin's sharp penknife has set you at ease,
And ev'ry man round me may rob, if he please.

Swift, however, was in too great a hurry: Jonathan Wild did not die then, and the thieves were not yet released from his iniquitous bondage. His wife was not then made a "sad widow," although she was soon to become one; and thus earned the remarkable distinction of having been twice a "hempen widow."

In January of the following year, 1725, the captain of Wild's sloop, a man named Roger Johnson, wh[[Pg 137](#)] been arrested on a charge of contraband trading with Holland, sent hurriedly to him. Wild, never at a moment's loss, assembled a mob, and provoked a riot, by which the prisoner was rescued.

Himself arrested at his own house in the Old Bailey, on February 15th, 1725, on a charge of being concerned in the theft of fifty yards of lace from the shop of Catherine Stetham, in Holborn, on January 22nd, he was, after considerable delay, put upon his trial at the Old Bailey on May 15th. The lace stolen was valued at £50.

He was further charged with feloniously receiving of Catherine Stetham "ten guineas on account, and under colour of helping the said Catherine Stetham to the said lace again; and that he did not then, nor at any time since, discover or apprehend, or cause to be apprehended and brought to Justice, the persons that committed the said felony."

The evidence adduced at the trial is first-hand information of Wild's method in organising a robbery. Henry Kelly, one of the chief witnesses against him, told how he went on that day to see a Mrs. Johnson who then lived at the prisoner's house. He found her at home, and with her the great Jonathan and his Molly, and they drank a quartern of gin together. By-and-by, in came a certain woman named Peg Murphy with a pair of brocaded clogs, which she presented to Mrs. Wild. After two or three more quarterns of gin had passed round, Murphy and Henry Kelly rose to leave.

"Which way are you going?" asked Wild.

"To my lodging in 'Seven Dials,'" replied Kelly.

"I suppose," remarked Wild, "you go along Holborn?"

Both Kelly and Murphy answered that they did.

"Why, then," he said, "I'll tell you what: there's an old blind bitch that keeps a shop within twenty yards of Holborn Bridge and sells fine Flanders lace, and her daughter is as blind as herself. Now, if you'll take the trouble of calling upon her, you may speak with a box of lace. I'll go along with you, and show you the door."

The Judge at this moment intervened with the question, "What do you understand by 'speaking with a box of lace'?"

Even in our own day judges are commonly found enquiring the meaning of phrases whose significance is common knowledge which one might reasonably suppose to be shared even on the Olympian heights of the King's Bench and other exalted divisions of the High Court. Every one in Jonathan Wild's day understood perfectly well that to "speak with" a thing was to steal it, and this was duly expounded to his lordship.

Then Kelly went on to explain how Wild, himself, and Murphy went along Holborn Hill until they came within sight of the lace-shop, which Wild pointed out to them.

"You go," he said, "and I'll wait here and bring you off, in case of any disturbance."

[Pg 139]



To all the Thieves, Whores, Pick-pockets, Family Fellows &c. in Great Brittain & Ireland, Gentlemen & Ladies You are hereby desir'd to accompany y^e worthy friend y^e Pious Mr. I—W—d from his Seat at Whittingtons Colledge to y^e Tripple Tree, where he's to make his last Exit on, and his Corps to be Carry'd from thence to be decently Interr'd amongst his Ancestors.

Pray bring this Ticket with you

SATIRICAL INVITATION-CARD TO EXECUTION OF JONATHAN WILD.

Murphy and Kelly accordingly entered, in the character of purchasers, and turned over several kin^[Pg 140] lace, pretending to be very difficult to please. This piece was too broad, that too narrow, and t'other not fine enough. At last the old woman went upstairs to fetch a finer piece, when Kelly took a tin box of lace and gave it to Murphy, who hid it under her cloak. Then the old woman came down with another box and showed them several more pieces, but the confederates made as if they could not agree about the price, and so left the shop and joined Wild, where they had parted from him. They told him they had "spoke"; whereupon they all returned to his house and opened the box, in which they found eleven pieces of lace. "Would they have ready money?" asked Wild, "or would they wait until the advertisement for the stolen lace came out?"

Funds were very low at the time with Murphy and Kelly, and they asked for ready money, Wild then giving them about four guineas.

"I can't afford to give any more," he said, "for she's a hard-mouthed old bitch, and I shall never get above ten guineas out of her."

Kelly took the lion's share of the money—three guineas—and Murphy had the remainder.

Wild was acquitted on the first charge, of being concerned in the actual theft, but for feloniously receiving the ten guineas the trial was continued.

Catherine Stetham the elder said that on January 22nd she had a box of lace, valued at £50, stolen out of [Pg 141]shop. She went, that same night, to the prisoner's house to enquire after it; but, not finding him at home, she advertised the stolen goods, offering a reward of fifteen guineas, and no questions to be asked. There was no reply to her advertisement, and she went again to the prisoner's house, and saw him there. He asked her to give a description of the persons she suspected, which she did, as nearly as she could, and he promised to make enquiries, and suggested she should call again in three days.

She did so, when he said he had heard something of her lace, and expected to hear more in a little time. Even as they were talking a man came in and said that, by what he had learned, he believed a man named Kelly, who had already stood his trial for passing gilded shillings, had been concerned in stealing the lace.

She then went away, and returned on the day the prisoner was apprehended. She had told him that, although she had advertised a reward of only fifteen guineas for the lace, she would be prepared to give twenty, or even five-and-twenty, rather than lose it.

"Don't be in such a hurry, good woman," he rejoined; "perhaps I may help ye to it for less, and if I can, I will. The persons that have got your lace are gone out of town; I shall set them quarrelling about it, and then I shall get it the cheaper."

On March 10th he sent her word that if she would go to him at Newgate, with ten guineas in her pocket, [Pg 142]ld he able to help her to her lace. She went. He asked her to call a porter, but she told him she did not know where to find one, so he sent out and obtained a ticket-porter. The porter was given ten guineas, to call upon the person who was said to have the lace, and he returned in a little while with a box which was said to contain all the lace, with the exception of one piece.

"Now, Mr. Wild," said she, "what must I give you for your trouble?"

"Not a farthing, madam," said he. "I don't do these things for worldly interest, but for the benefit of poor people who have met with misfortunes. As for the piece of lace that is missing, I would not have ye be uneasy, for I hope to get it for you ere long; nay, and I don't know but in a little time I may not only help ye to your ten guineas again, but to the thief too. And if I can, much good may it do you; and as you are a widow and a good Christian, I desire nothing of ye but your prayers; and for them I shall be thankful. I have a great many enemies, and God knows what may be the consequences of this imprisonment."

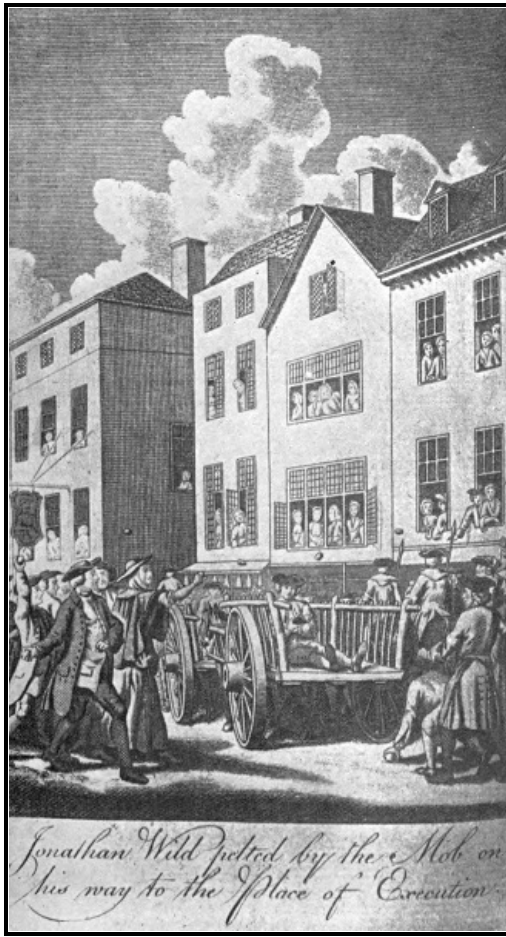
The consequences were the most serious known to the law. Wild was sentenced to death. No sentence in that court had ever been so popular. When asked if he had anything to say why this judgment should not be passed upon him, he handed a paper to the Judge, setting forth the numbers of criminals he had been instrumental in bringing to [Pg 143], and in a very feeble voice said: "My lord, I hope I may, even in the sad condition in which I stand, pretend to some little merit, in respect of the services I have done my country, in delivering it from some of the greatest pests with which it was ever troubled. My lord, I have brought many a bold and daring malefactor to just punishment, even at the hazard of my own life, my body being covered with scars received in these undertakings. I presume, my lord, to say I have some merit, because, at the time these things were done, they were esteemed meritorious by the Government; and therefore I beg, my lord, some compassion may be shown, upon the score of these services. I submit myself wholly to His Majesty's mercy, and humbly beg a favourable report of my case."

But the law had too long been waiting for him, and his enormities were too great, for any mercy to be hoped for; and he was left to die. He did not afford an edifying spectacle in that condemned hold to which he had consigned so many, reflecting that, as "his Time was but short in this World," it was necessary to improve it to the best advantage "in Eating, Drinking, Swearing, Cursing, and talking to his Visitants." His old crony, the Reverend Thomas Pureney, the Ordinary, he flouted; and, for the little spiritual consolation he at the last moment required, he called in an outsider. But this did not prevent Pureney from concocting a lying account and offering it for sale after his execution. [Pg 144]n we read, as though in Wild's own words:

"Finding that there was no room for mercy (and how could I expect Mercy, who never show'd any?), as soon as I came into the condemned Hole, I began to think of making a preparation for my Soul; and the better to bring my stubborn Heart to Repentance, I thought it more proper to have the advice and the Council and Directions of a Man of Learning, a Man of sound Judgment in Divinity, and therefore Application being made to the reverend Mr. *Nicholson*, he very Christian-like gave me his Assistance: And I hope that my Repentance has been such as will be accepted in Heaven, into which Place, I trust in God, my Soul will quickly be received. To part with my Wife, my dear *Molly*, is so great an Affliction to me, that it touches me to the Quick, and is like Daggers entering into my Heart. As she is innocent, and I am the Guilty Man, let her not suffer in her Charracter and Reputation for my Crimes: Consider that she is a Woman, and how ungenerous it would be to reflect upon one whose weakness will not permit her to defend herself so well as her Innocence will carry her.

"And now, good People, you see to what a shameful End my Wickedness has brought me; take warning therefore by my Example, and let my unhappy Fate deterr you from following wicked Courses, and cause such of you to forsake your Crimes, who are now fallen into them. Remember that though Justice has leaden feet, yet she has Iron [Pg 147], and sooner or later will overtake the unwary Criminal. I am now upon the point of departing out of this World; joyn with me, therefore, in Prayer while I have life, and pray to God to receive my poor Soul into his blessed Arms, and to make us all happy with our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen."

All the foregoing was the sheer invention of the egregious Pureney, and Wild really went unrepentant to his end at Tyburn, May 24th, 1725. He sought, by taking laudanum, to cheat the gallows of its due, but failed in the attempt. The day of his execution was one of great rejoicings in London, and huge crowds lined the way, pelting Wild, as he rode in the cart, with stones and dirt.



*Jonathan Wild jelted by the Mob on
his way to the place of Execution.*

JONATHAN WILD ON THE WAY TO EXECUTION.

NICHOLAS HORNER

NICHOLAS HORNER was a younger son of the vicar of Honiton, in Devonshire, and was born in 1687. He was wild and unmanageable almost from infancy, and showed little promise of remaining in the humble post of attorney's clerk, in which his father placed him, in London, when he was seventeen or eighteen years of age. He remained, however, with the attorney for three years, learning more in the way of drinking and dicing at the "Devil" and the "Apollo" taverns in the Strand, than of law in Clement's Inn. He then ran away, and remarked when he exchanged his quill-pen, his parchments, and his stool in the lawyer's office, for the pistols, the crape mask, and the mettlesome horse of the highwayman, that he was only exchanging one branch of the profession to which he had been articed for another and a higher—becoming a "highway lawyer," a "conveyancer" and a "collector." Unfortunately for him, he began to practise in this new branch before he had properly made himself acquainted with the rudiments of its procedure, and was in consequence taken in an interview with his first client, and lodged in Winchester gaol, where he remain[[Pg 149](#)] three months before his trial came on. In the meanwhile, the friends of his family, seeing how scandalous a thing it would be if a clergyman's son were convicted of highway robbery, and sentenced to die by the rope of the hangman, strongly endeavoured to persuade the gentleman whom he had robbed to fail in identifying him. But their efforts were fruitless, for he was determined to prosecute, and the trial in due course was held, and the prisoner found guilty and formally sentenced to death.

His friends were more successful in the petitions they forwarded to the Queen, herself an excellent Churchwoman, and disposed to stretch a point that its ministers might be saved from unmerited reproach. Horner was pardoned on condition that his friends undertook that he should be sent out of the kingdom within three months, and that they should undertake to keep him in exile for seven years. It was an excellent offer, and they accepted, shipping him to India, where he remained for the stipulated time, passing through many adventures which, although detailed by Smith, are not concerned with the highway portion of his career, and are not even remotely credible.

Returning to his native shores, he found both his father and mother dead, and received from the executors of his father's will the amount of £500, all his father had to leave him. That sum did not last him long. What are described as "the pleasures of town" soon brought him again to his last guinea; and he, of course, once more took to the r[[Pg 150](#)]

"Well overtaken, friend," he said to a farmer he came up with on the road. "Methinks you look melancholy; pray what ails you, sir? If you are under any afflictions and crosses in the world, perhaps I may help to relieve them."

"Ah! my dear sir," replied the farmer, "were I to say I had any losses, I should lie, for I have been a thriving man all my life, and want for nothing; but indeed I have crosses enough, for I have a d—d scolding wife at home, who, though I am the best of husbands to her, and daily do my best to make her and my children happy, is always raving and scolding about the house like a madwoman. I am daily almost nagged out of my life. If there be such a thing as perpetual motion, as some scientific men say, I'm sure it is in my wife's tongue, for it never lies still, from morning to night. Scolding is so habitual to her that she even scolds in her sleep. If any man could tell me how to remedy it, I have a hundred pounds in gold and silver about me which I would give him with all my heart, for so great a benefit which I should receive by the taming of this confounded shrew."

Horner, listening to this most pleasant tune of a hundred pounds, said: "Sir, I'll just tell the ingredients with which nature first formed a scold, and thus, the cause of the distemper being known, it will be easier to effect a cure. You must understand, then, that nature, in making a scold, first took of the tongues and galls of bulls, be[[Pg 151](#)]lves, magpies, parrots, cuckoos, and nightingales, of each a like number; the tongues and tails of vipers, adders, snails, and lizards, six each; *aurum fulminans*, aqua fortis, and gunpowder, of each a pound; the clappers of seventeen bells, and the pestles of thirty apothecaries' mortars, which becoming all mixed, she calcined them in Mount Stromboli and dissolved the ashes in water, distilled just under London Bridge at three-quarters flow-tide, and filtered through the leaves of Calepin's dictionary, to render the operation more verbal; after which she distilled it again through a speaking-trumpet, and closed up the remaining spirits in the mouth of a cannon. Then she opened the graves of all recently-deceased pettifoggers, mountebanks, barbers, coffeemen, news mongers, and fishwives at Billingsgate, and with the skin of their tongues made a bladder, covered over with drumheads and filled with storms, tempests, whirlwinds, thunder and lightning. Lastly, to irradiate the whole elixir, and make it more churlish, she cut a vein under the tongue of the dog-star, drawing thence a pound of the most choleric blood; and from which sublimating the spirits, she mixed them with the foam of a mad dog; and then, putting all together in the before-mentioned bladder, stitched it up with the nerves of Socrates' wife."

"A damned compound, indeed," said the farmer; "and surely it must be impossible for any man to tame a shrew at this rate."

"Not at all," replied Horner, "for when she first begins to be in her fits, you shall perceive it by the ben[[Pg 152](#)]f her brows; then apply to her a plaster of good words: after that, give her a wheedling potion; and if that will not do, take a bull's tail, and, applying the same with a strong arm from shoulder to flank, it shall infallibly complete the cure."

The farmer was very well pleased with this prescription, and, giving Horner many thanks and treating him liberally at the next inn, they continued to ride on together. At last, coming to a convenient place, Horner said, "Please pay me now, sir, for my advice."

"I thought the entertainment I provided for you just now at the inn was all the satisfaction you required," retorted the surprised farmer.

"No, sir," said Horner, "you promised a hundred pounds if any one would find you a remedy for your scolding wife; and a bargain is a bargain all the world over, in the market or on the road": so presenting his pistol at the farmer's head, "d—n me, sir," he continued, "presently deliver your bag, or you are a dead man!"

The farmer delivered the bag, which, if it did not contain quite a hundred pounds, formed an excellent recompense for the time Horner had spent in exercising his fantastic imagination upon him.

Shortly after this exploit, Horner met a gentleman on Hounslow Heath, saluting him with the customary demand to hand over his dibs.

The traveller gave him six guineas, all he had, saying: "Sir, you love money better than I do, to thus venture [Pg 153] neck for it"; to which Horner rejoined, "I follow the way of the world, sir, which now prefers money before friends, or honesty; yea, some before the salvation of their souls; for it is the love of money that makes the unjust judge take a bribe, the corrupt lawyer to plead an evil cause: the physician to kill a man without fear of hanging, and the surgeon to prolong a cure. 'Tis this that makes the tradesman tell a lie in selling his wares; the butcher to blow his veal; the tailor to covet so much cabbage; the miller to cheat in his corn-grinding; the baker to give short weight, and to wear a wooden cravat for it; the shoemaker to stretch his leather, as he does his conscience: and the gentlemen of the pad—such as myself—to wear a Tyburn tippet, or old Storey's cap on some country gallows. So good-day to you, sir, and thank you, and never despise money in a naughty world."

Horner now experienced a sad blow to his self-esteem, in an adventure in which he was made to play a ridiculous part, and to be the butt afterwards of his acquaintances. A lady of considerable position and wealth was travelling from Colchester to London by stage-coach, and happened to be the only passenger for a considerable distance. At Braintree the coachman very politely warned her that, if she had anything of value about her, she had better conceal it, for there were several gay sparks about the neighbouring heath, whom he thought to be highwaymen. Thanking hi [Pg 154] lady placed her gold watch, a purse full of guineas and some valuable lace under the seat; and then disarranged her hair, like poor Ophelia, to act the part of a lunatic.

Presently, Horner rode up to the coach, presented a pistol, and demanded her money. Instantly she opened the coach-door, leapt out, and taking the highwayman by the leg, cried in a very piteous voice, "Oh, dear cousin Tom, I am glad to see you. I hope you'll now rescue me from this rogue of a coachman, for he's carrying me, by my rogue of a husband's orders, to Bedlam, for a mad woman."

"D—n me," replied Horner, "I'm none of your cousin. I don't know you, but you must be mad, and Bedlam is the best place for you."

"Oh! cousin Tom," said she, clinging to him, "but I will go with you, not to Bedlam."

"Do you know this mad creature?" asked the now distracted highwayman of the coachman.

"Yes," he replied, entering into the spirit of the thing; "I know the lady very well. I am now going, by her husband's orders, to London, to put her in a madhouse, but not into Bedlam, as she supposes."

"Take her, then," exclaimed Horner, "even if it were to the devil." So saying, he set spurs to his horse, and made off as fast as he could, for fear of her continuing to claim cousinship with him.



HORNER MEETS HIS MATCH.

This story, afterwards appearing in the *Weekly Journal, or British Gazetteer*, of December 27th, 1718, an [Pg 157]ng to Horner's knowledge, he was almost beside himself with rage, at being so easily tricked. The tale enjoyed a wide circulation, and seems to have impressed other travellers; for when Horner soon afterwards adventured down into the West of England, and stopped a carriage near Honiton, in which was a lady travelling from Exeter to London, he beheld

another frantic creature with dishevelled hair, who greeted him as "cousin."

"You hypocritical—!" he roared out; "because I was once bit this way by one of your d—d sex, d'ye think I must always be bit so?"

Saying this he turned over every cushion in the carriage, and found under them sufficient for his trouble: a gold watch, and other valuables and money, in all to the value of some two hundred pounds.

But this was Horner's very last stroke of business. He was taken only two hours later, in attempting to rob two gentlemen, and after a patient trial at Exeter, was hanged there on April 3rd, 1719, aged thirty-two.

WALTER TRACEY

"THE adventures of this individual," says Johnson, "are neither of interest nor importance." He then proceeds to recount them at considerable length, sufficiently disproving his own words in the course of his narrative.

Tracey was heir to an estate of £900 annual value, in Norfolk. His father, himself a man of liberal education, wished his son to share the like advantage, and sent him to Oxford, where he hoped he would take a degree and then enter the Church. But Walter was a gay and idle blade; thoughtless and reckless. His character was otherwise gentle, open, and generous: so it will be noted that if his recklessness suited him for the profession of highwayman, his alleged mildness of disposition was distinctly a drawback. At the least of it, he seems to have been singularly unfitted for the Church, and, indeed, had never an opportunity of entering it, for his wild life as a student led to his being expelled from the University.

Our precious, delightful humbug, Johnson, greedily telling the story of the highwayman and omitting no scandalous detail from the task in which he revelled, halts at this point to make an insincere moral reflection, which he ^[Pg 159] would be called for by some of his readers, even in the middle of the eighteenth century, when morals and improving discourses were alike at a heavy discount.

"The road to vice," he remarks, with his tongue in his cheek, "is of easy access, and, fascinating as it appears when you proceed, it closes behind, and leaves nothing on the retrospect but ruggedness and gloom. Tracey had entered the delusive path, and though he had the wish, possessed not the fortitude, to retrace his steps."

That was bad for Tracey. He and his companions, we learn, for some time amused their parents with various artifices; "but were at last denied any further pecuniary assistance." In this Micawberish high-falutin style, are Tracey's experiences told.

To fill their pockets, Tracey and his friends went upon the road. Expelled from the University, he reformed for awhile, and made his way through England until he arrived in Cheshire, where he took service with a wealthy grazier. He soon became fond of the country, and reconciled to his now humble lot, and being a youth of elegant appearance, and possessing very pleasing and fascinating manners, his friendship was courted by every one. He was proficient in music and singing, and often, when the toils of the day were over, the villagers would assemble at his master' ^[Pg 160], and "measure their gay steps to the sound of his violin; 'in fact, as Mr. Micawber might say,' they danced to his fiddling."

The country girls vied with one another for his attention; but the grazier's daughter (or perhaps the prospect of the grazier's money) was the object of his choice; and so firmly had he gained the esteem of his master, that their marriage was agreed upon, and at length celebrated with every mark of happiness and satisfaction.

For a time he remained happy in this condition of life; especially as his wife had brought a part of her father's property with her. He managed farm and stock with skill and industry, and might have become an ornament and a shining light in the Cheshire cheese-farming, only for the vagabond blood in him. He found a respectable life insufferably dull after his early riotous days; and was so loud in his praise of town and its delights, that he at length disturbed the content of his wife and his father-in-law as well, and induced them to realise all their property, and to accompany him to London, where, he said, he expected to procure some lucrative situation.

Johnson, perhaps thinking this to be too great a demand upon the credulity of his readers, feels constrained to add at this point a criticism of his own. "It was no small proof of the influence he had over the resolutions and actions of others, that he could thus induce a country farmer to forget his accustomed habits, and follow an adventu^[Pg 161]n-in-law into scenes with which he was altogether unacquainted." We may heartily agree with him here.

Having disposed of their joint stock and other property, they proceeded to London by way of Trentham, in Staffordshire, where they intended to rest for a day or two. In the house where they stayed Tracey met some of his old college friends, with whom he spent a jovial time. This confirmed him in his desire to return to his former extravagant way of living, and he seems instantly to have lost all his new-found honesty and sense of responsibility, under the influence of this old acquaintance.

Early next morning he arose and, stealing his father-in-law's pocket-book, and everything of value that lay handy, went off on his horse, and thus, without a word of farewell, disappeared. "Thus," remarks our author, ready with the moralising reflections we know he really detested, "he in a moment blasted the good hopes which the reader must have entertained of him; and his future serves only to confirm that contempt which every honourable mind must feel for him, after so infamous an action. Every endeavour to discover his retreat proved ineffectual, and his wife and father-in-law never heard of him again, until he expiated his crimes by an ignominious death."

It appears that Tracey proceeded to Coventry, where he alighted at an inn, in which he observed an unusual stillness. Entering the house, and hearing sounds of quarrelling upstairs, his curiosity led him to enquire what was ^[Pg 162], and walking abruptly into one of the rooms, surprised the innkeeper and his wife in a heated dispute. The innkeeper, an elderly man, had married a woman much younger than himself, and had discovered, too late, that she had really been angling for his money, rather than for himself: hence these disagreements.

The dispute ran high as Tracey entered. Both husband and wife were eager to state their respective grievances, and he listened patiently. Having heard both sides, he summed up judicially.

"Money," he said, "has been the cause of this confusion. Without it you may live in peace and quietness; so, for your own sakes, hand me at once the money you possess"; handling a loaded pistol significantly the while. He took first eighty-five guineas, and then his farewell.

On his way south he met a young Oxonian, whom he accompanied as far as Ware, where they passed the evening in great harmony and friendship. Proceeding next day, Tracey frequently remarked that his companion's valise—a prosperous-looking article—was certainly too weighty for him. But, in constantly recurring to the subject, he aroused his companion's suspicions that this pleasant fellow, whom he had picked up on the road, was none other than a

highwayman. He said nothing of his suspicion, but was resolved to be even with him. Presently, remarking that he was travelling to take up his degree of Master of Arts, he hinted that he had with him, in his portmanteau, sixty [Pg 163]s for his expenses.

"Have you so?" said Tracey. "That is very convenient for me at this time, for I want to borrow just such a sum, and you could not lend it to a better person than myself."

So, without more ado, he helped himself to the valise, untying it from the other's horse and strapping it on his own.

The student poured forth the most lamentable entreaties, and begged Tracey not to thus deprive him of what was to establish his future prospects in life. The money, he declared, was all borrowed, and if it were sto— er! *borrowed* from him at this juncture, he had not the least prospect of ever being able to repay it.

All these tears and protestations moved Tracey only so far as to give him his own purse, containing some four pounds, to carry him on for a few days. He then disappeared down a bye-road with the valise, and the student saw him no more, and perhaps had no wish to see him again; for, as Tracey discovered when he halted at the next hedge-row alehouse and unstrapped the valise, the sixty pounds was purely imaginary, and its contents were nothing but two old shirts, half a dozen dirty collars, a ragged and threadbare student's gown, a pair of stockings minus the feet, a pair of shoes with but one heel between them, a comb, some needles and thread, and a ham. The picturesque force of the sucking highwayman's language when he discovered these treasures, and how simply he had been taken in, [Pg 164] have considerably astonished the landlord of that wayside tavern.

The biographers of Ben Jonson mention his once being robbed by Tracey in very humorous style. Tracey met the poet, whom he knew well by sight, on a road in Buckinghamshire, and demanded his purse. To this "Rare Ben," as his epitaph in Westminster Abbey styles him, answered in the following impromptu:

"Fly, villain! hence, or by thy coat of steel,
I'll make thy heart my leaden bullet feel;
And send that thrice thievish soul of thine
To Hell, to be the Devil's valentine."

Upon which Tracey is supposed to have replied:

"Art thou great Ben? or the revivèd ghost
Of famous Shakespeare? or some drunken host,
Who, being tipsy with thy muddy beer,
Dost think thy rhymes will daunt my soul with fear?"

"Nay, know, base slave, that I am one of those
Can take a purse as well in verse as prose;
And when thou'rt dead, can write upon thy hearse,
'Here lies a poet who was robbed in verse.'"

This ingenious reply disarmed Jonson, who thus discovered that he had both a wit and a knave to contend with. He endeavoured to save his money, but to no purpose, and had to resign it to the man who, it seemed, could rhyme better, impromptu, than himself, and at greater length. This was not the only misfortune that befel Jonson on this j [Pg 165]; for, when within two or three miles of London, he was attacked by a gang of thieves, who knocked him from his horse, bound him hand and foot, and threw him into a park, where some other wayfarers who had shared the same fate were lying. One of his unfortunate companions calling out that he and his wife and children were undone, another, who was tied up also, said, "Pray, if you are all undone come and undo me"; which afforded Ben a hearty laugh, and a subject upon which he afterwards expressed his poetical powers.

Tracey was not one of your common highwaymen who expended their money as fast as they earned it. He was of a saving disposition, and after some time amassed sufficient to keep him in comfort during the rest of his life. Unfortunately there is little dependence to be placed upon the honesty of the world, as Tracey found, for the person to whom he had entrusted his savings embezzled them; and so our highwayman's intention to retire was upset, and he was reduced to going once more upon the road. His hand seems by this time to have lost its cunning, or else he had the very worst luck, for he was soon taken, in an attempt to rob the Duke of Buckingham; and, after being brought to trial at Winchester, was executed there in 1634, aged thirty-eight.

NED WICKS

THE famous Edward Wicks—more famous as "Ned," one of the favourites of the romancing Harrison Ainsworth—was born in 1684, and was the son of an innkeeper at Coventry. His father had him properly grounded in reading, writing, and 'rithmetic, with the ambition of seeing him a clerk, but the youthful Edward shunned the desk, and for a few months filled the post of exciseman. The excisemen of that day were looked upon with that suspicion and hatred with which tax-gatherers, tithe-collectors, landlords, people who render accounts for payment, and the like vermin, have ever been regarded from the earliest times, and ever will be by all right-minded folk; and Edward soon quitted the unpopular post of gauger, not only because of its unpopularity, but for reasons not altogether unconnected with an inability to make his accounts balance. His reasons for the change are, however, put in a different light by Smith, who, with sardonic humour, says: "Not thinking that a post sufficient to cheat Her Majesty's subjects, he was resolved to impose upon 'em more by taking all they had on the highway." Or, in milder fashion, according to Johnson^[Pg 167];hose rather to gather contributions for himself than for the King." For "King" read "Queen," for Wicks practised in the reign of Queen Anne.

The first two interviews he held with travellers upon the highway were successful, but the third brought him misfortune, for he was apprehended near Croydon, and sent to prison in the Marshalsea, a doleful hold, at that time said to be "a lively representation of the Iron Age, since nothing but gingling of keys and rattling of shackles and bolts and grates are here to be heard."

His third attempt would no doubt have remained also his last, had it not been for the exertions of his friends, who, during the interval between his arrest and the trial at Sessions, got at the prosecutor and bribed him with sixty guineas, to fail in identifying him. As the prosecutor had been robbed of only thirty shillings, he profited largely by the transaction and was doubtless sorry it could not be often repeated.

Wicks was accordingly acquitted, on the failure of this suborned prosecutor to swear to him; and was immediately on the road again; this time in partnership with a certain Joe Johnson, alias Saunders. Near Colnbrook they held up a stage-coach containing four gentlemen, one of whom discharged a blunderbuss at the luckless Joe, who received seven or eight bullets, and was thus wounded so severely that he was easily seized: the more easily in that Wicks instantly made off, with the speed of the wind. The "chivalry" of the highwaymen, of which we read so much in nov^[Pg 168]as an elusive thing, and was apt to be altogether missing in the stress of danger. The highwayman who would stand by a wounded comrade was a very rare bird: so rare, indeed, that we are inclined to doubt his existence.

Joe Johnson, committed to prison, was charged by one Woolley with an earlier robbery, of a silver watch and some money, and was found guilty and hanged at Tyburn, February 7th, 1704, aged twenty-two.

The fate of the companion whom he had so basely deserted in the moment of his greatest need did not warn Wicks from his perilous career, and we are assured that he "pursued his wicked courses with a great deal of pleasure and satisfaction." One day he overtook the Duke of Marlborough at St. Albans, but His Grace had too large a retinue for it to be safe to venture an attack, and so the great Churchill escaped, for once in a way.

Then, riding on towards Cheshunt, he found his way to a little cottage in a bye-road, where he discovered a poor old woman, bitterly weeping. She told him she was a poor widow, with no money to pay her rent, and expected the landlord every moment to come and seize what few goods she had.

Wicks bade her rest contented, and he would make things easy; and, pulling off the richly laced clothes he wore, and putting on an old coat the woman lent him, he awaited the arrival of the hard-hearted landlord; who presently came and demanded payment. Ned thereupon, rising out of the chimney-corner with a short pipe in his mou^[Pg 169]ld, "I understand, sir, that my sister here, poor woman, is behindhand for rent, and that you design to seize her goods, but as she is a desolate widow and hath not wherewithal to pay you at present, I hope you will take so much pity and compassion on her mean circumstances as not to be too severe: pray let me persuade you to have a little forbearance."

Said the landlord, "Don't talk to me of forbearance; I'll not pity people to ruin myself. I'll have my money. I want my rent, and if I am not paid now, I'll seize her goods forthwith, and turn her out of my house."

When Ned found that no entreaties or persuasions would prevail, he said, "Come, come, let's see a receipt in full, and I'll pay it."

Accordingly the receipt was given, and the rent paid, and the landlord made ready to go.

But Wicks warned him of the dangers of the roads. "'Tis drawing towards night, sir, and there are many robbers about. I would advise you to stay here till to-morrow, and go in the morning."

"No, no!" exclaimed the landlord impatiently, "I'll go now. I can go seven miles before dark. I don't care what robbing there is abroad. Besides, I am not afraid of being robbed by any one man, be he whom he may."

So, taking his horse, away he rode, and Wicks, hastily re-assuming his fine clothes, quietly after him, at a cautious interval.

Taking a circuitous course and putting his mare to a hand-gallop, Wicks was already waiting the landlord ^[Pg 170]edge of a dark pond on a lonely stretch of road, when the old man rode by. In that situation, as the shades of night were falling, he robbed him of the rent and of as much beside, which he later kept for his honest brokerage, after making the widow a present of the original amount. Hastening back to the cottage, he had already resumed the rustic clothes and was seated in the chimney corner, when a knocking came at the door. It was the landlord returning to tell the story of his woes. He said he had been robbed by a rogue in a lace coat, who swore a thousand oaths at him.

"I told you how unsafe it was," said Wicks, from his corner; "but you would not take my advice."

The landlord begged leave to stay the night, and went the following morning upon his way.

The obvious criticism of this is that, having already been robbed, his best and safest course would have been to make haste on his way home, the remainder of the journey, without turning back.

Ned Wicks one day met Lord Mohun on the road between Windsor and Colnbrook, attended by only a groom and a footman. He commanded his lordship to "stand and deliver!" for he was in great want of money, and money he would have, before they parted company. Lord Mohun, a noted bully and rustler of that age, proposed that, if the h[[Pg 171](#)]yman was so insistent, they should fight for it, and Wicks very readily accepted this proposal; whereupon, my lord, seeing him busily preparing his pistols for the engagement, began to back out of the bargain. Wicks, perceiving this, said contemptuously: "All the world knows me to be a man, and such a man am I that, although your lordship could, in a cowardly manner, murder Mumford the actor, and Captain Cout, I am by no means afraid of you. Therefore, since you will not fight, I order you to down with your gold, or expect no quarter!"

Thus meeting with more than his match, Lord Mohun fell into a passionate fit of swearing. "My lord," said Wicks, when he could get a word in edgeways, "I perceive you swear perfectly well, *extempore*: come, I'll give your honour a fair chance for your money, and that is, he that swears best of us two shall keep his own, and the money of he who loses as well."

My lord, an expert in this line, through long cursing over losses at cards, eagerly agreed to this new bargain, and threw down a purse of fifty guineas. Wicks staked a like sum, and the competition started.

After a quarter of an hour's prodigious swearing on both sides, it was left to his lordship's groom to declare the winner.

He said: "Why, my lord, your honour swears as well as ever I heard any Person of Quality in my life; but, indeed, to give the Strange Gentleman his due, he has done better than yourself, and has won the wager, even if it[[Pg 172](#)]for a thousand pounds."

After a few successful years of constant attention to his profession, Wicks was at last executed at Warwick, on August 29th, 1719, aged twenty-nine.

DICK TURPIN

RICHARD TURPIN, the hero of half a hundred plays, and of many hundred ballads and chap-book histories, now demands our attention. His name stands out, far and away above that of any other of the high-toby fraternity. Not Claude Du Vall himself owns half his celebrity, nor Hind, nor Whitney, nor Sixteen-String Jack. Ballad-mongers, playwrights of the old penny-gaff order, and novelists, with Harrison Ainsworth at their head, have ever united to do him honour and have conspired—innocently as a rule—to deprive another and a worthier highwayman of his due, in order to confer it upon "Dick." The familiar "Dick" itself shows us how the great public long ago took Turpin to its ample bosom, and cherished him, but the student of these things smiles a little sourly as he traces the quite unheroic doings of this exceptionally mean and skulking scoundrel, and fails all the time to note anything of a dashing nature in his very busy but altogether sordid career.

Turpin never rode that famous Ride to York upon Black Bess: another and an earlier than he by some sixty years—the bold and daring Nevison—performed that ride, as we have already shown; and the chivalry, the coolness, and consideration, generally so much in evidence in the plays and the stories, are by no means found in the many contemporary reports of his doings.

Richard Turpin was born on September 21st, 1705, at the village of Hempstead, in Essex. There are those who find a fanciful appropriateness in the fact, that a man, whose wife was to become a "hempen widow," should have been born at a place so significantly named. Those who are curious enough to seek it, may duly find the record of the future highwayman's baptism in the parish register, and will find the baptism of an elder sister, Maria, recorded nearly three years and a half earlier, April 28th, 1702.

The Reverend William Sworder, vicar of Hempstead, who performed the baptism, and thereafter made an entry of it in his register, was evidently proud of his acquaintance with the language of the ancients, and less pleased with his native tongue, for his entries are generally in Latin: and thus we find the infant Dick and his parents figuring, "*Richardus, filius Johannis et Mariae Turpin.*"



TURPIN'S BAPTISMAL REGISTER OF HEMPSTEAD.

John Turpin at that time kept the inn that even now, somewhat altered perhaps in detail, looks across the road to the circle of pollard trees known as "Turpin's Ring," and thence up to the steep church-path. It was then, it appears, known as the "Bell," but at times is referred to as the "Royal Oak," and is now certainly the "Crown." Such are the duties that beset the path of the historian. Nor has this mere nomenclature of the ancestral roof-tree been the only difficulty. Were there not seven cities that claimed to be the birthplace of Homer? In like manner at least one other place, Thaxted, is said to have been Turpin's native home; but with the register as witness we can flatly disprove this, and give the honour of producing the famous person to Hempstead.

The youthful Turpin was apprenticed to a butcher in Whitechapel, and soon afterwards set up in business for himself at Waltham Abbey, at the same time marrying at East Ham a girl named Hester Palmer, whose father is said to have kept the "Rose and Crown" inn at Bull Beggar's Hole, Clay Hill, Enfield.

As a butcher, he introduced a novel method of business by which, except for the absurd and obstinate old-fashioned prejudices that stood in his way, he might soon have made a handsome competence. This method was simply that of taking your cattle wherever they might best be found, without the tiresome and expensive formality of buying and paying for them. It might conceivably have succeeded, too, except that he worked on too Napoleonic a scale, to hold a herd. It was a herd belonging to one "Farmer Giles," of Plaistow, and unfortunately it was traced to his door, and he had to fly. More restrained accounts, on the other hand, tell us it was only two oxen that were taken.

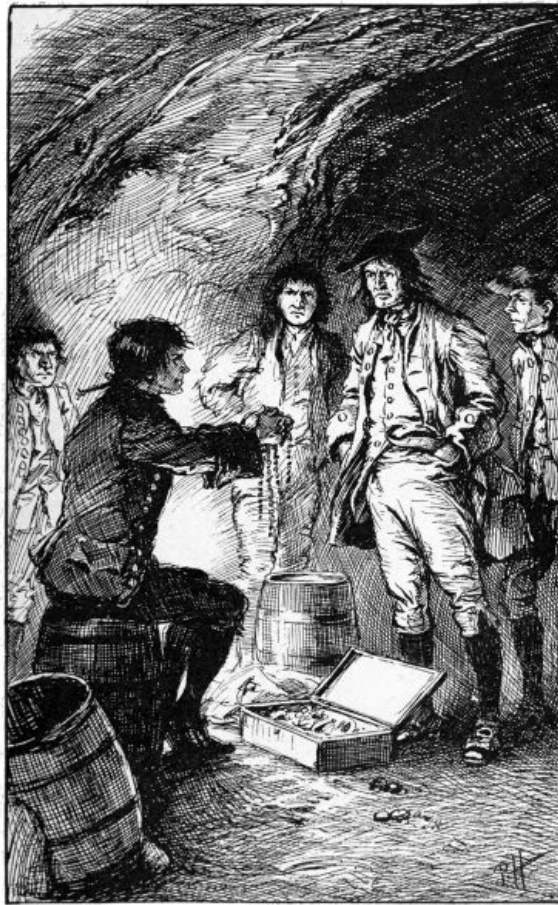
The Plaistow-Waltham Abbey affair rendered Turpin's situation extremely perilous, and he retired north-east in the Rodings district, generally called in those times "the Hundreds of Essex"—to "Suson," say old accounts, by which Seward-stone is meant.

But although a comparatively safe retreat, it was exceedingly dull, and nothing offered, either in the way of the excitements he now thirsted for, or by way of making a living. He was reduced to the at once mean and dangerous occupation of robbing the smugglers who then infested this, and indeed almost every other, country district. It was mean, because they, very like himself, warred with law and order; and dangerous, because although he might only attack solitary "freetraders," there was that strong fellow-feeling among smugglers that made them most ferociously resent interference with their kind. Turpin probably ran greater risks in meddling with them than he encountered at any other period in his career.

Sometimes he would rob them without any beating about the bush: at others he would make pretence of being a "riding-officer," *i.e.* a mounted Revenue officer, and would seize their goods "in the King's name."

But that line of business could not last long. Writers on Turpin generally say he wearied of it: but the truth was, he was afraid of the smugglers' vengeance, which, history tells us, could take fearful forms, scarcely credible in a Christian country, did we not know, by the irrefragible evidence of courts of justice, and by the terrible murders by smugglers in Hampshire, duly expiated in 1749, to what lengths those desperate men could go.

He turned again, therefore, to the neighbourhood of Waltham, and, with a few chosen spirits, haunted Epping Forest. There they established themselves chiefly as deer-stealers, and soon formed an excellent illicit connection with unscrupulous dealers in game in London, to whom they consigned many a cartload of venison, which generally travelled up to town covered over with an innocent-looking layer of cabbages, potatoes, or turnips.



TURPIN AND HIS GANG IN THEIR CAVE IN EPPING FOREST.

But the prices they obtained for these supplies did not, in their opinion, pay them sufficiently for the work they did, or the risks they ran, and they then determined to throw in their lot with a notorious band of housebreakers and miscellaneous evil-doers, dreaded in Essex and in the eastern suburbs of London as "Gregory's Gang." The earliest of their exploits in this new class of venture was the robbing of Mr. Strype, who kept a chandler's shop at Watford, a district hitherto unaffected by them. They cleared the house of everything of any value, without offering Mr. [\[Pg 178\]](#) any violence (which was thought to be very good of them) and so disappeared; to reappear always unexpectedly in widely-sundered districts.

Nothing came amiss to them. In one night they robbed both Chingford and Barking churches, but found little worth their while; and then, in a manner most baffling to the authorities of those times, would for a time disband themselves and work separately, or some of them would lie entirely by for a while. An odd one or two would even be taken and hanged, which rendered it more than ever desirable for their surviving brethren to make themselves scarce for a time. But want of money was not long in bringing such generally spendthrift and improvident rogues back again to the calling they had chosen. Several among them were already too well and too unfavourably known as deer-stealers to the verderers of Epping Forest for their reappearance in those glades to be safe, but Turpin, among others, ventured. Mr. Mason, one of the chief of these verderers, rangers, or keepers, was especially active in putting down this poaching, and the gang vowed they would repay him for it. But more immediate schemes claimed their attention. First among these was a plan for robbing a farmhouse at Rippleside, near Barking. There would seem to have been eight or nine of them on this occasion. After their manner, they knocked at the door at night, and when, properly afraid of strangers coming after dark, the people refused to open, they rushed forward in a body and broke the door in. Having [\[Pg 181\]](#) the farmer, his wife, his son-in-law, and the servant-maid, they ransacked the house, and stole £700.

"This will do!" exclaimed Turpin, captaining the band; adding regretfully, "if it were always so!"

The attack then made by the gang upon the house of Mr. Mason, the vigilant keeper of Epping Forest, was probably determined upon in the first instance from a desire rather to be revenged upon him for interfering with their earlier deer-stealing operations, than from the idea of plunder. Turpin was not present on this occasion, for although he had intended to take part in the act of vengeance, he was at the time in London, squandering his share of the Rippleside robbery, and in too advanced a state of intoxication to meet his accomplices as he had arranged to do.

Rust, Rose, and Fielder were the three concerned in the affair, and it clearly shows the spirit in which they entered upon it, when it is said that, before starting, they bound themselves by oath not to leave anything in the house undamaged. An oath would not necessarily be of any sacred quality of irrevocability with scoundrels of this or any other type, but when the compact fitted in with their own earnest inclinations, there was no difficulty in adhering to it.

Fielder gained admission to the house by scaling the garden wall and breaking in at the back door, then admitting the other two by the front entrance. Mason was upstairs, sitting with his aged father in his bedroom, when [\[Pg 182\]](#) three suddenly burst in upon them, and, seizing them, bound them hand and foot. They asked the old man if he knew them: he said he did not, and they then carried him downstairs and laid him, helplessly tied up, under the kitchen dresser. Mason, the keeper, had a sack forced over his head and tied round his waist; his little daughter, terrified at what she heard, slipping hurriedly out of bed and out of doors, and hiding in a pigstye.

The revengeful three then entered upon the work of wanton destruction upon which they had come. They first

demolished a heavy fourpost bedstead, and then, each armed with a post, systematically visited every room in the house and battered everything to pieces. Carpets, curtains, bedclothing, and linen, and everything that could not be broken, were cut to shreds. Money had not been expected, but in smashing a china punch-bowl that stood somewhat out of the way, on a high shelf, down fell a shower of a hundred and twenty-two guineas, with which they went off, doubly satisfied with revenge and this unlooked-for plunder. They hastened up to London and joined Turpin at the Bun-House in the Rope Fields, and shared their booty fairly with him, although he had not been present to earn his portion—an unusual support of that generally misleading proverb, "There is honour among thieves."

From 1732 and onwards a solitary inn, on the then desolate, remote, and often flooded Hackney Marshes [Pg 183], was frequently frequented by Turpin on his way to and from Epping and London. This inn, the "White House" by name, then kept by one Beresford, was the resort of sportsmen interested in cock-fighting. Turpin was known there as a private gentleman. The house was demolished and entirely rebuilt in 1900; but another at Tyler's Ferry, Temple Mills, also a white-faced house, remains, and claims a similar association.

On January 11th, 1735, Turpin and five of his companions, Ned Rust, George Gregory, Fielder, Rose, and Wheeler, went boldly to the house of a Mr. Saunders, a rich farmer at Charlton, Kent, between seven and eight o'clock in the evening, and, having knocked at the door, asked if Mr. Saunders were at home. When they learned that he was within, they rushed immediately into the house and found the farmer, with his wife and some friends, playing at cards. They told the company they would not be injured if they remained quiet, and then proceeded to ransack the house. First seizing a trifle in the way of a silver snuff-box that lay on the card-table, they left a part of their gang to stand guard over the party, while the rest took Mr. Saunders and forced him to act the part of guide, to discover the whereabouts of his valuables. They broke open some escritaires and cupboards, and stole about £100, exclusive of a quantity of plate. Meanwhile, the maid-servant had retreated into her room upstairs and bolted the door, and was calling "Thieves!" at the top of her voice, out of window. But the marauders presently found their way upstairs, broke open the door [Pg 184], and secured and silenced her: not, apparently, doing her any considerable injury: and then at leisure thoroughly searched every corner of the house, and gleaned everything of a portable nature that was worth taking. There was no hurry. They discovered some relics of the late Christmas festivities in the larder, in the shape of mince-pies, and sat down impudently, with the master of the house and his friends, to partake of them. One of the gang, by careful foraging, had found a bottle of brandy, and broached it at the table, hospitably offering some to Mr. Saunders and his friends, and assuring them, with a quaint humour, that they were as welcome as could be to it. Mrs. Saunders did not, however, see the humour of it, and was fainting from terror; and so they mixed her some brandy-and-water, to revive her.

At length, having taken everything possible, and thoroughly enjoyed themselves, they made off, declaring that if any of the family gave the least alarm within two hours, or if they dared to advertise the marks on the stolen plate, they would infallibly return at some future period, and murder them.

It was afterwards ascertained that they then retired to a public-house in Woolwich, near by, where the robbery had been planned, and soon afterwards crossed the river and resorted to an empty house in Ratcliffe Highway, where they deposited the plunder until they had found a purchaser ready to buy without asking any inconvenient questions [Pg 185].

A week later, the same gang visited the house of a Mr. Sheldon, near Croydon church. They arrived at about seven o'clock in the evening, and, finding the coachman in the stable, immediately gagged and bound him. Then, leaving the stable, they encountered Mr. Sheldon himself, in the yard, come to hear what the unaccustomed sounds of scuffling and struggling in the stable could mean. The unfortunate Mr. Sheldon was then compelled to act as guide over his own house, and to show the gang where all his valuables resided. Jewels, plate, and other valuable articles were removed, together with a sum of eleven guineas; but at the last moment, they returned two guineas, and apologised more or less handsomely for their conduct. They then had the effrontery to repair to the "Half Moon" tavern, close at hand, and to each take a glass of spirits there, and to change one of the guineas of which they had robbed Mr. Sheldon.

The manners of the gang would thus appear to be mending, but their unwonted politeness did not last long, as we shall presently see.

In giving some account of the doings of Turpin, either singly or in association with others, it is desirable, as far as possible, to tell his story largely by the aid, and in the exact words, of the newspapers of the time. Only in this manner is it likely that a charge of exaggeration can be avoided. Where all have boldly enlarged upon the popular [Pg 186], and have as richly brocaded it as their imaginations permit, to revert to plain facts becomes a healthy exercise.

The *London Evening Post* of February 6th, 1735, is the original authority for the next two incidents; two of the foremost in all popular accounts of Turpin's life. So much extravagant nonsense has been written, and is still being written, and will yet continue to be written about Dick Turpin, that any original documents about him are particularly valuable. They help to show us what we must discredit and what we may safely retain. Indeed, without such newspaper paragraphs, the conscientious writer, faced with the flood of indubitably spurious Turpin "literature," might in his impatience with its extravagance, refuse to credit any portion of it. But the newspapers of that day serve amply to show that in this case, truth is equally as strange as fiction. Not stranger, as the proverb would have us believe, but certainly as strange.

Thus we read in the *London Evening Post*: "On Saturday Night last, about Seven o'Clock, five Rogues enter'd the House of the Widow Shelley, at Loughton in Essex, having Pistols etc., and threaten'd to murder the old Lady, if she did not tell them where her Money lay, which she obstinately refusing for some Time, they threaten'd to lay her across the Fire if she did not instantly tell them, which she would not do; but her Son being in the Room, and threaten'd to be murder'd, cry'd out, he would tell them if they would not murder his Mother, and did; whereupon they went up stairs and took near £100, a Silver Tankard, and other Plate, and all Manner of Household Goods; they afterwards went into the Cellar, and drank several Bottles of Ale and Wine, and broil'd some Meat, eat the Relicts of a Fillet of Veal, etc. While they were doing this, two of their Gang went into Mr. Turkle's, a Farmer's, who rents one End of the Widow's House, and robb'd him of above £20 and then they all went off, taking two of the Farmer's Horses to carry off their Luggage; the Horses were found on Sunday Morning in Old Street; they staid (the Rogues, not the horses) about three Hours in the House."



TURPIN HOLDS THE LANDLADY OVER THE FIRE.

This house, still in existence, although part of it has been rebuilt, is identified with a place now styled "Priors," but at that time known as "Traps Hill Farm." The heavy outer door, plentifully studded with nail-heads, is said to have been added after this visit.

This incident is probably the original of the story told of Turpin holding the landlady of the "Bull" inn, Shooter's Hill, over the fire; although it is inherently possible that he and his scoundrelly crew, having certainly threatened to do as much at Loughton, and having done the like to a farmer at Edgeware, actually perpetrated the atrocity.

The startling paragraph already quoted is followed immediately by another report, a good deal more startling: "On Tuesday Night," it says, very circumstantially, "about Eight o'Clock, five Villains"—it will be noticed that by t[[Pg 190](#)]e the "Rogues" of the earlier narration have become "Villains," and their conduct, by natural consequence, infinitely more heinous—"came to the House of Mr. Lawrence, a Farmer at Edgewarebury, near Edgeware, in Middlesex, but the Door being bolted, they could not get in, so they went to the Boy who was in the Sheep-house, and compell'd him to call the Maid, who open'd the Door; upon which they rush'd in, bound the Master, Maid, and one Man-Servant, and swore they would murder all the Family, if they did not discover their Money, etc.; they trod the bedding under foot, in case there should be money hidden in it, and took about £10 in Money, Linnen etc., all they could lay their Hands on, broke the old Man's Head, dragg'd him about the House, emptied a kettle of water from the fire over him, which had fortunately only just been placed on it, and ravish'd the Maid, Dorothy Street, using her in a most barbarous Manner, and then went off, leaving the Family bound, lock'd the Door, and took the key away with them: The Son, who came Home soon after they were gone, call'd the Boy to take his Horse, but could make nobody hear, but at last the old Man call'd out, and told him Rogues had been there" (surely, he meant "Villains"), "as they were all bound, and that the Rogues said they would go rob his Brother; whereupon he rode and alarm'd the Town, went to his Brother's, but they had not been [[Pg 191](#)]they pursued them to the Turnpike, and found they had been gone through for London about an Hour. They were all arm'd with Pistols, and one had a Handkerchief all over his Face."

Neither of these accounts mentions the name of Turpin, but these outrages were immediately ascribed to a gang of which he was a member.

The same evening journal of February 11th has a later account: "Mr. Lawrence, the Farmer at Edgeware-Bury, who was robb'd last Week (as we mention'd) lies so ill, of the Bruises etc., he receiv'd, that its question'd whether he'll recover: the Rogues, after he had told them where his Money was, not finding so much as they expected, let his Breeches down, and set him bare—on the Fire, several times; which burnt him prodigiously."

There seems, by this account, to have been much in common between this gang and those "chauffeurs" described by Vidocq in his *Memoirs*; bands of robbers who pervaded the country districts of France, and adopted the like methods of persuasion with people who could not otherwise be made to disclose the whereabouts of their hoards.

This ferocious attack upon the farm at Edgewarebury was the first of a series in which the gang appeared on horseback. They had already done so well that they felt they could no longer deny themselves the luxury of being fully-furnished highwaymen. But they did not purchase; they merely hired; and imagination pictures some of them as very insufficient cavaliers, holding on by their horses' necks. For it is not given to a footpad, graduating in the hi[[Pg 192](#)]anch of his profession, instantly to command an easy seat in the saddle; and the scene at the "Old Leaping Bar" inn, High Holborn, whence they set out to ride to the "Ninepin and Bowl" at Edgeware, must have been amusing in the extreme.

Six of Turpin's gang assembled next on the 7th of February at the "White Bear" inn, Drury Lane, and planned to rob the house of a Mr. Francis, a farmer in the then rural fields of Marylebone. Arriving at the farm about dusk, they first saw a man in a cowshed and seized and bound him, declaring they would shoot him if he should dare to make any attempt to break loose, or to cry out. In the stable they found another man, whom they served in the like manner. Scarcely had they done this when they met Mr. Francis at his own garden gate, returning home. Three of the gang laid their hands upon his shoulders and stopped him; and the farmer, thinking it to be a freak of some silly young fellows, out for the evening, was not at all alarmed. "Methinks you are mighty funny, gentlemen," he said good-humouredly; upon which, showing him their pistols in a threatening manner, he saw his mistake.

No harm, they said, should come to him if he would but give his daughter a note by one of them, authorising her to pay bearer a hundred pounds in cash.

Mr. Francis declared he could not do so; he had not anything like that amount in the house; upon which t[[Pg 193](#)] him violently into the stable and tied him up also. Then, knocking at the door of the house, and Miss Francis opening it, they pushed into the passage and secured her as well. The foremost men were particularly rude and violent, but Turpin, who came in at the rear, appears to have remonstrated with them about this gross usage, and to have stopped it: only assuring her that it would be best she remained quiet, and that if she made any resistance she would be treated even worse.

A maid-servant, hearing this, cried out, "Lord, Mrs. Sarah! what have you done?"

One of the gang then struck the maid, and another hit Miss Francis, and swore they would be murdered if they did not hold their peace.

Mrs. Francis, hearing the disturbance from an inner room, called out, "What's the matter?" on which Fielder ran forward, and crying "D—n you, I'll stop your mouth presently!" broke her head with the handle of a whip he carried, and then tied her to a chair.

Miss Francis and the maid were tied to the kitchen-dresser, and Gregory was deputed to watch them, with a pistol in his hand, lest they should cry out for assistance or try to struggle free while the others were raiding the house.

A not very considerable reward met their unhallowed industry; including a silver tankard, a gold watch and chain, a silver medal of Charles the First, a number of minor silver articles, and four or five gold rings. A find of [\[Pg 194\]](#) even guineas was more to the point, and a brace of pistols was not to be despised. They were even so particular about details, in the hour-and-a-half search they made, that they took away with them such inconsiderable items as a wig, six handkerchiefs, four shirts, a velvet hat, and some pairs of stockings. A frugal and meticulous gang, this!

As a result of these bold attacks in the suburbs of London, a great feeling of indignation and insecurity arose, and a reward of £100 was at once offered for the apprehension of the gang, or of any members of it. Information having come to some of the Westminster peace-officers that these confederates were accustomed to meet in an alehouse situated in a low alley in Westminster, the place was beset, and Turpin, Fielder, Rose, and Wheeler were found there. After a short fight with cutlasses, the last three were secured. No one appears to have been seriously hurt in this affray, except the usual harmless, innocent person, present by mere chance; in this case, a certain Bob Berry, who received a dangerous cut on the arm, below the elbow. Turpin dexterously escaped out of window, and, obtaining a horse (*not* the celebrated "Black Bess," who never existed outside the imagination of Harrison Ainsworth and the pages of his *Rookwood*), rode away to fresh fields and pastures new. Fielder and Rose were tried and found guilty, chiefly on the testimony of Wheeler, who turned King's evidence. They were hanged at Tyburn, and afterwards gibbeted. [\[Pg 195\]](#)

The *Gentleman's Magazine* refers shortly to the execution, and includes a certain, or an altogether uncertain, Saunders: "Monday, March 10th, the following malefactors, attended by a guard of fifty soldiers, were executed at Tyburn, appearing bold and undaunted; viz. Rose, Saunders, and Fielder, the Country Robbers." It is significant of the horrors of that era that ten others were hanged in company with them, for various crimes.

The gang was thus broken up, but rogues have, as it were, a magnetic attraction for one another, and Turpin was not long alone. It must have been a dull business waiting solitary on suitable, *i.e.* dark or foggy, nights in lonely situations for unsuspecting wayfarers; an experience calculated to get on the nerves, and so it is scarcely remarkable that many highwaymen elected to hunt in couples; although in the long run it was safer to work alone and unknown. No fear then of treachery on the part of a trusted comrade, always ready to "make a discovery," as the technical phrase ran, to save his own neck from the rope, a little while longer.

But Turpin seems to have sought, and found, one companion for a little while, for he duly appears in an account of how two gentlemen were robbed about eight o'clock on the evening of July 10th, between Wandsworth and Barnes commons, "by two Highwaymen, suppos'd to be Turpin the Butcher, and Rowden the Pewterer, the remain[[Pg 196](#)]wo of Gregory's Gang, who robb'd them of their Money and dismounted them; made them pull off their Horse's Bridles, then turning them loose, they rode off towards Roehampton, where a Gentleman was robb'd (as suppos'd by the same Highwaymen), of a Watch and £4 in Money."

Old maps of this district hint, not obscurely, that this was no mere isolated, chance danger in the neighbourhood; for the eye, roaming along those charts, towards Richmond, notes "Thieves' Corner" boldly marked at what is now the junction of the Sheen Road and Queen's Road, where the "Black Horse" of old, a very shy and questionable kind of brick-built, white-washed alehouse, stood until it was pulled down about the year 1902 and rebuilt in the flashy modern style. Adjoining, was, and still is, for that matter, "Pest House Common": cheerful name! while Rocque's map of 1745, not marking that inimical corner, transfers the affected area to the stretch of highway between Marshgate and Manor Road and Richmond Town, and styles it "Thieves' Harbour." On the opposite side, in sharp contrast, is marked "Paradise Row." Rocque also styles the common, "Pestilent Common." Altogether, in fact, a pestilent neighbourhood.

How well-named was "Thieves' Corner" we may perhaps judge from a brief and matter-of-fact account (as though it were but an ordinary occurrence, demanding little notice) of a Reverend Mr. Amey, "a country clergyman w[[Pg 197](#)]es at the 'Star' inn, in the Strand," being robbed two nights earlier than the foregoing robbery "two miles this side of

Richmond in Surrey, of his Silver Watch, four Guineas, and some Silver, by two Highwaymen, well-mounted and well-dress'd. The Rogues turn'd his Horse loose and went off towards Richmond."



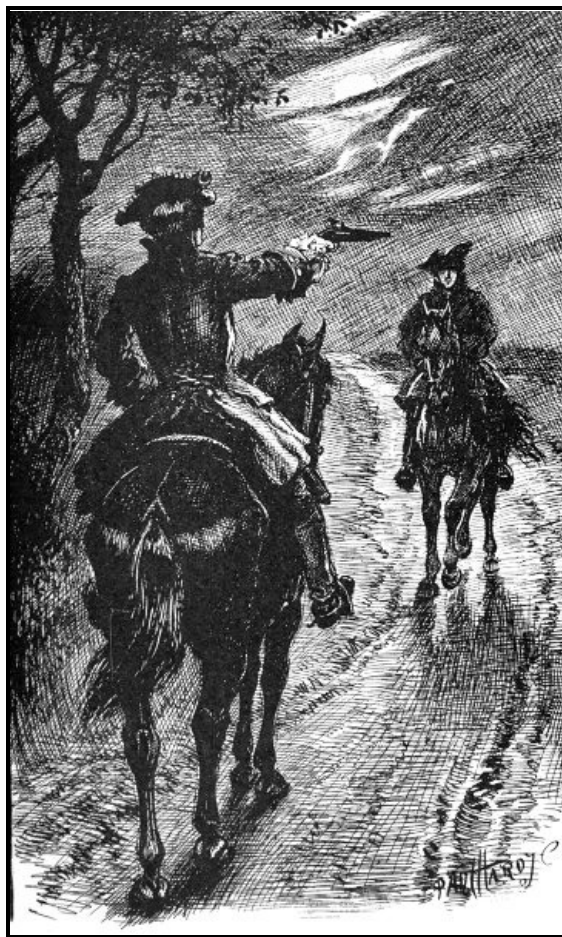
BOLD DICK TURPIN.
(According to Skelt.)

Again, this time in the *Grub Street Journal* of July 24th, 1735, we find a trace of the busy Dick, in the following: "Monday, Mr. Omar, of Southwark, meeting between Barnes-Common and Wandsworth, Turpin the butcher, with another person, clapt spurs to his horse, but they coming up with him, oblig'd him to dismount, and Turpin [\[Pg 198\]](#)cting that he knew him, would have shot him, but was prevented by the other, who pull'd the pistol out of his hand."

On Sunday, August 16th, Turpin and Rowden the Pewterer seem to have been particularly busy and to have had a good day; for it is recorded by the same authority that they robbed several gentlemen on horseback and in coaches. The district they favoured on this occasion was the Portsmouth Road between Putney and Kingston Hill.

In another fortnight's time or so, having made these parts of Surrey too hot to hold them longer, and being apparently unwilling to transfer their activities beyond ten or twelve miles' radius from London, they opened a most aggressive campaign in suburban Kent. "We hear," says the *Grub Street Journal* of October 16th, "that for about six weeks past, Blackheath has been so infested by two highwaymen (suppos'd to be Rowden and Turpin) that 'tis dangerous for travellers to pass. On Thursday Turpin and Rowden had the insolence to ride through the City at noonday, and in Watling Street they were known by two or three porters, who had not the courage to attack them; they were indifferently mounted, and went towards the bridge; so 'tis thought are gone the Tonbridge road."

It was while patrolling the road towards Cambridge (on Stamford Hill, according to some historians) that Turpin first met Tom King. Observing a well-dressed and well-mounted stranger riding slowly along, Turpin spurred [\[Pg 201\]](#) him, presented a pistol, and demanded his money. The stranger merely laughed, which threw Turpin into a passion, and he threatened him with instant death if he did not comply. King—for it was he—laughed again, and said, "What! dog eat dog? Come, come, brother Turpin; if you don't know me I know you, and shall be glad of your company."



TURPIN MEETS TOM KING.

This was the beginning of an alliance. These brethren in iniquity soon struck up a bargain, and, immediately entering on business, committed so large a number of robberies that no landlord of any wayside inn of the least respectability cared to welcome them, for fear of being indicted for harbouring such guests. Thus situated, they fixed on a spot between the King's Oak and the Loughton road, in Epping Forest, where they made a cave, "large enough to receive them and their horses," says an old account. This was enclosed within a thicket of bushes and brambles, through which they could look, without themselves being observed. From this station they used to issue, and robbed such numbers of persons that at length the very pedlars who travelled the road carried firearms for their defence. At such times when they could not safely stir from this hiding-place, Turpin's wife was accustomed to secretly convey to them such articles of food and such other things as might be necessary to their comfort. When, at a later period, Turpin^[Pg 202] was discovered, and he was reduced to skulking about the forest, it was found to be by no means a despicable retreat. It was dry, and carpeted with straw, hay, and dry leaves; and such articles as two clean shirts, two pairs of stockings, a piece of ham, a bottle of wine, and some feminine apparel, served to show that this was not altogether an anchorite's cell. Some old accounts go so far as to say that Turpin altogether occupied this cave for six years, but that is not credible.

One day, as Turpin and Tom King were spying up and down the road from their cave, through the screen of furze and bramble that hid them from passers-by, they saw a gentleman driving past whom King knew very well as a rich City merchant, of Broad Street. He was on his way to his country estate at Fairmead Bottom, in a carriage with his children. King made after him, and on the Loughton road called upon the coachman to stop. The merchant, however, was a man of spirit, and offered a resistance, supposing there to be only one highwayman; upon which, King called Turpin, by the name of "Jack," and bid him hold the horses' heads. They then proceeded to take his money, which he parted with, without any further trouble; but strongly demurred to parting with his watch, which he said was a family heirloom, the gift of his father. The altercation, although short, was accompanied by threats and menaces and frightened the children, who persuaded their father to give up the watch; and then an old mourning ring became an object of dispute^[Pg 203] value was very small, but King insisted upon having it, when Turpin interposed and said they were not so ungentlemanly as to deprive a traveller of such a relic, and bade King desist. This concession prompted the merchant to ask whether they would not, as a favour, permit him to repurchase his watch from them; upon which King said: "Jack, he seems to be a good, honest fellow; shall we let him have the watch?"

"Aye," said Turpin; "do as you will."

The merchant, then inquiring the price, King replied, "Six guineas," adding, "we never sell one for more, even though it be worth six-and-thirty." Then the merchant promised not to discover them, and said he would leave the money at the "Sword Blade" coffee-house in Birchin Lane, and no questions asked.

The *Country Journal* for April 23rd, 1737, says that on Saturday, April 16th, as a gentleman of West Ham and others were travelling to Epping, "the famous Turpin and a New Companion of his came up and attack'd the Coach, in order to rob it; the Gentleman had a Carbine in the Coach, loaded with Slugs, and seeing them coming, got it ready, and presented it at Turpin, on stopping the Coach, but it flash'd in the Pan; upon which says Turpin 'G—d D— you, you have miss'd me, but I won't you,' and shot into the Coach at him, but the Ball miss'd him, passing between Him and a Lady in the Coach; and then they rode off towards Ongar, and dined afterwards at Hare Street, and ro^[Pg 204]h the Evening several Passengers on the Forest between Loughton and Romford, who knew him; he has not robb'd on that Road for some Time before."

It is possible that this adventure gave Turpin the idea of providing himself with a carbine and slugs in addition to his pistols, for, following the contemporary newspaper record of his movements, we learn from several London papers, notably the *London Daily Post* and the *Daily Advertiser*, that when a servant of Thompson, one of the under-keepers of Epping Forest, went in search of him and his retreat in those leafy recesses, with a higgler on Wednesday, May 4th, Turpin shot the man dead with a charge of slugs from a carbine. Detailed accounts set forth how Mr. Thompson's servant, animated with hopes of a hundred pounds reward, went out, armed with a gun, in company with the higgler, in search for Turpin. When they came near his hiding-place, the highwayman saw them, and, taking them for sportsmen, called out that there were no hares near that thicket.

"No," replied Mr. Thompson's man, "but I have found a Turpin!" and, presenting his gun, required him to surrender.

Turpin, replying to him in a friendly manner, and at the same time gradually retreating into the cave, slyly seized his carbine, and shot him in the stomach.

He then fled from the Forest, and was reported, by the *London Daily Post* of May 12th, to have been very nearly captured in the small hours of the morning of the 11th by three peace-officers, who, late the night before [Pg 205]eived information that he proposed to sleep at a certain house near Wellclose Square. Three men accordingly beset the house, but they were observed by a woman on the look-out, and Turpin, hurriedly aroused, fled through the roof, and over the chimneypots of the adjoining houses.

It will be observed by these various newspaper paragraphs and scattered notices, that Turpin was always changing his associates, and it is obvious that the stories which would have us believe he and Tom King set up an exclusive partnership, are not to be implicitly believed. Turpin and the many of his kind, with whom he associated fi [Pg 206]ne to time, no doubt, worked together or apart, or in alliance with others, just as changing circumstances from week to week dictated.



TOM KING.
(From *Skelt's Drama*.)

Tom King is usually said to have been killed under dramatic circumstances in the yard of the "Red Lion" inn, at the corner of the Whitechapel Road and Leman Street; but although we read much of him in the picturesque romances of the highway, it is by no means easy to trace Tom's movements, and he remains, whatever brave figure he may be in fiction, a very shadowy figure as seen in recorded facts. He, it appears, was one of three brothers. The other two were named Matthew and Robert, and it was really Matthew King who was mortally wounded in the yard of the "Red Lion" in 1737, in the affray with the Bow Street runners. The newspapers of the time record how, a week later, he died of his wounds in the New Prison, Clerkenwell, on May 24th.

The affair was the outcome of Turpin having stolen a fine horse of considerable celebrity at that time, a racehorse named "White Stockings," belonging to a Mr. Major, who, riding it, was overtaken one evening by Turpin, Tom King, and a new ally of theirs, named Potter, near the "Green Man," Epping. Turpin made him dismount and exchange horses, and took away his riding-whip; and then the three confederates went their way to London.

Mr. Major immediately made his loss known at the "Green Man," to Mr. Bayes, the landlord, who at o [Pg 207]id: "I daresay Turpin has done it, or one of that crew," and then advised him the best thing to do would be to get a number of handbills immediately printed, describing the horse, and offering a reward. It was characteristic of the thoroughpaced rascality of Turpin, that the very horse he had compelled Mr. Major to change with him was stolen. It was identified as one that had been missing from Plaistow marshes. And the saddle had been stolen too, and was afterwards claimed.



DICK TURPIN.
(*Skelt.*)

Although this was on Saturday night, the handbills were at once struck off and put into circulation, and by Monday morning information was brought to the "Green Man," that a horse answering the description of "White Stockings," had been left at the "Red Lion," in the Whitechapel Road. The innkeeper went to the house with some Bow Street runners, determined to wait there until some one called for the horse; and about eleven o'clock at night Matthew King [Pg 208] he for it. When he was seized, he declared he had bought the animal; but a whip he held in his hand proved to be the identical one stolen by Turpin, and although a portion of the handle had been broken off, Mr. Major's name could still be read on it. An offer was made to Matthew King, that he would be released if he would disclose the actual robber, and he thereupon said it was a stout man in a white duffel coat, who was at that moment waiting in the street.

A movement was then made to capture the man in the duffel coat, who proved to be Tom King; but he resisted and fired at his would-be captors. The pistol merely flashed in the pan, and King then attempted to draw another; but it got twisted in his pocket, and Bayes' hands were being laid upon him, when he cried out to Turpin, who was waiting on horseback at a little distance, "Dick, shoot him, or we are taken, by God!"

Turpin was heavily armed. Nothing less than three brace of pistols contented him, in addition to a carbine slung across his back. He fired, and shot (the stories say) Tom King.

"Dick, you have shot me; make off," the wounded man is represented as saying, but is afterwards said to have cursed him for a coward, and to have informed the authorities that if they wanted him, he might most likely be found at a certain place on Hackney Marsh: indicating, no doubt, the "White House."

Turpin is indeed said to have at once made for that retreat and to have exclaimed, "What shall I do? where [Pg 209] I go? d—n that Dick Bayes, I'll be the death of him, for I have lost the best fellow I ever had in my life. I shot poor King in endeavouring to kill that dog."

That is the accepted version, but it seems to be incorrect in several particulars. As before mentioned, Matthew King was the victim of that ill-considered aim. A somewhat different account is given in Turpin's alleged confessions to the hangman, printed in the, in most respects, reliable pamphlet narrating his life and trial, published in York in four editions in 1739. In those pages Turpin "said he was confederate with one King, who was executed in London some time since, and that once, being very near taken, he fired a pistol in the crowd, and by mistake, shot the said King in the thigh, who was coming to rescue him."



TOM KING.

That entirely reverses the position, and may or may not be an imperfectly recollected account of what Turpin said.

There is no doubt that a Tom King, a highwayman, was executed at Tyburn, in 1753, many years after th[[Pg 210](#)] King who was supposed to have been shot dead.

If Turpin had been really so terrified for his safety after the Whitechapel affair as represented, he must speedily have recovered himself, for he was busy all that month in his vocation. Comrades might die tragically, but his own pockets, always leaking like a colander, must be replenished. Really, however narrowly the career of this much-discussed highwayman is scanned, it seems hopeless to paint a consistent picture of him. He was, by the testimony of many witnesses, a cowardly fellow, not often with sufficient resolution to rob unaccompanied, and even on those occasions when he did play a lone hand, he wore a perfect armoury of weapons and attacked only the unarmed. One Gordon, lying at Newgate on a charge of highway robbery, told how he had once proposed to Turpin that himself and his brother, Turpin, and another should seize the money going down to pay the King's ships at Portsmouth. They were to stand in a very narrow pass and with swords and pistols attack the convoy. The scheme recalls the fine mid-seventeenth century exploits of "Mulled Sack" and his contemporaries, and if the enterprise had been undertaken, a splendid booty might have become theirs. But Turpin's courage failed him, and he backed out. Gordon said he was sure Turpin would be guilty of many cowardly actions, and die like a dog. His career, although a busy one, never touched great heights, and was commonly concerned with mean thefts and raids, but he must have been possessed of some nerve [a href="#">Pg 211]tinue actively robbing in the neighbourhood of London where he was so well known, after a hundred pounds was advertised to be waiting for any one who brought about his arrest. It is not merely a tradition that he so continued: we have the facts abundantly in the public prints of the time.



TOM KING.
(*Skelt.*)

Thus, the *London Magazine* has this note respecting him: "The noted Highwayman, Turpin the Butcher, (who lately kill'd a Man who endeavour'd to take him on Epping Forest) this Night robbed several Gentlemen in their Coaches and Chaises at Holloway and the back Lanes at Islington, and took from them several Sums of Money. One of the Gentlemen signified to him that he had reigned a long Time, and Turpin replied, "Tis no matter for that. I am not afraid of being taken by you; therefore don't stand hesitating, but give me the Cole." (Or, by another account, "the coriander-seed.")

A London newspaper of the close of May is found stating that "Turpin, the renown'd Butcher-Highwayman, committed a robbery almost every day this month."

But these were his last exploits in the neighbourhood of London. The position presently grew so diffic[[Pg 212](#)]t the merest elementary instincts of self-preservation suggested a flight to other scenes.

By a proclamation issued in the *London Gazette* of June 25th, 1737, "His Majesty was pleased to promise his most gracious pardon to any of the Accomplices of Richard Turpin who shall discover him, so that he may be apprehended and convicted of the Murder, or any of the Robberies he has committed; as likewise a Reward of £200 to any Person or Persons who shall discover the said Criminal, so that he may be apprehended and convicted as aforesaid; over and above all other Rewards to which they may be entitled." In this proclamation, Turpin is described as being 5 feet 9 inches in height, and it further appears that he was not by any means the prepossessing and even elegant figure he presents in the engraving that shows him reclining exquisitely in his cave; dainty boots on his feet, and a ladylike hand thrown over his carbine. He had high cheekbones, his face tapered to a narrow point at his chin, and he was deeply pitted with small-pox.



TURPIN IN HIS CAVE.

From an old Engraving.

Really, he was, it will be gathered, not an engaging ruffian; but there is, unfortunately, no portrait existing which can lay the slightest claim to be authentic. A rough woodcut, no doubt from the strictly unauthentic imagination of the wood engraver, or the wood-chopper who engraved, or rather hewed it out, appears in one of the popular old chap[Pg 215], and shows him to have rather a plentiful development of chin and an expression that somewhat baffles description, but which conveys the very decided impression that he was not the kind of person one would much like to meet in a lonely lane on a dark night.



DICK TURPIN.

(From a strictly unauthentic source.)

Rowden the Pewterer, whom we have shown to have accompanied Turpin so frequently in 1735, chiefly in his adventures in Surrey, was taken about this time and transported in July 1737.

With the price of £200 upon his head, and with the additional promise of a pardon for any accomplice who would betray him, Turpin's position was now more than ever desperate. He fully realised this, and took the only possible course, that of removing himself into the country, far away from his accustomed haunts. After three months at Long Sutton, in Lincolnshire, he appears to have selected Yorkshire as the safest part, and staying some time at the ferry-house. Brough, and then at Market Cave and North Cave, to have settled at Welton, ten miles from Beverley, in October 1737. There he posed as a gentleman horse-dealer, Palmer by name. Sometimes he would range southward to Long

Sutton in Lincolnshire, but always where he went the farmers and others missed their horses, in the most [Pg 216]rious way. No one suspected the "gentleman" horse-dealer, who mixed freely in the company of the Yorkshire yeomen and knew a thing or two about cock-fighting and proved himself a singularly good judge of stock—qualities which would render any one popular at that time, with the Yorkshire tykes. His ugly mug was a mere accident, and as for his rough manners, why the tykes themselves were rough and ready, and so they easily excused, or perhaps even did not notice, his overbearing ways.

But his evil temper got the better of him one day, when, returning from a shooting expedition, and being perhaps half-drunk, he wantonly shot one of his neighbour's fowls. When the owner resented this, Turpin, or "Palmer," threatened to serve him in the same way (*i.e.* "if he would only stay till he had charged his piece, he would shoot him too"), and in the result he was arrested on a charge of brawling, at the "Green Man" inn. When he came before the magistrates in Quarter Sessions at Beverley, the singular fact was discovered that this man, so well known in the neighbourhood, had many acquaintances, but no friends who would speak to his character or go bail for him. It then appeared that he had come as an entire stranger to the district less than two years earlier; and in short, in one way and another, it was all at once discovered that he was a suspicious character, whose doings had better be investigated. He was accordingly remanded, and enquiries resulted in his being charged with stealing a black mare, blind of the near eye, off [Pg 217]ngton Common, in Lincolnshire, near Sleaford. He had declared himself a native of Long Sutton, and said his father lived there and his sister kept house for him. He had been, he continued, in business there, but had been obliged to abscond, owing to his having contracted some debts he found himself unable to pay, in an unfortunate transaction in which he had bought some sheep that had proved to be diseased. Enquiries proved these statements to be entirely false. He had no relations at Long Sutton, but he was known there, and badly wanted, as a sheep-stealer, suspected also of horse-stealing.

It is significant of Turpin's activity in horse-stealing, that the *Worcester Journal* of September 29th, 1738, has the following curious item: "A few days since, the Father of the noted Turpin was committed to Chelmsford Gaol, for having in his Possession a Horse supposed to be stolen out of Lincolnshire, which, he pleads, was left with him by his Son, to pay for Diet and Lodging." Research fails to discover the result of this committal.

John Palmer, or Richard Turpin, was sent from Beverley to York Castle to stand his trial at the assizes for stealing the horse from Heckington; and from his grim dungeon cell, still in existence in the Castle, he wrote a letter to his brother, or, according to the evidence at his trial, his brother-in-law, at Hempstead, asking him to be a referee as to c [Pg 218]er:

YORK, Feb. 6, 1639.

"DEAR BROTHER,

"I am sorry to acquaint you that I am now under confinement in York Castle, for horse-stealing. If I could procure an evidence from London to give me a character, that would go a great way towards my being acquitted. I had not been long in this county before my being apprehended, so that it would pass off the readier. For heaven's sake, my dear brother, do not neglect me; you will know what I mean when I say,

"I am, your's,
"JOHN PALMER."

The letter was not prepaid, and the recipient, not recognising the handwriting of the address, refused to receive it and pay the sixpence demanded. As it happened, Mr. Smith, the schoolmaster who had taught Turpin to write, saw the letter, and recognising the handwriting, carried it to the magistrates, so that it might legally be opened, and perhaps the very much wanted Turpin be arrested from the information it possibly contained. Perhaps this public-spirited person really thought he saw a chance of obtaining the £200 reward offered; but, however that may be, the letter disclosed the fact that Turpin was lying in prison at York, and Smith eventually appeared at the trial and identified hi [Pg 219]s not known who, if indeed any one, received the reward.

The rumour that Turpin had been taken, and was a prisoner in York Castle, was no sooner circulated than people flocked from all parts to get a sight of him, and debates ran very high whether he was the real person or not. This making a holiday show of a prisoner in his cell seems odd to us moderns; but it was then, as we see constantly in these pages, the usual thing, and a practice that greatly enriched the turnkeys; or the warders, as we should call them.



SIR RALPH ROOKWOOD AND SIMON SHARPSCENT.
(*Skelt.*)

Among others who visited Turpin was a young fellow who pretended to know the famous highwayman. After having looked for a considerable time at the prisoner, he turned to the warder on duty, and said he would bet him half a guinea this was not Turpin; whereupon Turpin, in his turn inclining to the warder, whispered, with cynical humour [Pg 220] him

the wager, you fool, and I'll go you halves!"

The trial of "John Palmer, *alias* Paumer, *alias* Richard Turpin," as the official account of the proceedings has it, took place at the York Assizes, March 22nd, 1739, "before the Hon. Sir William Chapple, one of His Majesty's Justices of the Court of King's Bench, for stealing a black gelding, the property of Thomas Creasy."

Thomas Creasy deposed that in the August of 1738 he was owner of the black gelding, and missed it on the eighteenth of the month. He had hired men and horses, and had ridden some forty miles to try and obtain news of its whereabouts, and had paid criers to cry it in different market towns. He had also told one Richard Grasby of his loss, and described the animal to him, and at a later date Grasby told him his horse was at an inn called the "Blue Bell" at Beverley. He then went to Beverley and saw the landlord of the "Blue Bell," and described the horse to him as a black gelding, with a little star on his forehead. The landlord then took him to the stable and showed him the horse.

James Smith was then called, and asked if he knew the prisoner at the bar. He said he did. He had known him at Hempstead, in Essex, where he was born. He had known him since he was a child. His name was Richard Turpin, and his father kept the "Bell" inn in that village. Richard Turpin had married one of his maids. It was about five Pg 221 since he had last seen him. He had taught him at school, and there was no doubt whatever that this was the same man.

Asked how it happened that, living so far distant as Essex, he came to be present as a witness at this trial, he said that at the Hempstead post-office one day he observed a letter directed to Turpin's brother-in-law, who had refused to pay the postage on it. Looking narrowly at the handwriting, he thought he recognised it as that of Richard Turpin, whom he had taught to write. Turpin then being very much in demand by the magistrates, he took the letter forthwith to a local Justice of the Peace, who opened it, and found it was sent from York Castle, and purported to come from one "John Palmer."

The justices had sent him a subpoena to appear for the prosecution at York. He had been shown into the prison yard, and there he had seen and recognised Turpin, who was there under the name of Palmer.

"Palmer," then informed that he might ask Mr. Smith any questions he desired, merely replied he did not know him.

Mr. Edward Seward, of Hempstead, then called and asked if he knew prisoner, said he did. He was born and brought up at the "Bell," kept by his father, John Turpin. He had known him twenty-two years. ("Upon my soul, I have," he added; to which counsel rejoined, "My friend, you have sworn once already; you need not swear again.") "I knew him ever since he was a boy and lived at the 'Bell.' He lived with his father there, and I was friendly with him. Pg 222 him also after he had set up for himself, and I have bought a great many good joints of meat from him." The prisoner had at first affected not to know him; but afterwards had acknowledged the acquaintance, and had added: "Let's bung our eyes up with drink."



TURPIN'S CELL IN YORK CASTLE.

The prisoner's sole defence was that he had bought the horse; but he could produce no evidence to show he had actually done so, and could not mention the name of the person from whom he had bought him, nor the place where the transaction had been completed.

The jury had no difficulty in returning a verdict of "guilty," and, indeed, did so without leaving the court. Pg 223 was then formally sentenced to death.

He wrote to his father, and made great efforts to obtain a reduction of his sentence to transportation; but without result. A letter received from his father was a feature of a pamphlet, detailing his trial and adventures, published at York in April 1739. There is no reason to doubt its genuine character:

March 29, 1739.

DEAR CHILD,

"I received you Letter this Instant, with a great deal of grief; according to your Request, I have writ to your Brother John, and Madam Peek, to make what intercession can be made to Col. Watson, in order to obtain

Transportation for your Misfortune; which, had I £100 I would freely part with it to do you good; and for God's Sake, give your whole Mind to beg of God to pardon your many Transgressions, which the Thief upon the Cross received Pardon for at the last Hour, tho' a very great Offender. The Lord be your Comfort, and receive you into his eternal Kingdom.

"I am yours Distress'd,
"Yet Loving Father,
"JOHN TURPIN.

"HEMSTEAD.

"All our Loves to you, who are in much Grief to subscribe ourselves your distressed Brother and Sister, with Relations."

Turpin principally concerned himself in those twenty-six days that bridged the distance between se[[Pg 224](#)], and execution in joking, drinking with the many visitors who came to see him, and telling stories of his adventures. He turned a deaf ear to the ministrations of the Ordinary, and was infinitely more concerned that he should make a last "respectable" appearance in this world, on the scaffold, than for his welfare in the next. Nothing would satisfy him but new clothes, a brand-new fustian frock, and a smart pair of pumps to die in. On the morning before the fatal April 17th he gave the hangman £3 10s. 0d., to be divided among five men, who were to follow him as mourners, and were to be furnished with black hat-bands and mourning gloves. When the time came, and he went in the tumbrel to be turned off upon York's place of execution at Knavesmire, he bowed to the ladies and flourished his hat like a hero. It is true that when he had arrived at the tragic place his leg trembled, but he stamped it down impatiently. He talked for half an hour with the hangman, until the crowd began to grow impatient, but then mounted the ladder provided, and threw himself off in the most resolute fashion. He had the reward of his courage, for he died in a moment.

It should here be explained that hanging in those old times, before the drop had been introduced, was generally a cruel and clumsy method. As a rule, the culprit was driven up in the cart immediately under the gallows, and the noose then adjusted round his neck. When all was ready, the cart was simply drawn away and the victim left ha[[Pg 225](#)] to be slowly and agonisingly suffocated. Thus the horrible spectacle was often witnessed of compassionate persons—and sometimes the relations of the hanging man—pulling his legs to more speedily end his sufferings. In the museum at Dorchester there may to this day be seen two heavy weights made for the purpose of thus shortening the misery of criminals hanged at the gaol there, and bearing the word MERCY.

It sometimes happened, in those days, that a criminal would be ineffectually hanged, and afterwards cut down and revived. "Half-hanged Smith" was a burglar who obtained his nickname in this manner at Tyburn; but he was convicted, a few years later, of a similar crime, and effectually hanged on that occasion. Another, cut down and revived, declared the sensation of being hanged was sufficiently bad, but that of being restored to life was indescribably agonising, and said he wished those hanged who had cut him down.

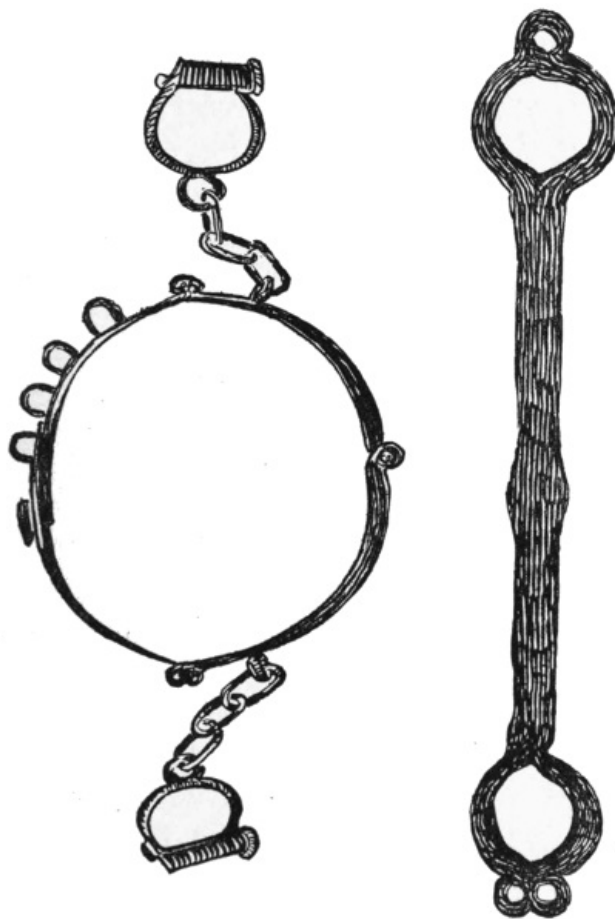


RALPH OSTLER.
(*Skelt.*)

The shocking old alternative to being slowly hanged when the cart was withdrawn was the method by which criminals with sufficient courage were enabled to anticipate the modern drop, by throwing themselves off the ladder, and so securing an instant and practically painless death. But this was making the condemned their own execution[[Pg 226](#)] and, to all intents and purposes, suicides. It also required a considerable amount of resolution.

Turpin's body lay in state for a day and a night at the "Blue Boar" inn, Castlegate, York, and was buried the following morning in the churchyard of St. George's, Fishergate Postern. That evening it was disinterred by some of the city surgeons, for dissection, but the mob, with whom Turpin had already become a hero, determined that his remains should not be dishonoured, rescued the body and reinterred it in lime, so as to effectually prevent any other attempts.

The Ride to York and Black Bess are alike myths, but the spot was long pointed out upon the racecourse at York (perhaps it still is), where that gallant mare sank down exhausted and died. So strong a hold have myths upon the imagination, that it is hardly possible the most painstaking historian will succeed in popularly discrediting the *bona fides* of that ride, invented and so stirringly described by Harrison Ainsworth in 1834, in his *Rookwood*.



TURPIN'S WAIST-GIRDLE, WRIST-SHACKLES, AND LEG IRONS.

Ainsworth was the unconscious predisposing cause of much of *Skelt's Juvenile Drama*, that singular collection of remarkably mild plays for toy theatres, allied with terrific scenes and the most picturesque figures conceived, drawn and engraved in the wildest spirit of melodrama, and in the most extravagant attitudes. No such scenery ever [Pg 228]ed as that drawn by Skelt's anonymous artists. It was a decided improvement upon Nature; and no heroes so heroic and no villains so villainous could possibly have lived and moved as those imagined by his staff of draughtsmen. *Dick Turpin* was of course in the forefront of the thirty-three plays published by Skelt, and the pictured characters do full justice—and perhaps a trifle over—to the entirely illegitimate fame Turpin has acquired. You see them reproduced here, engraved line for line from Skelt, scattered over the pages of this reconsideration of Turpin. Firstly, you have the great brethren, Turpin and Tom King, themselves, mounted on noble steeds that stretch themselves gallantly in their stride; and then you have Sir Ralph Rookwood and that intelligent officer, Simon Sharpscent, also on horseback, hurrying off in company, but upon the trail of the highwaymen. Simon Sharpscent, you will observe, has in his hand a something that looks not unlike a Field Marshal's bâton. It is the police-officer's crown-tipped staff of office; and producing it he will presently say, dramatically: "I arrest you in the King's name!"

Always, with the remarkable exception of the group of "Highwaymen Carousing," these characters are intensely dramatic in their attitudes; but the carousing highwaymen are unexpectedly wooden; although they look [Pg 229]le of being daredevil fellows when the generous wine, or the old ale—whichever it may be—has done its work. Even the "Maid of the Inn" is a creature of romance.





HIGHWAYMEN CAROUSING.
(*Skelt.*)

Although Ainsworth invented Turpin's Ride to York, he certainly did not invent Black Bess, nor did he conceive the ride as an attempt to establish an *alibi*; for he shows him hotly pursued by the officers of the law, nearly all the way. In Ainsworth's pages you find no reason why the ride should have been undertaken. I have elsewhere remarked that Ainsworth invented Black Bess, as well as robbed Swiftnicks of the glory of the ride; but a further acquaintance with the literature of the early part of the nineteenth century discloses the curious fact that Horace Smith in 1825, in a volume entitled *Gaieties and Gravities*, included a story called "Harry Halter," in which that highwayman hero is represented as sitting at the "Wig and Water Spaniel," in Monmouth Street, with his friends of the same persuasion, Ned [Pg 230], and Old Charley Crape, and singing the ballad of

TURPIN AND THE BISHOP

Bold Turpin upon Hounslow Heath
His black mare Bess bestrode,
When he saw a Bishop's coach and four
Sweeping along the road;
He bade the coachman stop, but he,
Suspecting of the job,
His horses lash'd—but soon roll'd off,
With a brace of slugs in his nob.

Galloping to the carriage-door,
He thrust his face within,
When the Chaplain said—"Sure as eggs is eggs,
That is the bold Turpin."
Quoth Turpin, "You shall eat your words
With sauce of leaden bullet";
So he clapp'd his pistol to his mouth,
And fired it down his gullet.

The Bishop fell upon his knees,
When Turpin bade him stand,
And gave him his watch, a bag of gold,
And six bright rings from his hand.
Rolling with laughter, Turpin pluck'd
The Bishop's wig from his head,
And popp'd it on the Chaplain's poll,
As he sate in the corner dead.

Upon the box he tied him then,
With the reins behind his back,
Put a pipe in his mouth, the whip in his hand,
And set off the horses, smack!
Then whisper'd in his black mare's ear,
Who luckily wasn't fagg'd,
"You must gallop fast and far, my dear,
Or I shall be surely scragg'd."

He never drew bit, nor stopp'd to bait,
Nor walk'd up hill or down,
Until he came to Gloucester's gate,
Which is the Assizes town.
Full eighty miles in one dark night,
He made his black mare fly,
And walk'd into Court at nine o'clock
To swear an Alibi.

[Pg 231]

A hue and cry the Bishop raised,
And so did Sheriff Foster,
But stared to hear that Turpin was
By nine o'clock at Gloucester.
So all agreed it couldn't be him,
Neither by hook nor crook;
And said that the Bishop and Chaplain was
Most certainly mistook.

Here we certainly find Black Bess, not treated to two capital letters, and only referred to as "his black mare Bess" (it was reserved for Ainsworth to discover the worth of the alliteration and the demand it made for two capital B's), but we thus have traced the invention of that coal-black steed one remove further back, and there it must rest, for a time, at any rate.

It seems pretty clear that Smith was acquainted with the exploit of Swifticks, but why he transferred the ride to Turpin, and the purpose of establishing an *alibi* to Gloucester, does not appear, unless indeed he wanted a rhyme to "Foster."



INNKEEPER.
(*Skelt.*)

Dickens, who wrote *Pickwick* in 1836, eleven years after *Gaieties and Gravities* was published, had evidently read Smith's book, for in Chapter XLIII. we find Sam Weller represented as singing to the coachman a condensed and greatly altered version, beginning:

Bold Turpin vunce, on Hounslow Heath
His bold mare Bess bestrode—er;
Ven there he see'd the Bishop's coach
A-coming along the road—er.

That Swiftnicks actually performed the famous ride was generally believed, as elsewhere described in these pages; and unless any later evidence can be adduced to deprive him of the credit, he must continue to enjoy it. But it is curious to note that riding horseback between York and London under exceptional circumstances has often been mentioned. A prominent instance is the wager accepted by John Lepton, esquire to James the First, that he would ride six times between London and York on six consecutive days. Fuller, in his *Worthies*, tells us all about it. He first set out on May 20th, 1606, from Aldersgate, London, and completed the journey before nightfall, returning the next day; and so on until he had won the wager, "to the great praise of his strength in acting, than to his discretion in undertaking it," says Fuller, with an unwonted sneer.

Turpin was certainly described in his own lifetime as "the noted," "the renowned," "the famous," but those were merely newspaper phrases, and the notability, the renown, or the fame commented upon in to-day's paper is here by way of seeing in our own age, the oblivion of next week. The *London Magazine*, commenting briefly on his execution, styles him a "mean and stupid wretch," and that estimate of him is little likely ever to be revised, although it may readily and justly be amplified by the epithets "brutal" and "cowardly." The brutalities of himself and his associates kept the suburbs of London for a while in terror, but he evidently had made little impression on the mind of Captain Charles Johnson, whose book on *The General History of Highwaymen*, published in 1742, three years after Turpin's execution, has no mention of him.

Yet, side by side with these facts, we are confronted with the undoubted immediate ballad fame he acquired in the north, of which here are two pitiful specimen verses:

For shooting of a dunghill cock
Poor Turpin he at last was took;
And carried straight into a jail,
Where his misfortune he does bewail,
O rare Turpin hero,
O rare Turpin O!
Now some do say that he will hang—
Turpin the last of all the gang;
I wish the cock had ne'er been hatched,
For like a fish in the net he's caught.

Pedlars hawked these untutored productions widely over the country, and it will be noticed with some amusement that, just as Robin Hood had been made a popular ballad hero, robbing the rich to give to the poor, and succouring the widow and the orphan, and just as Nevison had been similarly enshrined, so Turpin, who would have been mough to rob a poor man of his beer, a poor widow of her last goat, or to steal a penny out of a blind man's pannikin (the worst of crimes), was instantly converted into a blameless martyr. We may, however, readily imagine the ill-treated Mr. Lawrence of Edgewarebury, rubbing his roasted posteriors and vehemently dissenting from that estimate of Turpin.

But the ballad-writers did not pretend to historical accuracy, or to grammar, scansion, or anything but a rude way of appealing to the feelings of the rustics, whose lives of unremitting toil for poor wages embittered them more than they knew against the rich; to this extent, that they imagined virtue resided solely in the lowly cot, and vice and oppressive feelings exclusively in the lordly hall. Those who were poor were virtuous, and the highwayman who emptied the pockets of the rich performed a meritorious service. Hence ballads like the following grievous example, in which Turpin appears, in spite of well-ascertained facts, to have been executed at Salisbury:

Printed and sold by J. Pitts, 6, Great St. Andrew Street, Seven Dials

Come all you wild and wicked young men
 A warning take by me,
 A story now to you I'll tell
 Of Turpen of Salisbury.
 He was a wild and wicked blade
 On the High road did he hie,
 But at last was tried, and cast,
 And condemn'd he was to die.
 When before the Judge he came
 And at the Bar he did stand,
 For no pardon he did ask,
 But boldly he held up his hand,
 Declared the truth before the Judge
 Who was to try him then:—
 "I hope, my Lord, you'll pardon me,
 I'm not the worst of men,
 I the Scripture have fulfilled,
 Tho' a wicked life I led,
 When the naked I've beheld,
 I've cloathed them and fed;
 Sometimes in a Coat of Winter's pride,
 Sometimes in a russet grey,
 The naked I've cloathed, the hungry fed,
 And the Rich I've sent empty away.
 As I was riding out one day,
 I saw a Prisoner going to Jail,
 Because his debts he could not pay,
 Or yet sufficient bail.
 A true and faithful friend he found
 In me that very day;
 I paid the Creditor forty pounds
 Which set the Prisoner free.
 When he had my guineas bright,
 He told them into his purse,
 But I could not be satisfied:
 To have 'em again I must.
 Boldly I mounted my prancing steed,
 And crossing a point of land,
 There I met the Creditor,
 And boldly bade him stand.
 Sir, the debt you owe to me
 Amounts to Forty pounds
 Which I am resolved to have
 Before I quit this ground.
 I search'd his pockets all around,
 And robb'd him of his store,
 Wherein I found my forty pounds
 And Twenty Guineas more.
 What harm, my Lord Judge, he said,
 What harm was there in this,
 To Rob a Miser of his store,
 By my stout heartedness.
 I never rob'd or wrong'd the poor,
 As it plainly does appear;
 So I hope you'll pardon me
 And be not too severe."
 Then the Judge unto bold Turpen said
 "Your stories are but in vain,
 For by our laws you are condemn'd,
 And must receive your pain.
 Repent, repent, young man, he said,
 For what is done and past,
 You say the hungry you've cloathed and fed,
 But you must die at last."

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It is of course possible that this ballad was not meant for Dick Turpin at all; for, so widespread in rural districts had his fame early grown, that "Turpin" became almost a generic name for local highwaymen, just as after Julius Cæsar all the Emperors of Rome were Cæsars. It was a name to conjure with: and this no doubt goes some way to explain the infinitely many alleged "Turpin's haunts" in widely separated districts: places Turpin could not have found time to haunt, unless he had been a syndicate.

Away down in Wiltshire, in the neighbourhood of Trowbridge, between Keevil and Bulkington, and in a soggy level plain watered by an affluent of the Wiltshire Avon, there stands in a wayside ditch a hoary object called Pg 237 "Turpin's Stone," inscribed, in letters now almost entirely obliterated,

Dick Turpin's dead and gone,
 This Stone's set up to think upon.



TURPIN'S STONE.

This curious wayside relic may be found on the boundary-line of the parishes of Bulkington and Keevil, near a spot oddly named Brass Pan Bridge, and standing in an evil-smelling ditch that receives the drainage of the neighbouring pigsties. It is a battered and moss-grown object, and its inscription, despite the local version of it given above, is not really decipherable, as a whole. "Turpin" may be read, easily enough, but if the word above it is meant for [\[Pg 238\]](#) why then the sculptor of it spelled the name "Dicq," a feat of illiterate ingenuity that rather staggers belief. Brake-loads of Wiltshire archæologists have visited the spot in summer, when county antiquaries mostly archæologise, and, braving typhoid fever, have descended into the ditch and sought to unravel the mystery of this Sphinx: without result.

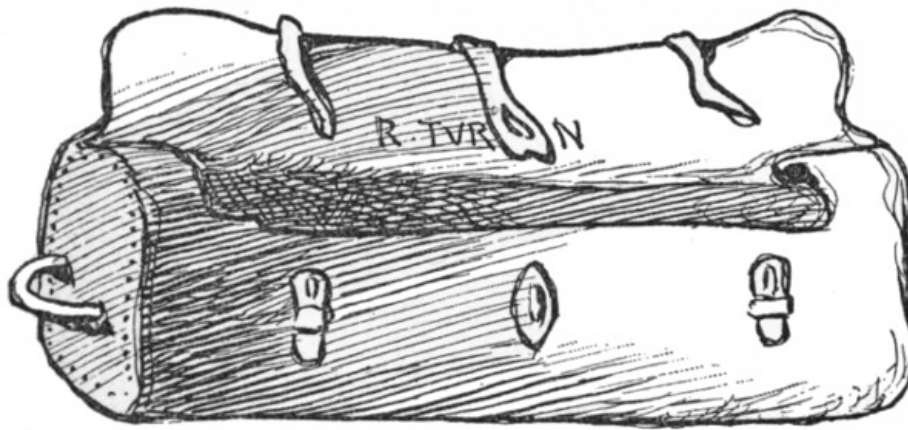
The village of Poulshot, birthplace of Thomas Boulter, a once-dreaded highwayman, is not far off, and it is possible that Boulter, who had a very busy and distinguished career on the highways of England in general, and of Salisbury Plain in particular, [\[2\]](#) may have been named locally "Dick Turpin," after the hero who died at York under tragical circumstances, with the aid of a rope, in 1739. Boulter himself ended in that way in 1778, at Winchester, and so the transference of names was quite possible. He, it is significant to note, had a mare named "Black Bess," which he stole in 1736 from Mr. Peter Delmé's stables at Erle Stoke.

[\[2\]](#) See the "Exeter Road," pp. 217-228.

There are Turpin "relics" and associations at the "Spaniards," on Hampstead Heath, and we find the *Times* of August 22nd, 1838, saying: "The rear of the houses on Holborn Bridge has for many years been the receptacle for characters of the most daring and desperate condition. There, in a secret *manège* (now a slaughter-house for her species), did Turpin suffer his favourite Black Bess to repose for many a night previously to her disastrous journey to York." The [\[Pg 239\]](#)s had evidently swallowed the Ride to York story whole, and relished it.

Another, and more cautious commentator says, "He shot people like partridges. Many wild and improbable stories are told of him, such as his rapid ride to York, his horse chewing a beef-steak on the way; but, setting these aside, he was hardy and cruel enough to shine as a mighty malefactor. He seems, to quote the Newgate jest, to have been booked, at his very birth, for the *Gravesend Coach* that leaves at eight in the morning."

"Many years ago," we read in Pink's *History of Clerkenwell*, "a small leather portmanteau was found at the 'Coach and Horses' tavern, at Hockley-in-the-Hole, with the ends of wood, large enough to contain a change of linen, besides other little *etceteras*. On the inner side of the lid, lightly cut in the surface of the leather, is the name, 'R. TVRPI' [\[Pg 240\]](#) ether or no this portmanteau (such an one as horsemen formerly carried behind them, strapped to the saddle), belonged to that famous highwayman," says Pink, "we will not attempt to decide."



PORTMANTEAU, FORMERLY BELONGING TO TURPIN, DISCOVERED AT CLERKENWELL.

But here there should not be much room for doubt. The relic was probably genuine. It was illustrated in Pink's book, but the whereabouts of it are not now known.

The irons worn by Turpin in his cell at York Castle are now preserved in the York Museum, together with those used for Nevison. They have a total weight of 28 lb.

WILLIAM PARSONS, THE BARONET'S SON

WILLIAM PARSONS, born in 1717, was the youngest son of a respectable baronet, Sir William Parsons, of Nottingham; and was so well connected that he could claim no less a personage than the Duchess of Northumberland for aunt. Sent to Eton, to complete his education, he left "Henry's holy shade" in considerable disfavour, and on a visit to an uncle at Epsom so misconducted himself, that he was bidden never show his face there again. His behaviour was no better at Cheshunt, where another relative had the misfortune to receive him for a time. He was then packed off to sea, as midshipman, aboard the *Drake*. Returning at the end of a cruise to England, he continued in the gaming habits he had early learnt, and, to provide funds for his amusements, called upon his highly-placed aunt and stole a gold-mounted miniature from her dressing-room. This he was obliged to sell for one-fourth its value. We next find him at Buxton, stealing a gold-buckled pair of shoes in the assembly-room belonging to a Mr. Graham, and realising on them while the owner, vainly seeking, lost all his dances.

A cruise aboard the *Romney* then took him to Newfoundland. He played cards and cheated aboard ship, and ^[Pg 242]quired so bad a character that it was plainly intimated the Navy was not his vocation and he had better leave it. He accordingly left the service and soon found himself deserted by his friends and without a stiver in his breeches pockets.

Realising his wild nature, his father thought it best to secure him some post that should take him abroad for at least a few years, by which time his hot blood might have cooled down. To this end, he procured him a billet with the Royal African Company, on the West Coast of that then very Dark Continent; but the scapegrace was soon back in England, having quarrelled with the governor of James Fort on the Gambia River, to whom he had been accredited. He landed even more destitute, if possible, than before, and of necessity lived the simple life, by existing for four whole days on three half-penny worth of bread. The public fountains supplied him freely with water, wherewith to wash down those frugal meals.



WILLIAM PARSONS.

He dared make no more applications to his father for assistance, for that father was then smarting at having paid £70 to redeem his honour over a discreditable affair that had taken place in Africa, where the reckless youth had forged a letter purporting to come from his aunt, the Duchess, saying she would be answerable for any debts her nephew might incur, up to that amount. It was folly of the worst, and most unremunerative, kind, for that aunt, with w^[Pg 245] had originally been a favourite, revoked the will she had made in his favour, and left the £25,000, that would have come to him, to his sister.

It is evident that William Parsons was what would be called in modern times a "degenerate." In 1740 he borrowed a large sum of money by a pretence that he was his elder brother, who was the prospective owner of a considerable legacy. He then succeeded in making a respectable appearance for a time, and married a young lady of good family and fortune. By that marriage he acquired a sum of £4,000, but his wife's trustees, being not quite satisfied with him, took care to secure the bulk of her property in such a manner that he could not touch it. Entering the Army in 1741, as an ensign in a foot regiment, he embarked upon an extravagant manner of living; obtained a quantity of gold and silver plate from confiding tradesmen, and kept a large number of servants. He could never resist the gaming-tables, and although himself a rogue and a swindler, always found others there who proved more finished than himself, and thoroughly fleeced him.

He would then turn to forgery, and successfully negotiate forged bills under well-known names. The Duke of Cumberland's signature was used for £500. Nothing came amiss to his perverse ingenuity; and he would even, as an army officer, call upon tailors and pretend to having a contract for the supply of uniforms. He would pocket [Pg 246] some commission and receive the goods and sell them for what they would fetch. To be his friend was to be marked down for being defrauded, and often to be placed in the most embarrassing situations. Thus in 1745, when the Jacobite rebellion was disturbing the country, he borrowed a horse of a brother officer and rode away with it, intending to desert to the rebels. But, thinking better of it, he went no further than Clerkenwell, where he sold the horse. The late owner was, in consequence, arrested on charges of desertion and high treason, and things might quite conceivably have gone hard with him.

Accounts of Parsons' next doings do not quite agree. By one of them we learn that he went to Florida as a lieutenant, but according to another and a more probable version, he was shipped to the plantations in Virginia as a convict, who had been found guilty of forgery at Maidstone Assizes, and sentenced to be transported. Family influence had no doubt prevented his being hanged.

Working as a slave in the plantations belonging to Lord Fairfax, he attracted the attention of that nobleman, who took him from the gang of convicted malefactors, with whom, under strict supervision, he hoed and delved under the blazing sun, and befriended him. It did not pay to befriend William Parsons. He stole one of the best horses belonging to his benefactor, and, going upon those early colonial roads, soon accumulated, as a highwayman, a sufficient [Pg 247] to buy himself a passage back to old England.

By fraud, backed up with consummate assurance, he obtained £70 at his port of landing, and came at once to London. A scheme for plundering his sister, who by this time had succeeded to her aunt's legacy of £25,000, then engaged his attention. He hatched a plot with a discharged footman, for that man to pose as a gentleman of fortune, and to make advances to her, and even to forcibly carry her off and marry her against her will, if needs were. Some women servants were also in the plot, and were even given duly signed bonds in £500 and lesser sums, to lend their aid. The footman and Parsons were, in the event of this scheme proving successful, to share the £25,000 in equal parts.



WILLIAM PARSONS.

By a mere accident, the plot was discovered in a milliner's shop in the West End, where a lady friend of M [Pg 248] rsons had pointed out to her a finely dressed gentleman, "who was going to marry Miss Parsons." This led to enquiries, and an exposure of the whole affair.

The last resource of this thorough-paced scoundrel was the road. He chiefly affected the western suburbs and Hounslow Heath, and it was in a robbery on that widespreading waste that he was captured. He had obtained information that a servant, with a valise containing a large sum in notes and gold, was to leave town and meet his master at Windsor; and so set out to lie in wait for him. But he had already been so active on the Heath that his face was too well known, and he was recognised at Brentford by a traveller who had suffered from him before. Following him into Hounslow Town, this former victim suddenly raised an alarm and caused him to be seized. Taken to the "Rose and Crown" inn, Parsons was recognised by the landlord and others, as one who had for some time scoured the Heath and committed robberies. His pistols were taken from him, and he was committed to Newgate, and in the fulness of time tried, convicted, and sentenced to death. The efforts of his family connections were again used to save him from the gallows, and themselves from the stigma of it; but his career was too notorious for further leniency, and he was hanged at Tyburn on February 11th, 1751.

WILLIAM PAGE

"THERE is always room on top" has long been the conclusive reply to complaints of overcrowding in the professions. However many duffers may already be struggling for a bare livelihood in them, there yet remains an excellent career for the recruit with energy and new methods. The profession of highwayman aptly illustrates the truth of these remarks. It was shockingly over-crowded in the middle of the eighteenth century, even though the duffers were generally caught in their initial efforts and hanged; and really it is wonderful where all the wealth came from, to keep such an army of "money-changers" in funds.

William Page, who for twelve years carried on a flourishing practice in the "Stand and Deliver!" profession, was one of those few who lived very near the top of it. His name is not so familiar as those of Du Vall, Hind, Maclean, or Turpin, but not always do the really eminent come down to us with their eminence properly acknowledged. He was born about 1730, the son of a bargeman to a coal merchant at Hampton-on-Thames. The bargeman was unfortunately drowned at Putney in 1740, and his widow was reduced to eking out a meagre livelihood by the distilling of waters from medicinal herbs. She is described as "a notable industrious woman," and certainly it was not from her example that William learned the haughty and offensive ways that would not permit him long to keep any of the numerous situations he took, after leaving the Charity School at Hampton, where he acquired what small education he had. He started life as tapster's boy at the "Bell" alehouse, in his native town, and thence changed to errand-boy in the employment of "Mr. Mackenzie," apothecary. Soon his youthful ambition took him to London, where he obtained a situation in the printing-office of Woodfall, in Little Britain, who became in after-years notorious as printer of the "Letters of Junius"; but "that business being too great a confinement for his rambling temper, he left it, and went footboy to Mr. Dalrymple, Scots Holland warehouse in London."

He rapidly filled the situations of footman to one Mr. Hodges, in Lincoln's Inn Fields; porter to a gentleman in Cork Street, and footman to Mr. Macartney in Argyle Buildings. He then entered the service of the Earl of Glencairn, but left that situation to become valet to a certain Captain Jasper. Frequently discharged for "his proud and haughty spirit, which would not brook orders from his masters," and prevented him, on the other hand, being on good terms with his fellow-servants, he at last found himself unable to obtain another place. This was a sad time for William Page; for since he had learned extravagant habits, the love of fine clothes and the fascination of gambling; but his arrogant ways had brought him low indeed.

"Being by such means as these extremely reduced in his circumstances, without money, without friends, and without character, he could think of no better method of supplying his wants, and freeing himself from a servile dependency, than by turning Collector on the Highway. This he imagined would not only take off that badge of slavery, the livery he had always worn with regret, but would set him on a level with gentlemen, a figure he was ever ambitious of making."

His first steps were attended with some difficulty, for he laboured under the disadvantage, at the moment of coming to this decision, of having no money in his pockets; and to commence highwayman, as to begin any other business or profession, it was necessary to have a small capital, for preliminary expenses. But a little ingenuity showed him the way. Pistols and a horse were the tools of his trade, and pistols, of course, first. A servant of his acquaintance knew a person who had a brace of pistols to sell, and Page took them, "to show a friend on approval." He then hired a horse for deferred payment, and with the pistols went out and immediately and successfully robbed the Highgate coach. Thus, with the £4 he in this manner obtained, he paid for the pistols and settled with the livery-stable keeper for a horse. In another day or two he had touched the wayfaring public for a sum sufficient to purchase a horse of his own; and thus commenced his twelve-years' spell of highway adventure, in which, although he had many exciting experiences, he was arrested only once before the final escapade that brought him to the gallows.

An early freak of his was the robbing of his former master, Captain Jasper, on Hounslow Heath. The Captain was crossing the ill-omened place with a lady in a post-chaise, when Page rode up, bade the postilion stop, and ordered the Captain to deliver.

"That may be, sir," retorted the Captain angrily, "but not yet," and, pulling out a pistol, fired at him. His aim was not good, but he hit somebody: none other, indeed, than his own postilion, who was struck in the back, "and wounded very much."

Then said Page, "Consider, sir, what a rash action you have been guilty of. You have killed this poor fellow, which I would not have done for the world. And now, sir, I repeat my orders, and if you refuse any longer to comply, I will actually fire upon you."



WILLIAM PAGE.

The Captain then snapped his second pistol at him, but it missed fire. Page then swore he would shoot the lady; intending to do nothing of the kind, but only to alarm the Captain the more. But in Captain Jasper our highwayman had met sterner stuff than common, and the gallant soldier, the better to protect her, forthwith sat himself in [Pg 255]b. On Page continuing to declare he would shoot him, the Captain leapt out of the chaise at him, and at that moment Page fired, but with intention to miss, and the shot passed harmlessly by. Again the Captain pulled the trigger of his pistol, and again it missed fire.

Then Page declared his ultimatum: "You must now surrender, or I absolutely will shoot you." Whereupon the Captain, having done all he possibly could, delivered up his gold watch and ten or eleven guineas. Page then demanded his sword, but he quite rightly, as a soldier, demurred to such a humiliation.

"You may see by my cockade I am an officer, and I would sooner part with my life and soul than with my sword," he bravely declared.

Page generously acknowledged his spirit. "I think myself," he said, "thou art the bravest fellow that ever crossed these plains, but thou art an obstinate fellow; and so, go about your business."

He introduced some interesting novelties into the well-worn business. The chief of these was the distinctly bright idea of driving from London in a phaeton with a pair of horses and at some lonely spot disguising himself with a wig and another suit of clothes. Then, saddling one of the horses and leaving the phaeton, he would carefully emerge upon the high road and hold up coaches, post-chaises, or solitary equestrians. This accomplished, he returned to [Pg 256]eton, harnessed the horse again, resumed his former attire, and drove back to town, like the gentleman of fashion and leisure he pretended to be. One day, pursuing this highly successful programme, he was nearly undone by the action of some countryfolk who, finding an abandoned phaeton and one horse strangely left in a coppice, went off with it. The simple people, making along the road with this singular treasure-trove, were themselves followed by some unlucky travellers whom Page had just robbed, and violently denounced as confederates. Page was fully equal to the occasion. Nearly stripping himself, and casting his clothes down a convenient well, he returned to London in that plight and declared himself to have been treated like the man in the Scriptures, who "fell among thieves"; although it does not appear that the traveller in question had a carriage. His phaeton had been stolen, and himself robbed and left almost naked.

This precious story was fully believed, and the country people themselves stood in some considerable danger. They were flung into prison and would no doubt have been convicted had Page appeared against them. This he, for obvious reasons, refused to do, and they found themselves at liberty once more, resolved to leave any other derelict carriages they might chance to see severely alone.

Page, in course of time, married a girl of his native town. She could not long remain ignorant of his [Pg 257]ns of livelihood, and earnestly begged him to leave the road and take to honest work. Few, however, quitted the highway except for the "three-legged mare" at Tyburn, and the one- or two-legged mares of other places; and he held on his way. Now and again he would disappear for a time, after some particularly audacious exploit, to reappear when the excitement it had caused was over. On one of these occasions he shipped to Barbados and Antigua, stayed there for seven or eight months, and then returned to England, desperately in want of money. The line of least resistance indicated the road once more.

His first exploit after this reappearance was the robbing of one Mr. Cuffe, north of Barnet. The traveller, being driven along the road alone and unarmed in a post-chaise, had no choice but to surrender his purse, and held it out from the window at arm's length. But Page's horse, not being used to this kind of business, shied violently, and Page thereupon ordered the postilion to dismount and hand it him, which he did, and he then gracefully and at leisure retired.

On his return to town, leading this high-mettled horse down Highgate Hill, Page was followed by three men on horseback, who, having heard of this robbery down the road, suspected he might be the man. They immediately planned how they were to take him, and then, one of them riding quietly up, said, "Sir, I have often walked my horse up Highgate Hill, but never down; but since you do, I will also, and bear you company." [Pg 258]

Page readily agreed, without the least suspicion of any design against him, and so they entered into a very friendly conversation. After walking in this manner some little distance, the gentleman finding a fit opportunity, keeping a little behind, suddenly laid hold of his arms and pinioned them so tightly behind him that he was not able to stir; seeing which, the other two, then on the opposite side of the road, crossed over and secured him beyond any possibility of escape. They found in his pockets four loaded pistols, a powder-horn, and some bullets, a crape mask, and a curious and ingenious map himself had drawn, showing all the main roads and cross roads for twenty miles round London.

They then took him before a Justice of the Peace at Highgate, who put many searching questions, without gaining any information. He was, however, committed to Clerkenwell Bridewell, and was afterwards examined by none other than Henry Fielding, magistrate and novelist. Sent from the Old Bailey to stand his trial at Hertford Assizes, he was acquitted for lack of exact evidence, although every one was fully satisfied of his guilt, for, however strange the times, they were not so strange that honest gentlemen carried such a compromising collection of things about with them on the roads.

His narrow escape did not disturb him, and he was soon again on his lawless prowls. On Hounslow Heath [Pg 259] he became a Captain of one of the Guards regiments, and was pursued into Hounslow town by that officer, shouting "Highwayman!" after him. No one took any notice. Page got clear away, and afterwards boasted of having, the following night at a theatre in London, sat next the officer, who did not recognise him.

An interlude followed in the activities of our high-spirited highwayman. He and an old acquaintance struck up a more intimate friendship over the tables of billiard-rooms in London, and there they entered into an alliance, with the object of rooking frequenters of those places. But their returns were small and precarious, and did not even remotely compare with the rich harvest to be gathered on the road, to which he accordingly returned.

It was Page's ill-fortune to meet with several plucky travellers, who, like Captain Jasper, would not tamely submit to be robbed, and resisted by force of arms. Among them was Lord Downe, whose post-chaise he, with a companion, one day stopped at Barnet. Presenting his pistol, he issued the customary orders, but, to his surprise, Lord Downe himself drew a pistol, and discharged it with such excellent aim, that Page was shot in the body, and bled very copiously. His companion's horse, alarmed at the shot, grew restive, and thus his friend was for a while unable to come to his aid. Page, however, again advanced to the attack; but my lord was ready with another pistol, and so the highwaymen thought it best to make off. They hurried to London, and Page sought a doctor, who found the wound so dan[Pg 260], that he refused to treat him without consultation. The other doctor, immediately on arriving, recognised Page, and asked him how he came by the wound; to which Page replied, that he had received it in a duel he had just fought.

"I will extract the ball," replied the doctor; "but," he added significantly, "I do not wish to see your face again, for I believe you fought that duel near Barnet."

Shortly after his recovery from this untoward incident, he and one ally, Darwell, by name, an old schoolfellow, waiting upon chance on Shooter's Hill, met two post-chaises, in one of which was a "supercargo" belonging to the East India Company, and in the other a person, who is simply described as a "gentleman."

Page's accomplice opened the encounter by firing a pistol, to which the supercargo replied in like manner; but with a better aim, for the bullet tore away a portion of his coat, under the armpit. A second shot from the highwayman was also ineffective. Then Page rode up and attacked the other chaise. A desperate fusillade followed; but the only damage done was that Page's horse was slightly wounded. At last, the post-chaise travellers having expended all their ammunition, the two highwaymen compelled them to alight, and the postilions to dismount; and then, having bound the hands of all of them with rope, they ordered these unfortunate persons, on peril of their lives, to remain on t[Pg 261] for one hour. They then returned to the chaises, removed the travelling trunks, and, carrying them off on horseback, hid them securely.

Then they hastened back to London. The next morning, in two chaises, they returned to the spot, and in security brought back the trunks, which contained, not only a large amount of money, but a mass of important documents belonging to the East India Company.

A reward of forty guineas was offered, by advertisement in the newspapers of the time, for the return of the documents, "and no questions asked." The advertisers themselves, by so doing, risked a fine of £50 for compounding a felony; but, in any case, the reward was never claimed, although Page carefully returned the papers anonymously.

The fact which at last cut the knot of William Page's existence was the robbing of Captain Farrington in 1757, on Blackheath. Among other things the Captain was compelled to render to this Cæsar of the roads was a gold repeater watch. Hotly pursued, Page gave the hue-and-cry a long chase for it, and finally, arriving at Richmond, had himself and his exhausted horse ferried across to Twickenham.

Soon after, finding the south of England ringing uncomfortably with the fame of his doings, he took ship for Scotland, but landed at Scarborough, where, at the fashionable spa, he gambled heavily and strutted awhile as a man of considerable fortune. But he must have been at last really alarmed and prepared to consider turning over [Pg 262] leaf, for he went north to see his former master, the Earl of Glencairn, who, he thought, would be able to recommend him to employment in the plantations. The Earl, however, received him coldly, and he came south again, to resume his chosen profession, in company with Darwell, whom he had by constant alternate threats and persuasions seduced from the

reformed life he was leading and the respectable situation he held, to take up again this hazardous calling.

Together they scoured the road to Tonbridge, Darwell forming, as it were, a rearguard. Page was pursued beyond Sevenoaks by five mounted men armed with pistols, and a blunderbuss, who dashed past Darwell, and after a struggle seized his leader, who presently escaped again. In their return, disappointed, they made a prisoner of Darwell, who, suspecting something of the kind would happen, had already thrown away his pistols. In spite of his indignant protestations that he was a private gentleman, and would not endure such an outrage, he was searched and a part of Captain Farrington's watch was found upon him, with the maker's name and most of the distinguishing marks more or less carefully obliterated. Questioned closely, he declared he had picked it up upon the road. As for the highwayman they had just now nearly captured, he knew nothing of him: had never set eyes on him before.

But, in spite of these denials, Darwell was taken off in custody and examined before a magistrate, who s[Pg 263] him with questions, threats of what would happen to him if he continued obstinate, and promises of clemency if he would make discovery of his companion, that he at last turned King's evidence. During the interval, he was lodged in Maidstone gaol.

A fortnight later, Page was arrested in one of their old haunts in London, the "Golden Lion," near Grosvenor Square. He was at first taken to Newgate, but afterwards remitted to Maidstone, and tried there for the robbery of Captain Farrington. Convicted and sentenced to death, he was hanged on Penenden Heath, April 6th, 1758.

ISAAC DARKIN, ALIAS DUMAS

ISAAC DARKIN was the son of a cork-cutter in Eastcheap, and was born about 1740; too late to appear in the stirring pages of Alexander Smith or Charles Johnson, in which he would have made, we may be sure, an admired figure. All those who knew him, on the road or in the domestic circle, agreed that he was a handsome fellow; and travellers, in particular, noticed his taking ways. These were first displayed in 1758, when he robbed Captain Cockburn near Chelmsford. No less taking, in their own especial way, were the police of the neighbourhood in that time, for they speedily apprehended Isaac, and lodged him in Springfield gaol. He was duly arraigned at the next assizes, and no fewer than eight indictments were then preferred against him. He pleaded guilty to the robbing of Captain Cockburn, but not guilty on the other counts; and was, after a patient trial, found guilty on the first and acquitted on the others. He was then sentenced to death, but was eventually respited on account of his youth, and finally pardoned on condition that he enlisted in the 48th Regiment of foot, then serving in the West Indies, at Antigua. Drafted with others ab[Pg 265] ship lying in the lower reaches of the Thames, presently to set sail for that distant shore, he effected his escape, almost at the moment of up-anchor, by dint of bribing the captain of a merchant vessel lying alongside, to whom he promised so much as a hundred pounds to help him out. He was smuggled aboard the merchantman, and so cunningly disguised that when a search-party, suspecting his whereabouts, boarded the ship, and searched it, even to the hold, they did not recognise him in a particularly rough and dirty sailor who was swearing nautical oaths among the ship's company on deck. So the transport-vessel sailed without him, and he, assuming the name of Dumas, rioted all through the West of England, robbing wealthy travellers and gaily spending his takings on what he loved best: fine clothes and fine ladies. He was so attentive to business that he speedily made a name for himself, the name of a daring votary of the high toby. This reputation rendered it politic on his part to enlist in the Navy, so that in case of being arrested for highway robbery, he could prove himself to have a respectable occupation, that would help to discredit the charge of being a highwayman.

He soon became a valued recruit, and was promoted to midshipman; and it is quite likely that if he had been sent on active service he would have distinguished himself in a more reputable career than that in which he was so soon to die. But his duties kept him for considerable periods in port, and he seems to have had ample leave from them; [Pg 266] find him hovering near Bath and gaily robbing the wealthy real or imagined invalids going to, or returning from, the waters.

On the evening of June 22nd, 1760, he fell in with Lord Percival, travelling by post-chaise over Clarken Down, near Bath, and robbed him of twelve, thirteen, or fourteen guineas—my lord could not positively swear to the exact amount. He then made off in the gathering twilight, and galloped across country, to Salisbury Plain and the little village of Upavon, where he was arrested in a rustic alehouse, and sent thence to Salisbury gaol. At his trial he indignantly denied being a highwayman, or that he was an Englishman. He declared his name was Dumas, that he had lately come from Guadaloupe, where he had taken a part in the late military operations; and said that the so-styled "suspicious behaviour" and damaging admissions he was charged with, when arrested at the inn, were merely the perplexities of a foreigner, when suddenly confronted by hostile strangers.

This special pleading did not greatly deceive judge or jury, but the prosecution broke down upon a technical detail, and Darkin was acquitted; not, however, without an affecting address to the prisoner from the judge, Mr. Justice Willmott, who urged him to amend his ways, while there was yet time.

It is thus quite sufficiently evident that, although the Court was bound to acquit the prisoner, no one h[Pg 267] least doubt of his guilt. His narrow escape does not appear to have impressed Darkin, or "Dumas"; but he was anxious enough to be off, as we learn from a contemporary account of the proceedings, in which it is quaintly said: "He discovered great Impatience 'till he had got off his Fetters and was discharged, which was about five o'clock in the evening, when he immediately set out for London in a post-chaise."

The fair ladies of Salisbury sorrowed when he was gone. They had been constant in visiting him in prison, and had regarded him as a hero, and Lord Percival as a disagreeable hunks. The hero-worship he received is properly noted in the account of his life, trial, and execution, issued in haste from an Oxford press in 1761, shortly after the final scene had been enacted. In those pages we read: "During Mr. Dumas' imprisonment at Salisbury, we find his sufferings made a deep impression upon the tender Hearts of the Ladies, some of whom, having visited him in his Confinement, his obliging Manner, genteel Address, lively Disposition, and whole Deportment so struck them that his Fame soon became the Discourse of the Tea Table; and at the happy Termination of His Affair with my Lord Percival, produced between them the following Copy of Verses:

Joy to thee, lovely Thief! that thou
Hast 'scaped the fatal string,
Let Gallows groan with ugly Rogues,
Dumas must never swing.

Dost thou seek Money?—To thy Wants
Our Purses we'll resign;
Could we our Hearts to guineas coin
Those guineas all were thine.

[Pg 268]

To Bath in safety let my lord
His loaded Pockets carry;
Thou ne'er again shall tempt the Road,
Sweet youth! if thou wilt marry.

No more shall niggard travellers
Avoid thee—We'll ensure them:
To us thou shalt consign thy Balls
And Pistol; we'll secure 'em.

Yet think not, when the Chains are off,
Which now thy Legs bedeck,
To fly: in Fetters softer far
We'll chain thee by the Neck."

But in the short space of six weeks from his acquittal at Salisbury and his triumphal exit in a post-chaise for London, he was again arrested on a charge of highway robbery, this time for robbing a Mr. Gammon at Nettlebed, on the road to Oxford. Committed to trial at Newgate, he was transferred to Oxford gaol, and tried there on March 6th. He had up to now been phenomenally fortunate, but things at this crisis looked a great deal more serious. He acknowledged "he had experienced many narrow scrapes, but never such a d—d one as this," and he was presently found guilty and condemned to death, this time without any extenuating circumstances being found.

Isaac Darkin was what in our times would be called a "superior person." Slang he disdained to use, bad language was anathema to him; and if he did, indeed, condescend to describe a person of mean understanding as "a cake," or "a flat," that was the most he permitted himself. His delicacy was so great that he never mentioned a "robbery," a "robber," or a "highwayman," but spoke instead of persons who had been "injured," or of "the injured parties." And as he was so nice in his language, so he was particular in his dress and deportment. As an eulogist of him said, not without a little criticism: "He was possessed of too great a share of pride for his circumstances in life, and retained more of it to the last than was becoming in a person in his unhappy situation. He had a taste for elegance in every respect; was remarkably fond of silk stockings, and neat in his linen; had his hair dressed in the most fashionable manner every morning; his polished fetters were supported round his waist by a sword-belt, and tied up at his knees with ribbon."

Although but the son of a cork-cutter, he had lived, in the estimation of his contemporaries, like a gentleman. Like a gentleman he spent his last days, and if he did indeed seem to boast a little when, a few days before his execution, he declared he had been nine times in gaol, and seven times tried on a capital charge, that was merely a pardonable professional exaggeration. His claim to have gleaned over six hundred guineas from the road has, on the other hand, the look of an under-estimate. The rumbustious fellows of a hundred years earlier would have thought that had business; they often took much more in a single haul. But times were changing, and not for the better, from the highwaymen's point of view.

Isaac Darkin died like a gentleman, without apparent fear, and without bravado, at Oxford, on March 23rd, 1761, and was at that time, as himself remarked, without apparent pathos or truckling to weak sentiment, "not twenty-one."

[Pg 271]

JAMES MACLAINE, THE "GENTLEMAN" HIGHWAYMAN

THE career of James Maclean, or Maclaine, shows that it was not really difficult to become a "gentleman" highwayman. Born at Monaghan in 1724, he was the second son of Lauchlin Maclaine, a Presbyterian minister, who, although settled in Ireland, was a Scotsman of unmixed Scottish blood, and of undoubted Scottish sympathies. There are plenty of materials for a life of his son James, the highwayman, for the story of his career had a remarkable attraction for all classes of people at the time when he went to die at Tyburn, in 1750; and consequently the "Lives" and "Memoirs" of him are numerous. There are also several portraits of him, most of them showing a distinctly Scottish type of countenance, but not one solving the mystery of his extraordinary fascination for women. Indeed, the full-length portrait of him engraved in Caulfield's *Remarkable Characters*, in which he is styled "Maclean, the Ladies' Hero," shows a heavy-jowled person, with dull, yet staring fish-like eyes; exactly the kind of person who might be expected to create an unfavourable impression. Perhaps the artist does him an injustice, but none of the several artists and engravers [Pg 272] who have handed down to us their respective versions of his features have succeeded in imparting the slightest inkling of good looks to him, and few of the portraits agree with one another. He was tall above the average, as the various prints show; and he wore fine clothes. It was these exceedingly fine feathers, and the fashionable resorts he affected, that gave him the distinction of "gentleman" highwayman; and it is to be feared that his exquisite dress, in larger measure than the quality of his manners, influenced the ladies of 1750, who wept over his fate just as the equally foolish women of 1670 had wept over the hanging of Du Vall.



JAMES MACLAINE.

From a contemporary Portrait.

The Ordinary of Newgate saw nothing remarkable in Maclaine. He speaks of him as "in person of the middle-size, well-limbed, and a sandy complexion, a broad, open countenance pitted with the small-pox, but though he [Pg 275] called the *Gentleman Highwayman*, and in his dress and equipage very much affected the fine gentleman, yet to a man acquainted with good breeding, and that can distinguish it from impudence and affectation, there was very little in his address or behaviour that could entitle him to the character."



MACLAINE, THE LADIES' HERO.

Archibald, the elder brother of this fashionable hero, was an entirely respected and blameless person, who entered the Church, and was pastor of the English community at The Hague for forty-nine years, from 1747 to 1796.

James, the future knight of the road, was intended by his father for a merchant; but that pious father died when James was eighteen years of age, and so the youthful "perfect master of writing and accompts," as he is styled, instead of proceeding, as intended, to a Scottish merchant in Rotterdam, received a modest inheritance, with which he immediately took himself off to Dublin, where he lost or expended it all inside twelve months, in dissipation, after the example of the Prodigal Son in the Scriptures.

Only, unfortunately for him, when the money was gone, and he would, given the opportunity, perhaps have returned, like that illustrious exemplar, from his husks and his harlots, to partake of the fatted calf, there was no father, no home, and no fatted calf to which he might return.

But he had still some relatives left in Monaghan, and he thought he might be received by them. In [\[Pg 276\]](#) was altogether mistaken when he tried to put it to the proof, and was reduced almost to the point of starvation there, when he attracted the attention of a gentleman, who offered him a footman's place in his service. He did not keep this situation long. He was too impudent to his master, and too patronising towards the other servants. He was discharged, and for a time subsisted upon a scanty allowance from his brother.

In this extremity he found a gentleman of Cork, a "Colonel F——n," who was confiding enough to engage him as butler. But he apparently did not make a good butler; and was, moreover, discovered making away with his master's property, and discharged. We next find him in London, thinking of joining the Irish Brigade in the French service; but abandoning the idea from conscientious scruples against being employed in Popish surroundings. Maclaine had a very tender conscience and a timid nature, and what with his religious scruples and the fear of being shot (to which he does not allude, but which was very vivid to him), he had to abandon the notion of wearing a fine uniform, which we may suspect had originally given him the impulse to a military life.



JAMES MACLAINE.

Maclaine did not at this period keep very reputable society; but was in 1746 again occupying a position with the forgiving "Colonel F—n." The Colonel seems to have, on this second occasion, found him an undesirable^[Pg 279] want; whereupon, "being prepossessed with the perfections of his person," he proposed to enlist in Lord Albemarle's troop of horseguards. The Colonel, as an old soldier, thought this, no doubt, the best thing, and, with an advance of ten pounds, bade him go where glory waited him.

Maclaine accordingly enlisted. He had visions of being seated on a prancing steed—"steed" being the superlative of "horse"—and, dressed in something with plenty of blue or scarlet and gold in it, taking part in ceremonial processions and escorts. Unhappily, soon after he had enlisted, he heard that the troop was to proceed at once to Flanders on active service, and hurriedly got, somehow, out of the dangerous position.

He then made some attempt to settle down and live respectably, for he married the daughter of a Mr. Maclagen, a horse-dealer in the Oxford Road—the Oxford Street of to-day. His wife brought a small dowry of £500, and with this they set up business in the grocery and chandlery way in Welbeck Street. Unhappily for any views he may have entertained of a settled life as a tradesman, his wife died in 1748. It appeared then that the business had not prospered, or that their style of living had been beyond their means, for the stock and furniture were then found to be worth only £85.

Maclaine's first idea after this domestic catastrophe was one very prevalent at that time: the notion of posing as a gentleman of fortune and of fashion, with the object of ensnaring the affections of some susceptible young^[Pg 280] lady by means and marrying her for her money. He accordingly realised all his effects, and, placing his two infant daughters in the care of his mother-in-law, burst upon the town as one of the elegants of the day.

A needy neighbour, like himself a tradesman, Plunkett by name, who had failed as a chemist, was induced by this hopeful widower to act a part as his footman, and together they frequented places of fashionable assemblage, both in London and at Tunbridge Wells, on the look-out for heiresses. But the game was shy, and meanwhile the small capital of £85 was fast melting away. Fine clothes were ten times more expensive in that age than the finest clothes of to-day, and although it was possible to obtain a good deal on credit, it was not at all workable to visit Vauxhall and such expensive places, and to cut a dash there, for any considerable time on so inconsiderable a capital.

It was Plunkett who at this stage of affairs, when their funds were nearly exhausted, suggested the road as a place where money might usually be had for the asking.

"A brave man," said Plunkett, "cannot want. He has a right to live, and need not want the conveniences of life. While the dull, plodding, busy knaves carry cash in their pockets, we must draw upon them to supply our wants. Only impudence is necessary, and the getting better of a few idle scruples. Courage is scarcely necessary, for all^[Pg 281] we have to deal with are mere poltroons." But when poltroon meets poltroon, when the timid traveller, ready to hand over his purse on demand, cannot do so because the coward highwayman dare not reach out and take it, what happens? It is an embarrassing moment, whose fortunes are (or were) determined only by chance.

Plunkett did not know the manner of man he had to deal with until they had taken the road together. He had always seemed a bold, swaggering fellow, and big enough in all conscience; but when it came to highway robbery he was a helpless companion.

Their first affair was with a grazier, going home from Smithfield with the proceeds of his day's business in his pocket. Plunkett, suddenly enlightened as to Maclaine's want of nerve, took the conduct of the incident firmly in hand at once, or the results might have been disastrous for both. He took £60 from the grazier, while Maclaine looked on and spoke no word, inwardly in greater fear than he, and ready, had there been any sign of resistance, to fly.

Their next attempt was to stop and rob a coach on the St. Albans road.

It was agreed that Maclaine should stop the coachman and present his pistol on one side, while Plunkett did the same on the other. But although he rode up several times, intending to challenge the Jehu with the traditional cry ^[Pg 282] bold and fearless fellows who did the like every night, his heart failed him; so Plunkett had to carry it off as best he could, while Maclaine sat shivering with cowardice in the background, in spite of the "Venetian mask" that covered the upper part of his face and concealed his identity sufficiently well.

But Plunkett, as may have been already gathered, was a man with sufficient resolution for two, and although Maclaine was quaking with terror on every occasion, he brought him in some fashion up to the scratch in a long series of robberies. They frequently hired or stabled horses at Hyde Park Corner, and thence rode out for a day and a night upon Hounslow Heath, or elsewhere.

"In all this while," we learn, he scarcely ever thought of his daughters, "and seldom visited his mother-in-law." O villain!

When in town, he had lodgings on the first floor over a shop in St. James's Street, and presented a gorgeous figure to morning callers. He was even more gorgeous in the evening, when he frequented places of public entertainment, and obtained the freedom of some fashionable houses. But the morning picture he presented will probably suffice. He then wore a crimson damask banjan, a silk shag waistcoat turned with lace, black velvet breeches, white silk stockings, and yellow morocco slippers.

On one exceptional occasion, Plunkett and Maclaine went as far as Chester, and did good business on t^[Pg 283]; but their best haul was on Shooter's Hill, where they stopped and robbed an official of the East India Company of a large sum.

With his share of the plunder, Maclaine took a little holiday on the Continent, and visited his brother at The Hague, probably astonishing that worthy man by his sudden magnificence. He then returned and rejoined Plunkett.

Horace Walpole wrote at different times several accounts of how he was once stopped by these brothers-in-arms. It was a moonlight night, in the beginning of November 1749, nearly a year before Maclaine's career was brought to a close, that Horace was returning from Holland House, Kensington, to London. The hour was ten o'clock, the place Hyde Park. What trifles, or what amount of money Messrs. Maclaine and Plunkett took on this occasion we are not told; for Walpole does not take his correspondents so completely and voluminously into his confidence over this affair as he generally did. He only tells them, and us, that the pistol of "the accomplished Mr. Maclean," as he calls him, went off—by accident, he is careful to say—and that the bullet passed so close as to graze the skin beneath his eye and stun him. The bullet then went through the roof of the carriage.

The incident that so nearly brought the life of Horace Walpole to an untimely end, and might thus have left the world much poorer in eighteenth-century gossip, was conducted, as he tells us, "with the greatest good-breedi^[Pg 284] both sides." He further adds that the reason of Maclaine being out that night and taking a purse *that* way was, he had only that morning been disappointed of marrying a great fortune. It does not seem at all an adequate reason; but that was the eighteenth century and this is the twentieth, and perhaps we cannot see eye to eye on all these matters.

But, at any rate, Maclaine afterwards behaved very nicely about the articles he had taken; sending a note to Walpole as soon as ever he had returned to his lodgings, in which he made his excuses, if not with the witty grace of a Voiture, at least expressed in a manner ten times more natural and easily polite. He declared that, had the bullet found its billet in Walpole's head, he would certainly have put one through his own. Then, in a postscript, which, like the postscripts in letters written by feminine hands, contained the whole substance of and reason for the letter, Maclaine added that he would be pleased to meet the gentleman at Tyburn (O ominous tryst!) at twelve at night, where the gentleman might purchase again any trifles he had lost.

There, if not particularly elsewhere, Maclaine seems to have indeed proved himself, in one brief moment, a "gentleman" highwayman. You see the argument passing in his mind. The trifles were indeed trifles intrinsically, but they might have had some sentimental worth, of old or new association, that would have made the loss of them a grievous thing to their rightful owner. Well, then, if that owner liked to ransom them for a trifling sum, h^[Pg 285]is his chance. A very considerate offer.

But Horace Walpole did not accept the rendezvous. Possibly he doubted the honour of a highwayman met at such a spot.

The "gentleman highwayman" resented criticism, as will be seen by the following story: Maclaine frequented Button's Coffee House, in Russell Street, Covent Garden, and paid particular attention to the barmaid there, daughter of the proprietor. The attentions of such a fine gentleman as he appeared to be were very flattering to the girl, and very noticeable to other frequenters of the house, one of whom, a certain Mr. Donaldson, knew Maclaine, and took the opportunity of warning the girl's father of his real character. The father in his turn cautioned his daughter, and foolishly let slip the name of the person who had warned him; and she, of course, passed on the information to the engaging Maclaine.

On the next occasion when Donaldson visited Button's, and while he was sitting in one of the boxes, Maclaine entered, and in a loud voice, and the pronounced Irish brogue that was ever on his tongue, said: "Mr. Donaldson, I wish to spake to you in a private room."

Mr. Donaldson, being unarmed, and naturally afraid of being alone with such a man as he knew Maclaine to be, said that as there could not possibly be anything pass between them that the whole world was not welcome t^[Pg 286]W, he

begged leave to decline the invitation.

"Very well," rejoined Maclaine, "we shall meet again."

A day or so later, as Mr. Donaldson was walking near Richmond in the evening, he saw Maclaine on horseback, approaching him; but fortunately at that moment a gentleman's carriage appeared, and Maclaine rode after it; Donaldson hastening into the protection that the streets of Richmond town afforded. It is probable that, but for this timely diversion, Maclaine would have shot the man who dared tell the truth about him.

But the end of the alliance of Maclaine and Plunkett was now at hand. On June 26th, 1750, at two o'clock in the morning, they stopped the Salisbury stage on Turnham Green. The courage of the coach passengers was at a low ebb at that unconscionable hour, and they suffered themselves to be robbed, without making the least resistance. They numbered five men and one woman. The men were bidden step out, and, doing so, were searched and robbed at leisure. A Mr. Higden had an exceptionally fine waistcoat, and had to part with even that to Maclaine, who was a connoisseur in waistcoats. A Mr. Lockyer also was constrained to give up a wig. From the lady was taken "only what she chose to give." Here, at any rate, is a faint sweet relic of an older courtesy.

As an afterthought, Maclaine went back for two or three of the portmanteaux stored away in the hoot.

[Pg 289]

They then, riding off westward, met the Earl of Eglinton, travelling in his post-chaise. He had an escort of two mounted servants, but as they were over half a mile behind at the time, he might equally well have been travelling alone.



MACLAINE AND PLUNKETT ROBBING THE EARL OF EGLINTON ON HOUNSLOW HEATH.

Maclaine, riding up to the postboy, threatened him with a pistol and told him to stop instantly; but, at the same time, was sufficiently cautious to so place himself that the occupant of the post-chaise would be unable to fire at him without hitting the postboy. The highwaymen were, as a rule, exceedingly well-informed persons; and Maclaine knew perfectly well that Lord Eglinton carried a blunderbuss with him, and had the reputation of always being ready and willing to use it.

But in the strategic position he had taken up, he was quite safe, and meanwhile Plunkett had advanced from the rear and taken his lordship completely by surprise. He threatened, indeed, instantly to shoot him, if he did not throw the blunderbuss away; and my lord flung the weapon from him at once, as though it had been red-hot. Plunkett then took seven guineas from him.

Maclaine was not behindhand, and seized his lordship's overcoat and the blunderbuss which was lying upon the heath. He was a frugal person, and in that particular did credit to his Scots ancestry. A curious old print shows this robbery, famous in its day, and in it Maclaine and Plunkett do certainly look most awe-inspiring in the [Pg 290]udes: Maclaine, in particular, being apparently engaged in pushing his pistol through the postboy's head. But that is doubtless artistic licence.

Maclaine did a very foolish thing when he returned to his St. James's Street rooms, early that same day. He sent for a Jew dealer to come and make an offer for some clothes he wished to sell; none other, in fact, than those he had taken from the coach, and when they were shortly advertised as having been stolen, the mischief was done. As if that were not folly enough, Maclaine's frugality had led him also to remove the gold lace from one of the stolen coats and to offer it for sale. He chanced to take it to the very laceman who had recently sold it. His arrest was then a matter of course. Equally of course, he strongly protested against the indignity of a "gentleman" being arrested for theft, and then he broke down and wept in "a most dastardly and pusillanimous manner, whimpering and crying like a whipt schoolboy."

Maclaine declared that the absconded Plunkett had left the clothes with him, in part satisfaction of a debt he owed, and that he, Maclaine, was to have sold them for what they would fetch, as part liquidation of the debt.

Any so-called confession he might have made, he now declared impossible. What should a gentleman like himself know of highway robbery? "It is true enough that when first apprehended, the surprise confounded me and [Pg 291] me a most extraordinary shock. It caused a delirium and confusion in my brain which rendered me incapable of being myself, or knowing what I said or did. I talked of robberies as another man would do in talking of stories; but, my Lord, after my friends had visited me in the Gate-house, and had given me some new spirits, and when I came to be re-examined before Justice Lediard, and was asked if I could make any discovery of the robbery, I then alleged I had recovered my surprise, that what I had talked of before concerning robberies was false and wrong, and was entirely owing to a

confused head and brain."

He called nine witnesses to character; among them Lady Caroline Petersham, who is represented in a curious print of the trial at the Old Bailey, under examination.

The elegant Maclaine stands prominently in the dock handsomely attired, but, alas! heavily fettered, with his laced hat under his left arm. One hand holds his lengthy written defence, the other is affectedly spread over his breast, in gentlemanly protestation of his being an injured person. His is a tall, upstanding figure; but he appears, by the evidence of the print, to have had a face like a pudding: and the majority of the counsel seated at a table in front of him are shown regarding it with easily understood curiosity and astonishment.

One of the dignified persons on the bench is represented addressing Lady Caroline: "What has your Ladys^h [Pg 292] ay in favour of the Prisoner at y^e Bar?"



MACLAINE IN THE DOCK.

With a dramatic gesture, she replies: "My Lord, I have had the Pleasure to know him well: he has often been about my House, and I never lost anything."

In spite of this cloud of witness, our gentleman was convicted, and that with the utmost dispatch, for the jury returned their verdict of "guilty" without leaving the box.

The time between his condemnation and execution was spent in an affectation of repentance, that does not read very pleasantly. He suddenly found himself a great sinner, and indeed revelled luxuriantly in the discovery. But there was not the true note of abasement and conviction in all this; for he went among his fellow-criminals like a superior person, and offered them consolation from the rarefied heights of his "gentility," that must have been excessively galling to them. Their profanity and callousness shocked him profoundly. Probably their behaviour was not less profane when he, condemned to die for misdeeds similar to their own, presumed to lecture them on the error of their ways. But preaching was in his blood, and would find expression somehow, and he found excuse for his almost consistent lack of courage on the road in the moral reflection that it was conscience made a coward of him. But conscience did not prevent him sharing in the swag when the enterprise was carried through.

He said it was true that, since he had entered upon the highway, he had never enjoyed a calm and easy m^o [Pg 295]; that when he was among ladies and gentlemen they observed his uneasiness, and would often ask him what was the matter, that he seemed so dull. And his friends would tell him that surely his affairs were under some embarrassment; "But they little suspected," said he, "the wound I had within."

He protested in a good cause he believed there was not a man of greater natural courage than himself, but that in every scheme of villainy he put Plunkett on the most hazardous post. "There," said he, "I was always a coward—my conscience"—always that sickly, unconvincing iteration. But the insistence of conscience that Plunkett should always be placed in the way of the bullets is at least amusing.

Walpole tells how Maclaine had rooms in St. James's Street, opposite White's Club, and others at Chelsea. Plunkett, he says, had rooms in Jermyn Street. Their faces were as well known in and about St. James's as that of any of the gentlemen who lived in that quarter, who might also be in the habit of going upon the road, if the truth were known

about everybody. Maclaine, he said, had quarrelled, very shortly before his arrest, with an army officer at the Putney Bowling Green. The officer had doubted his gentility, and Maclaine challenged him to a duel, but the exasperating officer would not accept until Maclaine should produce a certificate of the noble birth he claimed.

"After his arrest," says Walpole, "there was a wardrobe of clothes, three-and-twenty purses, and the [Pg 296]rated blunderbuss found at his lodgings, besides a famous kept-mistress." Walpole concluded he would suffer, and as he wished him no ill, he did not care to follow the example of all fashionable London, and go to see him in his cell. He was almost alone in his thus keeping away. Lord Mountfield, with half White's Club at his heels, went to Newgate the very first day. There, in the cell, was Maclaine's aunt, crying over her unhappy nephew. When those great and fashionable frequenters of White's had gone, she asked, well knowing who they were, but perhaps not fully informed of their ways, beyond the fact that they gambled extravagantly: "My dear, what did the Lords say to you? Have you ever been concerned with any of them?"

"Was it not admirable?" asks Walpole; adding, "but the chief personages who have been to comfort and weep over their fallen hero are Lady Caroline Petersham and Miss Ashe: I call them 'Polly' and 'Lucy,' and asked them if he did not sing: 'Thus I stand like the Turk with his doxies around?'"

In that last passage, Walpole refers to Gay's *Beggar's Opera*, written in 1716 and produced in 1728; a play written around an imaginary highwayman, "Captain Macheath," who might very well have stood for Maclaine himself. Polly and Lucy were two of Macheath's friends in the opera.

We have Walpole's own authority for the otherwise almost incredible statement that three thousand people [Pg 299] went to see Maclaine in his cell, the first Sunday after he was condemned. He fainted away twice with the heat of the cell. "You can't conceive the going there is to Newgate, and the prints that are published of the malefactors and the memoirs of their lives and deaths, set forth with as much parade as Marshal Turenne's."

The fatal October 3rd came at last, when he was to die. A curious etched print published at the time, at the small price of threepence, entitled "Newgate's Lamentation, or the Ladies' Last Farewell of Maclaine," shows the parting, and bears the following verses:

Farewell, my friends, let not your hearts be fill'd,
My time is near, and I'll with calmness yield.
Fair ladies now, your grief, I pray, forbear,
Nor wound me with each tender-hearted tear.

Mourn not my fate; your friendships have been kind,
Which I in tears shall own, till breath's resign'd.
Oh! may the indulgence of such friendly love,
That's been bestowed on me, be doubled from above.

Thus fortified, and giving his blessing, for what it might be worth, he went to Tyburn diligently conning his prayer-book all the way, and not once glancing at the crowds.



NEWGATE'S LAMENTATION; OR, THE LADIES' FAREWELL TO MACLAINE.

To the constable who had arrested him, and who now came to beg his forgiveness, he replied earnestly: "I forgive you, and may God bless you, and your friends; may He forgive my enemies and receive my soul." And then he was [Pg 300]d off, and died quite easily. There was a great sale for the many more or less truthful lives of him hawked round the gallows.

THE story of John Poulter is one of the saddest that here present themselves to be recorded. He was born at Newmarket, of poor parents, and was given a sufficient schooling for his station. At thirteen years of age he was taken into service in the stables of the Duke of Somerset, and remained there for six years, leaving with an excellent character for smartness and industry. He then went into the employ of Colonel Lumley, and was on three occasions sent to France, in charge of racehorses; always giving complete satisfaction. But this slight experience of foreign travel seems to have unsettled him, and he craved for adventures under alien skies. We next find him, accordingly, sailing on a Bristol merchant ship and voyaging to the West Indies, to the American Colonies, and to Newfoundland; seeing life in a humble but effective way.

Returning to England at last, and, sailor-like—or at any rate, like sailors of those times—falling at once into abandoned company, he met, at Lichfield on February 1749, a dissolute set of persons living disreputably upon their wits; among them a certain John Brown, alias Dawson, who, with an experience of the highway trade, easily [Pg 302]aded the adventurous Poulter to join him and his associates.

Brown, Poulter, and company, fully armed, then set out to prey upon all and sundry; devoting themselves more particularly to thefts from houses. At Lichfield, while one diverted the attention of the landlord of the "George" inn, another rifled a chest and stole a sum of money and many valuable articles. At Chester, Poulter distinguished himself by stealing some black plush that he fancied might make him a fine stylish waistcoat; and sent off at once to a tailor, to call at the "Black Dog" inn, where he and the gang were lodging, that he might be measured, and enabled to appear forthwith as a person of elegance and distinction. We may here fitly pause a moment to admire, or to be astonished at, the child-like vanity and delight in fine clothes displayed by nearly all the highwaymen at that time. They could not resist seizing every and any opportunity that offered, of dressing themselves in the best that could be obtained.

Unfortunately, the manners of a highwayman were not exactly those of a gentleman. There was something overdone in the affected elegance of deportment, a certain exaggeration and a decided "loudness" that made reflective people suspicious. Thus, the tailor to whom Poulter sent for his stolen plush to be made up was not altogether satisfied with his strange customer, and when a pistol that Poulter carried in his pocket went off accidentally during the [Pg 303]ss of measurement, he was convinced that a person who carried loaded firearms in this manner was not only a dangerous, but also a suspicious, person. The bullet had harmlessly sped into the ceiling, but the tailor was unnerved by the incident, and Poulter, rather lamely apologetic, endeavoured to explain away this concealed armoury by accusing Brown of putting crackers in his pockets. As for the tailor, he hurried off to the Mayor with the story that a dangerous person, evidently a highwayman, had taken lodgings in the city, and was one of a queer gang, whose suspicious movements had already attracted attention. The Mayor sent some trusty emissaries to examine Poulter and his associates, but they had already taken the alarm, and had embarked at Parkgate for Ireland.

Poulter had already had enough of this criminal life, and, tired of adventure of all kinds, desired nothing better than to settle down to some business. He accordingly, in the name of Baxter, took a small alehouse in Dublin, and, entirely dissociating himself from his companions for a time, did a comfortable and fairly prosperous trade, averaging five barrels a week. Here he might have continued, and would have been glad to do so, only for a most unfortunate circumstance.

There were at that time a number of Irish rogues in London, obtaining a hazardous livelihood, chiefly by picking pockets, but not disdaining any form of villainy that might promise to be profitable. General Sinclair was [Pg 304] of a gold watch by one or other of this gang, as he was leaving a party at Leicester House, and William Harper and Thomas Tobin, two suspicious characters, were arrested for being concerned, and taken to the Gatehouse at Westminster, whence they were presently rescued by their gang, to the number of a couple of dozen; all of them making off to Ireland.

This affair would not appear to concern Poulter in any way, engaged as he was at Dublin in earning an honest livelihood; but it had a very tragical result on his fortunes. Among the fugitives was one James Field, who had known Poulter in London; and he, as ill-fortune would have it, chanced one day to walk down that Dublin Street where Poulter's inn was situated. By the accursed malevolence of fate, Poulter himself happened at that moment to be standing at the door of his house. Field immediately recognised him and stopped to enquire what his old confederate was doing. He drank there and wished him good day, but soon after brought all that escaped gang of scoundrels to the spot; and there, much to Poulter's dismay, they established themselves, day by day, making his inn, once so respectable and well-conducted, a byword for riotous drinking, and the haunt of characters that it would be flattery to describe as merely "suspicious." Field and others were actually taken into custody there. Decent trade deserted th [Pg 305] and, despairing of being rid of the scoundrels, whom he dared not forbid the house, lest they should turn upon and denounce him, he absconded across Ireland to Cork, where he at first contemplated taking another inn. He at last, however, settled upon Waterford, and took an inn there, remaining for six months, when he was induced to return to Dublin by his former brewer, who, sorry to have lost a good customer by Poulter's enforced flight, wanted him back.

He eventually settled two miles outside Dublin, at an inn called the "Shades of Clontarf," looking upon the sea; and became part innkeeper, part fisherman, and led a very happy, honest, and contented life, making, moreover, an average profit of £3 a week.

But here he was found towards the close of 1751 by Tobin, who foisted himself and a dissolute woman companion upon the unfortunate man. Poulter generously received them, but earnestly implored Tobin not to bring his evil associates into the neighbourhood. He wanted, he declared, to live an honest life, and to be done with the past. Tobin assured him he would not appear in the neighbourhood again; but in a few days he was back at Clontarf, with a select company of rascals, and from that time the unhappy Poulter knew no peace. His determination to lead a respectable life they took as a direct challenge to, and slur upon, themselves. There is nothing that so greatly enrages the habitual criminal as the reclamation of one of his own kind, and it is doubtless the influence of hardened evil-doers th [Pg 306]vents many a criminal, really disgusted with crime, from reforming. These wretches set themselves deliberately to ruin Poulter. They practically lived at his house, and, as had been done before, they soon changed the character of it from a

decent alehouse to a thieves' boozing-ken, to which the police-officers came at once when they wanted to find some bad character, or to trace stolen property. Poulter was a mere cipher under his own roof.

But they were not content with wrecking his trade: they must needs blast that good character he had been so patiently acquiring. They did it by making him out a smuggler. Six pounds of tea and twelve yards of calico and muslin placed secretly in his boat, and information then lodged with the Revenue officers, was sufficient. Poulter's boat was seized and condemned, and Poulter himself, convinced that he would not be able to establish his innocence, fled from the scene and hurried aboard a vessel bound for Bristol, where he landed penniless. There, in Bristol streets, he met two early criminal acquaintances, Dick Branning and John Roberts, and as there seemed to be no likelihood of being allowed to live within the law, he agreed to take part with them and a number of confederates, whose headquarters were at Bath, in a campaign of highway and other robberies.

Their operations were of the most roving description. By way of Trowbridge, they made for Yorkshire, [Pg 307] the country as they went with all manner of rogueries. Nothing came amiss. At Halifax they netted twenty-five guineas from a clergyman by an eighteenth-century ancestor of the thimble-rigging fraud, called "pricking in the belt." At last they found themselves at Chester: place of evil omen for Poulter. There, at the house of a confederate, they heard on the evening of their arrival of a train of pack-horses laden with Manchester goods, due to pass that night. Watch had been kept upon them, said the confederate, and a man would point out to our friends which, among all the animals of the pack-horse train, was best worth robbing of his load. It would be best, he said, to do the work on the country road, and to take the horse into a field.

As it happened, they pitched upon the wrong horse, and got only a load of calamancoes, fabrics woven of wool with an admixture of silk, popular in those times; but the pack contained over a thousand yards, and they cut it off after some difficulty in the dark, and got away safely with it; although greatly alarmed by the horse's loud neighing when he found himself separated from his companions.

The robbers went off at once out of the neighbourhood, and that same night reached a village near Whitchurch, eighteen or twenty miles distant. There they obliterated all distinguishing marks on the goods, and divided them.

At Grantham, which Poulter and Tobin next favoured with a visit, they relieved a credulous farmer of fifty [Pg 308] guineas by the "pricking in the belt" device. At Nottingham several of the accomplices met, but they had bad luck, and Poulter went on the sneak and stole a silver tankard, without a lid, from the "Blackamoor's Head" inn: and that was all the scurvy town of Nottingham yielded them. They then made for Yorkshire, where they remained for a considerable period, and then left, only because their widespread thefts of all kinds made a continued stay dangerous. York, Durham, and the north, including Newcastle, comprised a tour then undertaken.

They then made their way to Bath, the general rendezvous of the gang, and thence in what Poulter calls "three sets," or gangs, moved independently and by easy stages into Devonshire: attending the cattle-fair at Sampford Peverell, with marked success to themselves, and grievous loss to the farmers and graziers there assembled. Thence they moved on to Torrington and Exeter, and so back again to Bath, where twelve of them met at Roberts's house.

Poulter and two confederates named Elgar and Allen then went into the north of England again, attending fairs, horse-races and cock-fighting matches on the sharpening lay; winning about £30 or £40 at cards. Returning to Bath, and being looked upon with suspicion, living as they were with a number of riotous men in Roberts's house, they hit upon the dodge of passing for smugglers, and thus at once explaining their association and enlisting public sympathy [Pg 309] every one, except the Revenue officers, was in those times well-affected towards smugglers.

They were not only at considerable pains, but at great expense also, to create this impression. "We used," says Poulter, in his confessions, "to give seven shillings a pound for tea, and sell it again for four shillings and sixpence, on purpose to make people believe we were smugglers."

While they were thus staying at Bath, they would go now and then to a fair, and try "the nob," or "pricking in the belt." If that did not succeed, they would buy a horse or two, give IOU's for the money and false addresses, and then sell the horses again. "This," says Poulter, "is called 'masoning.'"

This was followed by a raid into Dorset. A visit of the gang to Blandford races was highly successful. They attended numerous, and while some robbed the booths, others devoted their attention to the sportsmen, and yet others lightened the pockets of the crowds engrossed in watching the cock-fighting. They wound up a glorious day by dining in style at the "Rose and Crown," and there chanced upon the best luck of all those gorgeous hours: finding a portmanteau from which they took eighteen guineas, four broad pieces, and diamonds, jewels, and clothes to a great amount. Many of these articles were taken to London by Poulter, and sold there to Jews in Duke's Place, Aldgate, on behalf [Pg 310] of and partners. The proceeds were duly divided at Roberts's house at Bath.

The next activities of these busy rogues were at Corsham, near Bath. They then appeared at Farringdon in Berkshire, and there robbed the Coventry carrier. Newbury and Bristol then suffered from them. At last, they grew so notorious in the West of England that they judged it only prudent to alter their methods for a time, and to devote themselves exclusively to horse-stealing: an art they had not hitherto practised with any frequency.

An amusing incident was that in which Poulter robbed a man of £20. The foolish fellow, an utter stranger, had been rash enough to display his money to Roberts one night in a country alehouse. It had just been paid to him, he said. "And it will presently be taken from you," Roberts might truly have retorted. But he merely in a sly manner drew Poulter's attention, who later followed the man and presenting a metal tinder-box to his head, roared out, "Your money or your life." The tinder-box in the darkness looked so like a pistol that the money was meekly handed over.

Poulter then went off to Trowbridge, in company with a new recruit, Burke by name, an Irishman, who had been confidential ostler to Roberts, and was now advanced to full membership of this body of raiders. Meeting a post-chaise near Clarken Down, Burke proposed to attack it, but Poulter would agree only on condition that no violence [Pg 311] used. Poulter then led the attack, but in the darkness put his hand with accidental force through the window, and cut it severely. In doing so, his pistol went off, and Burke thinking it was the occupant of the chaise who had fired, replied

with his own firearms. Fortunately, no one was hit.

The chaise was occupied by Dr. Hancock and his little girl. Poulter took up the child and kissed her, and then, setting her down, robbed the Doctor of one guinea and a half in gold, six shillings, a gold watch, and some clothes: a booty not worth all the trouble, and certainly not by a long way worth the further trouble the affair was presently to bring.

After seeing the post-chaise disappear in the darkness, Poulter and his companion made their way to a neighbouring inn, and coolly displayed their takings to the landlord and his wife, who appear to have been, if not actual confederates, at least better disposed to self-revealed robbers than honest innkeepers should be. The landlady gave the highwaymen a bag for the clothes, and the landlord, when they lamented the fact of all their powder and ball being fired off, obligingly removed the charge from his loaded fowling-piece, and melted down two pewter spoons for casting into bullets. The landlady, when Poulter and Burke asked her if these preparations for arming did not alarm her, said: "No, they are not the first pistols I have seen loaded by night in this kitchen." Evidently an inn that the solitary a[Pg 312]rmed traveller with money about him should avoid.

She added thoughtfully that, after this robbery, they had better travel as far away as they could, that night from the spot. She would send them any news.

They then left, and, taking a horse they chanced to see in an adjacent meadow, proceeded to Exeter, where they sold the stolen articles to a receiver.

It was not more than three weeks later when Poulter was arrested on suspicion of being concerned in the robbery of Dr. Hancock. He was thrown into Ilchester gaol, brought to trial, and condemned to death. He made a full confession and disclosed the names of no fewer than thirty-one of his associates, their places of meeting, and their methods. He was not only anxious to save his life by thus turning evidence against the gang, but he was genuinely wearied of the manner of life into which he had been hounded.

Many members of the gang, he said, lived to all appearances respectably. Their general meeting-place was Bath. He added that it was on every account desirable that the messenger to the police at Bath, entrusted with these disclosures, should keep all these things secret, except to the Mayor; but some one had gossiped, for within one hour of his arrival those revelations were the talk of the town, and the names of those implicated in them were freely mentioned. The next day they were even printed, in accounts of the disclosures hastily struck off and sold in the streets. The v[Pg 313]rtual result was that most of the persons named escaped before justice could lay hands upon them. A list of nineteen not taken, and twelve in various gaols all over the country, is printed in the *Discoveries*.

Dr. Hancock's property was found and returned to him. His conduct was one of the most astonishing features in this amazing case, and reflected considerable discredit upon him; for although he visited Poulter in Ilchester gaol, before the trial, and assured the prisoner that although he was obliged to be a prosecutor, he would bear lightly upon the facts, and would in the event of a conviction use his best efforts to obtain the Royal pardon, he treacherously used every effort to secure his being hanged. There seems to have been no motive for this double-dealing, except his own natural duplicity. His treachery was thorough, for he even used his influence with the judge to obtain a shortening of the period between sentence and execution.

The trial and the revelations made by Poulter excited keen and widespread public interest, and the lengthy pamphlet account of them, entitled "The Discoveries of John Poulter, otherwise Baxter, apprehended for robbing Dr. Hancock on Clarken Down, near Bath," had a large and long-continued sale. A copy of the fourteenth edition, issued in 1769, fourteen years later, is in the British Museum library.

He was respited for six weeks, in consideration of the further disclosures he was to make, or of any eviden[Pg 314]t might be required to give, and in this time, so moving was his tale, and so useful was the information he had given, that the corporations of Bath, Bristol, Exeter, and Taunton, together with numerous private gentlemen of considerable influence, petitioned that he might be reprieved. It is probable that these efforts would have been successful; but Poulter was an unlucky man, and at this particular crisis in his affairs happened in some way to rouse the ill-will of the gaoler, who was never tired, in all those days of suspense, of assuring him that he would certainly be hanged, and serve him right!

It is not surprising that, under these circumstances, the unhappy Poulter endeavoured to escape. With the aid of a fellow-prisoner, committed to gaol for debt, he forced an iron bar out of a window, and the two, squeezing through the opening, broke prison at nightfall of Sunday, February 17th, 1755. They intended to make for Wales. All that night they walked along the country roads, Poulter with irons on his legs as far as Glastonbury, where he succeeded in getting them removed. When day came, they hid in haystacks, resuming their flight when darkness was come again. They next found themselves at Wookey, near Wells, much to their dismay, having intended to bear more towards the north-west. Poulter was by this time in a terribly exhausted condition, and his legs and ankles were so sore and swollen from the effects of being chafed with the irons he had walked with for ten miles, that it was absolutely necessary he [Pg 315] rest. He did so at an alehouse until two o'clock in the afternoon, and was about to leave when a mason at work about the place entered, and recognised him. Calling his workmen to help, he secured Poulter, who was then taken back to Ilchester. Nine days of his respite were left, but a strong and murderous animus was displayed against this most unfortunate of men, and it was decided to hang him out of hand. The execution could not, however, take place earlier without a warrant from London, and the trouble and expense of sending an express messenger to the local Member of Parliament, then in town, demanding his instant execution, were incurred, in order to cut shorter his already numbered days. The messenger must have been phenomenally speedy, for he is said to have returned with the warrant within twenty-four hours; and Poulter was at once taken out of his cell and hanged, February 25th, 1755.

PAUL LEWIS, who was, like Nicholas Horner, the son of a clergyman, was born at Hurst-monceaux, in Sussex, and was originally put to the profession of arms, and became an officer of artillery. The usual career of gambling and debauchery, so productive of highwaymen, led him first into difficulties with his creditors, and then caused him to desert from the army. He left one service only to enter another, for he joined the navy, and rose from the rank of midshipman to that of lieutenant.



PAUL LEWIS.

None doubted his courage, nor, on the other hand, was there any mistaking his depravity. He robbed his brother officers of the small sum of three guineas, and made off with that meagre amount to begin the life of the road in the neighbourhood of Newington Butts. He levied contributions from a gentleman travelling in a chaise on this spot, but this, his initial effort, resulted in his capture. The plea of an *alibi* set up for him, however, secured his acquittal. Later he was seized at night by a police-officer while in the act of robbing a Mr. Brown, whose horse he had frightened by discharging a pistol. Mr. Brown was flung violently to the ground, and Lewis was in the act of going over [Pg 319]ckets when Pope, the police-officer, who had been on the look-out for him, secured him, after a struggle.

Lewis was duly sentenced to death at the ensuing Sessions.

The Newgate Calendar, recounting all these things, says: "Such was the baseness and unfeeling profligacy of this wretch that when his almost heart-broken father visited him for the last time in Newgate, and put twelve guineas into his hand to repay his expenses, he slipped one of the pieces of gold into the cuff of his sleeve by a dexterous sleight, and then, opening his hand, showed the venerable and reverend old man that there were but eleven; upon which his father took another from his pocket, and gave it him to make the number intended. Having then taken a last farewell of his parents, Lewis turned to his fellow-prisoners, and exultingly exclaimed: "I have flung the old fellow out of another guinea!"

Lewis said he would die like a man of honour; no hangman should put a halter round his neck. He would rather take his own life. But this he had not, after all, sufficient courage to do. A knife he had secreted in his pillow fell out one day, either by accident or design, and was taken away from him. He was executed at Tyburn on May 4th, 1763, aged twenty-three.

THE WESTONS

THE careers of George and Joseph Weston read like the imaginings of a romantic novelist, and, indeed, Thackeray adopted some of the stirring incidents of their lives in his unfinished novel, *Denis Duval*.

George Weston was born in 1753, and his brother Joseph in 1759; sons of George Weston, a farmer, of Stoke, in Staffordshire. Early in 1772, George was sent to London, where a place in a merchant's office had been secured for him, and there he was fortunate enough to be promoted to the first position, over the heads of all the others, upon the death of the chief clerk, eighteen months later. He was then in receipt of £200 a year, and on that amount contrived to take part pretty freely in the gaities and dissipations of Vauxhall and similar resorts. At this period he introduced his brother Joseph to town, and also began a series of peculations in the office, in order to support the extravagances into which a passion for gambling and "seeing life" had led him. When he could no longer conceal his defalcations, he fled to Holland, and Joseph, suspected of complicity, was obliged to leave London.

Within three months George had returned to England in disguise. He made his way to Durham and there [Pg 321]d the service of a devout elderly lady of the Methodist persuasion. Pretending to have adopted the religious convictions of George Whitefield's followers, he affected the religious life, with the object of marrying the lady and securing her ample fortune. But he was recognised on the very eve of the wedding, and exposed. He then fled southward, with as much of the old lady's money and valuables as he could manage to secure at the moment.

But he speedily lost nearly all his plunder in backing outsiders at York and Doncaster races, and entered Nottingham with only one guinea. There he fell in with a company of strolling players, managed by one James Whiteley, who offered him the post of leading gentleman. He accepted it, and under the name of Wilford, remained with them a little while.

It was not a distinguished troupe, which perhaps accounts for his having been so promptly given a leading part in it. It consisted of two runagate apprentices, a drunken farrier, a stage-struck milliner, two ladies whose characters it were well not to study too closely, the manager's wife, a journeyman cobbler, a little girl seven years of age, and a stage-keeper, who alternated his stage-keeping with acting and barbering.

The theatre was a decrepit and almost roofless barn, and the stage consisted of loose boards propped up on empty barrels; while the scenery and the curtains were chiefly dilapidated blankets. Barn-storming in [Pg 322]ditiful circumstances did not suit our high-minded hero, who soon made his way to Manchester, where he became a schoolmaster, and a leading member of a local club, where he read the papers and conducted himself with such a show of authority that the parson, the lawyer, and the apothecary, who had before his coming disputed for pre-eminence over their fellow-members, yielded before his masterful ways. He shortly became High Constable, and soon began to abuse the position by blackmailing innkeepers and forging small drafts upon them. The more timid and easy-going submitted for a while to this, but others resented it in the very practical way of taking steps to secure his arrest. George then obeyed the instinct of caution and disappeared.

About the year 1774 the brothers met at a fair in Warwickshire, where Joseph had been playing the game of "hiding the horse," and had hidden three so effectively from their owners that he was presently able to sell them, unsuspected, for over £70. They then had thoughts of purchasing a farm, and travelled to King's Lynn, where, in the name of Stone, they lodged some time with a farmer. Pretending to be riders (*i.e.* travellers) to a London distiller, they wormed themselves into the confidence of the farmer and appointed him local agent for the non-existent firm, showing him tricks by which he would be able to water down the spirits he was to receive, and so cheat the retailers. On the strength of these confidences, they borrowed over a hundred pounds, and then decamped, leaving only their "sample [Pg 323]es" of brandies and rums behind.

They thought it wise to travel far, and so made their way into Scotland, and in the name of Gilbert took a small farm, where they remained for only a few months, leaving secretly and at night with all the movables, and with two geldings belonging to a neighbour.

Cumberland had next the honour of affording them shelter. In October 1776 they were apprehended on a charge of forgery at Bishop's Castle, Shropshire, and must have received an altogether inadequate sentence, or perhaps escaped, for they are next found in Ireland, in the following summer, at Baltinglass, county Wicklow. They were shortly afterwards at Dublin, frequenting the clubs under the name of Jones. There they met a noted plunger of that time, one "Buck" English, and fooled him in the highest degree; cheating at hazard, and obtaining money from him in exchange for forged bills and drafts. At length, after a fierce quarrel with English, who fought with George in the Dublin streets and wounded him in the right hand, the Westons left for Holyhead. Landing there with plenty of ready money, they toured Wales at leisure; Joseph as "Mr. Watson," and George as his valet.

In May 1778 they were at Tenby. On leaving the inn, where they had stayed and run up a bill of £30, they paid the landlord with a forged cheque and departed grandly with the change, in a post-chaise and four. They [Pg 324]sited Brecon and Bideford; George now posing as master, in the name of Clark, and Joseph acting as Smith, his valet. Next they are found at Sutton Coldfield, then on the Sussex and Kentish coasts, where they purchased a vessel and became known to the fishermen of Folkestone, Deal, and Dover as the "Gentlemen Smugglers," trading between those parts and Dunkirk. They did very well, too, until an interfering Revenue cutter chased them and forced them to run their craft ashore.

After this exciting episode, they made their way to London, and led a fashionable life, strongly flavoured with gambling and forgery. George took a house in Queen Anne Street, and the two "commenced gentlemen," as we are told; George passing for a wealthy squire of sporting tastes. Hounds and whippers-in were almost daily at the door in the morning, and at night the rooms were filled with callow young men about town, attracted by the brilliant card-parties given—at which, it is scarcely necessary to add, they were thoroughly rooked.

The brothers lived here in great style, on the proceeds of forgery and cheating at cards. They induced a lady next door to lend a sideboard full of valuable silver plate, on the pretence that their own had not arrived from the country, and sold it; and, advertising largely that they were prepared to purchase plate, jewellery, and annuities, did, in fact,

make several such purchases, paying for them in worthless bills. A good deal of the property thus obtained [Pg 325] tored at a residence they had hired at Beckenham, in the name of Green.

At length warrants were issued against them, and they fled to Scotland. At Edinburgh they posed as merchants trading with Holland, and acted the part with such complete success that they secured a considerable amount of credit. After forging and cashing numerous acceptances, they left for Liverpool, where, in the guise of "linen merchants," they repeated their Edinburgh frauds; and then, transferring themselves to Bristol, they became "African merchants." There they did a little privateering with one Dawson, but that, being legalised piracy, did not appeal to these instinctive criminals, to whom crime was a sport, as well as a livelihood.

London called them irresistibly, and they responded.

Riding up to town from Bristol to Bath, and then along the Bath Road, they overtook the postboy in the early hours of January 29th, 1781, driving the mail-cart with the Bristol mails, between Slough and Cranford Bridge, and bidding him "good night," passed him. Arriving at the "Berkeley Arms," Cranford Bridge, they halted for refreshment, and then turned back, with the object of robbing the mail.

George took a piece of black crape from his pocket and covered his face with it; and then they awaited the postboy.

Halting him, George ordered him to alight, and when he meekly did so, seized and bound him, and then flu [Pg 326] into a field. The two then drove and rode off to Windmill Lane, Sion Corner, and thence on to the Uxbridge road, through Ealing, and up Hanger Hill to Causeway Lane. There, in "Farmer Lott's meadow," they rifled the contents of the cart and took the bags bodily away.

Having disposed the mails carefully about their persons, they hurried off on horseback for London, to a house in Orange Street, near Piccadilly, where they were well known. The bags proved to contain between ten and fifteen thousand pounds, in notes and bills.

A clever plan for immediately putting a great part of the notes in circulation was at once agreed upon; and in the space of an hour or two, George left the house fully clothed in a midshipman's uniform, with Joseph following him dressed like a servant. They went to the "White Bear," in Piccadilly, and, hiring a post-chaise, set out upon what was nothing less than a hurried tour of the length and breadth of England; tendering notes at every stage, and taking gold in exchange. By way of Edgware, they went to Watford, Northampton, Nottingham, Mansfield, Chesterfield, Sheffield, York, Durham, Newcastle, and Carlisle. Thence they returned, on horseback, by way of Penrith, Appleby, Doncaster, Bawtry, and Retford, to Tuxford, where they arrived February 1st. Putting up for a much-needed rest there, with an innkeeper well known to them, they were informed that the Bow Street runners had only that day passed through, in search of them, and had gone towards Lincoln.

Early in the morning, the Westons resumed their express journey, making for Newark, where they were [Pg 327] ed by some exclusive information from an innkeeper friend, which enabled them narrowly to escape the runners, who had doubled back from Lincoln.

Thence, post-haste, they went to Grantham, Stamford, and Huntingdon, to Royston, halting two hours on the way at the lonely old inn known as "Kisby's Hut."

At Ware they took a post-chaise and four, and hurried the remaining twenty miles to London; arriving at the "Red Lion," Bishopsgate, at eleven o'clock on the night of February 2nd. The officers of the law were not remiss in the chase, and were at the "Red Lion" only one hour afterwards.

Once in London, the brothers separated; Joseph taking another post-chaise, and George a hackney-coach. They were traced to London Bridge, but there all track of them vanished.

Meanwhile, the Post Office had issued a long and detailed notice of the robbery, and had offered a reward of two hundred pounds for the apprehension of the guilty person, or persons:



"General Post Office, Jan. 29th, 1781.

"The Postboy bringing the Bristol Mail this morning from Maidenhead was stop't between two and three o'clock by a single Highwayman with a crape over his face between the 11th and 12th milestones, i [Pg 328] Cranford Bridge, who presented a pistol to him, and after making him alight, drove away the Horse and Cart, which were found about 7 o'clock this morning in a meadow field near Farmer Lott's at Twyford, when it appears that the greatest part of the letters were taken out of the Bath and Bristol Bags, and that the following bags were entirely taken away:—

Pewsey.
Ramsbury.
Bradford.
Henley.
Cirencester.
Gloucester.
Ross.
Presteign.
Fairford.
Aberystwith.
Carmarthen.

Pembroke.
Calne.
Trowbridge.
Wallingford.
Reading.
Stroud.
Ledbury.
Hereford.
Northleach.
Lechlade.
Lampeter.
Tenby.
Abergavenny.
Newbury.
Melksham.
Maidenhead.
Wantage.
Wotton-under-Edge.
Tewkesbury.
Leominster.
Cheltenham.
Hay.
Cardigan.
Haverfordwest.

"The person who committed this robbery is supposed to have had an accomplice, as two persons passed the Postboy on Cranford Bridge on Horseback prior to the Robbery, one of whom he thinks was the robber; but it being so extremely dark, he is not able to give any description of their persons.

"Whoever shall apprehend and convict, or cause to be apprehended and convicted, the person who committed this Robbery will be entitled to a reward of TWO HUNDRED POUNDS, over and above the Reward given by Act of Parliament for apprehending Highwaymen; or if any person, whether an Accomplice in the Robbery or knoweth thereof, shall make Discovery whereby the Person who committed the same may be apprehended and brought to Justice, such discoverer will upon conviction of the party be entitled to the [\[Pg 329\]](#) Reward of TWO HUNDRED POUNDS and will also receive His Majesty's most gracious Pardon.

"By Command of the Postmaster-General,
"ANTH. TODD, Sec."

It was soon ascertained that the Westons were the robbers, and careful descriptions of them were at once circulated:

"George Weston is about twenty-nine years of age, five feet seven inches high, square-set, round-faced, fresh-coloured, pitted with small-pox, has a rather thick nose, his upper lip rather thick, his hair of lightest brown colour, which is sometimes tied behind, and at other times loose and curled; has much the appearance of a country dealer, or farmer. One of his thumb-nails appears, from an accident, of the shape of a parrot's bill, and he is supposed to have a scar on his right hand, from a stroke with a cutlass."

The younger brother was just as closely described:

"Joseph Weston is about twenty-three years of age, five feet nine inches high, slender made, of a fair and smooth complexion, genteel person, has grey eyes and large nose with a scar upon it; his hair is of a light brown colour, sometimes tied behind, at other times loose and curled; his voice is strong and he speaks a little through his nose; has a remarkable small hand and long fingers."

While these descriptions were staring from every blank wall, George and Joseph were hiding, in disguise, in the Borough. They had a large amount of money, realised by their tremendous exertions over that long journey [\[Pg 330\]](#) they added judiciously to their store by carrying on their business of lending money on plate and jewellery, and paying for the articles in the remaining notes stolen from the Bristol mail. The famous "Perdita" Robinson was one of those victimised in this way; and, as a contemporary account says, "lost her diamond shoebuckles which a certain Heir Apparent presented her with."

It was in October 1781, when paying for some lottery tickets in Holborn, with stolen notes, that George and Joseph became acquainted with two pretty girls, cousins, employed as milliners near Red Lion Square. George gallantly bought some shares for them, and in the evening took them to Vauxhall Gardens. The delighted girls were told the two gentlemen were Nabobs just returned from India; and, dazzled with the wealth they flung about, readily consented to go and live with them. They were soon, accordingly, all four in residence in a fine house near Brompton; George adopting the name of "Samuel Watson," and Joseph passing as "William Johnson."

They left Brompton for a while and migrated to Winchelsea, where they took the "Friars," a fine house with beautifully wooded grounds. The foremost furnishers in London, Messrs. Elliot & Co., of 97, New Bond Street, were given orders for furniture, cutlery, and a generous supply of plate, and from other firms they procured horses and carriages, finally establishing themselves at the mansion in December 1781. While in residence there the ladies conducted [\[Pg 331\]](#)elves with such propriety, and the gentlemen appeared so distinguished and so wealthy, that they soon moved in the best society of the neighbourhood. It did not, apparently, take long in those times, or in the neighbourhood of Winchelsea, for strangers to obtain a footing in local society, for all this short-lived social splendour began in December, and ended in the middle of the following April. The last, sealing touch of respectability and recognition was when George was elected churchwarden of the parish church in Easter 1782. From that pinnacle of parochial ambition, however, he and

his were presently cast down, for Messrs. Elliot & Co., growing anxious about their unpaid bills for goods delivered, sent two sheriff's officers down to Winchelsea to interview the brothers. The officers met them at Rye on horseback, and endeavoured to arrest Joseph. When he refused to surrender, they tried to dismount him, but the two brothers overawed them by presenting pistols, and escaped; making their way back to Winchelsea, and thence travelling at express speed to London, in their own handsome chariot. Their identity with the Westons and the robbers of the mail was revealed in that encounter with the sheriff's officers, one of whom had observed George's peculiarly distorted thumb-nail. Information was thereupon given, and a redoubled search begun.

They went at once to their old hiding-place in the Borough, and might again have escaped detection had [Pg 332] been sufficiently careful. But, gambling for high stakes at the "Dun Horse," they quarrelled violently, and in the hearing of the ostler used some remarks that led him to suspect them. He communicated his suspicions to the police at Bow Street, and although they appear to have become uneasy and to have then left the Borough, they were traced on April 17th to Clements' Hotel, in Wardour Street. Mr. Clark, the officer sent to arrest them, met Mrs. Clements at the entrance and asked if two gentlemen of the description he gave were in the house. She said she would see, and went and warned them. Down they came, and, with pistols cocked and presented at him, walked past as he was standing in the passage, and, without a word, into the street. Once out of the house, they ran swiftly up Wardour Street, into Oxford Street, and then doubled into Dean Street and into Richmond Buildings. Unfortunately for them, this proved to be a blind alley, and an unpremeditated trap. They hurried out again, but already the mob was coming down the street after them, and they had only reached Broad Street when they were overtaken. Both fired recklessly upon the crowd; no one but a butcher-boy being hit, and he only slightly grazed under the left ear.

George was then knocked down by a carpenter, with a piece of wood. The carpenter, we learn, "afterwards jumping upon him, kept him down till his pistols were taken away."

Meanwhile Joseph had been vanquished in an equally unsportsmanlike way by a carrier, "who had a large [Pg 333] with which he beat him about the legs."

George was then pitched neck and crop, and still struggling, into a hackney coach; but Joseph, being more tractable, was permitted to walk to Bow Street, where, on being searched, he was found to have £240 in his pockets, all in bank-notes that had been stolen from the mail.

On the day of their arrest they gave a bill of sale to one Lucius Hughes, who disposed of plate to the amount of £2,500, at the price of old silver; and jewels to the value of £4,000 were said to have been sold to a Jew in St. Mary Axe.

After a preliminary examination, the brothers were committed to separate prisons: Joseph to Tothill Fields Bridewell, and George to the New Prison. They behaved with great insolence to the Bench, and seemed to build much upon the postboy having died since the robbery. In court they actually told Clark, who had arrested them, he was fortunate in still having his brains in his skull that morning. Their coachman and footman, attending upon them in the court, in livery, made an imposing show. They were then remanded, and their wenches were in the meanwhile arrested at Brompton, and appeared in court on the next hearing. No evidence being forthcoming against them, they were discharged; but the Westons were duly committed for trial, which began on May 15th, 1782.

They made a brave appearance in the dock, George being dressed quietly but fashionably, in black, w [Pg 334] hair finely curled in the latest style; while Joseph, whose taste was not so subdued, was radiant in a scarlet coat with gold buttons, and hair "queued à l'Artois."

The trial was unexpectedly postponed, on the application of counsel for the prosecution, owing to the death of Samuel Walker, and the difficulty of collecting sufficient evidence; and so they were taken back to Newgate. There they led a life typical of prison-life all over England in those days. They entertained their fellow-prisoners, gambled, and drank, and received their friends. They had plenty of money, and as Newgate was then no ill place for those whose pockets were well furnished, they were provided with every luxury that money could buy. Unfortunately, however, they were heavily ironed: the one circumstance that seared the souls of those gallant fellows. But, in spite of these encumbering circumstances, they dreamt of liberty, and a well-planned attempt to escape was made on July 2nd, the day before the opening of the new sessions.

Their faithful young women took breakfast with them that morning, and then left, whereupon one of the brothers called Wright, the warder on duty at the time, and asked him to get a bottle of port and make a bowl of negus for some expected company. He then handed him a guinea.

Wright had no sooner gone about this business than they slipped off their fetters, which they had secret [Pg 337] with much labour, filed through. Then they calmly awaited the return of Wright, with the bowl. It was too large to go through the hatch of their locked and bolted door, as they had foreseen, and Wright was persuaded to unlock and open the door and bring it in. When he had done so, the jovial highwaymen hospitably invited him to take the first drink, and while he was engaged in thus pleasing himself and themselves at the same time, they made suddenly at him and pushed him violently over; then slamming the door and fastening it securely upon him.



THE WESTONS ESCAPING FROM NEWGATE.

An old woman who sold porter and such-like plebeian drinks to the meaner prisoners, was at the head of the stone stairs up which they then rushed, and stood still with amazement at sight of them, whereupon they overset her and her cans, and then, by a short passage-way, came to the outer door. They were each armed with a pistol, which their thoughtful girls had smuggled into their cell. Escaping with them were also one Lepierre, a suspected spy, and a certain Francis Storey.

The warder whose post was at this doorway was at that moment washing down the steps. At once the fugitives flung themselves upon him, and downed him as he shouted "Stop thief!" The cry was heard, and by the time the Westons had emerged upon the street, they were followed by a "runner," John Owens by name. The brothers very cleverly [Pg 338]ated; Owens following George, who ran into Newgate Street, doubled into Warwick Lane, and made for Newgate Market. Here, however, he was felled by the fist of a market-porter, but struggled again to his feet, and desperately resisted until Owens and a crowd of excited spectators arrived and dragged him back to Newgate.

Joseph was not more fortunate, and had only reached Cock Lane when his flight also was stopped by a market-porter, one John Davis, who flung down a sack of peas in his path. This Joseph easily avoided, but Davis then laid hold of him by the collar.

"Let go!" said the highwayman, "or I will shoot you."

The porter did not let go, and Joseph fired and hit him in the neck. But Davis held on until the crowd closed in, and Joseph also was soon in his cell again.

So, too, was Lepierre, who was taken in Newgate Street. Storey was more successful, and escaped altogether, although he had fetters on his legs. The crowd, seeing him calmly walking along, thought he was being re-conducted to gaol, and so did not interfere with him.

The brothers were brought to trial on July 6th, 1782, charged with robbing the Bristol mail near Cranford Bridge, on January 29th, 1781. Over a hundred witnesses appeared for the prosecution, among them, people who had been given stolen notes by them. But the postboy, Samuel Walker, having died, the prosecution failed. [Pg 339]

They were then charged with forgery in respect of the notes and bills stolen: George being convicted and sentenced to death. Joseph was acquitted, but was then charged in the third instance with maliciously wounding John Davis, for which he was found guilty and condemned. They were executed at Tyburn on September 3rd, 1782.

Clothed quietly but fashionably in black, they went to the place of execution in two carts, in company with several other condemned criminals, but held themselves haughtily apart, as "gentlemen" should. They refused the ministrations of the Ordinary, declaring themselves to be Roman Catholics; and died firmly, and without any appearance of contrition.

JOHN RANN, better known as "Sixteen-string Jack," was born in the neighbourhood of Bath, midway in the eighteenth century. As a boy he earned a meagre but honest living by peddling articles of everyday household consumption in the villages round about. He and his donkey were well remembered in after years, and aroused the envious anticipations of other small boys who, reckless of the appointed end of highwaymen, looked forward to some happy day when they too might perhaps blossom out from such obscure beginnings into such fame as his. He was but twelve years of age when his handsome face attracted the attention of a lady prominent in the neighbourhood. She offered him a situation, and he gratefully accepted. A little later we find him in London, occupied as a stable-helper in Brooke's Mews. From that he became a postilion, and then an officer's servant. About the year 1770 he was coachman to a gentleman living in the neighbourhood of Portman Square, and was at one time in the service of the Earl of Sandwich. In this situation he obtained the nickname of "Sixteen-string Jack," from the bunches of eight parti-coloured ribbons he gaily [Pg 341] tucked the knees of his breeches; but by some intimates it was supposed that these "sixteen strings" were a covert allusion to his having been sixteen times arrested and charged, but on as many occasions acquitted. Such were the legends that enwrapped the career of him whom Dr. Johnson described as "above the common mark" in his line.

It was this love of finery that led to the undoing of Jack Rann, but before it sent him down into the company of those who lived by their wits, employed in unlawful enterprises, it raised him to better situations. For Rann was a tall, smart fellow, and good clothes well became him.

But flowered-satin waistcoats, and full-skirted damasked coats of silk, elaborately embroidered, are not paid for out of a coachman's wages, and Rann soon found himself deeply in debt. And, moreover, of what possible use are brave costumes, but to flaunt and flourish about in? And when you do so flourish, you must needs go the pace altogether. There were excellent companions in those places to which Rann most resorted, as a gentleman of fashion, at Vauxhall, and elsewhere; and there were the card-tables, where he had a passing run of luck; and there were the women. In spite of being pitted somewhat with the small-pox, he was still a handsome fellow, and he played the very Cupid with the girls.

All these items totted up to a very costly sum-total, and the gaming-tables did not long stand him in good stead [Pg 342] at the moment when he was in the sorest straits, he became acquainted with three men: Jones, Clayton, and Colledge (this last known as "Eight-string Jack"), in whose company he very speedily grew more and more reckless, and at last was dismissed from his situation with a long-suffering nobleman, and refused a character. Thus turned adrift upon the world, he began, with those three companions, a career of pocket-picking, and thence drifted by easy stages into the society of highwaymen and of receivers of stolen goods.

In these circles there moved at that time a certain Eleanor Roche, originally a milliner's apprentice, but who, from a somewhat unfortunate friendship with an officer of the Guards, had declined upon the condition of "fence," and generally, the fair friend and ally of the nimble-fingered, and the speakers with travellers on the highways. Jack Rann was a free-lover. Pretty faces, rosy lips, infallibly attracted him, and although he loved his Nelly best, he scarce knew the meaning of faithfulness.

But to Ellen Roche, "Sixteen-string Jack" was her own Jack, her hero; and when once she had met him, she had eyes for none other.

Rann was first in custody in April 1774, at the Old Bailey, in company with two others, named Clayton and Shepherd, on a charge of robbing William Somers and Mr. Langford on the highway. All three were acquitted, but on May 30th Rann was at Bow Street, charged with robbing Mr. John Devall of his watch and money, near the ninth miles [Pg 343] on the Hounslow Road. It was the watch brought him there. The gallant Rann had brought it back with him from the road—just as the hunter, home from the hill, returns with the day's spoil to his domestic circle. He handed it to Ellen, who in turn sent out a certain Catherine Smith to offer it in pledge with the nearest pawnbroker. The pawnbroker, distrustful man, sent for the police, who, seeing at once that Catherine Smith was merely an intermediary, apprehended Rann and Ellen.

"Sixteen-string Jack" made a proud, defiant figure in the dock before Sir John Fielding. He was dressed not only in, but in advance of the fashion. He was in irons, but the grimness of those fetters was disguised in the blue satin bows in which they were tricked out, and in his fine coat he carried a nosegay as big as a birch-broom. Beside him, but not so collected as he, stood Ellen, charged with receiving.

Ellen Roche had, indeed, lost her nerve altogether when Catherine Smith deposed to having been told by her how Rann was expected home that evening with some money; that he returned about ten o'clock, when Roche told her he had brought ten guineas and a watch, and that she was sent out to pawn the watch. Crying, and hardly aware of what she was doing, Ellen at the first hearing owned that Rann had given her the watch, and the two were thereupon committed.

At the trial, after having had plenty of time for reflection, she stoutly declared that she never before [Pg 344] had eyes upon him, and that her former evidence was a mistake!

Jack himself carried it off bravely, and, indeed, insolently. "I know no more of the matter than you do," he replied to Sir John Fielding, and added impudently, "nor half so much, neither."

The prosecution, on some technicality, broke down, and the pair were released. They celebrated the happy occasion by dining extravagantly and then spending the evening at Vauxhall, where Rann was the gayest of the gay, and returned home with two watches and three purses.

An absurd burglary charge brought him into the dock again, that July. The watch discovered him half-way through the window of a house in which lodged one Doll Frampton, and not only hauled him out, but marched him off to prison; but it appeared that he was only keeping an appointment to supper with the weary Doll, who, tired of waiting for him, had gone to bed. The Bench, assured of as much by the shameless minx herself, dismissed the charge, and, in addition to some pertinent remarks about this unconventional method of entry, gave him some excellent advice on conduct.

Although Rann had escaped so far, Sir John Fielding said, his profession was perfectly well known, and he urged the prisoner to leave his evil courses while yet there was time.

So far from paying attention to this well-meant discourse, Rann put in an appearance the next Sunday, not [Pg 345] Doll, but with Ellen, at Bagnigge Wells, then a famous place for dining and drinking. They drove thither in a carriage and dressed—in the slang phrase—"up to the nines." Jack was splendid in a scarlet coat, tambour waistcoat, white silk stockings, and a laced hat. Of course there flew at his knees the already famous sixteen strings.



JACK RANN.

He was by nature boastful, and when the drink was in him bragged without restraint or ordinary prudence. On this occasion he drank freely, and, with an oath, declared himself a highwayman. Rather more of a pickpocket, perhaps. The company trembled: some sought the way out. "No fear, my friends," quoth he, "this is a holiday." Then he fell to quarrelling, and presently lost a ring from his finger, and declared those present had stolen it. Then again his mood changed. "'Tis no matter," he exclaimed; "'tis but a hundred guineas gone, and one evening's work will repla [Pg 346] Then, growing more drunken and incapable, they threw him out, and he was not in a fit condition to resist. So, Ellen—the gentle Ellen—scratching the faces of the foremost, as they were put out, they drove back to their lodgings near Covent Garden.

"Fine treatment for a gentleman!" he hiccupped; and indeed a gentleman he considered himself. But his highwayman's takings, large though they occasionally were, did not keep pace with his gentlemanly expenses. Debts accumulated, and sheriff's officers dogged his footsteps. He was arrested for a debt of £50, and thrown into the Marshalsea prison; but so much of a hero had he already become among those of his calling that they clubbed together and liquidated the debt; and handsome Jack was again free.

The sheriff's officers he affected to regard as low, churlish fellows, but they would not be denied. His creditors were soon after him again, and he was arrested when drinking in an alehouse in the then suburban Tottenham Court Road. He shrank with horror from the touch of the two "vulgar" bailiffs, but there was little help for it. He must pay up, or be taken up. His drinking-companions found between them three guineas, and he gave up his watch. Together, these involuntary contributions made up more than the amount due. The bailiffs, on their part, agreed to refund the balance when Rann was sufficiently in funds to redeem the ticker; and cordiality then reigned. "Lend me five shillings," said Rann to the bailiffs, "and I will treat you to a bowl of punch." They fell in with the proposal, and a me [Pg 347] ouse ensued. Such were the manners and customs of about a hundred and forty years ago.

Still, in the course of this merry evening, the subject of the manner peculiar to bailiffs recurred to our Jack and rankled. "You have not," he grumbled, "treated me like a gentleman. When Sir John Fielding's people come after me, they only hold up a finger, beckon, and I follow like a lamb. There's your proper civility!"

It was soon after this that he visited Barnet races, fashionably dressed; with waistcoat of blue satin trimmed with silver, and other finery to match. Crowds followed him, eager to set eyes upon so famous a person. Shortly afterwards, with perhaps some melancholic foreshadowing of approaching doom, he attended a public execution at Tyburn. In spite of opposition, he thrust through the ring formed by the constables round the gallows. "For," said he, "perhaps it is very proper I should be a spectator on this occasion." Why, he did not say, but the inference was understood by some of the crowd.

In September 1774 he was arrested, together with one William Collier, for a robbery on the Uxbridge road, and brought the next Wednesday before Sir John Fielding, when Dr. Bell, chaplain to the Princess Amelia, gave evidence that, between three and four o'clock in the afternoon of Monday, when taking horse-exercise near Ealing, he [Pg 348] erved two men of mean (!) appearance and suspicious looks, who rode past him. Presently, one of them—he thought it was Rann—turned his horse's head and demanded his money. "Give it me," he said, "and take no notice, or I'll blow your brains out!"

Dr. Bell handed over one shilling and sixpence, all he had about him, and a common watch in a tortoiseshell case. So much tremendous bluster, so paltry a booty: so poor a thing for which to throw away a life. For that day's doings served to bring Rann to the gallows.

That evening, Ellen Roche and her servant took the watch to pawn with one "Mr. Cordy," in the Oxford Road, or, as we should now say, Oxford Street. Cordy was a suspicious man. He communicated with the watchmaker, Grigman by name, of Russell Street, Covent Garden, who had made it for Dr. Bell, who, when called upon, told how he had parted with it.

The next day, Jack Rann and his doxy were arrested, and with them Collier and Ellen Roche's servant, Christian Stewart. They all figured in Bow Street dock, and later appeared on trial at the Old Bailey.



"SIXTEEN-STRING JACK" AND ELLEN ROCHE IN THE DOCK.

Handsome Jack was no less a dandy on this occasion than he had been on others, and he took the centre of the stage in his drama with a fine air. To be sure, there were none who envied him the principal part. He was dressed in pea-green coat and waistcoat, with unblemished white buckskin breeches, and again his hat was silver-laced. He stood there with every assurance of acquittal, and had taken thought to order a splendid supper, wherewith to entertain his friends that evening, to celebrate his release. But, as the grey day wore on, he grew less confident. Dr. Bell's evidence was again taken, and a Mr. Clarke told how, going to Miss Roche's lodging on that Monday night of the robbery, he found two pairs of men's boots there, in a wet and dirty condition, having evidently been worn that day. A Mr. Haliburton also swore that he had waited at Miss Roche's lodgings that night until Rann and Collier arrived.

William Hills deposed that he was servant to the Princess Amelia. He had observed Rann, whom he knew well by sight, ascend the hill at Acton, about twenty minutes before the robbery was committed.

This spot would be about where the Police Station now stands, in the main road: less troubled nowadays with highwaymen than with electric tram-cars.

In the end, Rann was found guilty and sentenced to die. Collier was also found guilty, but recommended to mercy, and was afterwards respited. Ellen Roche was sentenced to fourteen years' transportation, and her servant was acquitted.

Thus the supper grew cold and was not eaten. The brave figure moved in pea-green glory to his prison cell, and hoped there for a rescue that never came. His last days were full-packed with the revelry the lax prison regulation permitted, and on Sunday, October 23rd, he had seven girls to dine with him in gaol; and he the gayest of the party. "Let us eat, drink, and be merry, for to-morrow we die." Or, at any rate, in a month's time. So, with an air and a jest, behold him on the fatal day, November 30th, 1774, the most admired figure in the three-miles' journey from Newgate to Tyburn. Was it the cold November air made him shiver, or the shadow of death, as, ladies' man to the last, he raised his hat to the crowded windows lining Holborn and thought how he would never come back? Whatever it was, it was no more than involuntary: for, arrived at the fatal tree, he ended manfully in his finery and his famous sixteen strings.

ROBERT FERGUSON, who in after life became famous as "Galloping Dick," was a native of Hertfordshire. His father, a gentleman's servant, proposed a like career for him, and had a mental picture of his son gradually rising from the position of stable-boy, in which he was placed, to that of coachman. In such respectable obscurity would Robert have lived and died, had his own wild nature not pioneered a career for him. He had proved a dull boy at school, but proud, and out of school-hours showed a strange original spirit of daring, so that he was generally to be found captaining his fellows in some wild exploit.

As a stable-boy, however, he proved efficient and obedient, and was found presentable enough to take the postilion's place when the regular man had fallen ill, on the eve of the family's journey to London in their chariot. He performed that task to the satisfaction of every one, but the other servant recovered, and the lad was obliged to return to his stables and work in shirt sleeves or rough stable-jacket, instead of titupping in beautifully white buckskin breeches, silk jacket, and tall beaver hat, on one of the leading horses that drew the carriage to town. The return to [Pg 354]erior position through no fault of his own was a bitter disappointment, and he determined to seek another situation.

Oddly enough, at this juncture of affairs, a neighbouring lady who was in want of a postilion chanced to ask the family who employed young Robert what had become of their smart young man, and, when informed of the situation, engaged him.

At this time he was close upon twenty years of age. Described as being by no means handsome, he was of a cheerful and obliging temperament, and might have long retained the post, had his employer not discovered him in a discreditable love-affair with one of the maid-servants. He was dismissed, but soon found another situation: but he never afterwards kept a place for any length of time. Roystering companions unsettled him and made him undesirable as a postilion.



"GALLOPING DICK.

Coming up to London, he found employment in a livery-stable in Piccadilly, but presently his father died and he found himself the owner of his savings, amounting to £57. Alas! poor Robert. He had never before possessed at one time the half of what he had now, and he acted as though the sum of £57 was an endowment for life. He threw up the Piccadilly livery-stable, and came out upon the world as a "gentleman"; or in other words, ruffled it in fine clothes in fashionable places. He frequented theatres in this novel character, and seems to have impressed a number of perha [Pg 357] very critical people. Amongst these was a dissolute woman whom he met at Drury Lane. She believed him to be a man of wealth, and sought to obtain a share of it. Ferguson flung away all his money on her. It could not have been a difficult task, one would say, nor have occupied him long. And when all the money was gone, he went back, sadder possibly, but still not wiser, to his livery-stable situation in Piccadilly, as postilion. It was in this employment that he observed the debonair gentlemen who had been his rivals in the affections of this woman calling upon her, and received, where he had been thrust forth with contumely when his money was at an end, and when she discovered that he was no man about town, but only one who got his living in the stables. False, perfidious Nancy!

It was some time before the true character of those visitors was revealed to him; but one day, acting as a postilion on the Great North Road, the chaise he was driving was stopped by two highwaymen, duly masked. One stood by the horses, while his companion robbed the occupants of the chaise. It was a windy day, and a more than usually violent

gust blew the first highwayman's mask off. Instantly Ferguson recognised the man who stood by the horses as one of his Nancy's visitors.

Seeing this, the unmasked robber perceived, clearly enough, that the situation was peculiarly dangerous [Pg 358] when he had galloped off with his companion, laid the facts before him. They agreed that there was nothing for it but to await Ferguson's return at a roadside inn, and to bribe him to silence. There, accordingly, they remained until the chaise on its return journey drew up at the door.

Two gentlemen, said the landlord, particularly desired to see the postilion. He entered and accepted a price for his silence; further agreeing to meet them that night at supper in the Borough. Meeting there, according to arrangement, Ferguson was persuaded to throw in his lot with the highway blades. His imagination took fire at the notion of riding a fine horse, and, dressed in handsome clothes, presenting a figure of romance; but his new-found friends were cool men of business, and had nothing of that kind in view for their fresh associate. To cut a fine figure was, no doubt, all very well, but the more important thing was to know which travellers were worth robbing, and which were not. If they could be reasonably well advised on that point, much useless effort, and a considerable deal of risk, would be avoided, in not stopping those whose pockets were so nearly next to empty as to be not worth "speaking to" on the road. Their idea was that Ferguson should continue in his employment of postilion, and, as a confederate, keep them well informed of the movements of his clients.

Ferguson was disappointed in not being allowed a spectacular part, but the profitable nature of the schen [Pg 359] ealed to him, and he agreed to this distinctly well-conceived plan. So a long series of unsuspecting travellers driven by him owed their extraordinary ill-luck on the road entirely to the agency of their innocent-looking postilion, who was so professionally interested in their movements, who was so obliging with the portmanteaus and valises, and who secretly kept a keen eye upon the contents of his customers' purses. Quite often it would happen that a trace would be broken in some lonely situation, and then, strange to say, while it was being mended, a couple of highwaymen would infallibly appear, and threatening the postilion with horrid oaths when he pretended to show fight, would at their leisure ransack all the luggage and coolly request all money and personal adornments to be handed over.

Wine, women, and cards were Ferguson's downfall. Success in his new line of life brought reckless conduct, and he grew so impossible that the livery-stable, without in the least suspecting his honesty, dismissed him for general unreliability. He then took to the road for a while as a highwayman, and thus indulged his natural liking for finery.

He was an excellent horseman, and daring to the verge—or beyond the verge—of recklessness. On one occasion, he and two companions "spoke to" and were robbing two gentlemen on the road to Edgeware, but were interrupted by the appearance of three other well-mounted travellers, who gave chase. Ferguson escaped, but his two comp [Pg 360] were caught, brought to trial, and executed. It was this exploit that first procured him the name of "Gallopig Dick," although his name was Robert. Complimented by admiring friends on his escape, he declared he would gallop a horse with any man in the kingdom.

The name of "Gallopig Dick" soon became well known, and was a name of dread. No clattering horseman could come hurriedly along the road without stirring the pulses of nervous travellers, who immediately fancied "Gallopig Dick" was upon them. Indeed, he soon became too well known for any reasonable degree of safety, and he would then for a while, for prudential reasons, find temporary employment as a postilion. Frequently in custody at Bow Street, on various charges, he was many times acquitted, on insufficient evidence; but was at last arrested, at the beginning of 1800, on a charge of highway robbery, sent for trial to the Lent Assizes at Aylesbury, convicted, and executed.

JERRY ABERSHAW

THE southern suburbs of London were haunted during the last quarter of the eighteenth century by a youthful highwayman of a very desperate kind. He was as successful as reckless, and captained a gang that made Putney Heath and Wimbledon Common places to be dreaded as much as were Hounslow Heath on the west, and Finchley Common in the north, and brought the name of "Jerry Abershaw" into exceptional prominence.

The real name of this highwayman was Louis Jeremiah Avershaw, and he was born in 1773, of the usual "poor but honest" parents. Indeed, it would seem, in enquiring into the lives of the highwaymen, that they in general came of such stock, whose only crime was their poverty: although *that*, as we well know in this happy land of ours, is a very heinous offence, it being the duty of every English man and woman to pay rates and taxes to keep a constantly growing official class in well-paid and easy employment.

We so rarely hear of a highwayman deriving from dishonest parents that, it would seem, even in [\[Pg 362\]](#) more adventurous centuries, ill-led lives were as a rule so short and sordid as to impress the children of those who led them with the idea that honesty was not only really, in the long run, the best policy, but that for evil courses there was no long run at all. Otherwise, the life of the highwayman, if not by any means, as a general rule, so gay as usually it was represented to be, was sufficiently full of that spice of excitement which to the youthful makes amends for much danger and discomfort, and sons might often have succeeded fathers in the liberal profession of highway robbery.

The boyhood of Jerry Abershaw has never been dragged from the obscurity that enwraps it. No slowly-budding flower he, but one that in one brief day flung open its petals. Or rather, in less flowery language, we learn nothing of the first steps that led him to the highway, and find him at the very first mention of his doings already a cool and assured character, robbing with impunity, and making one place in especial a spot to be dreaded. This was the hollow of Putney Bottom, through which the Portsmouth Road runs on its way to Kingston. The little Beverley Brook trickles by, to this day, in the hollow; and Combe Wood, whose thickets formed so convenient a lair for Abershaw, and a rallying-place for his gang, is still very much what it was then.

Abershaw was not, of course, the first to see the strategic value of the heath, and of such woody tangles as these, bordering the road for quite three miles; for we read in Ogilby's great book on the roads, published in 1675, [\[Pg 365\]](#) Kingston Hill, hard by as "not rarely infested with robbers"; and a gibbet long stood near at hand, to remind those robbers, and others who succeeded them, of their own probable fate. But, if by no means the first, or even the last, who practised here, he is easily the most famous, even though it be merely a pervasive fame, not crystallised into many anecdotes.



JERRY ABERSHAW ON PUTNEY HEATH.

The "Bald Faced Stag," that then stood, a lonely tavern, by the roadside near the Beverley Brook, was a favourite meeting-place of Abershaw and his fellows. It was afterwards rebuilt, as a superior hostelry, in the days when the growth of travel and of coaching had rendered the old roadside accommodation insufficient. This later house may still be seen, standing nowadays as a private residence, with imposing pillared portico, by the way.

Whether the landlord of the original "Bald Faced Stag," was in league with Abershaw and his gang, or not, is impossible to say. Very generally, the tavern-keepers of that age were suspected, and rightly suspected, of a guilty acquaintance with the highwaymen, but it would be too much to assume that they were all of that character; and indeed

we find in the sad story of one John Poulter, otherwise Baxter, who was hanged in 1754 for highway robbery, that the frequenting by highwaymen against his wish of an inn he kept in Dublin first ruined his trade and compelled [Pg 366] self-defence at last to seek a living on the road.

An innkeeper situated like him who kept the "Bald Faced Stag" in the days of Abershaw would have no choice but to harbour the gang whenever they felt inclined to confer their patronage upon him; but, to be quite just, it would certainly appear that he was a willing ally, for, in the most outstanding among the few stories told of Abershaw, it appears that once, when taken ill on the road, the highwayman was put to bed in the house and cared for while a doctor was procured. It was a Dr. William Roots who answered the call, from Putney. The ailing stranger, whose real name and occupation the doctor never for a moment suspected, was bled, after the medical practice of the time, and the doctor was about to leave for home, when his patient, with a great appearance of earnestness, said: "You had better, sir, have someone to go back with you, as it is a very dark and lonesome journey." This thoughtful offer the doctor declined, remarking that "he had not the least fear, even should he meet with Abershaw himself." The story was a favourite with Abershaw: it afforded him a reliable criterion of the respect in which the travelling public generally held him.

The notoriety Abershaw early attained led to his early end. The authorities made especial efforts to arrest him, and, learning that he frequented a public-house in Southwark, called the "Three Brewers," set a watch upon the [Pg 367]. One day the two officers detailed for this duty discovered him in the house, drinking with some of his friends, and entered to arrest him. But Abershaw was on the alert, and, as they stood in the doorway, arose with a pistol in either hand, and, with a curse, warned them to stand clear, or he would shoot them. Disregarding this threat, they rushed in, and Abershaw, firing both pistols at once, mortally wounded one officer and severely wounded the landlord in the head.

But he did not escape. He was tried at Croydon Assizes, on July 30th, 1795, before Mr. Baron Penryn, for murder; the wounded officer, David Price, having died in the interval. A second indictment charged him with having attempted to murder the other, by discharging a pistol at him.

Abershaw was taken by road from London to Croydon, and passing Kennington Common, then the principal place of execution in Surrey, he laughingly asked those in charge of him, if they did not share his own opinion that he would himself be "twisted" there on the following Saturday. That was the conventionally callous way in which the highwaymen approached their doom.

To prove the charge of killing Price was naturally the simplest of tasks, and the jury, returning from a three-minutes' deliberation, duly found him guilty. Prisoner's counsel, however, raising an objection on some legal quibble [Pg 368] flaw in the indictment, the point was argued for two hours—and not decided; the judge desiring to consult his learned brethren on the point. There is a certain grim humour about these proceedings; because, whatever the result of this was likely to be, there was yet the second indictment to be tried, and on that alone there could be no doubt of Abershaw being capitally convicted. It was then proceeded with, and Abershaw himself, seeing how he must inevitably be found guilty, and hanged, threw off all restraint. He insolently inquired of the judge, if he were to be murdered by perjured witnesses, and in violent language declared his contempt for the Court. Even at that solemn moment, when, having been found guilty on the second count, the judge, in passing sentence, assumed the black cap, he was not affected, except by rage and the spirit of mockery, and followed the action of the judge by putting on his own hat. The gaolers were at last compelled by his violence to handcuff him, and to tie his arms and legs. In that condition he was removed to gaol, to await execution.

There he must soon have realised the folly of resistance; for he became quiet and apparently resigned. In the short interval that remained between his sentence and that appearance on Kennington Common he had accurately foreseen, he occupied himself with drawing rough pictures on the whitewashed walls of his cell with the juice of black cherries that had formed part of the simple luxuries his purse and the custom of the prison permitted. These idle [Pg 369]blings represented his own exploits on the road. In one he appeared in the act of stopping a post-chaise and threatening the driver: the words, "D—n your eyes! Stop!" appended. The remainder of this curious gallery pictured the other incidents common in a highwayman's life.

The time then allowed convicted criminals between their sentence and execution was very short. On August 3rd he was hanged on Kennington Common; game—or, rather, callous—to the last. Arrived there, he kicked off his boots among the great crowd assembled, and died unshod, to disprove an old saying of his mother's, that he was a bad lad, and would die in his shoes. He was but twenty-two years of age when he met this fate, not actually for highway robbery, but for murder. His body was afterwards hanged in chains in Putney Bottom, the scene of his chief exploits, and an old and nasty legend was long current in those parts of a sergeant in a regiment soon afterwards marching past firing at the distended body, by which (to make short of an offensive story) the neighbourhood was nearly poisoned. The sergeant was reduced to the ranks for this ill-judged choice of a target.

JOHN AND WILLIAM BEATSON

THE very general idea that the highwayman ended with the close of the eighteenth century is an altogether erroneous one, and has already been abundantly disproved in these pages. They not only continued into the nineteenth century, but were very numerously executed for their crimes. Early among those who belong to that era were John Beatson and William Whalley. Theirs is a sad tale of business failure and of a desperate recourse to the road, rather than the story of professional highwaymen.

John Beatson was a Scotsman, who had in his youth been a sailor in the merchant service, and had made many voyages to India and other tropical countries. Tired at last of the sea, he settled at Edinburgh, where he established himself as an innkeeper at the "College Tavern." There he carried on a successful business for many years, and only relinquished it at last in favour of his adopted son, William Whalley Beatson, who for some time carried it on happily and profitably with his wife. Unhappily, his wife died, and when he was left alone it was soon seen, in the altered circumstances of the house, that it was she, rather than her husband, who had in the last few years kept the [Pg 371] going. Left alone, and incapable of managing the domestic side of the house, he was taken advantage of by the servants, who robbed him at every opportunity; and, in short, in every respect the "College Tavern" declined and ceased to pay its way. He gave it up and went to London, with the idea of entering the wine and spirit trade there. Arrived in London, he took a business in Bedford Street, Covent Garden, and, finding it uncongenial, sold it to a man and accepted six months' bills in payment. The purchaser went bankrupt within three months, throwing Beatson himself into difficulties. At this juncture of affairs he consulted with his adopted father as to what was to be done, and the upshot of their long and anxious deliberations was that there was no help for it but to try and retrieve their fortunes by robbing upon the King's highway. Their first essay in this new business was begun on July 18th, 1801, when they travelled from London to the "Rose and Crown" at Godstone, Surrey, staying there the night. The next morning they set off on foot, and at midday were at the "Blue Anchor," on the road to East Grinstead. They dined there, and asked questions about the mail, and did not leave until six o'clock. Between eight and nine o'clock they were seen on East Grinstead Common. Half an hour after midnight, the postboy who drove the mail-cart was stopped by two men near Forest Row, south of East Grinstead. They produced a pistol and threatened him with it if he refused to give up the bags. Then, he unresisting, [Pg 372] led the horse into a meadow, where they took the bags and carried them off. It was afterwards found that they had walked no less a distance than six miles with them. They were afterwards found in a wheatfield near the village of Hartfield, the letters strewn about in the corn.

They had taken all the Bank of England notes, and notes issued by country banks, and had left drafts and bills of exchange worth upwards of £9,500.

The next morning the two Beatsons appeared at the "Chequers" at Westerham, in a very exhausted condition, and had breakfast. With the excuse that they were Deptford people, and under the necessity of reaching the dockyard there in a hurry, they hastily hired a horse and trap, paying for their refreshment with a £2 note, and for the hire with one for £5.

The people of the "Chequers" inn thought it strange, when their man returned, to hear that he had driven them, not to the dockyard at Deptford, but to a coach-office in the town, where they had at once taken places in a coach for London.

The fugitives did not hurry themselves when they reached town. On the evening of their arrival, it was afterwards discovered, the elder purchased a pair of shoes at a shop in Oxford Street, paying for them with a £10 Bank of England note. They employed their time in London in a shopping campaign, purchasing largely and always tendering [Pg 373] notes, with the object of accumulating a large sum of money in gold, by way of change.

At the end of this week they procured a horse and gig and left London, saying they intended to travel to Ireland. Meanwhile, the loss of so many bank-notes had been widely advertised and the good faith of persons who presented any of them for payment enquired into. The movements of the men who had stopped the driver of the mail-cart and robbed him were traced, and soon the Holyhead Road was lively with the pursuit of them.

They arrived at Knutsford, in Cheshire, only a short time before the coming of the mail-coach bringing particulars of the robbery. Before that, however, they had attracted a considerable deal of notice by their singular behaviour at the "George" inn, where they had put up. To draw attention by peculiarities of dress or demeanour is obviously the grossest folly in fugitive criminals, whose only chance of safety lies in unobtrusive manners and appearance. That would appear to be obvious to the veriest novices in crime. But the Beatsons were no doubt by this time agitated by the serious position in which they had irretrievably placed themselves, and in so nervous a state that they really had not full command of their actions. They adopted a hectoring manner at the inn, and on the road had attracted unfavourable notice by the shameful way in which they had treated their horse.

On the arrival of the mail containing the official notices of the robbery and descriptions of the two men [Pg 374] led in it, the appearance of these two men with the gig seemed so remarkably like that of the robbers, that a Post Office surveyor was sent after them. They had already left Knutsford, and had to be followed to Liverpool, where they were discovered at an inn, and arrested.

The mere hasty preliminary inspection of their travelling valise was sufficient to prove that these were the men sought for. Bank-notes to the amount of £1,700 were discovered, wrapped round by one of the letters stolen; and the purchases of jewellery and other articles carried with them were valued at another £1,300.

Taken back to London, the prisoners were charged in the first instance at Bow Street, and then committed for trial at Horsham. An attempt they made to escape from Horsham gaol was unsuccessful, and they were found hiding in a sewer. Their trial took place before Mr. Baron Hotham on March 29th, 1802. No fewer than thirty witnesses were arrayed against them; chiefly London tradesmen, from whom they had made purchases and tendered notes in payment. There could hardly ever have been a clearer case, and the result of the trial was never for a moment in doubt.

The affectionate efforts of the elder man to shield his adopted son drew tears from many eyes, but the readiness of that "son" to take advantage of them and to throw the guilt upon him excited, naturally enough, much u[Pg 375]rable comment. Two statements had been prepared and written by the prisoners, and both were read by the younger in court.

The first was by John Beatson, who declared himself to be guilty, but his "son" innocent. Whalley's own statement, to the same effect, went into a detailed story of how his "father" had given him a large number of the notes, and had told him they were part of a large remittance he had lately received from India.

The story was so clumsy and unconvincing, and the story told by the prosecution so complete in every detail, that both prisoners were speedily found guilty. They were condemned to death, and were hanged on Saturday, April 7th, 1802, at Horsham, before a crowd of three thousand people. The elder Beatson was seventy years of age and the younger but twenty-seven.

ROBERT SNOOKS

THE careers of the highwaymen were, in the vast majority of cases, remarkably short, and they were, for the most part, cut off in the full vigour of their manly strength and beauty. The accursed shears of Fate—or, to be more exact, a rope dangling from a beam—ended them before experience had come to revise their methods and fit them out with the artistry of the expert.

But few were so summarily ended as the unfortunate Robert Snooks. This person, a native of Hungerford, was in the year 1800 living at Hemel Hempstead, in Hertfordshire, in the immediate neighbourhood of Boxmoor. He had often observed the postboy carrying the well-filled mail-bags across the lonely flat of Boxmoor, and (he is described as having been of remarkably fine physical proportions) thought how easy a thing it would be to frighten him into giving them up. Accordingly, on one sufficiently dark night, he waited upon the moor for the postboy, stopped him, and, adopting a threatening demeanour, instructed him to carry the bags to a solitary spot and then go about his business. The frightened official immediately hurried off to the postmaster of the district: one Mr. Page, of the "Kiln^[Pg 377] Arms," Berkhamstead, and told his tale; leaving Snooks to ransack the bags and take what he thought valuable.

The bags, turned inside out, were found, the next morning, with a heap of letters, torn open and fluttering in all directions across the fields. It subsequently appeared that the highwayman had secured a very considerable booty, one letter alone having contained £5 in notes. The postboy did not know the man who had terrorised him: only that he was a "big man"; but the simultaneous disappearance of Snooks left no reasonable doubt as to who it was.

This was Snooks's first essay in the dangerous art, and it proved also his last. Hurrying to London, he took up his abode in Southwark, and presently had the dubious satisfaction of reading the reward-bills issued, offering £300 for his capture. After a while he thought himself comparatively safe, and was emboldened to make an effort at negotiating one of the notes he still held. Afraid to do this in person, he thought he might see what would happen if he tried to pass one of the notes through the intermediary of the servant of the house where he was lodging, and accordingly sent her to purchase a piece of cloth for a coat, handing her a five-pound note. The tradesman evidently found something suspicious about the note thus tendered, and returned it, with the message that "there must be some mistake." Whether the tradesman would have followed this up by communicating any suspicions he may have had to the auth^[Pg 378] does not appear; but "the wicked flee when no man pursueth," and Snooks hurried off to what was undoubtedly the most dangerous place for him. He fled to Hungerford, his birthplace; yet, strange to say, he long evaded capture, and it was not until 1802 that he was arrested, on the information of a postboy who had been to school with him. He was in due course brought to trial at Hertford Assizes, found guilty, and sentenced to death. It was judged expedient, as a warning to others, that he should be executed on the scene of his crime, the selection of the spot falling to Mr. Page, who, besides being postmaster of Berkhamstead, was High Constable of the Hundred of Dacorum. As a further warning, and one likely to be of some permanence, it was originally proposed to gibbet the body of the defunct Snooks on the same spot; so that, swinging there in chains on the moor, it might hint to others the folly of doing likewise. But the time was growing full late for such exhibitions; the inhabitants of the district protested, and this further project was abandoned.

Journeying from Hertford gaol on the morning of the fatal March 11th, 1802, Snooks, according to a surviving tradition, was given a final glass of ale at the "Swan" inn, at the corner of Box Lane, and is said to have remarked to the rustics hastening to the scene of execution: "Don't hurry; there'll be no fun till I get there."

The usual large and unruly crowd, that could always be reckoned upon on such melancholy occasions, w^[Pg 381] sent, and seemed to regard the event as no more serious than a fair. To those thus assembled, Robert Snooks, standing in the cart under the gallows, held forth in a moral address:

"Good people, I beg your particular attention to my fate. I hope this lesson will be of more service to you than the gratification of the curiosity which brought you here. I beg to caution you against evil doing, and most earnestly entreat you to avoid two evils, namely, 'Disobedience to parents'—to you youths I particularly give this caution—and 'The breaking of the Sabbath.' These misdeeds lead to the worst of crimes: robbery, plunder, bad women, and every evil course. It may by some be thought a happy state to be in possession of fine clothes and plenty of money, but I assure you no one can be happy with ill-gotten treasure. I have often been riding on my horse and passed a cottager's door, whom I have seen dressing his greens, and perhaps had hardly a morsel to eat with them. He has very likely envied me in my station, who, though at that time in possession of abundance, was miserable and unhappy. I envied him, and with most reason, for his happiness and contentment. I can assure you there is no happiness but in doing good. I justly suffer for my offences, and hope it will be a warning to others. I die in peace with God and all the world."



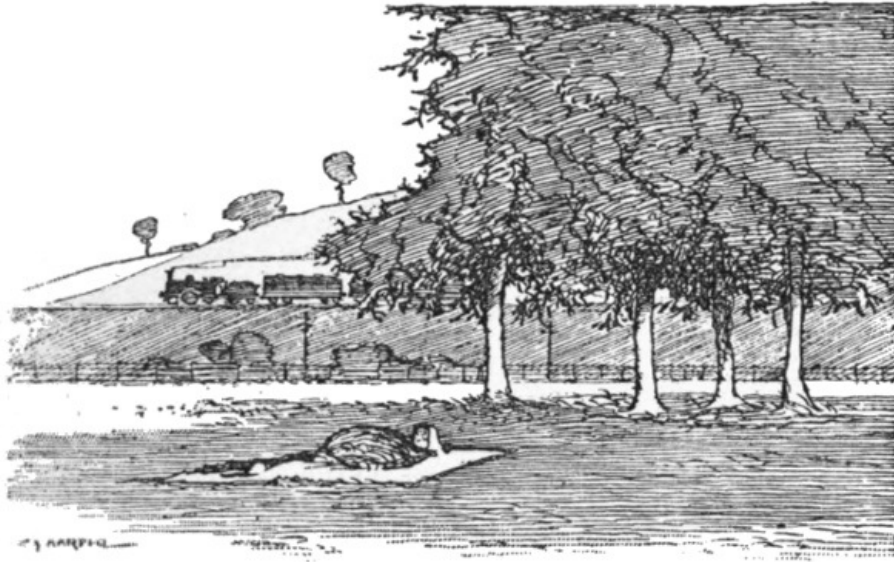
SNOOKS ADDRESSING THE CROWD AT HIS EXECUTION.

The horse was then whipped up, the cart drawn away from beneath the gallows-tree, and Robert [Pg 382] had presently paid the harsh penalty of his crime. He had behaved with remarkable courage, and, espying an acquaintance in the crowd, offered him his watch if he would promise to see that his body received Christian burial. But the man, unwilling to be recognised as a friend of the criminal, made no response, and Snooks's body was buried at the foot of the gallows. A hole was dug there, and a truss of straw divided. Half was flung in first; the body upon that, and the second half on top. The hangman had half-stripped the body, declaring the clothes to be his perquisite, and would have entirely stripped it, had not the High Constable interfered, insisting that some regard should be had to decency.

A slow-moving feeling of compassion for the unhappy wretch took possession of some of the people of Hemel Hempstead, who on the following day procured a coffin, reopened the grave, and, placing the body in the coffin, thus gave it some semblance of civilised interment; but, those being the times of the body-snatchers, doubts have been expressed of the body being really there. It is thought that the body-snatchers may afterwards have visited the lonely spot and again resurrected it.

Two rough pieces of the local "plum-pudding stone" were afterwards placed on the grave, and remained until recent years.

Boxmoor is not now the lonely place it was. The traveller who seeks Snooks's grave may find it by [Pg 383]uing northward from Apsley End, passing under the railway bridges, and coming to a little roadside inn called the "Friend at Hand." Opposite this, on the right-hand side of the road, and between this road and the railway embankment runs a long narrow strip of what looks like meadow land, enclosed by an iron fence, This is really a portion of Boxmoor. At a point, a hundred and fifty yards past the inn, look out sharply for a clump of five young horse-chestnut trees growing on the moor. Close by them is a barren space of reddish earth, with a grassy mound, a piece of conglomerate, or "pudding-stone," and a newer stone inscribed "Robert Snooks, 11 March, 1802." This has been added since 1905, and duly keeps the spot in mind.



SNOOKS'S GRAVE.

HUFFUM WHITE

THE decay of the highwayman's trade and its replacement by that of the burglar and the bank-robber is well illustrated by the career of Huffum, or Huffy, White, who was first sentenced for burglary in 1809. Transportation for life was then awarded him, and we might have heard no more of his activities, had not his own cleverness and the stupidity of the authorities enabled him to escape from the hulks at Woolwich. Thus narrowly missing the long voyage to Botany Bay, he made direct for London, then as now the best hiding-place in the world. He soon struck up an acquaintance with one James Mackcoull, and they proposed together to enter upon a course of burglary; but at the very outset of their agreement they were arrested. Mackcoull, as a rogue and vagabond, was sent to prison for six months, and White was sentenced to death as an escaped convict, the extreme penalty being afterwards reduced to penal servitude for life.



HUFFUM WHITE ESCAPING FROM THE HULKS.

On January 20th, 1811, Mackcoull was released, and at once, like the faithful comrade he was, set about the task of securing White's escape from the convict ship to which he had again been consigned. Dropping overboard [\[Pg 387\]](#) the fog and darkness that enshrouded the lower reaches of the Thames on that winter's evening into the boat that Mackcoull had silently rowed under the bows of the ship, White was again free.

An astonishing enterprise now lay before White, Mackcoull, and a new ally: a man named French. This was nothing less than a plan to break into the premises of the Paisley Union Bank at Glasgow. Arrived in Glasgow, they at length, after several disappointments, succeeded in forcing an entry on a Saturday night, selecting that time for the sake of the large margin it gave them for their escape, until the re-opening of the bank on the Monday morning. Their booty consisted of £20,000 in Scotch notes: a large sum, and in that form an unmanageable one, as they were eventually to discover.

The burglary accomplished, their first care was to set off at once for London, posting thither by post-chaise, as fast as four horses could take them. At every stage they paid their score, which they took care should be a generous one, as beseemed the wealthy gentlemen they posed as, with a £20 note: thus accumulating, as they dashed southward along those four hundred miles, a heavy sum in gold.

On the Monday morning the loss of the notes was of course at once discovered. Information was easily acquired as to the movements of the men who were at once suspected, and they were followed along the road, and some [\[Pg 388\]](#) later White was arrested in London by a Bow Street runner, at the house of one Scoltock, a maker of burglars' tools. None of the stolen property was found upon White, Mackcoull having been sufficiently acute to place all the remaining notes in the keeping of a certain Bill Gibbons, who combined the trade of bruiser with that of burglars' banker.

Mackcoull himself went into hiding, both from the law and from his associates, he having had the counting and custody of the notes, and told White and French the amount was but £16,000.

It now became quite evident to French, at least, that, so far as he and his friends were concerned, the remaining notes were merely so much waste-paper. Their numbers were bound to be known, and they could not safely be negotiated. So he suggested to Mrs. Mackcoull that they should propose to return the paper-money to the Bank, and save further trouble, on the understanding that they should not be prosecuted.

Mrs. Mackcoull appears to have had an influential friend named Sayer, employed in close attendance upon the King, and by his good offices secured a pardon for all concerned, on the conditions already named. Unfortunately, she could not fully carry out the bargain agreed upon, for, on the notes being counted, it was discovered that only £11,941 remained.

White, already in custody, was once more condemned to transportation for life. The procedure must by thi [Pg 389] have become quite staled by familiarity, and we picture him going again to the hulks with an air of intense boredom.

He, of course, again escaped, and was soon again on his burglarious career: this time at Kettering among other places. But the exploit which concluded his course was the almost purely highwayman business of robbing the Leeds mail-coach, on October 26th, 1812, near Higham Ferrers. He had as accomplices a certain Richard Kendall and one Mary Howes. White had booked an outside seat on the coach, and had, in the momentary absence of the guard in front, cleverly forced open the lock of the box in which the mail-bags were kept, extracted the bags, and replaced the lid. At the next stage he left the coach. The accomplices, who had a trap in waiting, then all drove off to London, White immediately afterwards making for Bristol, where he was soon located, living with two notorious thieves, John Goodman and Ned Burkitt. A descent was made upon the house, and the two arrested, but White escaped over the roof of a shed, and through the adjoining houses.

He was traced in April 1813 to a house in Scotland Road, Liverpool, where, in company with a man named Hayward, he was meditating another burglary. The officers came upon them hiding in a cellar, and a desperate strugg [Pg 390] wed; but in the end they were secured.

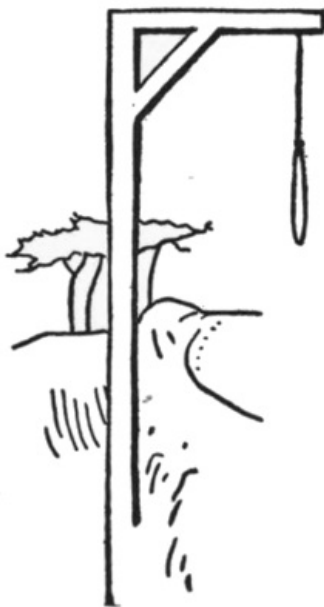
Richard Kendall and Mary Howes, *alias* Taylor, were already in custody, and White was arraigned with them at the ensuing Northampton Assizes, for the robbery of the Leeds mail. Witnesses spoke at this trial to having seen the men in the gig on the evening of October 26th, on the road near Higham Ferrers, and afterwards at the house of Mary Howes, who lived close by, and the keeper of the turnpike deposed to only one gig having passed through that evening. There were no fewer than forty witnesses, and the trial occupied fourteen hours.

Mary Howes was acquitted, not from lack of evidence, but merely on a technical flaw in the indictment; her offence having been committed in another county. White and Kendall were convicted and sentenced to death.

White again came near to escaping. By some unknown means, a file had been conveyed to him, and on the night before the execution he filed through his irons, and then forced a way through several doors, being only stopped at the outer gate. The following morning, August 13th, 1813—unlucky date, with two thirteens—he met his fate with an unmoved tranquility. He declared Kendall to be innocent. When the chaplain asked him earnestly if he could administer any comfort to him at that solemn moment, he replied: "Only by getting some other man to be hanged for me."

Kendall was then brought to the gallows, declaring himself to be innocent, and a murdered man. [Pg 391]

Mackcoull, the earlier associate of White, disappeared for years, but was arrested for a robbery in 1820, and died in prison soon after receiving sentence.



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Transcriber's Note:

- Minor typographical errors have been corrected without note.
- Ambiguous hyphens at the ends of lines were retained.
- Punctuation and spelling were made consistent when a predominant form was found in this book; otherwise they were not changed.
- Mid-paragraph illustrations have been moved between paragraphs and some illustrations have been moved closer to the text that references them. The paginations in the list of illustrations have been adjusted accordingly.
- Footnotes were moved to the end of chapters and numbered in one continuous sequence
- In the index the numbers i. and ii. refer to volumes i. and ii.
- Other notes:
 - Page 191: "... three several times;" changed to "... several times;"
 - In this text Edgware is spelled Edgeware.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK HALF-HOURS WITH THE HIGHWAYMEN - VOL 2 ***

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