

# **The Complete Cony-catching**

By

**Robert Greene**

Published by the Ex-classics Project, 2017  
<http://www.exclassics.com>

Public Domain



# The Complete Cony-catching

## CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION .....	5
BIBLIOGRAPHICAL AND EDITORIAL NOTE.....	7
A NOTABLE DISCOVERY OF COZENAGE .....	8
Title Page .....	9
Frontispiece.....	10
To the Reader.....	11
The Art of Cony-Catching .....	14
A table of the words of art, used in the effecting these base villainies.....	21
The Art of Cross-Biting. ....	23
A Pleasant Discovery of the cozenage of Colliers.....	27
THE SECOND PART OF CONY-CATCHING.....	31
Title Page .....	32
Frontispiece.....	33
The Epistle Dedicatory .....	34
The Discovery of the Prigging Law or Nature of Horse Stealing.....	36
The Vincents Law, with the Discovery therof. ....	39
A Table of the Laws contained in this second part.....	41
The Second Part of Cony-Catching. ....	43
A discourse, or rather discovery of the Nip and the Foist, laying open the nature of the Cutpurse and Pick-pocket. ....	48
The Discovery of the lifting Law.....	53
The discovery of the Courbing Law. ....	55
The Discovery of the Black Art. ....	57
THE THIRD AND LAST PART OF CONY-CATCHING.....	59
Title Page .....	60
Frontispiece.....	61
To The Reader.....	62
The third and last part of Cony-catching with the new devised knavish art of Fool-taking. 63	
A pleasant tale how an honest substantial Citizen was made a cony, and simply entertained a knave that carried away his goods very politicly.....	64
Of a notable knave, who for his cunning deceiving a gentleman of his purse, scorned the name of a cony-catcher, and would needs be termed a fool-taker, as master and beginner of that new found art. ....	68
Another tale of a cozening companion, who would needs try his cunning in this new invented art, and how by his knavery (at one instant) he beguiled half a dozen and more.....	70
Of a crafty mate, that brought two young men unto a Tavern, where departing with a cup, he left them to pay both for the wine and cup. ....	71
Of an honest householder which was cunningly deceived by a subtle companion, that came to hire a chamber for his master.....	72
Of one that came to buy a knife, and made first proof of his trade on him that sold it.....	73
Of a young nip that cunningly beguiled an ancient professor of that trade, and his quean with him, at a play.....	74
How a gentleman was craftily deceived of a chain of Gold and his purse in Paul's Church in London. ....	75
How a cunning knave got a Trunk well stuffed with linen and certain parcels of plate out of a citizen's house, and how the master of the house help the deceiver to carry away his own goods. ....	78

How a broker was cunningly over-reached by as crafty a knave as himself and brought in danger of the Gallows. ....	79
A merry Tale taken not far from Fetter Lane end, of a new-found cony-catcher, that was cony-catched himself. ....	82
THE BLACK BOOK'S MESSENGER. ....	83
Title Page .....	84
To the Courteous Reader .....	85
A Table of the words of Art lately devised by Ned Browne and his associates, to Cross-bite the old Phrases used in the manner of Cony-catching. ....	86
The life and death of Ned Browne, a notable Cutpurse and Cony-catcher.....	87
A Pleasant Tale how Ned Browne cross-bit a Maltman. ....	88
A Merry Tale how Ned Browne Used a Priest. ....	90
A Pleasant Tale how Ned Brown Kissed a Gentlewoman and Cut Her Purse. ....	91
How Ned Brown Let Fall a Key. ....	92
The Species of Cony-Catchers.....	93
A Merry Jest how Ned Browne's Wife Was Cross-Bitten in her Own Art. ....	96
Ned Browne's Farewell .....	97
THE DEFENCE OF CONY-CATCHING. ....	99
Title Page .....	100
Frontispiece.....	101
To The Readers .....	102
The Defence of Cony-Catching. ....	104
A Pleasant Tale of an Usurer. ....	106
Cony-catching Millers, and a Pleasant Tale of a Miller and an Ale-wife's Boy of Edmonton. ....	109
A Pleasant Tale Of Will Sommers.....	112
Gentlemen Cony-Catchers .....	113
A Pleasant Tale How A Holy Brother Cony-catched For A Wife.....	116
A Pleasant Tale Of A Man That Was Married To Sixteen Wives, And How Courteously His Last Wife Entreated Him. ....	118
Cony-Catching Tailors, and a Pleasant Tale of a Tailor, how he Cony-catched a Gentlewoman, and Was Made Himself a Cony Afterwards by His Man. ....	121
Conclusion. ....	124
A DISPUTATION BETWEEN A HE CONY-CATCHER AND A SHE CONY-CATCHER. ....	125
Title Page .....	126
The Epistle .....	127
A disputation between Laurence a foist and Fair Nan a traffic, whether a whore or a thief is most prejudicial.....	129
The Conversion of an English courtesan .....	140
NOTES.....	152
A Notable Discovery of Cozenage .....	153
The Second Part of Cony-Catching .....	153
The Third and Last Part of Cony-Catching.....	154
The Black Book's Messenger.....	154
The Defence of Cony-Catching .....	155
A Disputation between a He Cony-catcher and a She Cony-catcher.....	156
GLOSSARY .....	158

## **INTRODUCTION**

## Introduction

Robert Greene (1558 – 1592) was an English dramatist, poet, pamphleteer, rake and debauchee. He appears as a minor character in both of Anthony Burgess' Elizabethan novels *Nothing Like The Sun* (about Shakespeare) and *A Dead Man In Deptford* (about Marlowe). A graduate of Clare Hall, Cambridge, he eloped with a wealthy woman whom he abandoned after having spent all her money. He then went to London, where he lived by writing, associated with whores, thieves, and low fellows of every kind, and spent money faster than he got it on drunkenness and debauchery. The "Groatsworth of Wit", also available on the Ex-Classics site, at <http://www.exclassics.com/groat/grtintro.htm> is his best known work, and has the first reference in print to William Shakespeare as a playwright. In addition he wrote six plays, an amount of poetry and numerous pamphlets, mostly love stories and accounts of criminals and swindlers.

In the six pamphlets here collected you will learn about the tricks of *cony-catchers* (swindlers), *nips* (cutpurses), *foists* (pickpockets), *cross-biters* (men who extort money from a prostitute's clients by pretending to be her husband), *lifts* (shoplifters, and stealers of other unguarded goods), *priggers* (horse thieves), and *courbers* (thieves who drag goods out through the window with a long hooked pole). Based on close observation, and illustrated with stories of notable strokes, they give a great insight into the underside of queen Bess's and Shakespeare's London.

## **BIBLIOGRAPHICAL AND EDITORIAL NOTE**

The six works which make up this anthology were all published as pamphlets in 1591-92. They sold well at the time, but because of their ephemeral nature, are now very rare. A detailed bibliography of the originals can be found in *The Cony-catching Pamphlets of Robert Greene – A Bibliography and Study* by Frances Kirkpatrick Darden. (<http://etheses.bham.ac.uk/5572/1/Darden1952PhD.pdf>) The text for this edition has been taken from volumes X and XI of *The Complete Works of Robert Greene*, edited by Alexander Grosart, Huth Library, 1881-83.

Spelling has been modernized and obsolete words standardized at the as the primary spelling used by the OED.

The Glossary and Notes are the work of the Ex-Classics project.

**A NOTABLE DISCOVERY OF COZENAGE**

**Title Page**

A

Notable Discovery of Coosnage  
*Now daily practised by sundry lewd persons, called Connie-catchers,  
and Crosse-biters.*

Plainely [l]aying open those pernicious sleights that hath brought many ignorant men to confusion.

*Written for the general benefit of all Gentlemen, Citizens, Aprentises, Countrey Farmers and yeomen, that may hap to fall into the company of such coosening companions.*

*With a delightfull discourse of the coosnage of colliers.*

*Nascimur pro patria.<1>*

By R. Greene, Maister of Arts

LONDON.

Printed by Iohn Wolfe for T.N. and are to be sold ouer  
against the great south doore of Paules. 1591.

Robert Greene

## Frontispiece



## To the Reader

TO THE YOUNG GENTLEMEN,  
Merchants, Apprentices,  
*farmers, and plain countrymen*

### HEALTH

DIOGENES, gentlemen, from a counterfeit coiner of money, became a current corrector of manners, as absolute in the one, as dissolute in the other: time refineth men's effects, and their humours grow different by the distinction of age. Poor Ovid that amorously writ in his youth the art of love, complained in his exile amongst the Getes of his wanton follies. And Socrates' age was virtuous though his prime was licentious. So, gentlemen, my younger years had uncertain thoughts, but now my ripe days calls on to repentant deeds, and I sorrow as much to see others wilful, as I delighted once to be wanton. The odd mad-caps I have been mate too, not as a companion, but as a spy to have an insight into their knaveries, that seeing their trains I might eschew their snares: those mad fellows I learned at last to loathe, by their own graceless villainies, and what I saw in them to their confusion, I can forewarn in others to my country's commodity. None could decipher Tyranism better than Aristippus, not that his nature was cruel, but that he was nurtured with Dionysius: The simple swain that cuts the lapidary's stones, can distinguish a ruby from a diamond only by his labour: though I have not practised their deceits, yet conversing by fortune, and talking upon purpose with such copesmates, hath given me light into their conceits, and I can decipher their qualities, though I utterly mislike of their practices. To be brief gentlemen, I have seen the world and rounded it, though not with travel, yet with experience, and I cry out with Solomon, *Omnia sub sole vanitas*<2>. I have smiled with the Italian, and worn the viper's head in my hand, and yet stopped his venom. I have eaten Spanish myrobalans, and yet am nothing the more metamorphosed. France, Germany, Poland, Denmark, I know them all, yet not affected to any in the form of my life; only I am English born, and I have English thoughts, not a devil incarnate because I am Italianate, but hating the pride of Italy, because I know their peevishness: yet in all these countries where I have travelled, I have not seen more excess of vanity then we English men practise through vainglory: for as our wits be as ripe as any, so our wills are more ready than they all, to put in effect any of their licentious abuses: yet amongst the rest, letting ordinary sins pass, because custom hath almost made them a law, I will only speak of two such notable abuses, which the practitioners of them shadow with the name of Arts, as never have been heard of in any age before. The first and chief, is called the Art of Cony-catching; the second, the Art of Cross-biting; two such pestilent and prejudicial practices, as of late have been the ruin of infinite persons, and the subversion and overthrow of many merchants, farmers, and honest minded yeomen. The first is a deceit at cards, which growing by enormity into a cozenage, is able to draw (by the subtle show thereof) a man of great judgement to consent to his own confusion. Yet gentlemen when you shall read this book, written faithfully to discover these cozening practices, think I go not about to disprove or disallow the most ancient and honest pastime or recreation of card play, for thus much I know by reading: When the city of Thebes was besieged by them of Lacedemonia, being girt within strong fenced walls, and having men enough, and able to rebate the enemy, they found no inconvenience of force to breed their ensuing bane but famine, in that when victuals waxed scant, hunger would either make them yield by a fainting composition, or a miserable death. Whereupon to weary the foe with wintering at the siege, the Thebans devised this policy, they found out the method of cards and dice, and so busied their brains with the pleasantness of that new invention, passing away the time with strange recreations and pastimes, beguiling hunger with the delight of the new

sports, and eating but every third day, and playing two, so their frugal sparing of victuals kept them from famine, the city from sacking, and raised the foe from a mortal siege. Thus was the use of cards and dice first invented, and since amongst princes highly esteemed, and allowed in all commonwealths, as a necessary recreation for the mind: But as in time and malice of man's nature hatcheth abuse, so good things by ill wits are wrested to the worse, and so in cards: for from an honest recreation, it is grown to a prejudicial practice, and most high degree of cozenage, as shall be discovered in my Art of Cony-catching, for not only simple swains, whose wits is in their hands, but young gentlemen, and merchants, are all caught like conies in the hay, and so led like lambs to their confusion.

The poor man that cometh to the Term to try his right, and layeth his land to mortgage to get some crowns in his purse to see his lawyer, is drawn in by these devilish cony-catchers, that at one cut at cards loseth all his money, by which means, he, his wife and children, is brought to utter ruin and misery. The poor prentice, whose honest mind aimeth only at his master's profits, by these pestilent vipers of the commonwealth, is smoothly enticed to the hazard of this game at cards, and robbed of his master's money, which forceth him oft times either to run away, or bankrupt all, to the overthrow of some honest and wealthy citizen. Seeing then such a dangerous enormity groweth by them, to the discredit of the estate of England, I would wish the justices appointed as severe censors of such fatal mischiefs, to show themselves *patres patriæ*<sup><3></sup>, by weeding out such worms as eat away the sap of the tree, and rooting this base degree of cozeners out of so peaceable and prosperous a country, for of all devilish practices this is the most prejudicial. The high lawyer that challengeth a purse by the highway side, the foist, the nip, the stall, the snap, I mean the pick-pockets and cutpurses are nothing so dangerous to meet withal, as these cozening cony-catchers. The cheaters that with their false dice make a hand, & strike in at hazard or passage with their dice of advantage, are nothing so dangerous as these base minded caterpillars. For they have their vies and their revies<sup><6></sup> upon the poor cony's back, till they so ferret beat him, that they leave him neither hair on his skin, nor hole to harbour in.

There was before this many years ago, a practice put in use by such shifting companions, which was called the Barnard's Law, wherein as in the art of cony-catching, four persons were required to perform their cozening commodity. The Taker-up, the Verser, the Barnard and the Rutter, and the manner of it indeed was thus. The Taker-up seemeth a skilful man in all things, who hath by long travail learned without book a thousand policies to insinuate himself into a man's acquaintance: Talk of matters in law, he hath plenty of cases at his finger's ends, and he hath seen, and tried, and ruled in the King's courts: Speak of grazing and husbandry, no man knoweth more shires than he, nor better which way to raise a gainful commodity, and how the abuses and overture of prices might be redressed. Finally, enter into what discourse they list, were it into a broker's faculty, he knoweth what gains they have for old boots and shoes: Yea, and it shall scape him hardly, but that ere your talk break off, he will be your countryman at least, and peradventure either of kin, ally, or some stale sib to you, if your reach far surmount not his. In case he bring to pass that you be glad of his acquaintance, then doeth he carry you to the taverns, and with him goes the Verser, a man of more worship than the Taker-up, and he hath the countenance of a landed man. As they are set, comes in the Barnard stumbling into your company, like some aged farmer of the country, a stranger unto you all, that had been at some market town therabout, buying and selling, and there tipped so much Malmsey, that he had never a ready word in his mouth, and is so careless of his money, that out he throweth some forty Angels on the board's end, and standing somewhat aloof, calleth for a pint of wine, and saith: masters, I am somewhat bold with you, I pray you be not grieved if I drink my drink by you: and thus ministers such idle drunken talk, that the Verser who counterfeited the landed man, comes and draws more near to the plain honest dealing man, and

## The Complete Cony-catching

prayeth him to call the Barnard more near to laugh at his folly. Between them two the matter shall be so workmanly conveyed and finely argued, that out cometh an old pair of cards, whereat the Barnard teacheth the Verser a new game, that he says cost him for the learning two pots of ale not two hours ago, the first wager is drink, the next two pence or a groat, and lastly to be brief they use the matter so, that he that were an hundred year old, and never played in his life for a penny, cannot refuse to be the Verser's half, and consequently at one game at cards, he loseth all they play for, be it a hundred pound. And if perhaps when the money is lost (to use their word of art) the poor countryman begin to smoke them, and swears the drunken knave shall not get his money so, then standeth the Rutter at the door and draweth his sword and picketh a quarrel at his own shadow, if he lack an ostler or a tapster or some other to brabble with, that while the streets and company gather to the fray, as the manner is, the Barnard steals away with all the coin, and gets him to one blind tavern or other, where these cozeners had appointed to meet.

Thus gentlemen I have glanced at the Barnard's Law, which though you may perceive it to be a prejudicial insinuating cozenage, yet is the art of cony-catching so far beyond it in subtlety, as the devil is more honest than the holiest angel: for so unlikely is it for the poor cony to lose, that might he pawn his stake to a pound, he would lay it that he cannot be cross-bitten in the cut at cards, as you shall perceive by my present discovery. Yet gentlemen am I sore threatened by the hucksters of that filthy faculty, that if I set their practices in print, they will cut off that hand that writes the pamphlet, but how I fear their bravados, you shall perceive by my plain painting out of them, yea, so little do I esteem such base minded braggarts, that were it not I hope of their amendment, I would in a schedule set down the names of such cozening cony-catchers. Well, leaving them and their course of life to the honourable and the worshipful of the land, to be censors of with justice, have about for a blow at the Art of Cross-biting: I mean not cross-biters at dice, when the cheater with a langret, cut contrary to the vantage, will cross-bite a card cater trey:<4> Nor I mean not when a broking knave cross-biteth a gentleman with a bad commodity: nor when the foyst, the pick-pockets (sir-reverence I mean) is cross-bitten by the Snap, and so smoked for his purchase: nor when the Nip, which the common people call a cutpurse, hath a cross-bite by some bribing officer, who threatening to carry him to prison, takes away all the money, and lets him slip without any punishment: But I mean a more dishonourable art, when a base rogue, either keepeth a whore as his friend, or marries one to be his maintainer, and with her not only cross-bites men of good calling, but especially poor ignorant country farmers, who God wot be by them led like sheep to the slaughter. Thus gentle readers, have I given you a light in brief, what I mean to prosecute at large, and so with an humble suit to all Justices, that they will seek to root out these two roguish arts, I commit you to the Almighty.

Yours Rob. Greene.

## The Art of Cony-Catching

THERE be requisite effectually to act the art of cony-catching three several parties: the Setter, the Verser, and the Barnacle. The nature of the Setter, is to draw any person familiarly to drink with him, which person they call the Cony, & their method is according to the man they aim at: if a gentleman, merchant, or apprentice, the cony is the more easily caught, in that they are soon induced to play, and therefore I omit the circumstance which they use in catching of them. And for because the poor country farmer or yeoman is the mark which they most of all shoot at, who they know comes not empty to the Term, I will discover the means they put in practice to bring in some honest, simple & ignorant men to their purpose. The cony-catchers, appavelled like honest civil gentlemen, or good fellows, with a smooth face, as if butter would not melt in their mouths, after dinner when the clients are come from Westminster Hall and are at leisure to walk up and down Paul's, Fleet-street, Holborn, the Strand, and such common haunted places, where these cozening companions attend only to spy out a prey: who as soon as they see a plain country fellow well and cleanly appavelled, either in a coat of homespun russet, or of frieze, as the time requires, and a side pouch at his side, there is a cony, saith one. At that word out flies the Setter, and overtaking the man, begins to salute him thus: Sir, God save you, you are welcome to London, how doth all our good friends in the country, I hope they be all in health? The countryman seeing a man so courteous he knows not, half in a brown study at this strange salutation, perhaps makes him this answer. Sir, all our friends in the country are well thanks be to God, but truly I know you not, you must pardon me. Why sir, saith the Setter, guessing by his tongue what country man he is, are you not such a country man, if he say yes, then he creeps upon him closely: if he say no, the straight the setter comes over him thus: in good sooth sir, I know you by your face & have been in your company before, I pray you (if without offence) let me crave your name and the place of your abode. The simple man straight tells him where he dwells, his name, and who be his next neighbours, and what gentlemen dwell about him. After he hath learned all of him then he comes over his fallows kindly: sir, though I have been somewhat bold to be inquisitive of your name, yet hold me excused, for I took you for a friend of mine, but since by mistaking I have made you slack your business, we'll drink a quart of wine, or a pot of ale together: if the fool be so ready as to go, then the cony is caught: but if he smack the setter, and smells a rat by his clawing, and will not drink with him, then away goes the setter, and discourseth to the verser the name of the man, the parish he dwells in, and what gentlemen are his near neighbours, with that away goes he, & crossing the man at some turning, meets him full in the face, and greets him thus.

What Goodman Barton, how fare all our friends about you? you are well met, I have the wine for you, you are welcome to town. The poor countryman hearing himself named by a man he knows not, marvels, & answers that he knows him not, and craves pardon. Not me Goodman Barton, have you forgot me? why I am such a man's kinsman, your neighbour not far off: how doth this or that good gentleman my friend? good Lord that I should be out of your remembrance, I have been at your house divers times. Indeed, sir, saith the farmer, are you such a man's kinsman, surely sir if you had not challenged acquaintance of me, I should never have known you, I have clean forgot you, but I know the good gentleman your cousin well, he is my very good neighbour: & for his sake saith the verser, we'll drink afore we part, haply the man thanks him, and to the wine or ale they go, then ere they part, they make him a cony, & so ferret-claw him at cards, that they leave him as bare of money, as an ape of a tail: thus have the filthy fellows their subtle fetches to draw on poor men to fall into their cozening practices: thus like consuming moths of the common wealth, they prey upon the ignorance of such plain souls, as measure all by their own honesty, not regarding either conscience, or the fatal revenge that's threatened for such idle & licentious persons, but do employ all their wits to overthrow such as with their handy thrift satisfy their hearty thirst: they preferring cozenage before labour, and

## The Complete Cony-catching

choosing an idle practice before any honest form of good living. Well, to the method again of taking up their conies. If the poor countryman smoke them still, and will not stoop unto either of their lures: then one, either the verser, or the setter, or some of their crew, for there is a general fraternity betwixt them, steppeth before the cony as he goeth, and letteth drop twelve pence in the highway, that of force the cony must see it. The countryman spying the shilling, maketh not dainty, for *quis nisi mentis inops ollatum respuit aurum,*<5> but stoopeth very mannerly and taketh it up: then one of the cony-catchers behind crieth half part, and so challengeth half of his finding. The countryman content, offereth to change the money. Nay faith friend, saith the verser, 'tis ill luck to keep found money, we'll go spend it in a pottle of wine, or in a breakfast, dinner or supper, as the time of day requires: If the cony say he will not, then answers the verser, spend my part: if still the cony refuse, he taketh half and away, if they spy the countryman to be of a having and covetous mind, then have they a further policy to draw him on: another that knoweth the place of his abode, meeteth him and saith Sir, well met, I have run hastily to overtake you, I pray you dwell you not in Darbyshire, in such a village? Yes marry do I friend saith the cony, then replies the verser, truly sir I have a suit to you, I am going out of town, & must send a letter to the parson of your parish, you shall not refuse to do a stranger such a favour as to carry it him, haply, as men may in time meet, it may lie in my lot to do you as good a turn, and for your pains I will give you xii. pence. The poor cony in mere simplicity saith, sir, I'll do so much for you with all my heart, where is your letter? I have it not good sir ready written, but may I entreat you to step into some tavern or alehouse, we'll drink the while, and I will write but a line or two: at this the cony stoops, and for greediness of the money, and upon courtesy goes with the setter unto the tavern. As they walk they meet the verser, and then they all three go into the tavern together.

See gentlemen what great logicians these cony-catchers be, that have such rhetorical persuasions to induce the poor countryman to his confusion, and what variety of villainy they have to strip the poor farmer of his money. Well, imagine the cony is in the tavern, then sits down the verser, and saith to the setter, what sirrah, wilt thou give me a quart of wine, or shall I give thee one? we'll drink a pint saith the setter, & play a game at cards for it, respecting more the sport than the loss: content quoth the verser, go call for a pair, and while he is gone to fetch them, he saith to the cony, you shall see me fetch over my young master for a quart of wine finely, but this you must do for me, when I cut the cards, as I will not cut above five off, mark then of all the greatest pack which is undermost, & when I bid you call a card for me, name that, and you shall see we'll make him pay for a quart of wine straight, truly saith the cony, I am no great player at cards, and I do not well understand your meaning, why, saith he, it is thus: I will play at mum-chance, or decoy, that he shall shuffle the cards, and I will cut: now either of us must call a card, you shall call for me, and he for himself, and whose card comes first wins, therefore when I have cut the cards, then mark the nethermost of the greatest heap, that I set upon the cards which I cut off, & always call that for me. O now saith the cony, I understand you, let me alone, I warrant I'll fit your turn, with that in comes the setter with his cards, and asketh at what game they shall play, why saith the verser, at a new game called mum-chance, that hath no policy nor knavery, but plain as a pike-staff, you shall shuffle and I'll cut, you shall call a card, and this honest man, a stranger almost to us both, shall call another for me, and which of our cards comes first, shall win, content saith the setter, for that's but mere hazard, & so he shuffles the cards, and the verser cuts off some four cards, and then taking up the heap to set upon them, giveth the cony a glance of the bottom card of that heap, and saith, now sir, call for me. The cony to blind the setter's eyes, asketh as though he were not made privy to the game, what shall I cut? what card saith the verser? why what you will, either heart, spade, club or diamond, court-card or other. O is it so, saith the cony? why then you shall have the four of hearts, which was the card he had a glance of, and saith the setter (holding the cards in his hand, and turning up the uppermost card, as if he knew not well the game) I'll have the

knave of trumps. Nay saith the verser, there is no trump, you may call what card you will: then saith he, I'll have the ten of spades, with that he draws, and the four of hearts comes first: well saith the setter, 'tis but hazard, mine might have come as well as yours, five is up, I fear not the set: so they shuffle and cut, but the verser wins. Well saith the setter, no butter will cleave on my bread, what, not one draught among five: drawer, a fresh pint, I'll have another bout with you: but sir I believe, saith he to the cony, you see some card, that it goes so cross on my side. I, saith the cony, nay I hope you think not so of me, 'tis but hazard and chance, for I am but a mere stranger unto the game, as I am an honest man I never saw it before.

Thus this simple cony closeth up smoothly to take the verser's part, only for greediness to have him win the wine: well answers the setter, then I'll have one cast more, and to it they go, but he loseth all, and beginneth to chafe in this manner: were it not quoth he, that I care not for a quart of wine, I could swear as many oaths for anger, as there be hairs on my head, why should not my luck be as good as yours, and fortune favour me as well as you? what, not one called card in ten cuts, I'll forswear the game for ever. What, chafe not man, saith the verser, seeing we have your quart of wine. I'll show you the game, and with that discourseth all to him, as if he knew it not. The setter, as simply as if the knave were ignorant, saith, marry, I think so, you must needs win, when he knows what card to call, I might have played long enough before I had got a set. Truly says the cony, 'tis a pretty game, for 'tis not possible for him to lose that cuts the cards: I warrant the other that shuffles may lose Saint Peter's cope if he had it. Well, I'll carry this home with me into the country, and win many a pot of ale with it. A fresh pint, saith the verser, and then we'll away: but seeing sir, you are going homeward, I'll learn you a trick worth the noting, that you shall win many a pot with in the winter nights: with that he culls out the four knaves, & pricks one in the top, one in the midst, and one in the bottom. Now sir, saith he, you see these three knaves apparently, thrust them down with your hand, & cut where you will, & though they be so far asunder, I'll make them all come together. I pray you let's see that trick, saith the cony, methinks it should be impossible. So the verser draws, and all the three knaves comes in one heap: this he doth once or twice, then the cony wonders at it, and offers him a pint of wine to teach it him. Nay, saith the verser, I'll do it for thanks, and therefore mark me where you have taken out the four knaves, lay two together above, and draw up one of them that it may be seen, then prick the other in the midst, & the third in the bottom, so when any cuts, cut he never so warily, three knaves must of force come together, for the bottom knave is cut to lie upon both the upper knaves. I marry, saith the setter, but then the 3 knaves you showed come not together. Truth, saith the verser, but not one among a thousand mark that, it requires a quick eye, a sharp wit, and a reaching head to spy at the first. Now gramercy sir for this trick, saith the cony, I'll domineer with this amongst my neighbours. Thus doth the verser and the setter feign friendship to the cony, offering him no show of cozenage, nor once to draw him in for a pint of wine, the more to shadow their villainy, but now begins the sport: as thus they sit tippling, comes the barnacle and thrusts open the door, looking into the room where they are, and as one bashful steppeth back again, and saith, I cry you mercy gentlemen, I thought a friend of mine had been here, pardon my boldnes. No harm saith the verser, I pray you drink a cup of wine with us and welcome: so in comes the barnacle, and taking the cup drinks to the cony, and then saith, what, at cards gentlemen? were it not I should be offensive to the company I would play for a pint till my friend come that I look for. Why sir, saith the Verser, if you will sit down you shall be taken up for a quart of wine. With all my heart, saith the barnacle, what will you play at, at primero, primo visto, sant, one and thirty, new cut, or what shall be the game? Sir, saith the verser, I am but an ignorant man at cards, & I see you have them at your fingers' end, I will play with you at a game wherein can be no deceit, it is called mum-chance at cards, and it is thus: you shall shuffle the cards, and I will cut, you shall call one, and this honest country yoman shall call a card for me, and which of our cards comes first shall win: here you see is no deceit, and this I'll play. No truly, saith the

## The Complete Cony-catching

cony, me thinks there can be no great craft in this: well saith the barnacle, for a pint of wine have at you: so they play as before, five up, and the verser wins. This is hard luck, saith the barnacle, and I believe the honest man spies some card in the bottom, and therefore I'll make this, always to prick the bottom card: content saith the verser, and the cony to cloak the matter, saith: sir, you offer me injury to think that I can call a card, when I neither touch them, shuffle, cut, nor draw them: Ah sir, saith the barnacle, give losers leave to speak: well, to it they go again, and then the barnacle knowing the game best, by chopping a card wins two of the five, but lets the verser win the set, then in a chafe he sweareth 'tis but his ill luck, and he can see no deceit in it, and therefore he will play xii.d. a cut. The verser is content, & wins ii. or iii.s. of the barnacle, whereat he chafes, and saith, I came hither in an ill hour: but I will win my money again, or lose all in my purse: with that he draws out a purse with some three or four pound, & claps it on the bord: the verser asketh the cony secretly by signs if he will be his half, he says aye, and straight seeks for his purse: well, the barnacle shuffles the cards throughly, and the verser cuts as before, the Barnacle when he hath drawn one card, saith, I'll either win something or lose something, therefore I'll vie and revie<6> every card at my pleasure, till either yours or mine come out, and therefore twelve pence upon this card, my card comes first for twelve pence: no saith the verser, aye saith the cony, and I durst hold twelve pence more, why, I hold you, saith the Barnacle, and so they vie and revie till some ten shillings be on the stake: and then next comes forth the verser's card, that the cony called, and the barnacle loseth: well, this flesheth the cony, the sweetness of gain maketh him frolic, and no man is more ready to vie and revie than he. Thus for three or four times the barnacle loseth, at last to whet on the cony, he striketh his chopped card, and winneth a good stake. Away with the witch, cries the Barnacle, I hope the cards will turn at last. Aye much, thinketh the cony, twas but a chance that you asked so right, to ask one of the five that was cut off, I am sure there was forty to one on my side, and I'll have you on the lurch anon, so still they vie and revie, and for once that the barnacle wins, the cony gets five, at last when they mean to shave the cony clean of all his coin, the barnacle chafeth, and upon a pawn borroweth some money of the Tapster, & swears he will vie it to the uttermost, then thus he chops his card to cross-bite the cony: he first looks on the bottom card, and shuffles often, but still keeping that bottom card which he knows to be uppermost, then sets he down the cards, and the verser to encourage the cony, cut off but three cards, whereof the barnacle's card must needs be the uppermost, then shows he the bottom card of the other heap cut off to the cony, and sets it upon the barnacle's card which he knows, so that of force the card that was laid uppermost, must come forth first, and then the barnacle calls that card: they draw a card, and then the Barnacle vies, and the countryman vies upon him: for this is the law, as often as one vies or revies, the other must see it, else he loseth the stake: well, at last the barnacle plies it so, that perhaps he vies more money then the cony hath in his purse. The cony upon this, knowing his card is the third or fourth card, and that he hath forty to one against the Barnacle, pawns his rings if he have any, his sword, his cloak, or else what he hath about him, to maintain the vie, and when he laughs in his sleeve, thinking he hath fleeced the barnacle of all, then the barnacle's card comes forth, and strikes such a cold humour unto his heart, that he sits as a man in a trance, not knowing what to do, and sighing while his heart is ready to break, thinking on the money that he hath lost, perhaps the man is very simple and patient, and whatsoever he thinks, for fear goes his way quiet with his loss, while the cony-catchers laugh and divide the spoil, and being out of the doors, poor man, goes to his lodging with a heavy heart, pensive & sorrowful, but too late, for perhaps his state did depend on that money, and so he, his wife, his children, and his family, are brought to extreme misery. Another perhaps more hardy and subtle, smokes the cony-catchers, and smelleth cozenage, and saith, they shall not have his money so, but they answer him with braves, and though he bring them before an officer, yet the knaves are so favoured, that the man never recovers his money, and yet he is let slip unpunished. Thus are the poor conies robbed by these base minded caterpillars:

thus are serving men oft enticed to play, and lose all: thus are prentices induced to be conies, and so are cozened of their master's money, yea young gentlemen, merchants, and others, are fetched in by these damnable rakehells, a plague as ill as hell, which is, present loss of money, & ensuing misery. A lamentable case in England, when such vipers are suffered to breed and are not cut off with the sword of justice. This enormity is not only in London, but now generally dispersed through all England, in every shire, city, and town of any receipt, and many complaints are heard of their egregious cozenage. The poor farmer simply going about his business, or unto his attorney's chamber, is catched up & cozened of all. The serving-man sent with his lord's treasure, loseth oft-times most part to these worms of the commonwealth, the prentice having his master's money in charge, is spoiled by them, and from an honest servant either driven to run away, or to live in discredit for ever. The gentleman loseth his land, the merchant his stock, and all to these abominable cony-catchers, whose means is as ill as their living, for they are all either wedded to whores, or so addicted to whores, that what they get from honest men, they spend in bawdy houses among harlots, and consume it as vainly as they get it villainously. Their ears are of adamant, as pitiless as they are treacherous, for be the man never so poor, they will not return him one penny of his loss.

I remember a merry jest done of late to a Welshman, who being a mere stranger in London, and not well acquainted with the English tongue, yet chanced amongst certain cony-catchers, who spying the gentleman to have money, they so dealt with him, that what by signs, and broken English, they got him in for a cony, and fleeced him of every penny that he had, and of his sword, at last the man smoked them, and drew his dagger upon them at Ludgate, for thereabouts they had catched him, and would have stabbed one of them for his money, people came and stopped him, and the rather because they could not understand him, though he had a card in one hand, and his dagger in the other, and said as well as he could, a card, a card, *Mon dieu*. In the mean while the cony-catchers were got into Paul's, and so away. The Welshman followed them, seeking them there up and down in the church still with his naked dagger and the card in his hand, and the gentlemen marvelled what he meant thereby, at last one of his countrymen met him, and enquired the cause of his choler, and then he told him how he was cozened at cards, and robbed of all his money, but as his loss was voluntary, so his seeking them was mere vanity, for they were stepped into some blind ale house to divide the shares.

Near to S. Edmunds Bury in Suffolk, there dwelt an honest man, a shoemaker, that having some twenty marks in his purse, long a-gathering, and nearly kept, in came to the market to buy a dicker of hides, and by chance fell among cony-catchers, whose names I omit, because I hope of their amendment. This plain countryman drawn in by these former devices was made a cony, and so straight stripped of all his xx. marks, to his utter undoing: the knaves escaped, and he went home a sorrowful man. Shortly after, one of these cony-catchers was taken for a suspected person, and laid in Bury gaol, the sessions coming, and he produced to the bar, it was the fortune of this poor shoemaker to be there, who spying this rogue to be arraigned, was glad, and said nothing unto him, but looked what would be the issue of his appearance, at the last he was brought before the justices, where he was examined of his life, and being demanded what occupation he was, said none, what profession then are you of, how live you? Marry quoth he, I am a gentleman, and live of my friends. Nay that is a lie, quoth the poor shoemaker, under correction of the worshipful of the bench, you have a trade, and are by your art a cony-catcher. A cony-catcher, said one of the justices, and smiled, what is he a warrener fellow, whose warren keepeth he, canst thou tell? Nay sir, your worship mistaketh me quoth the shoemaker, he is not a warrener, but a cony-catcher: the bench, that never heard this name before, smiled, attributing the name to the man's simplicity, thought he meant a warrener, which the shoemaker spying, answered, that some conies this fellow catched, were worth twenty mark apiece, and for proof quoth he, I am one of them: and so discoursed the whole order of the art, and the baseness of

## The Complete Cony-catching

the cozening: whereupon the justices looking into his life, appointed him to be whipped, and the shoemaker desired that he might give him his payment, which was granted: when he came to his punishment, the shoemaker laughed, saying, 'tis a mad world when poor conies are able to beat their catchers, but he lent him so friendly lashes, that almost he made him pay an ounce of blood for every pound of silver.

Thus we see how the generation of these vipers increase, to the confusion of many honest men, whose practices to my poor power I have discovered, and set out, with the villainous sleights they use to entrap the simple, yet have they cloaks for the rain, and shadows for their villainies, calling it by the name of art or law: as cony-catching art, or cony-catching law. And hereof it riseth, that like as law, when the term is truly considered, signifieth the ordinance of good men, established for the commonwealth, to repress all vicious living, so these cony-catchers turn the cat in the pan, giving to divers vile patching shifts, an honest & godly title, calling it by the name of a law, because by a multitude of hateful rules, as it were in good learning, they exercise their villainies to the destructio of sundry honest persons. Herupon they give their false conveyance, the name of cony-catching law, as there be also other laws; as high law, sacking law, figging law, cheating law and Barnard's law. If you marvel at these mysteries and quaint words, consider, as the carpenter hath many terms familiar enough to his prentices, that others understand not at all, so have the cony-catchers, not without great cause: for a falsehood once detected, can never compass the desired effect. Therefore will I presently acquaint you with the signification of the terms in a table.

But leaving them till time and place, coming down Turnmill street the other day, I met one whom I suspected a cony-catcher, I drew him on to the tavern, and after a cup of wine or two, I talked with him of the maner of his life, & told him I was sorry for his friends' sake, that he took so bad a course, as to live upon the spoil of poor men, and specially to deserve the name of cony-catching, dissuading him from that base kind of life, that was so ignominious in the world, and so loathsome in the sight of God. Tut sir, quoth he, calling me by my name, as my religion is small, so my devotion is less, I leave God to be disputed on by divines, the two ends I aim at, are gain and ease, but by what honest gains I may get, never comes within the compass of my thoughts. Though your experience in travail be great, yet in some matters mine be more, yea, I am sure you are not so ignorant, but you know that few men can live uprightly, unless he have some pretty way more than the world is witness to, to help him withal: Think you some lawyers could be such purchasers, if all their pleas were short, and their proceedings justice and conscience? That offices would be so dearly bought, and the buyers so soon enriched, if they counted not pillage an honest kind of purchase? or do you think that men of handy trades make all their commodities without falsehood, when so many of them are become daily purchasers? nay what will you more, who so hath not some sinister way to help himself, but followeth his nose always straight forward, may well hold up the head for a year or two, but the third he must needs sink, and gather the wind into beggars' haven, therefore sir, cease to persuade me to the contrary, for my resolution is to beat my wits, and spare not to busy my brains to save and help me, by what means soever I care not, so I may avoid the danger of the law: whereupon, seeing this cony-catcher resolved in his form of life, leaving him to his lewdness I went away, wondering at the baseness of their minds, that would spend their time in such detestable sort. But no marvel, for they are given up into a reprobate sense, and are in religion mere atheists, as they are in trade flat dissemblers. If I should spend many sheets in deciphering their shifts, it were frivolous, in that they be many, and full of variety, for every day they invent new tricks, and such quaint devices as are secret, yet passing dangerous, that if a man had Argus eyes, he could scant pry into the bottom of their practices. Thus for the benefit of my country I have briefly discovered the law of cony-catching, desiring all justices, if such cozeners light in their precinct, even to use *summum ius* against them, because it is the

basest of all villainies. And that London prentices, if they chance in such cony-catchers' company, may teach them London law, that is, to defend the poor men that are wronged, and learn the caterpillars the highway to Newgate, where if Hind favour them with the heaviest irons in all the house, & give them his unkindest entertainment, no doubt his other petty sins shall be half pardoned for his labour: but I would it might be their fortune to happen into noble's, northward in Whitechapel, there in faith round Robin his deputy, would make them, like wretches, feel the weight of his heaviest fetters. And so desiring both honourable and worshipful, as well justices, as other officers, and all estates, from the prince to the beggar, to rest professed enemies to these base-minded cony-catchers, I take my leave.

*Nascimur pro patria.<1>*

**A table of the words of art, used in the effecting these base villainies.**

*Wherein is discovered the nature of every term, being proper to none but to the professors thereof.*

1 High law	Robbing by the highway side.
2 Sacking law	Lechery.
3 Cheating law	Play at false dice.
4 Cross-biting law	Cozenage by whores.
5 Cony-catching law	Cozenage by cards.
6 Versing law	Cozenage by false gold.
7 Figging law	Cutting of purses, & picking of pockets.
8 Barnard's law	A drunken cozenage by cards.

These are the eight laws of villainy, leading the high way to infamy.

In high law.	The thief is called a high lawyer. He that setteth the watch — a scrippet. He that standeth to watch — an oak He that is robbed — the Martin When he yieldeth — stooping.
In sacking law.	The bawd, if it be a woman — a pander The bawd, if a man — an apple squire The whore — a commodity The whore house — a trugging place.
In cheating law.	Pardon me gentlemen, for although no man could better than myself discover this law and his terms, and the name of their cheats, barddice, flats, forgers, langrets, gourds, demies, and many other, with their nature, & the crosses and contraries to them upon advantage, yet for some special reasons, herein I will be silent.
In cross-biting law	The whore — the traffique The man that is brought in — the simpler. The villains that take them — the cross-biters.
In cony-catching law	The party that taketh up the cony — the setter. He that playeth the game — the verser He that is cozened — the cony He that comes in to them — the barnacle The money that is won — purchase
In versing law.	He that bringeth him in — the verser The poor countryman — the cozen And the drunkard that comes in — the suffier
In Figging law.	He that bringeth him in — a nip

	<p>He that is half with him — the snap          The knife — the cuttle bung          The pickpocket — a foin          He that faceth the man — the stall          Taking the purse — drawing          Spying of him — smoking          The purse — the bung          The money — the shells          The Act doing — striking</p>
In Barnard's law.	<p>He that fetcheth the man — the taker          He that is taken — the cozen          The landed man — the verser          The drunken man — the Barnard          And he that makes the fray — the rutter.</p>

*Cum multis aliis quæ nunc præscribere longum est. <8>*

These quaint terms do these base arts use to shadow their villainy withal: for, *multa latent quæ non patent*,<9> obscuring their filthy crafts with these fair colours, that the ignorant may not espy what their subtlety is: but their end will be like their beginning, hatched with Cain, and consumed with Judas: and so bidding them adieu to the devil, and you farewell to God, I end. And now to the art of cross-biting.

## The Art of Cross-Biting.

THE Cross-biting law is a public profession of shameless cozenage, mixed with incestuous whoredoms, as ill as was practised in Gomorrah or Sodom, though not after the same unnatural manner: for the method of their mischievous art (with blushing cheeks & trembling heart let it be spoken) is, that these villainous vipers, unworthy the name of men, base rogues (yet why do I term them so well) being outcasts from God, vipers of the world, and an excremental reversion of sin, doth consent, nay constrain their wives to yield the use of their bodies to other men, that taking them together, he may cross-bite the party of all the crowns he can presently make, and that the world may see their monstrous practices, I will briefly set down the manner.

They have sundry preys that they call simplers, which are men fondly and wantonly given, whom for a penalty of their lust, they fleece of all that ever they have: some merchants, prentices, serving-men, gentlemen, yeomen, farmers, and all degrees, and this is their form: there are resident in London & the suburbs, certain men attired like gentlemen, brave fellows, but basely minded, who living in want, as their last refuge, fall unto this cross-biting law and to maintain themselves, either marry with some stale whore, or else forsooth keep one as their friend: and these persons be commonly men of the eight laws before rehearsed: either high lawyers, versers, nips, cony-catchers, or such of the like fraternity. These when their other trades fail, as the cheater, when he has no cozen to grime with his stop dice,<10> or the high lawyer, when he hath no set match to ride about, and the nip when there is no term, fair, nor time of great assembly, then to maintain the main chance, they use the benefit of their wives or friends, to the cross-biting of such as lust after their filthy enormities: some simple men are drawn on by subtle means, which never intended such a bad matter. In summer evenings, and in the winter nights, these traffics, these common trulls I mean, walk abroad either in the fields or streets that are commonly haunted, as stales to draw men into hell, and afar of, as attending apple-squires, certain cross-biters stand aloof, as if they knew them not: now so many men so many affections. Some unruly mates that place their content in lust, letting slip the liberty of their eyes on their painted faces, feed upon their unchaste beauties, till their hearts be set on fire: then come they to these minions, and court them with many sweet words: alas their loves needs no long suits, for they are forthwith entertained, and either they go to the tavern to scale up the match with a pottle of hippocras, or straight she carries him to some bad place, and there picks his pocket, or else the cross-biters comes swearing in, & so out-face the dismayed companion, that rather than he would be brought in question, he would disburse all that he hath present. But this is but an easy cozenage. Some other meeting with one of that profession in the street, will question if she will drink with him a pint of wine, their trade is never to refuse, and if for manners they do, it is but once: & then scarce shall they be warm in the room, but in comes a terrible fellow, with a side hair & a fearful beard, as though he were one of Polyphemus'<11> cut, & he comes frowning in & saith, what hast thou to do base knave, to carry my sister or my wife to the tavern: by his owns<12> you whore, 'tis some of your companions, I will have you both before the justice, Deputy, or Constable, to be examined. The poor serving-man, apprentice, farmer, or whatsoever he is, seeing such a terrible huff-snuff, swearing with his dagger in his hand, is fearful both of him and to be brought in trouble, and therefore speaks kindly and courteously unto him, and desires him to be content he meant no harm. The whore, that hath tears at command, falls a weeping, and cries him mercy. At this submission of them both he triumphs like a braggart, and will take no compassion: yet at last, through entreaty of other his companions coming in as strangers, he is pacified with some forty shillings, and the poor man goes sorrowful away, sighing out that which Solomon hath in his Proverbs, *A shameless woman hath honey in her lips, and her throat as sweet as honey, her*

*throat as soft as oil: but the end of her is more bitter than aloes, and her tongue is more sharp than a two edged sword, her feet go unto death, and her steps lead unto hell.<13>*

Again these trulls when they have got in a novice, then straight they pick his purse, and then have they their cross-biters ready, to whom they convey the money and so offer themselves to be searched: but the poor man is so outfaced by these cross-biting ruffians, that he is glad to go away content with his loss, yet are these easy practices. O might the justices send out spials in the night, they should see how these street walkers will jet in rich garded gowns, quaint periwigs, ruffs of the largest size, quarter and half deep, gloried richly with blue starch, their cheeks dyed with surfling water, thus are they tricked up, and either walk like stales up and down the streets, or stand like the devil's *Si quis*<14> at a tavern or alehouse, as if who should say, if any be so minded to satisfy his filthy lust, to lend me his purse, and the devil his soul, let him come in and be welcome. Now sir comes by a country farmer, walking from his inn to perform some busines, and seeing such a gorgeous damsel, he wondering at such a brave wench, stands staring her on the face, or perhaps doth but cast a glance, and bid her good speed, as plain simple swains have their lusty humours as well as others: the trull straight beginning her *exordium*<15> with a smile, saith, how now my friend, what want you, would you speak with anybody here? If the fellow have any bold spirit, perhaps he will offer the wine, & then he is caught, 'tis enough: in he goes, and they are chambered: then sends she for her husband, or her friend, and there either the farmer's pocket is stripped, or else the cross-biters fall upon him, and threaten him with Bridewell and the law: then for fear he gives them all in his purse, and makes them some bill to pay a sum of money at a certain day. If the poor farmer be bashful, and passeth by one of these shameless strumpets, then will she verse it with him, and claim acquaintance of him, and by some policy or other fall aboard on him, and carry him into some house or other: if he but enter in at the doors with her (though the poor farmer never kist her) yet then the cross-biters, like vultures, will prey upon his purse, and rob him of every penny. If there be any young gentleman that is a novice and hath not seen their trains, to him will some common filth (that never knew love) feign an ardent and honest affection, till she and her cross-biters have versed him to the beggar's estate. Ah gentlemen, merchants, yeomen and farmers, let this to you all, and to every degree else, be a caveat to warn you from lust, that your inordinate desire be not a mean to impoverish your purses, discredit your good names, condemn your souls, but also that your wealth got with the sweat of your brows, or left by your parents as a patrimony, shall be a prey to those cozening cross-biters. Some fond men are so far in with these detestable truggs, that they consume what they have upon them, and find nothing but a Neapolitan favour<16> for their labour.

Read the seventh of Solomon's proverbs, and there at large view the description of a shameless and impudent courtesan: yet is there another kind of cross-biting which is most pestilent, and that is this. There lives about this town certain householders, yet mere shifters and cozeners, who learning some insight in the civil law, walk abroad like parators, sunners<17> and informers, being none at all either in office or credit, and they go spying about where any merchant, or merchant's prentice, citizen, wealthy farmer, or other of credit, either accompany with any woman familiarly, or else hath gotten some maid with child, as men's natures be prone to sin, straight they come over his fallows thus: they send for him to a tavern, & there open the matter unto him, which they have cunningly learned out, telling him he must be presented to the Arches<18>, & the citation shall be peremptorily served in his parish church. The party afraid to have his credit cracked with the worshipful of the City, and the rest of his neighbours, & grieving highly his wife should hear of it, straight takes composition with this cozener for some twenty marks, nay I heard of forty pound cross-bitten at one time, & then the cozening informer or cross-biter promiseth to wipe him out of the book, & discharge him from the matter, when it was neither known nor presented: so go they to the

## The Complete Cony-catching

woman, and fetch her off if she be married, and though they have this gross sum yet oft times they cross-bite her for more: nay thus do they fear citizens, prentices, & farmers, that they find but any way suspicious of the like fault. The cross-biting bawds, for no better can I term them, in that for lucre they conceal the sin, and smother up lust, do not only enrich themselves mightily thereby, but also discredit, hinder, and prejudice the court of the Arches, and the Officers belonging to the same. There are some poor blind patches of that faculty, that have their tenements purchased, and their plate on the board very solemnly, who only get their gains by cross-biting, as is afore rehearsed. But leaving them to the deep insight of such as be appointed with Justice to correct vice, again to the crew of my former cross-biters, whose fee simple to live upon, is nothing but the following of common, dishonest and idle trulls, and thereby maintain themselves brave, and the strumpets in handsome furniture. And to end this art with an English demonstration, I'll tell you a pretty tale of late performd in Bishopgate street, there was there five traffics, pretty, but common housewives, that stood fast by a tavern door, loking if some prey would pass by for their purpose, anon the eldest of them, and most experienced in that law, called Mal B., spied a master of a ship coming along: here is a simpler quoth she, I'll verse him, or hang me. Sir, said she, God even, what, are you so liberal to bestow on three good wenches that are dry, a pint of wine. In faith, fair women quoth he, I was never niggard for so much, and with that he takes one of them by the hand, and caries them all into the tavern, there he bestowed cheer and hippocras upon them, drinking hard till the shot came to a noble, so that they three carousing to the gentleman, made him somewhat tipsy, and then & *venus in vinis, ignis in igne fuit*,<19> well, night grew on, and he would away, but this mistress Mal B. stopped his journey thus, gentleman, quoth she, this undeserved favour of yours makes us so deeply beholding to you, that our ability is not able any way to make sufficient satisfaction, yet to show us kind in what we can, you shall not deny me this request, to see my simple house before you go. The gentleman a litle whiffled, consented, & went with them, so the shot was paid, & away they go: Without the tavern door stood two of their husbands, J. B. & J. R. and they were made privy to the practice. Home goes the gentleman with these lusty housewives, stumbling, at last he was welcome to M. Mal's house, and one of the three went into a chamber, and got to bed, whose name was A. B. After they had chatted a while, the gentleman would have been gone, but she told him that before he went, he should see all the rooms of her house, and so led him up into the chamber where the party lay in bed: who is here said the gentleman. Marry saith Mal, a good pretty wench sir, and if you be not well, lie down by her, you can take no harm of her: drunkenness desires lust, and so the gentleman begins to dally, and away goes she with the candle, and at last he put of his clothes and went to bed: yet he was not so drunk, but he could after a while remember his money, and feeling for his purse all was gone, and three links of his whistle broken off: the sum that was in his purse was in gold and silver twenty nobles. As thus he was in a maze, though his head were well laden, in comes J. B. the good man of the house, and two other with him, and speaking somewhat loud, peace husband quoth she, there is one in bed, speak not so loud. In bed, saith he, gogs nownes<20> I'll go see, and so will I, saith the other: you shall not saith his wife, but strove against him, but up goes he and his cross-biters with him, & seeing the gentleman in bed, out with his dagger, and asked what base villain it was that there sought to dishonest his wife: well, he sent one of them for a constable, and made the gentleman rise, who half drunk yet had that remembrance to speak fair, and to entreat him to keep his credit: but no entreaty could serve, but to the Compter he must, & the constable must be sent for: yet at the last one of them entreated that the gentleman might be honestly used, and carried to a tavern to talk of the matter till a constable come. Tut, saith J. B. I will have law upon him: but the base cross-biter at last stooped, and to the tavern they go, where the gentleman laid his whistle to pawn for money, & there bestowed as much of them as came to ten shillings, and sat drinking and talking until the next morrow. By that the gentleman had stolen a nap, and waking it was

daylight, and then seeing himself compassed with these cross-biters, and remembering his night's work, soberly smiling, asked them if they knew what he was: they answered, not well. Why then quoth he, you base cozening rogues, you shall ere we part: and with that drawing his sword, kept them into the chamber, desiring that the constable might be sent for: but this brave of his could not dismay M. Mall, for she had bidden a sharper brunt before, witness the time of her martyrdom, when upon her shoulders was engraven the history of her whorish qualities: but she replying, swore, sith he was so lusty, her husband should not put it up by no means. I will tell thee thou base cross-biting bawd, quoth he, and you cozening companions, I serve a noble man, & for my credit with him, I refer me to the penalty he will impose on you, for by God I will make you an example to all cross-biters ere I end with you, I tell you villains, I serve, and with that he named his Lord. When the guilty whores and cozeners heard of his credit and service, they began humbly to entreat him to be good to them: then quoth he, first deliver me my money, they upon that gladly gave him all, and restored the links of his chain. When he had all, he smiled, and swore afresh that he would torment them for all this, that the severity of their punishment might be a caveat to others to beware of the like cozenage: and upon that knocked with his foot, and said he would not let them go till he had a constable. Then in general they humbled themselves, so recompensing the party, that he agreed to pass over the matter, conditionally beside, that they would pay the sixteen shillings he had spent in charges, which they also performed. The gentleman stepped his way, and said, you may see the old proverb fulfilled, *Fallere fallentem non est fraus.*<21>

Thus have I deciphered an odious practice not worthy to be named: and now wishing all, of what estate soever, to beware of filthy lust, and such damnable stales as draws men on to inordinate desires, and rather to spend their coin amongst honest company, than to bequeath it to such base cross-biters, as prey upon men, like ravens upon dead carcasses, I end with this prayer, that cross-biting and cony-catching may be as little known in England, as the eating of swine's flesh was amongst the Jews. Farewell.

*Nascimur pro patria.*

FINIS.

## A Pleasant Discovery of the cozenage of Colliers.

ALTHOUGH (courteous Readers) I did not put in amongst the laws of cozening, the law of *legering*, which is a deceit wherewith colliers abuse the commonwealth, in having unlawful sacks, yet take it for a petty kind of craft or mystery, as prejudicial to the poor, as any of the other two, for I omitted divers other devilish vices; as the nature of the *lift*, the *black art*, & the *curbing law*, which is the filchers and thieves that come into houses or shops, & lift away anything: or picklocks, or hookers at windows, though they be as species and branches to the table before rehearsed. But leaving them, again to our law of *legering*. Know therefore, that there be inhabiting in & about London, certain caterpillars (colliers I should say) that term themselves (among themselves) by the name of *legers* who for that the honourable the L. Mayor of the city of London, & his officers, look strictly to the measuring of coals, do (to prevent the execution of his justice,) plant themselves in & about the suburbs of London, as Shoreditch, Whitechapel, Southwark, & such places, and there they have a house or yard, that hath a back gate, because it is the more convenient for their cozening purpose, and the reason is this; the leger, the crafty collier I mean, riseth very early in the morning, and either goeth towards Croydon, Whetstone, Greenwich, or Romford, and there meeteth the country colliers, who bring coals to serve the market: there, in a forestalling manner, this leger bargainth with the country collier for his coals, and payeth for them nineteen shillings or twenty at the most, but commonly fifteen and sixteen, and there is in the load 36 sacks: so that they pay for every couple about fourteen pence. Now having bought his coals, every sack containing full four bushels, he carrieth the country collier home to his legering place, and there at the back gate causeth him to unload, and as they say, shoot the coals down. As soon as the country collier hath dispatched and is gone, then the leger who hath three or four hired men under him, bringeth forth his own sacks, which be long & narrow, holding at the most not three bushels, so that they gain in the change of every sack a bushel for their pains. Tush, yet this were somewhat to be borne withal, although the gain is monstrous, but this sufficeth not, for they fill not these sacks full by far, but put into them some two bushels & a half, laying in the mouth of the sack certain great coals, which they call fillers, to make the sack show fair, although the rest be small wilow coals, and half dross. When they have thus not filled their sacks, but thrust coals into them, that which they lay uppermost, is best filled, to make the greater show: then a tall sturdy knave, that is all ragged, and dirty on his legs, as though he came out of the country (for they dirty their hose and shoes on purpose to make themselves seem country colliers:) Thus with two sacks apiece they either go out at the back gate, or steal out at the street side, and so go up and down the suburbs, & sell their coals in summer for fourteen and sixteen-pence a couple, and in winter for eighteen or twenty. The poor cooks & other citizens that buy them, think they be country colliers, that have left some coals of their load, and would gladly have money, supposing (as the statute is) they be good and lawful sacks, are thus cozened by the legers, & have but two bushels and a half for four bushels, and yet are extremely racked in the price, which is not only a great hindrance to her Majesty's poor commons, but greatly prejudicial to the master colliers, that bring true sacks & measure out of the country. Then consider (gentle readers) what kind of cozenage these legers use, that make of thirty sacks some 56, which I have seen, for I have set down with my pen how many turns they have made of a load, and they make 28, every turn being two sacks, so that they have got an intolerable gains by their false measure. I could not be silent seeing this abuse, but thought to reveal it for my country's commodity, and to give light to the worshipful justices, and other her Majesty's officers in Middlesex, Surrey, and elsewhere, to look to such a gross cozenage, as contrary to a direct statute, doth defraud & impoverish her Majesty's poor commons. Well may the honourable and worshipful of London flourish, who carefully look to the country coals, & if they find not 4 bushels in every sack, do sell them to the poor as forfeit, & distribute the money to them that have need, burning the

sack, & honouring or rather dishonouring the pillory with the colliers' dirty faces: & well may the honourable & worshipful of the suburbs prosper, if they look in justice to these legers who deserve more punishment than the statute appoints for them, which is whipping at a cart's tail, or with favour the pillory.

#### **A Plain Discovery.**

For fuel or firing being a thing necessary in a commonwealth, and charcoal used more then any other, the poor not able to buy by the load, are fain to get in their fire by the sack, & so are greatly cozened by the retail. Seeing therefore the careful laws her Majesty hath appointed for the wealth of her commons, and succour of the poor, I would humbly entreat all her Majesty's officers, to look into the life of these legers, and to root them out, that the poor feel not the burden of their unconscionable gains. I heard with my ears a poor woman of Shoreditch who had bought coals of a leger, with weeping tears complain and rail against him in the street, in her rough eloquence calling him cozening knave, & saying, 'tis no marvel, villain (quoth she) if men compare you colliers to the devil, seeing your consciences are worsor then the devil's, for he takes none but those souls whom God hates: and you undo the poor whom God loves.

What is the matter good wife (quoth I) that you use such invective words against the collier: a collier sir, (saith she) he is a thief and a robber of the common people. I'll tell you sir, I bought of a country collier two sacks for thirteen-pence & I bought of this knave three sacks, which cost me 22 pence: and sir, when I measured both their sacks, I had more in the two sacks by three pecks, then I had in the three. I would (quoth she) the Justices would look into this abuse, and that my neighbours would join with me in a supplication, and by God I would kneel before the Queen, and entreat that such cozening colliers might not only be punished with the bare pillory, (for they have such black faces, that no man knows them again, and so are they careless) but that they might leave their ears behind them for a forfeit: & if that would not mend them, that Bull<22> with a fair halter might root them out of the world, that live in the world by such gross and dishonest cozenage. The collier hearing this, went smiling away, because he knew his life was not looked into, & the woman wept for anger that she had not some one by that might with justice revenge her quarrel. There be also certain colliers that bring coals to London in barges, and they be called *Gripers*, to these comes the leger, & bargains with him for his coals, & sells by retail with the like cozenage of sacks as I rehearsed before. But these mad legers (not content with this monstrous gain) do besides mix among their other sacks of coals, store of shruff dust and small coal, to their great advantage. And for proof hereof, I will recite you a matter of truth, lately performed by a cook's wife upon a cozening collier.

#### **How a Cook's wife in London did lately serve a Collier for his cozenage.**

IT chanced this summer that a load of coals came forth of Kent to Billingsgate, and a leger bought them, who thinking to deceive the citizens, as he did those in the suburbs, furnished himself with a couple of sacks, and comes up Saint Mary Hill to sell them: a cook's wife bargained with the collier and bought his coals, and they agreed upon fourteen pence for the couple: which being done, he carried the coals into the house, and shot them: and when the wife saw them, and perceiving there was scarce five bushels for eight, she calls a little girl to her, and bade her go for the Constable: for thou cozening rogue, quoth she, (speaking to the collier) I will teach thee how thou shalt cozen me with thy false sacks, whatsoever thou doest to others, and I will have thee before my Lord Mayor: with that she caught a spit in her hand, and swore if he offered to stir, she would therewith broach him; at which words the Collier was amazed, and the fear of the pillory put him in such a fright, that he said he would go to his boat, & return again to answer whatsoever she durst object against him, and for pledge hereof (quoth the collier) keep my sacks, your money, and the coals also. Whereupon the woman let him go,

but as soon as the collier was out of doors, it was needless to bid him run, for down he gets to his boat, & away he thrusts from Billingsgate, and so immediately went down to Wapping, and never after durst return to the cook's wife to demand either money, sacks or coals.

**How a Flax-wife and her neighbours used a cozening Collier.**

NOW gentlemen by your leave, and hear a mery jest: There was in the suburbes of London a flax-wife that wanted coals, and seeing a leger come by with a couple of sacks, that had before deceived her in like sort, cheapened, bargained & bought them, & so went in with her to shoot them in her coalhouse. As soon as she saw her coals she easily guessed there was scarce six bushels, yet dissembling the matter, she paid him for them, and bade him bring her two sacks more: the collier went his way, & in the meantime the flax-wife measured the coals, and there was just five bushels and a peck. Hereupon she called to her neighbours; being a company of women, that before time had also been pinched in their coals, and showed them the cozenage, & desired their aid to her in tormenting the collier, which they promised to perform, & thus it fell out. She conveyed them into a back room (some sixteen of them) every one having a good cudgel under her apron; straight comes the collier, and saith, Mistress, here be your coals: welcome good collier, quoth she, I pray thee follow me into the back side, & shoot them in an other room. The collier was content, and went with her. but as soon as he was in, the good wife locked the door, and the Collier seeing such a troupe of wives in the room, was amazed, yet said God speed you all shrews, welcome quoth one jolly dame, being appointed by them all to give sentence against him: who so soon as the collier had shot his sacks, said, Sirrah collier, know that we are here all assembled as a Grand Jury, to determine of thy villainies, for selling us false sacks of coals, & know that thou art here indited upon cozenage, therefore hold up thy hand at the bar, & either say, guilty, or not guilty, and by whom thou wilt be tried, for thou must receive condign punishment for the same ere thou depart. The collier who thought they had but jested, smiled & said Come on, which of you shall be my judge? Marry, quoth one jolly dame, that is I, and by God you knave, you shall find I will pronounce sentence against you severely, if you be found guilty. When the collier saw they were in earnest, he said, Come, come, open the door, and let me go: with that five or six started up, and fell upon the collier, and gave unto him half a score of sound lambacks with their cudgels, and bade him speak more reverently to their principal.

The collier feeling it smart, was afraid, & thought mirth & courtesy would be the best mean to make amends for his villainy, and therefore said he would be tried by the verdict of the smock. Upon this they panelled a jury, and the flax-wife gave evidence; and because this unaccustomed jury requir'd witness, she measured the coals before the collier's face, upon which he was found guilty, & she that sat as principal to give judgement upon him, began as followeth.

Collier, thou art condemned here by proof, of flat cozenage, and I am now appointed in conscience to give sentence against thee, being not only moved thereunto because of this poor woman, but also for the general commodity of my country, and therefore this is my sentence: we have no pillory for thee, nor cart to whip thee at, but here I do award that thou shall have as many bastinadoes as thy bones will bear, and then to be turned out of doors without sacks or money. This sentence being pronounced, she rose up, and gave no respite of time for the execution, but according to the sentence before expressed, all the women fell upon him, beating him extremely, among whom he lent some lusty buffets. But might overcomes right, and therefore *Ne Hercules contra duos.*<23> The women so crushed him, that he was not able to lift his hands to his head, and so with a broken pate or two, he was paid, & like Jack Drum<24>, fair and orderly thrust out of doors.

Robert Greene

This was the reward that the collier had, and I pray God all such colliers may be so served, and that good wives when they buy such sacks, may give them such payments, and that the honourable and worshipful of this land, may look into this gross abuse of colliers, as well for charity sake, as also for the benefit of the poor: and so wishing colliers to amend their deceitful and disordered dealings herein, I end.

FINIS

**THE SECOND PART OF CONY-CATCHING.**

Robert Greene

## Title Page

### The SECOND

#### Part of Conny-Catching

*Contayning the discovery of certaine wondrous  
Coosenages, either superficialle passed ouer, or*

*vtterly vntoucht in the first.*

As the nature of

(The black Art	(Picking of locks.
(The Vincent's Law	(Cozenage at Bowls.
(The Prigging Law	(Horse stealing.
(The Courbing Law	(Hooking at windows.
(The Lifting Law	(Stealing of parcels
(The Foist	(The pickpocket.
(The Nip	(The cut purse.

With sundrie pithy and pleasant Tales worthy the reading of all e-  
states, that are ennemies to such base and dishonest practises.

*Malle non esse quam non prodesse patriae.<25>*

R. G.

LONDON.

Printed by Iohn Wolfe for William Wright, and  
are to be sold at his shop in Pauls Church  
yard, near to the French schoole.

1591.

Frontispiece



A rabbit picking a lock

## The Epistle Dedicatory

TO ALL YOUNG GENTLEMEN, merchants, citizens, apprentices, yeomen,  
and plain country farmers, Health.

When Scaevola, gentlemen, saw his native city besieged by Porsena, and that Rome the mistress of the world was ready to be mastered by a professed foe to the public estate: he entered boldly into the enemy's camp, and in the tent of the king (taking him for the king) slew the king's secretary, whereupon condemned, brought to the fire, he thrust his right hand into the flame burning it off voluntary, because it was so unfortunate to miss the fatal stab he had intended to his country's enemies, and then with an honourable resolution, breathed out this, *Mallum non esse quam non prodesse patriae.*<25>. This instance of Scaevola greatly hath emboldened me to think no pains nor danger too great that groweth to the benefit of my country, & though I cannot as he manage with my cutlass, nor attempt to unleaguer Porsena: yet with my pen I will endeavour to display the nature and secrets of divers cozenages more prejudicial to England then the invasion of Porsena was to Rome. For when that valiant king saw the resolution of Scaevola: as one dismayed at the honour of his thoughts, he sorrowed so brave a man had so desperately lost his hand, and thereupon grew friends with the Romans. But gentlemen these cony-catchers, these vultures, these fatal harpies, that putrefy with their infections, this flourishing estate of England, as if they had their consciences sealed with a hot iron, & that as men delivered up into a reprobate sense, grace were utterly exiled from their hearts, so with the deaf adder they not only stop their ears against the voice of the charmer, but dissolutely without any spark of remorse stand upon their bravados, and openly in words & actions maintain their palpable and manifest cozenages, swearing by no less then their enemies' blood, even by God himself, that they will make a massacre of his bones, and cut off my right hand for penning down their abominable practices: but alas for them, poor snakes, words are wind, & looks but glances: every thunderclap hath not a bolt, nor every cony-catcher's oath an execution. I live still, & I live to display their villainies, which, gentlemen you shall see set down in most ample maner in this small treatise, but here by the way, give me leave to answer an objection, that some inferred against me, which was, that I showed no eloquent phrases, nor fine figurative conveyance in my first book as I had done in other of my works, to which I reply that το προπον [*to prepon*]<26>, a certain decorum is to be kept in every thing, and not to apply a high style in a base subject: beside the faculty is so odious, and the men so servile and slavish minded, that I should dishonour that high mystery of eloquence, and derogate from the dignity of our English tongue, either to employ any figure or bestow one choice English word upon such disdained rakehells as those cony-catchers. Therefore humbly I crave pardon, and desire I may write basely of such base wretches, who live only to live dishonestly. For they seek the spoil and ruin of all, and like drones eat away what others labour for. I have set down divers other laws untouched in the first, as their Vincent's law, a notable cozenage at bowls, when certain idle companions stand and make bets, being compacted with the bowlers, who look like honest minded citizens, either to win or lose, as their watch-word shall appoint, then the Prigger or Horse-stealer, with all his gins belonging to his trade, and their subtle cautels to amend the statute, next the curbing law, which some call but too basely hookers, who either dive in at windows, or else with a hook, which they call a courb, do fetch out whatsoever, either apparel, linen, or wollen, that be left abroad. Beside I can set down the subtlety of the black Art, which is picking of locks, a cozenage as prejudicial as any of the rest, and the nature of the lift, which is he that stealeth any parcels, and slyly taketh them away. This (gentlemen) have I searched out for your commodities, that I might lay open to the world, the villainy of these cozening caterpillars, who are not only abhorred of men, but hated of God, living idly to themselves, & odiously to the world, they be those foolish children that Solomon speaks of, that feeds

## The Complete Cony-catching

themselves fat with iniquity, those untamed heifers, that will not break the yoke of labour, but get their livings by the painful thrift of other men's hands. I cannot better compare them, than unto vipers, who while they live are hated & shunned of all men as most prejudicial creatures, they feed upon hemlock and aconiton, and such fatal & empoisoned herbs, but the learned apothecaries takes them, cuts off their heads, and after they be embowelled of their flesh, they make the most precious mithridate: so these cony-catchers, foists, nips, priggers, & lifts, while they live are most unprofitable members of the commonwealth: they glut themselves as vipers upon the most loathsome, and detestable sins, seeking after folly with greediness, never doing anything that is good, till they be trussed up at Tyburn: and then is a most wholesome mithridate made of them, for by their deaths others are forewarned for falling into the like enormities. And as the gangrene is a disease incurable by the censure of the surgeons, unless the member where it is first be cut off: so this untoward generation of loose libertines, can by no wholesome counsels, nor advised persuasions be dissuaded from their loathsome kind of life, till by death they be fatally, and finally cut off from the commonwealth, whereof spake Ovid well in his Metamorphosis.

*Immedicabile vulnus,*

*Ense resecandum est ne pars sincera trahitur.<27>*

Sith then this cursed crew, these Machavellians, that neither care for God nor devil, but set with the Epicures, gain and ease their *summum bonum*<28> cannot be called to any honest course of living: if the honourable and worshipful of this land look into their lives, and cut off such upstarting suckers that consume the sap from the root of the tree: they shall neither lose their reward in heaven, nor pass over any day wherein there will not be many faithful prayers of the poor, exhibited for their prosperous success and welfare: so deeply are these monstrous cozeners hated in the commonwealth. Thus gentlemen I have discovered in brief, what I mean to prosecute at large: though not eloquently, yet so effectually, that if you be not altogether careless, it may redound to your commodity: forewarned, forearmed: burnt children dread the fire, and such as neither counsel, nor other men's harms may make to beware, are worthy to live long, and still by the loss. But hoping these secrets I have set abroad, and my labours I have taken in searching out those base villainies, shall not be only taken with thanks, but applied with care: I take my leave with this farewell. God either confound, or convert such base minded cozeners.

Yours R. G.

## The Discovery of the Prigging Law or Nature of Horse Stealing.



Illustration – The Horse Thief

TO the effecting of this base villainy of Prigging or horse stealing, there must of necessity be two at the least, and that is the Prigger and the Marter. The prigger is he that steals the horse, and the marter is he that receives him, and chops and changeth him away in any fair, mart, or other place where any good vent for horses is: and their method is thus.

The prigger if he be a lanceman, that is, one that is already horsed, then he hath more followers with him, and they ride like gentlemen, and commonly in the form of drovers, & so coming into pasture grounds or enclosures, as if they meant to survey for cattle, do take an especial and perfect view where prankers or horses be, that are of worth, and whether they be trammelled or no, that is whether they have horse-locks or no, then lie they hovering about till fit opportunity serve, and in the night they take him or them away, and are skilful in the black art, for picking open the trammels or locks, and so make haste till they be out of those quarters. Now if the priggers steal a horse in Yorkshire, commonly they have vent for him in Surrey, Kent, or Sussex, and their marters that receive them at his hand, chops them away in some blind fairs after they have kept them a month or two, till the hue and cry be ceased and passed over. Now if their horse be of any great valure and sore sought after, and so branded or ear marked, that they can hardly sell him without extreme danger, either they brand him with a cross brand upon the former, or take away his ear mark, and so keep him at hard meat<29> till he be whole, or else sell him in Cornwall or Wales, if he be in Cumberland, Lincolnshire, Norfolk or Suffolk, but this is if the horse be of great valour and worthy the keeping: Marry if he be only coloured and without brands, they will straight spot him by sundry policies, and in a black horse, mark saddle spots, or star him in the forehead and change his tail, which secrets I omit least I should give too great a light to other to practice such lewd villainies. But again to our lance-men priggers, who as before I said, cry with the lapwing farthest from their nest and from their place of residence, where their most abode is, furthest from thence they steal their

horses, and then in another quarter as far off they make sale of them by the marter's means, without it be some base prigger that steals of mere necessity, and beside is a Trailer. The trailer is one that goeth on foot, but meanly attired like some plain gran of the country, walking in a pair of boots without spurs, or else without boots, having a long staff on his neck, and a black buckram bag at his back, like some poor client that had some writing in it, and there he hath his saddle, bridle and spurs, stirrups and stirrup leathers, so quaintly and artificially made that it may be put in the slop of a man's hose<30>, for his saddle is made without any tree, yet hath both cantle & bolsters, only wrought artificially of cloth and bombast, with folds to wrap up in a short room, his stirrups are made with devices and gins that one may put them in a pair of gloves, and so are his spurs, and then a little white leather headstall and reins with a small Scottish brake or snaffle, all so featly formed, that as I said before they may be put in a buckram bag. Now this trailer he bestrides the horse which he priggeth, and saddles and bridles him as orderly as if he were his own, and then carries him far from the place of his breed, and there sells him. Oh will some man say, it is easier to steal a horse then to sell him, considering that her Majesty and the honourable Privy Council, hath in the last Act of Parliament made a strict statute for horse stealing, and the sale of horses, whose proviso is this: That no man may buy a horse untolled, nor the toll be taken without lawful witnesses, that the party that selleth the horse is the true owner of him, upon their oath and special knowledge, and that who buyeth a horse without this certificate or proof, shall be within the natue of Felony, as well as the party that stealeth him.<31> To this I answer that there is no Act, Statute, nor Law so strict conveyed, but there be straight found starting-holes to avoid it, as in this. The prigger when he hath stolen a horse and hath agreed with his marter, or with any other his confederate, or with any honest person to sell the horse, bringeth to the toller, which they call the rifler, two honest men either apparelled like citizens, or plain country yeomen, and they not only affirm, but offer to depose, that they know the horse to be his, upon their proper knowledge, although perhaps they never saw man nor horse before, and these perjured knaves be commonly old knights of the post,<32> that are foisted off from being taken for bail at the kings bench, or other places, and seeing for open perjuries they are refused, there they take that course of life, and are wrongly called equerries, but it were necessary and very much expedient for the commonwealth, that such base rogues should be looked into, and be punished as well with the pillory, as the other with the halter. And thus have I revealed the nature of priggers, or horse-stealers briefly, which if it may profit, I have my desire, but that I may recreate your minds with a pleasant history, mark the sequel.

*A pleasant story of a horse-stealer.*

NOT far off from Truro in Cornwall, a certain prigger, a horse-stealer, being a lance-man, surveying the pastures thereabouts, spied a fair black horse without any white spot at all about him, the horse was so fair and lusty, well proportioned, of a high crest, of a lusty countenance, well buttocked, and strongly trussed, which set the prigger's teeth a-water to have him: well he knew the hardest hap was but a halter, and therefore he ventured fair, and stole away the prancer: and seeing his stomach was so good as his limbs, he kept him well, and by his policy seared him in the forehead, and made him spotted in the back, as if he had been saddle-bitten, and gave him a mark in both ears, whereas he had but a mark in one. Dealing thus with his horse, after a quarter of a year, that all hurly-burly was passed for the horse, he came riding to Truro to the market, and there offered him to be sold, the gentleman that lost the horse, was there present, and looking on him with other gentlemen, liked him passing well, and commended him: insomuch that he beat the price of him, bargained, & bought him: and so when he was tolled, and that the horse-stealer clapped him good luck: Well my friend, quoth the gentleman, I promise thee I like the horse the better, in that once I lost one as like him as might be, but that mine wanted these saddle spots, and this starre in the forehead. It may be so sir, said the prigger, and so the gentleman and he parted: the next day after, he caused a letter

to be made, and sent the gentleman word that he had his horse again that he lost, only he had given him a mark or two, and for that he was well rewarded, having twenty mark for his labour. The gentleman hearing how he was cozened by a horse-stealer, and not only robbed, but mocked, let it pass till he might conveniently meet with him to revenge it. It fortun'd not long after, that this lanceman prigger was brought to Truro gaol for some such matter, and indeed it was about a mare that he had stolen: but as knaves have friends, especially when they are well moneyed, he found divers that spake for him, and who said it was the first fault: and the party plaintiff gave but slender evidence against him, so that the judge spake favourably in his behalf: the gentleman as then sat in the bench, and calling to mind the prigger's countenance, how he had stolen his horse and mocked him, remembered he had the letter in his pocket that he sent him, and therefore rising up, spake in his behalf, and highly commended the man, and desired the judges for one fault he might not be cast away, and besides, may it please you (quoth he) I had this morning a certificate of his honesty and good behaviour sent me, and with that he delivered them the letter, and the judge and the rest of the bench smiled at this conceit, and asked the fellow if he never stole a horse from that gentleman: no quoth the prigger, I knew him not: your honours mistake me, said the gentleman, he did but borrow a black horse of me, and marked him with a star in the forehead, and asked twenty mark of me for his labour, and so discoursed the whole matter: whereupon the quest went upon him, and condemned him: and so the prigger went to heaven in a string, as many of his faculty had done before.

## The Vincents Law, with the Discovery therof.

THE Vincents Law is a common deceit or cozenage used in bowling-alleys amongst the baser sort of people, that commonly haunt such lewd and unlawful places: for although I will not discommend altogether the nature of bowling, if the time, place, persons, and such necessary circumstances be observed: yet as it is now used, practised & suffered, it groweth altogether to the maintenance of unthrifths that idly and disorderly make that recreation a cozenage. Now the manner and form of their device is thus effected: the Baulkers, for so are the common haunters of the alley termed, apparelled like very honest and substantial citizens come to bowl, as though rather they did it for sport than gains, & under that colour of carelessness, do shadow their pretended knavery: well to bowls they go, and then there resort of all sorts of people to behold them, some simple men brought in of purpose by some cozening companions to be stripped of their crowns, others, gentlemen or merchants, that delighted with the sport, stand there as beholders to pass away the time: amongst these are certain old soakers, which are lookers on, and listen for bets either even or odd, and these are called Gripes: and these fellows will refuse no lay if the odds may grow to their advantage, for the gripes and the baulkers are confederate, and their fortune at play ever sorts according as the gripes have placed their bets, for the baulker he marketh how the lays goes, and so throws his casting: so that note this, the bowlers cast ever booty, and doth win or lose as the bet of the gripe doth lead them, for suppose seven be up for the game, and the one hath three and the other none, then the Vincent, for that is the simple man that stands by & is not acquainted with their cozenage, nor doth so much as once imagine that the baulkers that carry such a countenance of honest substantial men, would by any means, or for any gains be persuaded to play booty. Well this vincent, for so the cozeners or gripes please to term him, seeing three to none, beginneth to offer odds on that side that is fairest to win: what odds, says the gripe? three to one, says the vincent, no says the gripe it is more, and with that they come to four for none, then the vincent offers to lay four to one, I take six to one says the gripe, I lay it says the vincent, and so they make a bet of some six crowns, shillings, or pence as the vincent is of ability to lay, & thus will sundry take their odds of him: well then, the baulkers go forward with their bowls, and win another cast which is five, then the vincent grows proud, & thinks both by the odds and goodness of the play, that it is impossible for his side to lose, and therefore takes and lays bets freely, then the baulkers' fortune begin to change, and perhaps they come to three for five, and still as their luck changes, diversity of bets grows on, till at last it comes to five and five, and then the Gripe comes upon the vincent and offers him odds, which if the vincent take he looseth all, for upon what side the Gripe lays, that side ever wins how great soever the odds be at the first in the contrary part, so that the cozenage grows in playing booty, for the gripe and the baulker meet at night, & there they share whatsoever termage they have gotten, for so they call the money that the poor vincent loseth unto them: Now to shadow the matter the more, the baulker that wins and is afore-hand with the game will lay frankly that he shall win, and will bet hard and lay great odds, but with whom, either with them which play with him that are as crafty knaves as himself, or else with the gripe, and this makes the poor vincent stoop to the blow, and to lose all the money in his purse: Besides, if any honest men that holds themselves skilful in bowling, offer to play any set match against these common baulkers, if they fear to have the worse or suspect the other's play to be better then theirs, then they have a trick in watering of the alley to give such a moisture to the bank, that he that offers to strike a bowl with a shore, shall never hit it whilst he lives, because the moisture of the bank hinders the proportion of his aiming. Divers other practices there are in bowling tending unto cozenage, but the greatest is booty, and therefore would I wish all men that are careful of their coin, to beware of such cozeners, and not to come in such places, where a haunt of such hell-rakers are resident, & not in any wise to stoop to their bets, least he be made a vincent, for so manifest

and palpable is their cozenage, that I have seen men stone-blind offer to lay bets frankly, although they can see a bowl come no more then a post, but only hearing who plays, and how the old gripes make their lays: seeing then as the game is abused to a deceit, that is made for an honest recreation, let this litle be a caveat for men to have an insight into their knavery.

**A Table of the Laws contained in this second part.**

- 1 Black Art. Picking of locks.
- 2 Courbing Law. Hooking at windows.
- 3 Vincents Law. Cozenage at Bowls.
- 4 Prigging Law. Horse stealing.
- 5 Lifting Law. Stealing of any parcels.

**The discovery of the words of Art used in these Laws.**

In black Art.

- The Picklock, is called a Charm.
- He that watcheth, a Stond.
- Their engines, Wresters.
- Picking the lock, Farsing.
- The gains gotten, Pelfrey.

In courbing Law.

- He that hooks, the Courber.
- He that watcheth, the Warp.
- The hook, the Courb.
- The goods, Snappings .
- The gin to open the window, the Tricker.

In lifting Law.

- He that first stealeth, the Lift.
- He that receives it, the Marker.
- He that standeth without and carries it away, the Santer.
- The goods gotten, Garbage.

In Vincent's Law.

- They which play booty, the Bankers.
- He that betteth, the Gripe.
- He that is cozened, the Vincent.
- Gains gotten, Termage.

In Prigging Law.

- The horse stealer, the Prigger.
- The horse, the Prancer.
- The tolling place, All-hallows.

- The toller, the Rifler.
- The sureties, Querris.

For the Foist and the Nip, as in the first Book.

## The Second Part of Cony-Catching.

THE professors of this law, being somewhat dashed, and their trade greatly impoverished by the late editions of their secret villainies, seek not a new means of life, but a new method how to fetch in their conies and to play their pranks: for as grievous is it for them to let slip a country farmer come to the term that is well apparelled, and in a dirty pair of boots (for that is a token of his new coming up, and a full purse) as it was for the boys of Athens to let Diogenes pass by without a hiss. But the countrymen having had partly a caveat for their cozenage, fear their favourable speeches and their courteous salutations, as deadly as the Greeks did the whistle of Polyphemus<12>. The cony-catcher now no sooner cometh in company, and calleth for a pair of cards, but straight the poor cony smokes him, and says: masters, I bought a book of late for a groat that warns me of card-play, least I fall amongst cony-catchers: What, doest thou take us for such, says the verser? no gentlemen says the cony, you may be men of honest disposition, but yet pardon me, I have forsworn cards ever since I read it: at this reply God wot, I have many a cozening curse at these cony-catchers' hands, but I solemnly stick to the old proverb: the fox the more he is cursed, the better he fares: but yet I will discover some of their newest devices, for these caterpillars resemble the nature of the Syrens, who sitting with their watching eyes upon the rocks to allure sea-passengers to their extreme prejudice, sound out most heavenly melody in such pleasing chords, that who so listens to their harmony, lends his ear unto his own bane and ruin: but if any wary Ulysses pass by and stop his ears against their enchauntments, then have they most delightful jewels to show him, as glorious objects to inveigle his eye with such pleasant vanities, that coming more nigh to behold them, they may dash their ship against a rock and so utterly perish. So these cony-catchers, for that I smoked them in my last book, and laid open their plots and policies, where with they drew poor conies into their lay, seeking with the orators *benevolentiam captare*<33>, and as they use rhetorical tropes and figures, the better to draw their hearers with the delight of variety: so these moths of the commonwealth, apply their wits to wrap in wealthy farmers with strange and uncouth conceits. Tush, it was so easy for the setter to take up a cony before I discovered the cozenage that one stigmatical shameless companion amongst the rest, would in a bravery wear parsley in his hat, and said he wanted but *aqua vitae* to take a cony with but since he hath looked on his feet, and veiled his plumes with the Peacock, and swears by all the shoes in his shop, I shall be the next man he means to kill, for spoiling of his occupation: but I laugh at his bravadoes, and though he speaks with his eunuch's voice, and wears a long sword like a morris-pike, were it not I think he would with Bathyllus<34> hang himself at my invective, his name should be set down with the nature of his follies: but let him call himself home from this course of life and this cozenage, and I shall be content to shadow what he is with pardon, but from this degression again to the double diligence of these cony-catchers, whose new sleights, because you shall the more easily perceive, I will tell you a story pleasant and worth the noting.

### A pleasant tale of the cony-chatchers.

Not long since, certain Exeter merchants came up to London to traffic such wares as their city commodities affords, & one of them whose name I conceal, called Master F., having leisure at will, walked about the city to visit his friends, and by chance met with two or three cony-catchers: amongst whom was one of his old and familiar acquaintance. This gentleman at that time taking the setter's office upon him seeing such a fat cony so fit for his purpose began to pitch his lay with this courteous and clawing gratulation. What, Master F., (quoth he) welcome to London, and well are you met; I see time may draw friends together, little did I think to have seen you here, but sith oportunitie hath granted me such a favour to meet with such an unlooked-for man, we'll at the next tavern drink a pint of wine together, to your welcome, and the health of our friends. The merchant hearing the gentleman ply him with such

plausible entertainment, stooped as a poor cony, and granted to take his courtesy, and with them went the verser, a lusty fellow, well apparelled, and as smooth tongued as if every word came out of an orator's inkhorn: this jolly squire that played the verser, when he came at the tavern door, would needs drop away, and offered to be gone: but the setter said to him, nay I pray you sir stay, and drink with this friend of mine, for I have not a more familiar acquaintance in Exeter: The merchant simply also entreated him, and with few words he was satisfied, and as three of them went in together, and asked for a room, the boy showed them up into a chamber, and as soon as they came to, the verser, having a pair of cards in his pocket, for they thought it too suspicious to call for a pair, stepped to the window, and clapped his hand on the ledge, and laughed, gog's wounds (quoth he) a man can neither come into tavern, nor Alehouse, but he shall find a pair of cards in the window: Here hath been some praying, and have left their books behind them. Boy (quoth he) throw me a couple of faggots on the fire, and set a pottle of sack too, and burn it, and sir he says to the setter, thou and I will play at cards who shall pay for it. Content says the setter, so you will play at a game that I can play at, which is called mum-chance. I know it well, says the verser: have with you for a pottle of burnt sack, and so to it they go, as before in my first part I describe it unto you: the poor merchant the simple honest cony, calling the card: well the verser lost, and at last they reveal the policy to the cony, who wondered at the strange device, and solemnly swore it was impossible for him either to lose, or the other to win: As thus they sat drinking the setter showed him divers tricks at Cards, to pass away the time, because their barnacle stayed over long, who at last, attired like a serving-man, came and thrust open the door, and said, masters by your leave, I look for a greyhound that hath broken my slip, & is run into this house. In faith friend, quoth the setter, here is none, nor did we see any: Then by your leave gentlemen (quoth he) and sit you merry, I had rather have given forty shillings then have lost the dog: Nay stay sir (quoth the verser) and drink a cup of sack with us: at that the Barnacle came in, and courteously took it of them, and made sore lament for his dog, saying, he durst scarce look his master in the face: but I hope (quoth he) he is run to the farmer's house, where he was brought up, and therefore I'll seek him nowhere to day, with that he called for a pint of wine, to requite their courtesies withal, and the verser answered that they would take none of him as a gift, but if he would play for a pint or a quart he should be welcome into their company: at this he sat down, and said he would, then they induced him to play at mum-chance, and the cony called the card, so the barnacle lost all, who being in a great chafe, cursed his luck, and the cards, and offered to play three games, xii. pence: the setter took him up, and secretly asked the cony if he would be his half, or play with him himself. In faith, says the merchant, I dare play with him, as long as five shillings last, and so much I will venture: with that the barnacle drew out a purse with some three or four pence in it, and to this game they go, with vie and revie<6> till the barnacle had lost all his money, then he blasphemed the name of God mightily, and laid his sword and his cloak to pawn to the good man of the house, and borrowed money of it, to the value of some xx. shillings . The cony smiled at this for he counted all his own, & winked upon the verser, and the setter, again they go to it, and they make five games for ten shillings, and every card to be vied at the losers pleasure, the cony won three of them, and the barnacle never a one: then he exclaimed against fortune, and swore he would make short work, and of a ring he borrowed thirty shillings more, and vied hard: well that game he won, and got some twenty shillings of the cony, who thought it was but a chance, that could not hit in seven years again, and the next game they vied, and layed some five pound by on the belt, so that the vie and call, came to some seven pound, then the barnacle stroke in his chopped card, and wipe the cony's mouth clean for troubling his purse, with any of those crowns, yea he so handled the poor merchant, that of nine pound he had in his purse, these three base cony-catchers left him never a penny, although he was sore nipped on the head, with this hard fortune, yet he brooked it with patience, and litle suspected that his countryman the setter had sifted him out of his money, and therefore drunk to him

## The Complete Cony-catching

friendly, and took his leave without smoking them at all, and went quiet though discontent to his lodging. The cony-catchers they shared the purchase, and went singing home as winners do that have leave and leisure to laugh at the spoil of such wealthy and honest merchants.

Not long after this, the cony chanced to come to my chamber to visit me for old acquaintance, where he found a book of cony-catching new come out of the press which when he had smiled at, for the strangeness of the title: at last he began to read it, and there saw how simply he was made a cony, and stripped of his crowns: with that he fetched a great sigh, and said: sir, if I had seen this book but two days since, it had saved me nine pound in my purse, and then he rehearsed the whole discourse, how kindly he was made a cony. Thus you may see that these base cony-catchers spare not their own acquaintance nor familiar friends: but like vultures seek to prey upon them, and like the harpy, infects that house wherein they harbour: so odious is their base and detestable kind of cozenage, that the very nips, the cutpurses I mean, desire to smoke them, and have them in as great contempt, as they themselves are despised of others: holding the cony-catcher for their inferior: for, say the nips, I disdain to use my occupation against any friend, or so draw a purse from him that I am familiarly acquainted with: whereas the cony-catcher preyeth most upon his countrymen and friends, and at the first hand comes with a smiling face to embrace that man, whom presently he means to spoil and cozen. Again, the nip useth his knife, and if he see a bung lie fair, strikes the stroke, and ventures his neck for it if he be taken, which is a certain point (say they) of resolution, though in the basest degree: but the cony-catcher, like a coward keeps himself within compass of law, as the picture of a faint-hearted cozener: like a fawning cur wags his tail upon him he means most deadly to bite. Then let this be a caveat for all men, and all degrees to take heed of such prejudicial peasants: who like worms in a nut eat the kernel, wherein they are bred, and are so venomous minded, that like the viper they disparage whomsoever they light on: I know I shall have many braves uttered against me for this invective: but so I may profit my countrymen I will hazard myself against their deepest villainies: and therefore sleeping never a whit the worse for their bravado, I commit such enemies of the flourishing estate of England, to the consideration of the justices who I hope will look into the loose life of bad, base, and dishonest caterpillars.

**A pleasant Tale of a Horse, how at Uxbridge, he cozened a Cony-catcher, and had like to brought him to his Neckverse<35>.**



IT fortuned that not long since certain cony-catchers met by hap a pranker or horse-stealer at Uxbridge, who took up his inn where those honest crews lodged, & as one vice follows another, was as ready to have a cast at cards as he had a hazard at a horse, the cony-catchers who supped with him, feeling him pliant to receive the blow, began to lay the plot how they might make him stoop all the money in his purse, & so for a pint of wine drew him in at cards, by degrees as these rakehells do, *Lento gradu*,<sup><36></sup> measure all things by minutes: he fell from wine to money, and from pence to pounds, that he was stripped of all that ever he had, as well crowns, apparell, as jewels, that at last to maintain the main and to check vies with revies he laid his horse in the hazard and lost him, when the prigger had smoked the game, and perceived he was bitten of all the bite in his bung, and turned to walk penniless in Mark lane, as the old proverb is, he began to chafe, and to swear, and to rap out goggs Nownes, and his pronouns, while at voluntary he had sworn through the eight parts of speech in the Accidence,<sup><37></sup> avowing they had cozened him both of his money and horse. Whereupon the gross ass more hardy then wise, understanding the cony-catchers were gone, went to the Constable and made hue & cry after them, saying: They had robbed him of his horse, at this the headboroughs followed amain, and by chance met with another hue and cry that came for him that had stolen, which hue and cry was served upon the horse stealer, and at that time as far as I can either conjecture or calculate, the cony-catchers were taken suspicious for the same horse, and the rather for that they were found loose livers & could yield no honest method or means of their maintenance, upon this for the horse they were apprehended, & bound over to the Sessions at Westminster, to answer what might be objected against them in her Majesty's behalf. Well the horse stealer broke from his keepers and got away, but the rest of the rascal crew; the cony-catchers I mean, were brought to the place of judgement, and there like valiant

## The Complete Cony-catching

youths they thrust twelve men into a corner, who found them guiltless for the fact, but if great favour had not been shown they had been condemned & burnt in the ears for rogues.

Thus the horse stealer made hue & cry after the cony-catchers, and the man that had lost the horse he pursued the horse stealer, so that a double hue and cry passed on both sides, but the cony-catchers had the worse, for what they got in the bridle they lost in the saddle, what they cozened at cards had like to cost them their necks at the Sessions, so that when they were free and acquitted, one of the cony-catchers in a merry vein, said, he had caught many conies, but now a horse had like to caught him, and so deeply quoth he, that *Miserere mei*<35> had like to have been my best matins. Thus we may see *Fallere fallentem non est fraus*,<21> every deceit hath his due, he that maketh a trap falleth into the snare himself, and such as covet to cozen all, are crossed themselves often times almost to the cross, and that is the next neighbour to the gallows. Well gentlemen thus I have bewrayed much and gotten little thanks, I mean of the dishonest sort, but I hope such as measure virtue by her honours, will judge of me as I deserve. Marry the good men cony-catchers, those base excrements of dishonesty, they in their huffs report they have got one (---) I will not bewray his name, but a scholar they say he is, to make an invective against me, in that he is a favourer of those base reprobates, but let them, him, and all know, the proudest peasant of them all, dare not lift his plumes in disparagement of my credit, for if he do, I will for revenge only appoint the jakes farmers<38> of London, who shall cage them in their filthy vessels, and carry them as dung to manure the barren places of Tyburn, and so for cony-catchers an end.

**A discourse, or rather discovery of the Nip and the Foist, laying open the nature of the Cutpurse and Pick-pocket.**



Illustration: A Cony with a Razor

Now gentlemen, merchants, farmers, and termers, yea whosoever he be, that useth to carry money about him, let him attentively hear what a piece of new found philosophy, I will lay open to you whose opinions, principles, aphorisms, if you carefully note and retain in memory, perhaps save some crowns in your purse ere the year pass, and therefore thus: The Nip & the Foist, although their subject is one which they work on, that is, a well lined purse, yet their manner is different, for the nip useth his knife, and the foist his hand: the one cutting the purse, the other drawing the pocket: but of these two scurvy trades, the foist holdeth himself of the highest degree, and therefore, they term themselves gentlemen foists, and so much disdain to be called cutpurses, as the honest man that lives by his hand or occupation, in so much that the foist refuseth even to wear a knife about him to cut his meat withal, lest he might be suspected to grow into the nature of the nip, yet as I said before is their subject and haunt both alike, for their gains lies by all places of resort and assemblies, therefore their chief walks is Paul's, Westminster, the Exchange, plays, bear garden, running at tilt, the Lord Mayor's day, any festival meetings, frays, shootings, or great fairs: to be short, wheresoever there is any extraordinary resort of people, there the nip and the foist have fittest opportunity to show their juggling agility. Commonly, when they spy a farmer or merchant, whom they suspect to be well moneyed, they follow him hard until they see him draw his purse, then spying in what place he puts it up, the stall or the shadows being with the foist or nip, meets the man at some straight turn & jostles him so hard, that the man marvelling, and perhaps quarrelling with him, the whiles the foist hath his purse and bids him farewell. In Paul's (especially in the term time) between ten and eleven, then is their hours, and there they walk, and perhaps, if there be great press, strike a stroke in the middle walk, but that is upon some plain man that stands gazing about, having never seen the Church before; but their chiefest time is at divine service, when men devoutly given do go up to hear either a sermon, or else the harmony of the choir and the organs: there the nip and the foist as devoutly as if he were some zealous parson, standeth

## The Complete Cony-catching

soberly with his eyes elevated unto heaven when his hand is either on the purse or in the pocket, surveying every corner of it for coin, then when the service is done and the people press away, he thrusteth amidst the throng, and there worketh his villainy. So likewise in the markets, they note how every one putteth up his purse, and there either in a great press, or while the party is cheapening of meat, the foist is in their pocket and the nip hath the purse by the strings, or some times cuts out the bottom, for they have still their stalls following them, who thrusteth and jostleth him or her whom the foist is about to draw. So likewise at plays, the nip standeth there leaning like some mannerly gentleman against the door as men go in, and there finding talk with some of his companions, spieth what every man hath in his purse, and where, in what place, and in which sleeve or pocket he puts the bung, and according to that so he worketh either where the thrust is great within, or else as they come out at the doors: but suppose that the first is smoked, and the man misseth his purse, & apprehendeth him for it then straight he either conveyeth it to his stall, or else droppeth the bung, and with a great brave he defieth his accuser: and though the purse be found at his foot, yet because he hath it not about him, he comes not within compass of life. Thus have they their shifts for the law, and yet at last, so long the pitcher goeth to the brook that it cometh broken home, and so long the foists put their villainy in practice, that westward they go, and there solemnly make a rehearsal sermon at Tyburn.

But again, to their places of resort, Westminster, aye marry, that is their chiefest place that brings in their profit, the term-time is their harvest: and therefore, like provident husbandmen they take time while time serves, and make hay while the sun shines, following their clients, for they are at the hall very early and there they work like bees, haunting every Court, as the Exchequer chamber, the Star chamber, the Kings-bench, the Common-pleas, and every place where the poor client standeth to hear his lawyer handle his matter, for alas the poor country gentleman or farmer is so busied with his causes, and hath his mind so full of cares to see his counsel and to ply his attorney, that the least thing in his thought is his purse: but the eagle-eyed foist or nip he watcheth, and seeng the client draw his purse to pay some charges or fees necessary for the court, marketh where he putteth it, and then when he thrusteth into the throng, either to answer for himself, or to stand by his counsellor to put him in mind of his cause, the foist draws his pocket and leaves the poor client penniless. This do they in all courts, and go disguised like servingmen, wringing the simple people by this juggling subtlety; well might therefore the honourable & worshipful of those courts do to take order from such vile and base minded cutpurses, that as the law hath provided death for them if they be taken, so they might be rooted out especially from Westminster where the poor clients are undone by such roguish catchers. It boots not to tell their course at every remove of her Majesty when the people flock together, nor at Bartholomew fair, on the Queen's day, at the tilt-yard and at all other places of assembly: for let this suffice, at any great press of people or meeting, there the foist and the nip is in his kingdom: Therefore let all men take this caveat, that when they walk abroad amid any of the forenamed places or like assemblies, that they take great care for their purse how they place it, and not leave it careless in their pockets or hose, for the foist is so nimble handed that he exceeds the juggler for agility, and hath his legerdemain as perfectly: therefore an exquisite foist must have three properties that a good surgeon should have, and that is an eagle's eye, a lady's hand, and a lion's heart, an eagle's eye to spy a purchase, to have a quick insight where the bung lies, and then a lion's heart not to fear what the end will be, and then a lady's hand to be little and nimble, the better to dive into the pocket. These are the perfect properties of a foist: but you must note that there be diversities of this kind of people, for there be city nips & country nips, which haunt from fair to fair, and never come in London, unless it be at Bartholomew fair, or some other great and extraordinary assemblies. Now there is a mortal hate between the country foist and the city foist, for if the city foist spy one of the conies in London, straight he seeks by some means to smoke him, and so the country nip if he spy a

city nip in any fair, then he smokes him straight, and brings him in danger, if he flee not away the more speedily. Beside there be women foists and women nips, but the woman foist is most dangerous, for commonly there is some old hand, or mouthfair strumpet, who inveigleth either some ignorant man or some young youth to folly, she hath straight her hand in his pocket, and so foists him of all that he hath: but let all men take heed of such common harlots, who either sit in the streets in evenings, or else dwell in bawdy houses and are pliant to every man's lure, such are always foists and pickpockets, and seek the spoil of all such as meddle with them, and in cozening of such base minded lechers as give themselves to such lewd company, are worthy of whatsoever befalls, and sometime they catch such a Spanish pip, that they have no more hair on their head then on their nails.

But leaving such strumpets to their souls' confusion and bodies' correction in Bride-well: again, to our nips and foists, who have a kind of fraternity or brotherhood among them, having a hall or place of meeting, where they confer of weighty matters, touching their workmanship, for they are provident in that, every one of them hath some trusty friend whom he calleth his treasurer, and with him he lays up some rateable portion, of every purse he draws, that when need requires, and he is brought in danger, he may have money to make composition with the party: But of late, there hath been a great scourge fallen amongst them, for now if a purse be drawn of any great value, straight the party maketh friends to some one or other of the Counsel or other inferior her Majesty's Justices, and then they send out warrants if they cannot learn who the foist is, to the keepers of Newgate that they take up all the nips and foists about the city, and let them lie there while the money be reanswered unto the party, so that some pay three pound, nay five pound at a time according as the same loss did amount unto, which doth greatly impoverish their trade, and hinder their figging law. Therefore about such causes grows their meeting, for they have a kind of corporation, as having wardens of their company, and a hall: I remember their hall was once about Bishopsgate, near unto Fisher's Folly, but because it was a noted place, they have removed it to Kent-street, and as far as I can learn, it is kept at one Laurence Pickering's house, one that hath been if he be not still a notable foist. A man of good calling he is, and well allied brother in law to Bull the hangman<22>, there keep they their feasts and weekly meetings, fit for their company. Thus have I partly set down the nature of the foist, and the nip, with their special haunts, as a caveat to all estates to beware of such wicked persons, who are as prejudicial to the Commonwealth as any other faculty whatsoever; and although they be by the great discretion of the Judges and Justices daily trussed up, yet still there springeth up young that grow in time to bear fruit fit for the gallows: let then every man be as careful as possibly he may, and by this caveat take heed of his purse, for the prey makes the thief, and there an end.

#### **A merry tale how a Miller had his purse cut in Newgate market.**

IT fortun'd that a nip and his stall drinking at the Three Tuns in Newgate market, sitting in one of the rooms next to the street, they might perceive where a meal-man stood selling of meal, and had a large bag by his side, where by conjecture there was some store of money, the old Coole, the old cutpurse I mean, spying this, was delighted with the show of so glorious an object, for a full purse is as pleasing to a cutpurse's eye, as the curious physiognomy of Venus was to the amorous God of war, and entering to a merry vein as one that counted that purchase his own, discovered it to the novice and bade him go & nip it, the young toward scholar although perhaps he had striken some few strokes before, yet seeing no great press of people, and the meal-man's hand often upon his bag, as if he had in times past smoked some of their faculty, was half afraid and doubted of his own experience and so refused to do it. Away villain, saith the old nip, art thou faint hearted, belongs it to our trade to despair? If thou wilt only do common work, and not make experience of some hard matters to attempt, thou wilt never be master of thine occupation, therefore try thy wits and do it, at this the young stripling stalks me

## The Complete Cony-catching

out of the Tavern, and feeling if his cuttle-bung were glib and of a good edge, went to this meal-man to enter combat hand to hand with his purse, but seeing the meal-man's eye was still abroad, and for want of other sport that he played with his purse, he was afraid to trust either to his wit or fortune, and therefore went back again without any act achieved. How now, saith the old nip, what hast thou done, nothing, quoth he, the knave is so wary, that it is impossible to get any purchase there, for he stands playing with his purse for want of other exercise. At this his fellow looks out and smiles, making this reply. And doest thou count it impossible to have the meal-man's bung, lend me thy knife for mine is left at home, & thou shalt see me strike it straight, and I will show thee a method, how perhaps hereafter to do the like after my example, and to make thee a good scholar, and therefore go with me and do as I shall instruct thee, begin but a feigned quarrel, and when I give thee a watch word, then throw flour in my face, and if I miss his purse let me be hanged for my labour, with that he gave him certain principles to observe, and then paid for the wine and out they went together. As soon as they were come to the meal-man, the old nip began to jest with the other about the miller's sack, and the other replied as knavishly, at last, the elder called the younger rogue, rogue thou swain, quoth he, doest thou or darest thou dishonour me with such a base title? And with that taking a whole hand full of meal out of the sack, threw it full in the old nip's neck and his breast, and then ran away. He being thus dusted with meal, entreated the meal-man to wipe it out of his neck, and stooped down his head, the meal-man laughing to see him so arrayed and whited, was willing to shake off the meal, and while he was busy about that, the nip had stroken the purse and done his feat, and both courteously thanked the meal-man and closely went away with his purchase. The poor man thinking little of this cheat, began again to play with his purse strings, and suspected nothing till he had sold a peck of meal, and offered to change money, and then he found his purse bottomless, which struck such a cold quandary to his stomach, as if in a frosty morning he had drunk a draught of small beer next his heart, he began then to exclaim against such villains, and called to mind how in shaking the dust out of the gentleman's neck, he shook his money out of his purse, and so the poor meal-man fetched a great sigh, knit up his sack and went sorrowing home.

### **A Kind Conceit of a Foist Performed in Paul's.**

While I was writing this discovery of foisting, & was desirous of any intelligence that might be given me, a gentleman a friend of mine, reported unto me this pleasant tale, of a foist, & as I well remember it grew to this effect. There walked in the middle walk a plain country farmer, a man of good wealth, & that had a well lined purse, only barely thrust up in a round slop<30> which a crew of foists having perceived, their hearts were set on fire to have it, and every one had a fling at him but all in vain, for he kept his hand close in his pocket, and his purse fast in his fist like a subtle churl, that either had been forewarned of Paul's, or else had afore time smoked some of that faculty, well howsoever, it was impossible to do any good with him he was so wary. The foists spying this, strained their wits to the highest string how to compass this bung, yet could not all their politic conceits fetch the farmer over, for jostle him, chat with him, offer to shake him by the hand, all would not serve to get his hand out of his pocket. At last one of the crew that for his skill might have been doctorate in his mystery, amongst them all chose out a good foist, one of a nimble hand & great agility, and said to the rest thus: masters it shall not be said such a base peasant shall slip away from such a crew of gentlemen foists as we are, and not have his purse drawn, and therefore this time I'll play the stall myself, and if I hit him not home, count me for a bungler for ever, and so he left them and went to the farmer and walked directly before him & next him three or four turns, at last standing still he cried alas honest man help me, I am not well, and with that sunke down suddenly in a swoon, the poor farmer seeing a proper young gentleman (as he thought) fall dead afore him, stepped to him, held him in his arms, rub'd him and chafed him: at this there gathered a great multitude of people about him, and the whilst the foist drew the farmer's purse

and away: by that the other thought the feat was done, he began to come something to himself again, and so half staggering, stumbled out of Paul's, and went after the crew where they had appointed to meet, and there boasted of his wit and experience. The farmer little suspecting this villainy, thrust his hand into his pocket and missed his purse, searched for it, but lining and shells and all was gone, which made the countryman in a great maze, that he stood still in a dump so long, that a gentleman perceiving it asked what he ailed: what ail I sir, quoth he, truly I am thinking how men may long as well as women, why dost thou conjecture that, honest man, quoth he? marry sir, answers the farmer, the gentleman even now that swooned here I warrant him breeds his wife's child, for the cause of his sudden qualm that he fell down dead grew of longing: the gentleman demanded how he knew that, well enough sir, quoth he, and he hath his longing too, for the poor man longed for my purse, and thanks be to God he hath it with him. At this all the hearers laughed, but not so merrily as the foist and his fellows, that then were sharing his money.

#### **A Quaint Conceit of a Cutler & a Cutpurse.**

A nip having by fortune lost his cuttle-bung or having not one fit for his purpose, went to a cunning cutler to have a new made, and prescribed the cutler such a method and form to make his knife and the fashion to be so strong, giving such a charge of the fineness of the temper and well setting of the edge, that the cutler wondered what the gentleman would do with it, yet because he offered so largely for the making of it, the cutler was silent and made few questions, only he appointed him the time to come for it, and that was three days after: Well, the time being expired, the gentleman nip came, and seeing his knife liked it passing well, and gave him his money with advantage<39>. The cutler desirous to know to what use he would put it, said to the cutpurse thus, sir quoth he I have made many knives in my days, and yet I never saw any of this form, fashion, temper or edge, & therefore if without offence I pray you tell me how or to what will you use it? While thus he stood talking with the nip, he spying the purse in his apron, had cut it passing cunningly, and then having his purchase close in his hand, made answer, in faith my friend to dissemble is a folly, 'tis to cut a purse withal and I hope to have good handsel, you are a merry gentleman, quoth the cutler, I tell true said the cutpurse and away he goes. No sooner was he gone from the stall, but there came an other and bought a knife and should have single money again, the cutler thinking to put his hand in his bagge, thrust it quite through at the bottom, all his money was gone, & the purse cut, perceiving this and remembering how the man prayed he might have good handsel, he fetched a great sigh and said, now I see he that makes a snare, first falls into it himself: I made a knife to cut other men's purses and mine is the first handsel, well revenge is fallen upon me, but I hope the rope will fall upon him, and so he smoothed up the matter to himself, lest men should laugh at his strange fortune.

## The Discovery of the lifting Law.

The lift, is he that stealeth or prowleth any plate, jewels, bolts of satin, velvet, or such parcels from any place by a sleight conveyance under his cloak, or so secretly that it may not be espied: of lifts there be divers kinds as their natures be different, some base rogues that lift when they come into alehouses quart pots, platters, cloaks, swords, or any such paltry trash which commonly is called pilfering or petty-larceny, for under the colour of spending two or three pots of ale, they lift away anything that cometh within the compass of their reach, having a fine & nimble agility of the hand as the foist had: these are the common and rascal sorts of lifts, but the higher degrees and gentlemen lifts have to the performance of their faculty three parties of necessity: the Lift, the Marker and the Santar: the lift attired in the form of a civil country gentleman, comes with the marker into some mercer's shop, haberdasher's, goldsmith's, or any such place where any particular parcels of worth are to be conveyed, and there he calls to see a bolt of satin, velvet or any such commodity, and not liking the pile, colour or brack, he calls for more, and the whiles he begins to resolve which of them most fitly may be lifted, and what garbage (for so he calls the goods stolen) may be most easily conveyed, then he calls to the mercer's man and says, sirrah reach me that piece of velvet or satin, or that jewel, chain or piece of plate, and whilst the fellow turns his back, he commits his garbage to the marker: for note, the lift is without his cloak, in his doublet & hose to avoid the more suspicion: the marker which is the receiver of the lift's luggage, gives a wink to the santar that walks before the window and then the santar going by in great haste, the marker calls him & says, sir a word with you, I have a message to do unto you from a very friend of yours, and the errand is of some importance, truly sir says the santar I have very urgent business in hand and as at this time I cannot stay, but one word and no more says the marker, and then he delivers him whatsoever the lift hath conveyed unto him, and then the santar goes his way, who never came within the shop, and is a man unknown to them all: suppose he is smoked and his lifting is looked into, then are they upon their pantofles<40>, because there is nothing found about them: they defy the world for their honesty, because they be as dishonest as any in the world, and swear as God shall judge them they never saw the parcel lost, but oaths with them are like wind out of a bellows, which being cool kindleth fire: so their vows are without conscience and so they call for revenge: Therefore let this be a caveat to all occupations, sciences and mysteries, that they beware of the gentleman lift, and to have an eye to such as cheapen their wares and not when they call to see new stuff to leave the old behind them, for the fingers of lifts are formed of adamant, though they touch not yet they have virtue attractive to draw any pelf to them as the adamant doth the iron.

But yet these lifts have a subtle shift to blind the world for this close kind of cozenage they have when they want money, one of them apparels himself like a country farmer, & with a memorandum drawn in some legal form, comes to the chamber of some counsellor or serjeant-at-law with his marker and his santar, and there tells the lawyer his case and desires his counsel, the whilst the marker and the santar lay the platform for any rapier, dagger, cloak, gown or any other parcel of worth that is in the withdrawing or outer chanber, and as soon as they have they go their way: then when the lawyer hath given his opinion of the case the lift requires, then he puts in some demur or blind, and says he will have his cause better discovered and then he will come to his worship again, so taking his leave without his ten shillings fee, he goes his ways to share what his companions had gotten: the like method they use with scriveners, for coming by the shop and seeing any garbage worth the lifting on, starteth in to have an obligation or bill made in haste, and while the scrivener is busy, the lift bringeth the marker to the blow, and so the luggage is carried away. Now, these lifts have their special receivers of their stolen goods, which are two sundry parties, either some notorious bawds in whose houses they lie, and they keep commonly tapping-houses and have young trugs in their

house which are consorts to these lifts and love them so dear, that they never leave them till they come to the gallows, or else they be brokers, a kind of idle sort of livers as pernicious as the lift, for they receive at their hands whatsoever garbage is conveyed, be it linen, woollen, plate, jewels, and this they do by a bill of sale, making the bill in the name of John a Nokes or John a Styles, so that they shadow the lift & yet keep themselves without the danger of the law. Thus are these brokers and bawds as it were, efficient causes of the lifters' villainy, for were it not their alluring speeches and their secret concealings, the lift for want of receivers should be fain to take a new course of life, or else be continually driven into great extremes for selling his garbage, and thus much briefly for the nature of the lift.

## The discovery of the Courbing Law.

The Courber, which the common people call the hooker, is he that with a courb (as they term it) or hook, do pull out of a window any loose cloth, apparel or else any other houshold stuff whatsoever, which stolen parcels, they in their art call snappings: to the performance of this law there be required, only two persons, the Courber and the Warp: the courber his office is to spy in the day time fit places where his trade may be practised at night, and coming to any window if it be open, then he hath his purpose; if shut, then growing into the nature of the black art, hath his trickers, which are engines of iron so cunningly wrought, that he will cut a bar of iron in two with them so easily, that scarcely shall the standers-by hear him: then when he hath the window open and spies any fat snappings worth the curbing, then straight he sets the warp to watch, who hath a long cloak to cover whatsoever he gets, then doth the other thrust in a long hook some nine foot in length (which he calleth a courb) that hath at the end a crook with three tines turned contrary so that 'tis impossible to miss if there be any snappings abroad: Now this long hook they call a courb, and because you shall not wonder how they carry it for being espied, know this that it is made with joints like an angle rod, and can be conveyed into the form of a truncheon & worn in the hand like a walking staff, until they come to their purpose and then they let it out at the length and hook or courb whatsoever is loose and within the reach, and then he conveys it to the warp, and from thence (as they list) their snappings goes to the broker or to the bawd, and there they have as ready money for it as merchants have for their ware in the exchange: beside, there is a Diver, which is in the very nature of the courber, for as he puts in a hook, so the other puts in at the window some little figging boy who plays his part notably, and perhaps the youth is so well instructed that he is a scholar in the black art, and can pick a lock if it be not too cross-warded, and deliver to the diver what snappings he finds in the chamber. Thus you hear what the courber doth and the diver, and what inconvenience grows to many by their base villainies: therefore I do wish all men servants and maids, to be careful for their masters' commodities, and to leave no lose ends abroad, especially in chambers where windows open to the street, least the courber take them as snappings, and convey them to the cozening broker.

Let this suffice, and now I will recreate your wits with a merry Tale or two.

### Of a Courber, & how Cunningly he was Taken.

IT fortun'd of late that a courber & his warp went walking in the dead of the night to spy out some window open for their purpose, & by chance came by a nobleman's house about London and saw the window of the porter's lodge open, and looking in, spied fat snappings and bade his warp watch carefully for there would be purchase, & with that took his courb and thrust it into the chamber, and the porter lying in his bed was awake & saw all, and so was his bedfellow that was yeoman of the wine-seller, the porter stole out of his bed to mark what would be done, and the first snapping the courber light on, was his livery coat, as he was drawing it to the window, the porter easily lifted it off and so the courber drew his hook in vain, the whilst his bedfellow stole out of the chamber and raised up two or three more and went about to take them, but still the rogue he plied his business and lighted on a gown that he used to sit in in the porters lodge, and warily drew it, but when it came at the window, the porter drew it off so lightly that the hooker perceived it not: then when he saw his courb would take no hold, he swore and chafed and told the warp he had hold of two good snaps and yet missed them both and that the fault was in his courb, then he fell to sharpening and hammering of the hook to make it keep better hold, and in again he thrusts it and lights upon a pair of buff hose, but when he had drawn them to the window the porter took them off again, which made the courber almost mad, & swore he thought the devil was abroad tonight he had such hard fortune: nay says the yeoman of the seller, there is three abroad, and we are come to fetch you and your

hooks to hell: so they apprehended these base rogues & carried them into the porter's lodge and made that their prison. In the morning a crew of gentlemen in the house, sat for judges (in that they would not trouble their Lord with such filthy caterpillars) and by them they were found guilty, and condemned to abide forty blows apiece with a bastinado, which they had solemnly paid, and so went away without any further damage.

**Of the Subtlety of a Curber in Cozening a Maid.**

A Merry jest and a subtle, was reported to me of a cunning courber, who had apparelled himself marvelous brave, like some good well-favoured young gentleman, and instead of a man had his warp to wait upon him: this smooth faced rogue comes into Moorfields, and caused his man to carry a pottle of hippocras under his cloak, and there had learned out, amongst others that was drying of clothes, a very well-favoured maid that was there with her basket of linen, what her master was, where she dwelt, and what her name: having gotten this intelligence, to this maid he goes, and courteously salutes her, and after some pretty chat, tells her how he saw her sundry times at her master's door, and was so besotted with her beauty, that he had made inquiry what her qualities were, which by the neighbours he generally heard to be so virtuous, that his desire was the more inflamed, and thereupon in sign of good will, and in further acquaintance he had brought her a pottle of hippocras: the maid seeing him a good proper man, took it very kindly, and thanked him, and so they drunk the wine, and after a little lovers' prattle, for that time they parted.

The maid's heart was set on fire, that a gentleman was become a suitor unto her, and she began to think better of herself than ever she did before, and waxed so proud that her other suitors were counted too base for her, and there might be none welcome but this new come gentleman her lover. Well, divers times they appointed meetings, that they grew very familiar, and he oftentimes would come to her master's house, when all but she and her fellow maids were abed so that he and the warp his man did almost know every corner of the house: It fortune that so long he dallied, that at length he meant earnest, but not to marry the maid whatsoever he had done else, and coming into the fields to her on a washing day, saw a mighty deal of fine linen worth twenty pound as he conjectured: whereupon he thought this night to set down his rest, and therefore he was very pleasant with his lover, and told her that that night after her master and mistress were to bed he would come and bring a bottle of sack with him and drink with her: the maid glad at these news, promised to sit up for him and so they parted: till about ten o'clock at night, when he came and brought his man with him, and one other courber with his tools, who should stand without the doors. To be brief, welcome he came, and so welcome as a man might be to a maid: he that had more mind to spy the clothes, then to look on her favour, at last perceived them in a parlour that stood to the street-ward, and there would the maid have had him sit, no sweetening quoth he, it is too near the street, we can neither laugh nor be merry but every one that passeth by must hear us: upon that they removed into another room, and pleasant they were, and tippled the sack round, till all was out, and the gentleman swore that he would have another pottle, and so sent his man, who told the other courber that stood without, where the window was he should work at, & away goes he for more sack and brings it very orderly, and then to their cups they fall again, while the courber without had not left one rag of linen behind. Late it grew, and the morning began to wear grey, and away goes this courber and his man, leaving the maid very pleasant with his flattering promises until such time as poor soul she went into the parlour, and missed all her master's linen, then what a sorrowful heart she had, I refer to them that have grieved at the like loss.

## The Discovery of the Black Art.

The Black Art is picking of locks, and to this busy trade two persons are required, the Charm and the Stand, the charm is he that doth the feat, and the stand is he that watcheth: There be more that belong to the burglary for conveying away the goods, but only two are employed about the lock: the charm hath many keys and wrests, which they call picklocks, and for every sundry fashion they have a sundry term, but I am ignorant of their words of art, and therefore I omit them, only this, they have such cunning in opening a lock, that they will undo the hardest lock though never so well warded, even while a man may turn his back, some have their instruments from Italy made of steel, some are made here by smiths, that are partakers in their villainous occupations: but howsoever, well may it be called the black Art, for the Devil cannot do better then they in their faculty. I once saw the experience of it myself, for being in the Compter upon a commandment, there came in a famous fellow in the black art, as strong in that quality as Samson: The party now is dead, and by fortune died in his bed, I hearing that he was a charm, began to enter familiarity with him, and to have an insight into his art, after some acquaintance he told me much, and one day being in my chamber I showed him my desk, and asked him if he could pick that little lock that was so well warded, and too little as I thought for any of his gins. Why sir, says he, I am so experienced in the black art, that if I do but blow upon a lock it shall fly open, and therefore let me come to your desk, and do but turn five times about, and you shall see my cunning, with that I did as he bade me, and ere I had turned five times, his hand was rifling in my desk very orderly, I wondered at it, and thought verily that the Devil and his dam was in his fingers. Much discommodity grows by this black art in shops and noblemen's houses for their plate: therefore are they most severely to be looked in to by the honourable and worshipful of England, and to end this discourse as pleasantly as the rest, I will rehearse you a true tale done by a most worshipful knight in Lancashire, against a tinker that professed the black art.

### A true and merry Tale of a Knight, and a Tinker that was a pick-lock.

Not far off from Bolton in the Moors, there dwelled an ancient knight, who for courtesy and hospitality was famous in those parts: divers of his tenants making repair to his house, offered divers complaints to him how their locks were picked in the night and divers of them utterly undone by that means, and who it should be they could not tell, only they suspected a tinker that went about the country and in all places did spend very lavishly: the knight willing, heard what they exhibited, and promised both redress and revenge if he or they could learn out the man. It chanced not long after their complaints, but this jolly tinker (so expert in the black art) came by the house of this knight, as the old gentleman was walking afore the gate, and cried for work, the knight straight conjecturing this should be that famous rogue that did so much hurt to his tenants, called in and asked if they had any work for the tinker, the cook answered there was three or four old kettles to mend, come in tinker, so this fellow came in, laid down his budget and fell to his work, a blackjack of beer for this tinker says the knight, I know tinkers have dry souls: the tinker he was pleasant and thanked him humbly, the knight sat down by him and fell a ransacking his budget, and asked wherefore this tool served and wherefore that, the tinker told him all, at last as he tumbled amongst his old brass the Knight spied three or four bunches of pick-locks, he turned them over quickly as though he had not seen them and said, well tinker I warrant thou art a passing cunning fellow & well skilled in thine occupation by the store of tools thou hast in thy budget: In faith if it please your worship, quoth he, I am thanks be to God my craft's master: Aye, so much I perceive that thou art a passing cunning fellow quoth the knight, therefore let us have a fresh jack of beer and that of the best and strongest for the tinker: thus he passed away the time pleasantly, and when he had done his work he asked what he would have for his pains? but two shillings of your worship, quoth the tinker. Two shillings, says the Knight, alas tinker it is too little, for & see by thy tools

thou art a passing cunning workman, hold there is two shillings: come in, thou shalt drink a cup of wine before thou goest; but I pray thee to tell me which way travellest thou? faith sir, quoth the tinker all is one to me; I am not much out of my way wheresoever I go, but now I am going to Lancaster: I pray thee tinker then, quoth the knight carry me a letter to the gaoler, for I sent in a felon thither the other day and I would send word to the gaoler he should take no bail for him; marry that I will in most dutiful manner, quoth he, and much more for your worship then that: give him a cup of wine quoth the knight and sirrah (speaking to his clerk) make a letter to the gaoler, but then he whispered to him and bade him make a *mittimus*<41> to send the tinker to prison, the clerk answered he knew not his name. I'll make him tell it thee himself, says the Knight and therefore fall you to your pen: the clerk began to write his *mittimus*, and the Knight began to ask what countryman he was where he dwelt & what was his name, the tinker told him all, and the clerk set it in with this proviso to the gaoler that he should keep him fast bolted or else he would break away. As soon as the *mittimus* was made, sealed and subscribed in form of a letter, the Knight took it and delivered it to the tinker and said, give this to the chief Gaoler of Lancaster & here's two shillings more for thy labour, so the tinker took the letter and the money and with many a cap & knee thanked the old knight and departed: and made haste till he came at Lancaster, and stayed not in the town so much as to taste one cup of nappy ale, before he came at the Gaoler, and to him very briskly he delivered his letter, the Gaoler took it and read it and smiled a good, and said tinker thou art welcome for such a knight's sake, he bids me give thee the best entertainment I may. Aye sir, quoth the tinker, the knight loves me well, but I pray you hath the courteous gentleman remembered such a poor man as I? Aye marry doth he, tinker, and therefore sirrah, quoth he to one of his men, take the tinker in the lowest ward, clap a strong pair of bolts on his heels, and a basil of 28 pound weight, and then sirrah see if your picklocks will serve the turn to bail you hence? at this the tinker was blank, but yet he thought the Gaoler had but jested, but when he heard the *mittimus*, his heart was cold, and had not a word to say his conscience accused, and there he lay while the next sessions, and was hanged at Lancaster, and all his skill in the black art could not serve him.

FINIS.

**THE THIRD AND LAST PART OF CONY-CATCHING.**

Robert Greene

**Title Page**

THE  
Third and last part of Conny-  
catching.  
With the new deuised knauish arte of  
Foole-taking.  
*The like Coosnages and Villanies never before discovered.*  
By R. G.

Printed by *T. Scarlet* for *C. Burby*, and are to be solde at  
his shop vnder S. Mildreds Church in the  
poultry.

1592.

**Frontispiece**



**Frontispiece – The Clown and the Lady**

## To The Reader

TO ALL SUCH AS HAVE received either pleasure or profit by the two former published books of this Argument, and to all beside, that desire to know the wonderful sly devices of *this hellish crew of cony-catchers*.

IN the time of king Henry the fourth, as our English chroniclers have kept in remembrance, lived diverse sturdy and loose companions, in sundry places about the City of London, who gave themselves to no good course of life, but because the time was somewhat troublesome, watched diligently, when by the least occasion of mutiny offered, they might prey upon the goods of honest citizens, and so by their spoil enrich themselves. At that time likewise lived a worthy gentleman, whose many very famous deeds (whereof I am sorry I may here make no rehearsal, because neither time nor occasion will permit me) renown his name to all ensuing posterities: he, being called Sir Richard Whittington, the founder of Whittington College<sup><42></sup> in London, and one that bare the office of Lord Mayor of this City three several times. This worthy man well noting the dangerous disposition of that idle kind of people, took such good and discreet order (after he had sent divers of them to serve in the King's wars, and they loath to do so well returned to their former vomit) that in no place of or about London they might have lodging, or entertainment, except they applied themselves to such honest trades and exercises, as might witness their maintaining was by true and honest means. If any to the contrary were found, they were in justice so sharply proceeded against, as the most hurtful and dangerous enemies to the commonwealth.

In this quiet and most blissful time of peace, when all men (in course of life) should show themselves most thankful for so great a benefit, this famous city is pestered with the like, or rather worse kind of people, that bear outward show of civil, honest, and gentlemanlike disposition, but in very deed their behaviour is most infamous to be spoken of. And as now by their close villainies they cheat, cozen, prig, lift, nip, and such like tricks now used in their cony-catching trade, to the hurt and undoing of many an honest citizen, and other: So if God should in justice be angry with us, as our wickedness hath well deserved, and (as the Lord forfend) our peace should be molested as in former time, even as they did, so will these be the first in seeking domestical spoil and ruin: yea so they may have it, it skills not how they come by it. God raise such another as was worthy Whittington, that in time may bridle the headstrong course of this hellish crew, and force them live as becometh honest subjects, or else to abide the reward due to their looseness. By reading this little treatise ensuing, you shall see to what marvellous subtle policies these deceivers have attained, and how daily they practice strange drifts for their purpose. I say no more, but if all these forewarnings may be regarded, to the benefit of the well minded, and just control of these careless wretches, it is all I desire, and no more than I hope to see.

Yours in all he may

R. G.

### **The third and last part of Cony-catching with the new devised knavish art of Fool-taking.**

BEING by chance invited to supper, where were present divers, both of worship and good account, as occasion served for intercourse of talk, the present treacheries and wicked devices of the world was called in question. Amongst other most hateful and well worthy reprehension, the wondrous villainies of loose and lewd persons, that bear the shape of men, yet are monsters in condition, was specially remembered, and not only they, but their complices, their confederates, their base natured women and close compacters were noted: Namely, such as term themselves cony-catchers, cross-biters, with their appertaining names to their several cozening qualities, as already is made known to the world, by two several imprinted books, by means whereof, the present kind of conference was occasioned. Quoth a gentleman sitting at the table, whose deep step into age deciphered his experience, and whose gravity in speech reported his discretion, quoth he, by the two published books of cony-catching: I have seen divers things wherof I was before ignorant, notwithstanding, had I been acquainted with the author, I could have given him such notes of notorious matters that way intending, as in neither of the pamphlets are the like set down. Beside, they are so necessary to be known, as they will both fore-arm any man against such treacherous vipers, and forewarn the simpler sort from conversing with them. The gentleman being known to be within commission of the peace, and that what he spake of either came to him by examinations, or by riding in the circuits as other like officers do: was entreated by one man above the rest (as his leisure served him) to acquaint him with those notes, and he would so bring it to pass, as the writer of the other two books, should have the sight of them, and if their quantity would serve, that he should publish them as a third, and more necessary part than the former were. The gentleman replied, all such notes as I speak, are not of mine own knowledge, yet from such men have I received them, as I dare assure their truth: and but that by naming men wronged by such mates, more displeasure would ensue than were expedient, I could set down both time, place and parties. But the certainty shall suffice without any such offence. As for such as shall see their injuries discovered, and (biting the lip) say to themselves, thus was I made a cony: their names being shadowed, they have no cause of anger, in that the example of their honest simplicity beguiled, may shield a number more endangered from tasting the like. And seeing you have promised to make them known to the author of the former two books, you shall the sooner obtain your request: assuring him thus much upon my credit and honesty, that no one untruth is in the notes, but every one credible, and to be justified if need serve. Within a fortnight or thereabout afterward, the gentleman performed his promise, in several papers sent the notes, which here are in our book compiled together: when thou hast read, say, if ever thou heardest more notable villainies discovered. And if thou or thy friends receive any good by them, as it cannot be but they will make a number more careful of themselves: thank the honest gentleman for his notes, and the writer that published both the other and these, for general example.

**A pleasant tale how an honest substantial Citizen was made a cony, and simply entertained a knave that carried away his goods very politicly.**

WHAT laws are used among this hellish crew, what words and terms they give themselves and their copesmates, are at large set down in the former two books: let it suffice ye then in this, to read the simple true discourses of such as have by extraordinary cunning and treachery been deceived, and remembering their subtle means there, and sly practices here, be prepared against the reaches of any such companions.

Not long since, a crew of cony-catchers meeting together, and in conference laying down such courses as they severally should take, to shun suspect, and return a common benefit among them: the carders received their charge, the dicers theirs, the hangers about the court theirs, the followers of sermons theirs, and so the rest to their offices. But one of them especially, who at their wonted meetings, when report was made how every purchase was gotten, and by what policy each one prevailed: this fellow in a kind of priding scorn, would usually say, In faith masters, these things are prettily done, common sleights, expressing no deep reach of wit, and I wonder men are so simple to be so beguiled. I would fain see some rare artificial feat indeed, that some admiration and fame might ensue the doing thereof: I promise ye, I disdain these base and petty paltries, and may my fortune jump with my resolution, ye shall hear my boys within a day or two, that I will accomplish a rare stratagem indeed, of more value than forty of yours, and when it is done shall carry some credit with it. They wondering at his words desired to see the success of them, and so dispersing themselves as they were accustomed, left this frolic fellow pondering on his affairs. A citizen's house in London, which he had diligently eyed and aimed at for a fortnight's space, was the place wherein he must perform this exploit, and having learned one of the servant maid's name of the house, as also where she was born and her kindred: Upon a Sunday in the afternoon, when it was her turn to attend on her master and mistress to the garden in Finsbury fields, to regard the children while they sported about, this crafty mate having duly watched their coming forth, and seeing that they intended to go down S. Laurence lane, stepped before them, ever casting an eye back, least they should turn some contrary way. But their following still fitting his own desire, near unto the Conduit in Aldermanbury, he crossed the way and came unto the maid, and kissing her said: Cousin Margaret, I am very glad to see you well, my uncle your father, and all your friends in the country are in good health God be praised. The maid hearing herself named, and not knowing the man, modestly blushed, which he perceiving, held way on with her amongst her fellow apprentices, and thus began again. I see cousin you know me not, and I do not greatly blame you, it is so long since you came forth of the country: but I am such a one's son, naming her Uncle right, and his son's name, which she very well remembered, but had not seen him in eleven years. Then taking forth a bowed groat, and an old penny bowed, he gave it her as being sent from her uncle and aunt, whom he termed to be his father and mother: Withal (quoth he) I have a gammon of bacon and a cheese from my uncle your father, which are sent to your master and mistress, which I received of the carrier, because my uncle enjoined me to deliver them, when I must entreat your mistress, that at Whitsuntide next she will give you leave to come down into the country. The maid thinking simply all he said was true, and as they so far from their parents, are not only glad to hear of their welfare, but also rejoice to see any of their kindred: so this poor maid, well knowing her uncle had a son so named as he called himself, and thinking from a boy, (as he was at her leaving the country) he was now grown such a proper handsome young man, was not a little joyful to see him: beside, she seemed proud that her kinsman was so neat a youth, and so she held on questioning with him about her friends: he soothing each matter so cunningly, as the maid was confidently

## The Complete Cony-catching

persuaded of him. In this time, one of the children stepped to her mother and said, Our Margaret (mother) hath a fine cousin come out of the country, and he hath a cheese for my father and you: whereon she looking back, said: maid, is that your kinsman? Yea forsooth mistress, quoth she, my uncle's son, whom I left a litle one when I came forth of the country.

The wily treacher, being master of his trade, would not let slip this opportunity, but courteously stepping to the mistress, (who loving her maid well, because indeed she had been a very good servant, and from her first coming to London had dwelt with her, told her husband thereof) coined such a smooth tale unto them both, fronting it with the gammon of bacon and the cheese sent from their maid's father, and hoping they would give her leave at Whitsuntide to visit the country, as they with very kind words entertained him, inviting him the next night to supper, when he promised to bring with him the gammon of bacon and the cheese. Then framing an excuse of certain business in the town, for that time he took his leave of the master and mistress, and his new cousin Margaret, who gave many a look after him (poor wench) as he went, joying in her thoughts to have such a kinsman.

On the morrow he prepared a good gammon of bacon, which he closed up in a soiled linen cloth, and sewed an old card upon it, whereon he wrote a superscription unto the master of the maid, and at what sign it was to be delivered, and afterward scraped some of the letters half out, that it might seeme they had been rubbed out in the carriage. A good cheese he prepared likewise, with inscription accordingly on it, that it could not be discerned, but that some unskilful writer in the country had done it, both by the gross proportion of the letters, as also the bad orthography which amongst plain husbandmen is very common, in that they have no better instruction. So hiring a porter to carry them between five and six in the evening he comes to the citizen's house, and entering the shop, receives them of the porter, whom the honest meaning citizen would have payed for his pains, but this his maid's new-found cousin said he was satisfied already, and so straining courtesy would not permit him: well, up are carried the bacon and the cheese, where God knows, Margaret was not a little busy, to have all things fine and neat against her cousin's coming up, her mistress likewise, (as one well affecting her servant) had provided very good cheer, set all her plate on the cupboard for show, and beautified the house with cushions, carpets, stools and other devices of needlework, as at such times divers will do, to have the better report made of their credit amongst their servants' friends in the country, albeit at this time (God wot) it turned to their own after-sorrowing. The master of the house, to delay the time while supper was ready, he likewise shows this dissembler his shop, who seeing things fadge so pat to his purpose, could question of this sort, and that well enough I warrant you, to discern the best from the worst and their appointed places, purposing a further reach than the honest citizen dreamed of: and to be plain with ye, such was this occupier's trade, as though I may not name it, yet thus much I dare utter, that the worst thing he could carry away, was worth about 20 nobles, because he dealt altogether in whole and great sale, which made this companion forge this kindred and acquaintance, for an hundred pound or twaine was the very least he aimed at. At length the mistress sends word supper is on the table, where upon up he conducts his guest, and after divers welcomes, as also thanks for the cheese and bacon: To the table they sit, where let it suffice, he wanted no ordinary good fare, wine and other knacks, beside much talk of the country, how much his friends were beholding for his cousin Margaret, to whom by her mistress leave he drank twice or thrice, and she poor soul doing the like again to him with remembrance of her father and other kindred, which he still smoothed very cunningly. Countenance of talk made them careless of the time, which slipped from them faster then they were aware of, nor did the deceiver hasten his departing, because he expected what indeed followed, which was, that being past ten of the clock, and he feigning his lodging to be at Saint Giles in the Field, was entreated both by the good man and his wife, to take a bed there for that night, for fashion sake (though very glad of

this offer) he said he would not trouble them, but giving the many thanks, would to his lodging though it were further. But wonderful it was to see how earnest the honest citizen and his wife laboured to persuade him, that was more willing to stay then they could be to bid him, and what dissembled willingness of departure he used on the other side, to cover the secret villainy intended.

Well, at the length, with much ado, he is contented to stay, when Margaret and her mistress presently stirred to make ready his bed, which the more to the honest man's hard hap, but all the better for this artificial cony-catcher, was in the same room where they supped, being commonly called their hall, and there indeed stood a very fair bed, as in such sightly rooms it may easily be thought, citizens use not to have anything mean or simple. The mistress, lest her guest should imagine she distrusted him, suffered all the plate to stand still on the cupboard: and when she perceived his bed was warmed, and every thing else according to her mind, she and her husband bidding him good night: took themselves to their chamber, which was on the same floor, but inward, having another chamber between them and the hall, where the maids and children had their lodging. So desiring him to call for anything he wanted, and charging Margaret to look it should be so, to bed are they gone: when the apprentices having brought up the keys of the street door, and left them in their master's chamber as they were wont to do, after they had said prayers, their evening exercise, to bed go they likewise, which was in a Garret backward over their masters chamber. None are now up but poor Margaret and her counterfeit cozen, whom she loath to offend with long talk, because it waxed late: after some few more speeches, about their parents and friends in the country, she seeing him laid in bed, and all such things by him as she deemed needful, with a low courtesy I warrant ye, commits him to his quiet, and so went to bed to her fellows the maidservants. Well did this hypocrite perceive the keys of the doors carried into the good man's chamber, whereof he being not a little glad, thought now they would imagine all things sure, and therefore doubtless sleep the sounder: as for the keys, he needed no help of them, because such as he go never unprovided of instruments fitting their trade, and so at this time was this notable treacher. In the dead time of the night, when sound sleep makes the ear unapt to hear the very least noise, he forsaketh his bed, & having gotten all the plate bound up together in his cloak, goeth down into the shop, where well remembering both the place and percells, maketh up his pack with some twenty poundsworth of goods more. Then settling to his engine, he getteth the door off the hinges, and being forth, lifteth close to again, and so departs, meeting within a dozen paces, three or four of his companions that lurked therabouts for the purpose. Their word for knowing each other, as is said, was *quest*, and this villain's comfortable news to them, was *twag*, signifying he had sped: each takes a fleece for easier carriage, and so away to Bellbrow, which, as I have heard is as they interpret it, the house of a thief receiver, without which they can do nothing, and this house with an apt porter to it, stands ready for them all hours of the night: too many such are there in London, the masters whereof bear countenance of honest substantial men, but all their living is gotten in this order, the end of such (though they scape awhile) will be sailing westward in a cart to Tyburn. Imagine these villains there in their jollity, the one reporting point by point his cunning deceit, and the other (fitting his humour) extolling the deed with no mean commendations.

But returning to the honest citizen, who finding in the morning how dearly he paid for a gammon of bacon, and a cheese, and how his kind courtesy was thus treacherously requited: blames the poor maid, as innocent herein as himself, and imprisoning her, thinking so to regain his own: grief with ill-cherishing there shortens her life: And thus ensueth one hard hap upon another, to the great grief both of master and mistress, when the truth was known, that they so wronged their honest servant: how it may forewarn others, I leave to your own opinions, that see what extraordinary devices are nowadays, to beguile the simple and honest liberal-minded.

## The Complete Cony-catching

**Of a notable knave, who for his cunning deceiving a gentleman of his purse, scorned the name of a cony-catcher, and would needs be termed a fool-taker, as master and beginner of that new found art.**

A crew of these wicked companions being one day met together in Paul's church, (as that is a usual place of their assembly, both to determine on their drifts, as also to speed of many a booty) seeing no likelihood of a good afternoon, so they term it either forenoon or after, when aught is to be done: some dispersed themselves to the plays, other to the bowling alleys, and not past two or three stayed in the church. Quoth one of them, I have vowed not to depart but something or other I'll have before I go: my mind gives me, that this place yet will yield us all our suppers this night, the other holding like opinion with him there likewise walked up and down, looking when occasion would serve for some cash. At length they espied a gentleman toward the law entering in at the little North door, and a country client going with him in very hard talk, the gentleman holding his gown open with his arms on either side as very many do, gave sight of a fair purple velvet purse, which was half put under his girdle: which I warrant you the resolute fellow that would not depart without some thing, had quickly espied. A game, goth he to his fellows, mark the stand, and so separating themselves walked aloof, the gentleman going to the nether step of the stairs that ascend up into the choir, and there he walked still with his client. Oft this crew of mates met together, and said there was no hope of nipping the bung because he held open his gown so wide, and walked in such an open place. Base knaves, quoth the frolic fellow, if I say I will have it, I must have it, though he that owes it had sworn the contrary. Then looking aside, he spied his trug or quean coming up the church: Away, quoth he to the other, go look you for some other purchase, this wench and I are sufficient for this. They go, he lessons the drab in this sort, that she should to the gentleman, whose name she very well knew, in that she had holp to cozen him once before, & pretending to be sent to him from one he was well acquainted with for his counsel, should give him his fee for avoiding suspicion, and so frame some wrong done her, as well enough she could: when her mate (taking occasion as it served) would work the mean, she should strike, & so they both prevail. The quean well inured with such courses, because she was one of the most skilful in that profession, walked up and down alone in the gentleman's sight, that he might discern she stayed to speak with him, and as he turned toward her, he saw her take money out of her purse, whereby he gathered some benefit was toward him: which made him the sooner dispatch his other client, when she stepping to him, told such a tale of commendations from his very friend, that had sent her to him as she said, that he entertained her very kindly, and giving him his fee, which before her face he put up into his purse, and thrust it under his girdle again: she proceeded to a very sound discourse, whereto he listened with no litle attention. The time serving fit for the fellow's purpose, he came behind the gentleman, and as many times one friend will familiarly with another, clap his hands over his eyes to make him guess who he is, so did this companion, holding his hands fast over the gentleman's eyes, said: who am I? twice or thrice, in which time the drab had gotten the purse and put it up. The gentleman thinking it had been some merry friend of his, reckoned the names of three or four, when letting him go, the crafty knave dissembling a bashful shame of what he had done, said: By my troth sir I cry thee mercy, as I came in at the Church door, I took ye for such a one (naming a man) a very friend of mine, whom you very much resemble: I beseech the be not angry, it was very boldly done of me, but in penance of my fault, so please the to accept it, I will bestow a gallon or two of wine on ye, and so laboured him earnestly to go with him to the tavern, still alleging his sorrow for mistaking him. The gentleman litle suspecting how who-am-I had handled him, seeing how sorry he was, and seeming to be a man of no such base condition: took all in good

## The Complete Cony-catching

part, saying: No harm sir, to take one for another, a fault wherein any man may easily err, and so excusing the acceptation of his wine, because he was busy there with a gentlewoman his friend: the treacher with courtesy departed, and the drab (having what she would) shortening her tale, he desiring her to come to his chamber the next morning, went to the place where her copesmate & she met, and not long after, divers other of the crew, who hearing in what manner this act was performed, smiled a good thereat, that she had both got the gentleman's purse, her own money again, and his advice for just nothing. He that had done this tall exploit, in a place so open in view, so hardly to be come by, and on a man that made no mean esteem of his wit: bids his fellows keep the worthless name of a cony-catcher to themselves: for he henceforth would be termed a fool-taker, and such as could imitate this quaint example of his, (which he would set down as an entrance into that art) should not think scorn to become his scholars

Night drawing on apace, the gentleman returned home, not all this while missing his purse, but being set at supper, his wife entreated a pint of sack, which he minding to send for, drew to his purse, and seeing it gone, what strange looks (beside sighs) were between him and his wife, I leave to your supposing, and blame them not: for as I have heard, there was seven pound in gold, beside thirty shillings and odd white money in the purse. But in the midst of his grief, he remembered him that said, who am I? Wherewith he brake forth into a great laughter, the cause whereof his wife being desirous to know, he declared all that passed between him and the deceiver, as also how soon afterward the quean abbreviated her discourse and followed: so by troth wife (quoth he) between who-am-I and the drab, my purse is gone: let his loss teach others to look better to theirs.

**Another tale of a cozening companion, who would needs try his cunning in this new invented art, and how by his knavery (at one instant) he beguiled half a dozen and more.**

OF late time there hath a certain base kind of trade been used, who though divers poor men, & doubtless honest apply themselves to, only to relieve their need: yet are there some notorious varlets do the same, being compacted with such kind of people, as this present treatise manifesteth to the world, and what with outward simplicity on the one side, and cunning close treachery on the other, divers honest citizens and day-labouring men, that resort to such places as I am to speak of, only for recreation as opportunity serveth, have been of late sundry times deceived of their purses. This trade, or rather unsufferable loitering quality, in singing of ballads and songs at the doors of such houses where plays are used, as also in open markets and other places of this city, where is most resort: which is nothing else but a sly fetch to draw many together, who listening unto an harmless ditty, afterward walk home to their houses with heavy hearts: from such as are hereof true witnesses to their cost, do I deliver this example.

A subtle fellow, belike emboldened by acquaintance with the former deceit, or else being but a beginner to practice the same, calling certain of his companions together, would try whether he could attain to be master of his art or no, by taking a great many of fools with one train. But let his intent and what else beside, remain to abide the censure after the matter is heard, & come to Gracious street, where this villainous prank was performed. A roguing mate, & such another with him, were there got upon a stall singing of ballads which belike was some pretty toy, for very many gathered about to hear it, & divers buying, as their affections served, drew to their purses & paid the singers for them. The sly mate and his fellows, who were dispersed among them that stood to hear the song, well noted where every man that bought, put up his purse again, and to such as would not buy, counterfeit warning was sundry times given by the rogue and his associate, to beware of the cutpurse, and look to their purses, which made them often feel where their purses were, either in sleeve, hose, or at girdle, to know whether they were safe or no. Thus the crafty cope-smates were acquainted with what they most desired, and as they were scattered, by shouldering, thrusting, feigning to let fall something, and other wily tricks fit for their purpose: here one lost his purse, there another had his pocket picked, and to say all in brief, at one instant, upon the complaint of one or two that saw their purses were gone, eight more in the same company, found themselves in like predicament. Some angry, others sorrowful, and all greatly discontented, looking about them, knew not who to suspect or challenge, in that the villains themselves that had thus beguiled them, made show that they had sustained like loss. But one angry fellow, more impatient then all the rest, he falls upon the ballad singer, and beating him with his fists well favouredly, says, if he had not listened his singing, he had not lost his purse, and therefore would not be otherwise persuaded, but that they two and the cutpurses were compacted together. The rest that had lost their purses likewise, and saw that so many complain together: they jump in opinion with the other fellow, & begin to tug & hale the ballad singers, when one after one, the false knaves began to shrink away with the purses. By means of some officer then being there present, the two rogues were had before a Justice, and upon his discreet examination made, it was found, that they and the cutpurses were compacted together, and that by this unsuspected villainy, they had deceived many. The fine fool-taker himself, with one or two more of that company, was not long after apprehended: when I doubt not but they had their reward answerable to their deserving: for I hear of their journey westward, but not of their return<43>: let this forewarn those that listen singing in the streets.

**Of a crafty mate, that brought two young men unto a Tavern,  
where departing with a cup, he left them to pay both for the wine  
and cup.**

A friend of mine sent me this note, and assuring me the truth therof, I thought necessary to set it down amongst the rest: both for the honest simplicity on the one side and most cunning knavery used on the other, and thus it was. Two young men of familiar acquaintance, who delighted much in music, because themselves therein were somewhat expert, as on the virginals, bandore, lute and such like, were one evening at a common inn of this town (as I have heard) where the one of them showed his skill on the virginals, to the no little contentment of the hearers. Now as divers guests of the house came into the room to listen, so among the rest entered an artificial cony-catcher, who as occasion served, in the time of ceasing between the several toys and fancies he played, very much commended his cunning, quick hand, and such qualities praiseworthy in such a professor. The time being come, when these young men craved leave to depart, this politic varlet stepping to them, desired that they would accept a quart of wine at his hand, which he would, most gladly he would, bestow upon them: besides, if it liked him that played on the virginals to instruct, he would help him to so good a place, as happily might advantage him for ever. These kind words, delivered with such honest outward show, caused the young men, whose thoughts were free from any other opinion, than to be as truly and plainly dealt withal as themselves meant, accepted his offer, because he that played on the virginals was desirous to have some good place of service, and here upon to the tavern they go, and being set, the wily companion calleth for two pints of wine, a pint of white, and a pint of claret, casting his cloak upon the table, and falling to his former communication of preferring the young man. The wine is brought, and two cups withal, as is the usual manner: when drinking to them of the one pint, they pledge him, not unthankful for his gentleness. After some time spent in talk, and as he perceived fit for his purpose, he takes the other cup, and tastes the other pint of wine: wherewith he finding fault, that it drank somewhat hard, said, that rose-water and sugar would do no harm, whereupon he leaves his seat, saying he was well acquainted with one of the servants of the house, of whom he could have two pennyworth of rose-water for a penny, and so of sugar likewise, wherefore he would step to the bar unto him, so taking the cup in his hand, he did, the young men never thinking on any such treachery as ensued, in that he seemed an honest man, and beside left his cloak lying on the table by them. No more returns the younker with rose-water and sugar, but stepping out of doors, unseen of any, goes away roundly with the cup. The young men not a little wondering at his long tarrying, by the coming of the servants to see what they wanted, who took no regard of his sudden departure, find themselves there left, not only to pay for the wine, but for the cup also, being rashly supposed by the master and his servants to be co-partners with the treacherous villain: but their honest behaviour well known, as also their simplicity too much abused well witnessed their innocence: notwithstanding they were fain to pay for the cup, as afterward they did, having nothing towards their charge but a threadbare cloak not worth two shillings. Take heed how you drink wine with any such companions.

## **Of an honest householder which was cunningly deceived by a subtle companion, that came to hire a chamber for his master.**

NOT far from Charing Cross dwelleth an honest young man, who being not long since married, and having more rooms in his house than himself occupieth, either for term time, or the Court lying so near, as divers do, to make a reasonable commodity, and to ease house-rent, which (as the world goeth now is none of the cheapest) letteth forth a chamber or two, according as it may be spared. In an evening but a while since, came one in the manner of a serving-man to this man and his wife, and he must needs have a chamber for his master, offering so largely, as the bargain was soon concluded between them. His intent was to have fingered some booty in the house, as by the sequel it may be likeliest gathered: but belike no fit thing lying abroad, or he better regarded than happily he would be, his expectation that way was frustrate: yet as a resolute cony-catcher indeed, that scorneth to attempt without some success, and rather will prey upon small commodity, than return to his fellows disgraced with a lost labour: he summons his wits together, and by a smooth tale over-reached both the man and his wife. He tells them, that his master was a captain late come from the Sea, and had costly apparel to bring thither, which for more easy carriage, he entreats them lend him a sheet to bind it up in: they suspecting no ill, because he required their boy should go with him to help him carry the stuff, the good wife steps unto her Chest, where her linen lay finely sweetened with roseleaves and lavender, and lends him a very good sheet indeed. This success made him bold to venture a little further, and then he tells them, his master had a great deal of broken sugar, and fine spices that lay negligently abroad in his lodging as it was brought from the ship, all which he was assured his master would bestow on them, so he could devise how to get it brought thither.

These liberal promises, prevailing with them that lightly believed, and withal were somewhat covetous of the sugar and spices: The woman demanded if a couple of pillow-beres would not serve to bring the sugar and spices in? Yes marry, (quoth he) so the sugar may best be kept by itself, and the spices by themselves. And (quoth he) because there are many crafty knaves abroad, (grieving that any should be craftier than himself) and in the evening the linen might quickly be snatched from the boy: For the more safety, he would carry the sheet and pillow-beres himself, and within an hour or little more, return with the boy again, because he would have all things ready before his master came, who (as he said) was attending on the Council at the Court. The man and his wife crediting his smooth speeches, sends their boy with him, and so along toward Ivy-bridge go they. The Cony-catcher seeing himself at free liberty, that he had gotten a very good sheet, and two fine pillow-beres, steps to the wall, as though he would make water, bidding the boy go fair and softly on before. The boy doubting nothing, did as he willed him, when presently he stepped into some house hard by fit to entertain him: and never since was he, his master, the sugar, spices, or the linen heard off. Many have been in this manner deceived, as I hear, let this then give them warning to beware of any such unprofitable guests.

## **Of one that came to buy a knife, and made first proof of his trade on him that sold it.**

ONE of the cunning nips about the Town, came unto a poor cutler to have a cuttle made according unto his own mind, and not above three inches would he have both the knife and the haft in length: yet of such pure metal, as possible may be. Albeit the poor man never made the like before, yet being promised four times the value of his stuff and pains, he was contented to do this, and the day being come that he should deliver it, the party came, who liking it exceedingly, gave him the money promised, which the poor man gladly put up into his purse, that hung at a button hole of his wascoat before his breast smiling that he was so well paid for so small a trifle. The party perceiving his merry countenance, and imagining he guessed for what purpose the knife was, said, honest man, whereat smile you? By my troth sir (quoth the cutler) I smile at your knife, because I never made one so little before: and were it not offensive unto you, I would request to know to what use you will put it too: Wilt thou keep my counsel (quoth the nip?) yea on mine honesty (quoth the cutler.) Then hearken in thy ear said the nip, and so rounding with him, cut the poor man's purse that hung at his bosom, he never feeling when he did it: with this knife (quoth the nip) mean I to cut a purse: marry god forbid (quoth the cutler) I cannot think you to be such a kind of man, I see you love to jest, and so they parted.

The poor man, not so wise as to remember his own purse, when by such a warning he might have taken the offender doing the deed, but rather proud (as it were) that his money was so easily earned: walks to the alehouse, which was within a house or two of his own, and finding there three or four of his neighbours, with whom he began to jest very pleasantly: swears by cock and pie he would spend a whole groat upon them, for he had gotten it and more, clearly by a good bargain that morning.

Though it was no marvel to see him so liberal, because indeed he was a good companion: yet they were loath to put him unto such cost, notwithstanding he would needs do it, and so far as promise stretched, was presently filled in and set upon the board. In the drinking time often he wished to meet with more such customers as he had done that morning, and commended him for a very honest gentleman I warrant you. At length, when the reckoning was to be payed, he draws to his purse, where finding nothing left but a piece of the string in the button hole: I leave to your judgement, whether he was now as sorry as he was merry before.

Blank and all amort sits the poor cutler, and with such a pitiful countenance, as his neighbours did not a little admire his solemn alteration, & desirous to know the cause thereof, from point to point he discourseth the whole manner of the tragedy, never naming his new customer, but with such a far fetched sigh, as soul and body would have parted in sunder. And in midst of all his grief, he brake forth into these terms. I'll beleve a man the better by his word while I know him, the knife was bought to cut a purse indeed, and I thank him for it he made the first proof of the edge with me. The neighbours grieving for his loss, yet smiling at his folly to be so overreached, were fain to pay the groat the cutler called in, because he had no other money about him, and spent as much more beside to drive away his heaviness. This tale, because it was somewhat misreported before, upon talk had with the poor cutler himself, is set down now in true form and manner how it was done, therefore is there no offence offered, when by better consideration, a thing may be enlarged or amended, or at least the note be better confirmed. Let the poor cutler's mishap example others, that they brag not over hastily of gain easily gotten, least they chance to pay as dearly for it, as he did.

**Of a young nip that cunningly beguiled an ancient professor of that trade, and his quean with him, at a play.**

A good fellow that was newly entered into the nipping craft, and had not as yet attained to any acquaintance with the chief and cunning masters of that trade: In the Christmas holidays last came to see a play at the Bull within Bishopsgate, there to take his benefit as time and place would permit him. Not long had he stayed in the press, but he had gotten a young man's purse out of his pocket, which when he had, he stepped into the stable to take out the money, and to convey away the purse. But looking on his commodity, he found nothing therein but white counters, a thimble and a broken threepence, which belike the fellow that ought it, had done of purpose to deceive the cutpurse withal, or else had played at the cards for counters, and so carried his winnings about him till his next sitting to play. Somewhat displeased to be so overtaken, he looked aside, and spied a lusty youth entering at the door, and his drab with him: this fellow he had heard to be one of the finest nippers about the town, and ever carried his quean with him, for conveyance when the stratagem was performed: he puts up the counters into the purse again, and follows close to see some piece of their service. Among a company of seemely men was this lusty companion and his minion gotten, where both they might best behold the play, and work for advantage, and ever this young nip was next to him, to mark when he should attempt any exploit, standing as it were more then half between the cunning nip and his drab, only to learn some part of their skill. In short time the deed was performed, but how, the young nip could not easily discern, only he felt him shift his hand toward his trug, to convey the purse to her, but she being somewhat mindful of the play, because a merriment was then on the stage, gave no regard: whereby thinking he had pulled her by the coat, he twitched the young nip by the cloak, who taking advantage of this offer, put down his hand and received the purse of him. Then counting it discourtesy to let him lose all his labour, he softly plucked the quean by the coat, which she feeling, and imagining it had been her companion's hand: received of him the first purse with the white counters in it. Then fearing lest his stay should hinder him, and seeing the other intended to have more purses ere he departed: away goes the young nip with the purse he got so easily, wherin (as I have heard) was xxxvii. shillings, and odd money, which did so much content him, as that he had beguiled so ancient a stander in that profession. What the other thought when he found the purse, and could not guess how he was cozened: I leave to your censures, only this makes me smile, that one false knave can beguile another, which bids honest men look the better to their purses.

## **How a gentleman was craftily deceived of a chain of Gold and his purse in Paul's Church in London.**

A gentleman of the country, who (as I have heard since the time of his mishap, whereof I am now to speak) had about half a year before buried his wife & belike thinking well of some other gentlewoman, whom he meant to make account of as his second choice: upon good hope or otherwise persuaded, he came up to London to provide himself of such necessaries as the country is not usually stored withal. Besides, silks, velvets, cambrics and such like, he bought a chain of gold that cost him lvii. pounds and odd money, whereof because he would have the maidenhead or first wearing himself, he presently put it on in the goldsmith's shop, and so walked therewith about London as his occasions served. But let not the gentleman be offended, who if this book come to his hands, can best avouch the truth of this discourse, if here by the way I blame his rash pride, or simple credulity: for between the one and other, the chain he paid so dear for about ten of the clock in the morning, the cony-catchers the same day ere night shared amongst them, a matter whereat he may well grieve, and I be sorry, in respect he is my very good friend: but to the purpose. This gentleman walking in Paul's, with his chain fair glittering about his neck, talking with his man about some busines: was well viewed and regarded by a crew of cony-catchers, whose teeth watered at his goodly chain, yet knew not how to come by it hanging as it did, and therefore entered into secret conspiracy among themselves, if they could not come by all the chain, yet how they might make it lighter by half a score pounds at the least. Still had they their eyes on the honest gentleman, who little doubted any such treason intended against his so late bought bargain: and they having laid their plot, each one to be assistant in this enterprise, saw when the gentleman dismissed his servant, to go about such affairs as he had appointed him, himself still walking there up and down the middle aisle. One of these mates, that stood most on his cunning in these exploits, followed the serving-man forth of the church calling him by divers names, as John, Thomas, William, &c. as though he had known his right name, but could not hit on it: which whether he did or no I know not, but well I wot the serving-man turned back again, and seeing him that called him seemed a gentleman, booted and cloaked after the newest fashion, came with his hat in his hand to him, saying: Sir, do ye call me? Mary do I my friend quoth the other, dost not thou serve such a gentleman? and named one as himself pleased. No truly sir, answered the serving-man, I know not any such gentleman as you speak of. By my troth replied the cony-catcher, I am assured I knew thee and thy master, though now I cannot suddenly remember myself. The serving-man fearing no harm, yet fitting the humour of this treacherous companion, told right his master's name whom he served, and that his master was even then walking in Paul's. O God's will (quoth the cony-catcher, repeating his master's name) a very honest gentleman, of such a place is he not? naming a shire of the country: for he must know both name, country and sometimes what gentlemen dwell near the party that is to be over-reached, ere he can proceed. No indeed sir (answered the serving-man, with such reverence as it had been to an honest gentleman indeed) my master is of such a place, a mile from such a Town, and hard by such a knight's house: by which report the deceiver was half instructed, because though he was ignorant of the fellow's master, yet well he knew the country, and the knight named. So craving pardon that he had mistaken him, he returns again into the Church, and the serving-man trudgeth about his assigned business. Being come to the rest of the crew, he appoints one of them (whom he knew to be expert indeed) to take this matter in hand, for himself might not do it, lest the serving-man should return and know him, he schooled the rest likewise what every man should do when the pinch came, and changing his cloak with one of his fellows, walked by himself attending the feat: and every one being as ready, the appointed fellow makes his sally forth, and coming to the gentleman, calling him by his name, gives him the courtesy and embrace, likewise thanking him for good cheer he had at his house, which he did with such seemly

behaviour and protestation, as the gentleman (thinking the other to be no less) used like action of kindness to him. Now as country gentlemen have many visitors both with near dwelling neighbours, and friends that journey from far, whom they can hardly remember, but some principal one that serves as countenance to the other: so he not discrediting the cunning mate's words, who still at every point alleged his kindred to the knight neighbour to the gentleman, which the poor serving-man had (doubting no ill) revealed before, and that both there and at his own house in hawking time with that knight and other gentlemen of the country he had liberally tasted his kindness: desiring pardon that he had forgotten him, and offered him the courtesy of the city. The cony-catcher excused himself for that time, saying, at their next meeting he would bestow it on him. Then seeming to have espied his chain, and commending the fairness and workmanship thereof: says, I pray the sir take a litle counsel of a friend, it may be you will return thanks for it. I wonder quoth he, you dare wear such a costly jewel so open in sight, which is even but a bait to entice bad men to adventure time and place for it, and nowhere sooner then in this city, where (I may say to you) are such a number of cony-catchers, cozeners and such like, that a man can scarcely keep anything from them, they have so many reaches and sleights to beguile withal: which a very especial friend of mine found too true not many days since. Hereupon he told a very solemn tale, of villainies and knaveries in his own profession, whereby he reported his friend had lost a watch of gold: showing how closely his friend wore it in his bosom, and how strangely it was gotten from him, that the gentleman by that discourse waxed half afraid of his chain. And giving him many thanks for this good warning, presently takes the chain from about his neck, and tying it up fast in a handkerchief, put it up into his sleeve, saying, If the cony-catcher get it here, let him not spare it. Not a little did the treacher smile in his sleeve, hearing the rash security, but indeed simplicity of the gentleman, and no sooner saw he it put up, but presently he counted it sure his own, by the assistance of his complices, that lay in an ambuscado for the purpose. With embraces and courtesies on either side, the cony-catcher departs, leaving the gentleman walking there still: whereat the crew were not a little offended, that he still kept in the church, and would not go abroad. Well, at length (belike remembering some business) the gentleman taking leave of another that talked with him, hasted to go forth at the furthest west door of Paul's, which he that had talked with him, and gave him such counsel perceiving, hied out of the other door, and got to the entrance ere he came forth, the rest following the gentleman at an inch. As he was stepping out, the other stepped in, and let fall a key, having his hat so low over his eyes, that he could not well discern his face, and stooping to take up the key, kept the gentleman from going backward or forward, by reason his leg was over the threshold. The foremost cony-catcher behind, pretending a quarrel unto him that stooped, rapping out an oath, and drawing his dagger, said: Do I meet the villain? Nay, he shall not 'scape me now, and so made offer to strike him.

The gentleman at his standing up, seeing it was he that gave him so good counsel, and pretended himself his very friend, but never imagining this train was made for him: stepped in his defence, when the other following tripped up his heels: so that he and his counsellor were down together, and two more upon them, striking with their daggers very eagerly, marry indeed the gentleman had most of the blows, and both his hand-kerchief with the chain, and also his purse with three and fifty shillings in it, were taken out of his pocket in this struggling, even by the man that himself defended.

It was marvellous to behold, how not regarding the villain's words uttered before in the church, nor thinking upon the charge about him (which after he had thus treacherously lost unwittingly:) he stands pacifying them that were not discontented but only to beguile him. But they vowing that they would presently go for their weapons, & so to the field, told the gentleman he laboured but in vain, for fight they must and would, and so going down by Paul's

## The Complete Cony-catching

Chain, left the gentleman made a cony going up toward Fleet street, sorry for his new counsellor and friend, and wishing him good luck in the fight: which indeed was with nothing but wine pots, for joy of their late gotten booty. Near to Saint Dunstan's Church the gentleman remembered himself, and feeling his pocket so light had suddenly more grief at his heart, than ever happen to him or any man again. Back he comes to see if he could espy any of them, but they were far enough from him: God send him better hap when he goes next a-wooing, and that this his loss may be a warning to others.

**How a cunning knave got a Trunk well stuffed with linen and certain parcels of plate out of a citizen's house, and how the master of the house help the deceiver to carry away his own goods.**

WITHIN the city of London, dwelleth a worthy man who hath very great dealing in his trade, and his shop very well frequented with customers: had such a shrewd mischance of late by a cony-catcher, as may well serve for an example to others lest they have the like. A cunning villain, that had long time haunted this citizen's house, and gotten many a cheat which he carried away safely: made it his custom when he wanted money, to help himself ever where he had sped so often, divers things he had which were never missed, especially such as appertained to the citizen's trade, but when any were found wanting, they could not devise which way they were gone, so politicly this fellow always behaved himself, well knew he what times of greatest business this citizen had in his trade, and when the shop is most stored with chapmen: then would he step up the stairs (for there was and is another door to the house besides that which entereth into the shop) and what was next to hand came ever away with. One time above the rest, in an evening about Candlemas, when daylight shuts in about six of the clock, he watched to do some feat in the house, and seeing the mistress go forth with her maid, the goodman and his folks very busy in the shop: up the stairs he goes as he was wont to do, and lifting up the latch of the hall portal door, saw nobody near to trouble him, when stepping into the next chamber, where the citizen and his wife usually lay, at the beds feet there stood a handsome trunk, wherein was very good linen, a fair gilt saltcellar, two silver french bowls for wine, two silver drinking pots, a stone jug covered with silver, and a dozen of silver spoons. This trunk he brings to the stairs' head, and making fast the door again, draws it down the steps so softly as he could, for it was so big and heavy, as he could not easily carry it, having it out at the door, unseen of any neighbour or anybody else, he stood struggling with it to lift it up on the stall, which by reason of the weight troubled him very much. The goodman coming forth of his shop, to bid a customer or two farewell, made the fellow afraid he should now be taken for all together: but calling his wits together to escape if he could, he stood gazing up at the sign belonging to the house, as though he were desirous to know what sign it was: which the citizen perceiving, came to him and asked him what he sought for? I look for the sign of the Bluebell sir, quoth the fellow, where a gentleman having taken a chamber for this term time, hath sent me hither with this his trunk of apparel. Quoth the citizen, I know no such sign in this street, but in the next (naming it) there is such a one indeed, and there dwelleth one that letteth forth chambers to gentlemen. Truly sir quoth the fellow, that's the house I should go to, I pray you sir lend me your hand, but to help the trunk on my back, for I thinking to ease me a while upon your stall, set it short, and now I can hardly get it up again. The citizen not knowing his own trunk, but indeed never thinking on any such notable deceit, helps him up with the trunk, and so sends him away roundly with his own goods. When the trunk was missed, I leave to your conceits what houshold grief there was on all sides, especially the goodman himself, who remembering how he helped the fellow up with a trunk, perceived that hereby he had beguiled himself, and lost more then in haste he should recover again. How this may admonish others, I leave to the judgement of the indifferent opinion, that see when honest meaning is so craftily beleaguered, as good foresight must be used to prevent such dangers.

## **How a broker was cunningly over-reached by as crafty a knave as himself and brought in danger of the Gallows.**

IT hath been used as a common byword, a crafty knave needeth no broker, whereby it should appear that there can hardly be a craftier knave than a broker. Suspend your judgements till you have heard this discourse ensuing, & then as you please censure both the one and the other.

A lady of the country sent up a servant whom she might well put in trust, to provide her of a gown answerable to such directions as she had given him, which was of good price, as may appear by the outside and lace, whereto doubtless was every other thing agreeable. For the tailor had seventeen yards of the best black satin that could be got for money, and so much gold lace, beside spangles, as valued thirteen pound, what else was beside I know not, but let it suffice thus much was lost, and therefore let us to the manner how.

The satin and the lace being brought to the tailor that should make the gown, and spread abroad on the shop board to be measured, certain good fellows of the cony-catching profession chanced to go by, who seeing so rich lace, and so excellent good satin, began to commune with themselves how they might make some purchase of what they had seen: and quickly it was to be done or not at all. As ever in a crew of this quality, there is some one more ingenious and politic then the rest, or at leastwise that covets to make himself more famous then the rest, so this instant was there one in this company that did swear his cunning should deeply deceive him, but he would have both the lace and satin. When having laid the plot with his companions, how and which way their help might stand him in stead, this way they proceeded.

Well noted they the serving-man that stood in the shop with the tailor, and gathered by his diligent attendance, that he had some charge of the gown there to be made, wherefore by him must they work their treachery intended, and use him as an instrument to beguile himself. One of them sitting on a seat near the tailor's stall, could easily hear the talk that passed between the serving-man and the tailor, where among other communication, it was concluded that the gown should be made of the self-same fashion in every point, as another lady's was who then lay in the City, and that measure being taken by her, the same would fitly serve the lady for whom the gown was to be made. Now the serving-man intended to go speak with the lady, and upon a token agreed between them (which he carelessly spake so loud, that the cony-catcher heard it) he would as her leisure served, certify the tailor, and he should bring the stuff with him, to have the lady's opinion both of the one and the other.

The serving-man being gone about his affairs, the subtle mate that had listened to all their talk, acquaints his fellows both with the determination and token appointed for the tailor's coming to the lady. The guide and leader to all the rest for villainy, though there was no one but was better skilled in such matters than honesty: he appoints that one of them should go to the tavern, which was not far off, and laying two faggots on the fire in a room by himself, and a quart of wine filled for countenance of the treachery: another of that crew should give attendance on him, as if he were his master, being bareheaded, and sir, humbly answering at every word. To the tavern goes this counterfeit gentleman, and his servant waiting on him, where every thing was performed as is before rehearsed. When the master knave calling the drawer, demanded if there dwelt near at hand a skilful tailor, that could make a suit of velvet for himself, marry it was to be done with very great speed.

The drawer named the tailor that we now speak of, and upon the drawer's commending his cunning, the man in all haste was sent for to a gentleman, for whom he must make a suit of velvet forthwith. Upon talk had of the stuff, how much was to be bought of every thing

appertaining thereto: he must immediately take measure of this counterfeit gentleman, because he knew not when to return that way again: afterward they would go to the mercer's.

As the tailor was taking measure on him bare-headed, as if he had been a substantial gentleman indeed, the crafty mate had cunningly gotten his purse out of his pocket, at the one string whereof was fastened a little key, and at the other his signet ring: This booty he was sure of already, whether he should get anything else or no of the mischief intended, stepping to the window he cuts the ring from the purse, and by his supposed man (rounding him in the ear) sends it to the plot-layer of this knavery, minding to train the tailor along with him, as it were to the mercer's, while he the meantime took order for the other matter.

Afterward speaking aloud to his man, Sirrah, quoth he, dispatch what I bade you, and about four of the clock meet me in Paul's, by that time I hope the tailor and I shall have dispatched. To Cheapside goeth the honest tailor with this notorious dissembler, not missing his purse for the space of two hours after, in less then half which time the satin and gold lace was gotten likewise by the other villain from the tailor's house in this order.

Being sure the tailor should be kept absent, he sends another mate home to his house, who abused his servants with this device: That the lady's man had met their master abroad, and had him to the other lady to take measure of her, and lest they should delay the time too long, he was sent for the satin and lace, declaring the token appointed, and withal giving their masters signet ring for better confirmation of his message. The servants could do no less then deliver it, being commanded (as they supposed) by so credible testimony: Neither did the leisure of any one serve to go with the messenger, who seemed an honest young gentleman, and caried no cause of distrust in his countenance: Wherefore they delivered him the lace and satin folded up together as it was, and desired him to will their master to make some speed home, both for cutting out of work, and other occasions.

To a broker fit for their purpose, goes this deceiver with the satin lace, who knowing well they could not come honestly by it, nor anything else he bought of that crew, as often before he had dealt much with them: either gave them not so much as they would have, or at least as they judged they could have in another place, for which the ring-leader of this cozenage, vowed in his mind to be revenged on the broker. The master knave, who had spent two hours and more in vain with the tailor, & would not like of any velvet he saw, when he perceived that he missed his purse, and could not devise how or where he had lost it, showed himself very sorry for his mishap, and said in the morning he would send the velvet home to his house, for he knew where to speed of better than any he had seen in the shops. Home goes the tailor very sadly, where he was entertained with a greater mischance, for there was the lady's serving-man swearing and stamping, that he had not seen their master since the morning they parted, neither had he sent for the satin and lace, but when the servants justified their innocency, beguiled both with the true token rehearsed, and their master's signet ring, it exceedeth my cunning to set down answerable words, to this exceeding grief and amazement on either part, but most of all the honest tailor, who sped the better by the broker's wilfulness, as afterward it happened, which made him the better brook the loss of his purse. That night all means were used that could be, both to the mercers, brokers, goldsmiths, gold-finers, and such like, where haply such things do come to be sold: but all was in vain, the only help came by the inventor of this villainy, who scant sleeping all night, in regard of the broker's extreme gaining, both by him, and those of his profession: the next morning he came by the tailor's house, at what time he espied him with the lady's serving-man, coming forth of the doors, and into the tavern he went to report what a mishap he had upon the sending for him thither the day before.

As she was but newly entered his sad discourse, in comes the party offended with the broker, and having heard all, (whereof none could make better report than himself) he takes

## The Complete Cony-catching

the tailor & serving-man aside, and pretending great grief for both their causes, demands what they would think him worthy of that could help them to their good again. On condition to meet with such a friend offer was made of five pound, and after sundry speeches passing between them alone, he seeming that he would work the recovery thereof by art, and they promising not to disclose the man that did them good, he drew forth a litle book out of his bosom—whether it were Latin or English it skilled not, for he could not read a word on it—then desiring them to spare him alone a while, they should perceive what he would do for them. Their hearts encouraged with some good hope, kept all his words secret to themselves: and not long had they sitten absent out of the room, but he called them in again, and seeming as though he had been a scholar indeed, said he found by his figure that a broker in such a place had their goods lost, and in such a place of the house they should find it, bidding them go thether with all speed, and as they found his words, so (with reserving to themselves how they came to knowledge thereof) to meet him there again in the evening, and reward him as he had deserved.

Away in haste goes the tailor and the serving-man, and entering the house with the constable, found them in the place where he that revealed it, knew the broker alway laid such gotten goods. Of their joy again, I leave you to conjecture, and think you see the broker with a good pair of bolts on his heels, ready to take his farewell of the world in a halter, when time shall serve. The counterfeit cunning man, and artificial cony-catcher, as I heard, was paid his five pound that night. Thus one crafty knave beguiled another, let each take heed of dealing with any such kind of people.

## **A merry Tale taken not far from Fetter Lane end, of a new-found cony-catcher, that was cony-catched himself.**

But amongst all these blithe and merry jests, a little by your leave, if it be no farther than Fetter lane: oh take heed, that's too nigh the Temple: what, then, I will draw as near the sign of the White Hart as I can, and breathing myself by the bottle ale-house, I'll tell you a merry jest how a cony-catcher was used.

So it fell out, that a gentleman was sick and purblind, and went to a good honest man's house to sojourn, and taking up his chamber grew so sick that the goodman of the house hired a woman to keep and attend day and night upon the gentleman: this poor woman, having a good conscience, was careful of his welfare, and looked to his diet, which was so slender that the man, although sick, was almost famished, so that the woman would no longer stay, but bade his host provide him of some other to watch with him sith it grieved her to see a man lie and starve for want of food, especially being set on the score for meat and drink in the space of a fortnight four pounds. The goodman of the house at last, hearing how the poor woman did find fault with his scoring, the gentleman not only put her out of doors without wages, but would have arrested her, for taking away his good name, and defaming and slandering him, and with that calling one of his neighbours to him, said neighbour, whereas such a bad-tongued woman hath reported to my discredit that the gentleman that lies sick in my house wants meat, and yet runs very much on the score, I pray you, judge by his diet whether he be famished or no: first, in the morning he hath a caudle next his heart, half an hour after that, a quart of sugar sops; half an hour after that a neck of mutton in broth, half an hour after that chickens in sorrel sops, and an hour after that, a joint of roast meat for his dinner: now, neighbour, having this provision, you may judge whether he be spoiled for lack of meat or no, and to what great charges his diet will arise: whereas in truth, the poor gentleman would have been glad of the least of these, for he could get none at all. But the cozening knave thought to verse upon him, and one day, seeing money came not briefly to the gentleman, took some of his apparel, his cloak, I guess, and pawned it for forty shillings, whereas, God wot, all he eat in that time was not worth a crown: well, the gentleman seeing how the knave went about to cony-catch him, and that he had taken his cloak, smothered all for revenge, and watched opportunity to do it, and on a time, seeing the goodman out, borrowed a cloak far better than his own of the boy, saying that he would go to a friend of his to fetch money for his master, & discharge the house: the boy lending it him, away walks the gentleman, though weak after this great diet, and never came at the tailor's house to answer him cloak or money. And thus was he cony-catched himself, that thought to have versed upon another.

FINIS

**THE BLACK BOOK'S MESSENGER.**

Robert Greene

**Title Page**

**THE  
BLACK BOOKES**

***MESSENGER.***

**Laying open the Life and Death**  
*of Ned Browne one of the most notable Cutpurses,  
Crosbiters, and conny-catchers, that  
ever lived in England.*

**Heerein he telleth very plea-**  
santly, in his own person such strange prancks and  
monstrous villainies by him and his Consorte  
performed, as the like was yet never  
heard of in any of the former  
bookes of Conny-  
catching.

**Read and be Warnd, Laugh as you like,  
Judge as you find.**

*Nascimur pro Patria.<1>*

by R. G.

Printed at London by Iohn Danter, For *Thomas  
Nelson* dwelling in Silver street, neere to the  
Signe of the Red-Crosse. 1592.

## To the Courteous Reader

### Health.

Gentlemen, I know you have long expected the coming forth of my Black Book, which I long have promised, and which I had many days since finished, had not sickness hindered my intent: Nevertheless, be assured it is the first thing I mean to publish after I am recovered. This messenger to my Black Book I commit to your courteous censures, being written before I fell sick, which I thought good in the meantime to send you as a fairing, discoursing Ned Browne's villainies, which are too many to be described in my Black Book.

I had thought to have joined with this treatise, a pithy discourse of the repentance of a cony-catcher lately executed out of Newgate, yet forasmuch as the method of the one is so far differing from the other, I altered my opinion, and the rather for that the one died resolute and desperate, the other penitent and passionate. For the cony-catcher's repentance which shall shortly be published, it contains a passion of great importance. First how he was given over from all grace and godliness, and seemed to have no spark of the fear of God in him: yet nevertheless, through the wondrous working of God's spirit, even in the dungeon at Newgate the night before he died, he so repented him from the bottom of his heart, that it may well beseem parents to have it for their children, masters for their servants, and to be perused of every honest person with great regard.

And for *Ned Browne* of whom my Messenger makes report, he was a man infamous for his bad course of life and well-known about London: He was in outward show a gentlemanlike companion, attired very brave, and to shadow his villainy the more would nominate himself to be a marshal-man, who when he had nipped a bung or cut a good purse, he would steal over in to the Low Countries, there to taste three or four stoops of Rhenish wine, and then come over forsooth a brave soldier: But at last he leapt at a daisy for his loose kind of life, and therefore imagine you now see him in his own person, standing in a great bay window with a halter about his neck ready to be hanged, desperately pronouncing this his whole course of life and confesseth as followeth.

*Yours in all courtesy, R. G.*

**A Table of the words of Art lately devised by Ned Browne and his associates, to Cross-bite the old Phrases used in the manner of Cony-catching.**

HE that draws the fish to the bait,	<i>The Beater.</i>
The Tavern where they go,	<i>The Bush</i>
The fool that is caught,	<i>The Bird.</i>
Cony-catching to be called,	<i>Bat Fowling.</i>
The wine to be called,	<i>The Shrap.</i>
The cards to be called,	<i>The Lime Twigs.</i>
The fetching in a cony,	<i>Beating the Bush.</i>
The good ass if he be won,	<i>Stooping to the Lure.</i>
If he keep a loss,	<i>A Haggard.</i>
The verser in cony-catching is called	<i>The Retriver.</i>
And the barnacle,	<i>The Pot Hunter.</i>

## The life and death of Ned Browne, a notable Cutpurse and Cony-catcher.

If you think (gentlemen) to hear a repentant man speak, or to tell a large tale of his penitent sorrows, ye are deceived: for as I have ever lived lewdly, so I mean to end my life as resolutely, and not by a cowardly confession to attempt the hope of a pardon. Yet, in that I was famous in my life for my villainies, I will at my death profess myself as notable, by discoursing to you all merrily, the manner and method of my knaveries, which if you hear without laughing, then after my death call me base knave, and never have me in remembrance.

Know therefore (gentlemen) that my parents were honest, of good report, and no little esteem amongst their neighbours, and sought (if good nurture and education would have served) to have made me an honest man: but as one self-same ground brings forth flowers and thistles; so of a sound stock proved an untoward scion; and of a virtuous father, a most vicious son. It boots little to rehearse the petty sins of my nonage; as disobedience to my parents, contempt of good counsel, despising of mine elders, filching, petty-larceny, and such trifling toys: but with these follies I inured myself, till waxing in years, I grew into greater villainies. For when I came to eighteen years old, what sin was it that I would not commit with greediness, what attempt so bad, that I would not endeavour to execute; cutting of purses, stealing of horses, lifting, picking of locks, and all other notable cozenages. Why, I held them excellent qualities, and accounted him unworthy to live, that could not, or durst not live by such damnable practices. Yet as sin too openly manifested to the eye of the Magistrate, is either sore revenged or soon cut off: So I to prevent that, had a net wherein to dance, and divers shadows to colour my knaveries withal, as I would title myself with the name of a fencer, & make gentlemen believe that I picked a living out by that mystery, whereas God wot, I had no other fence but with my short knife, and a pair of purse strings, and with them in troth many a bout have I had in my time. In troth? O what a simple oath was this to confirm a man's credit withal? Why, I see the halter will make a man holy, for whilst God suffered me to flourish, I scorned to disgrace my mouth with so small an oath as In faith: but I rent God in pieces, swearing and forswearing by every part of his body, that such as heard me, rather trembled at mine oaths, than feared my braves, and yet for courage and resolution I refer myself to all them that have ever heard of my name.

Thus animated to do wickedness, I fell to take delight in the company of harlots: amongst whom, as I spent what I got, so I suffered not them I was acquainted withal to feather their nests, but would at my pleasure strip them of all that they had. What bad woman was there about London whose champion I would not be for a few crowns, to fight, swear, and stare in her behalf, to the abuse of any that should do justice upon her? I still had one or two in store to cross-bite withal, which I used as snares to trap simple men in: for if I took but one suspiciously in her company, straight I versed upon him, and cross-bit him for all the money in his purse. By the way (sith sorrow cannot help to save me), let me tell you a merry jest how once I cross-bit a maltman, that would needs be so wanton, as when he had shut his malt to have a wench, and thus the jest fell out.

## A Pleasant Tale how Ned Browne cross-bit a Maltman.

This *Senex Fornicator*<45>, this old lecher, using continually into Whitechapel, had a haunt into Petticoat Lane to a trugging house there, and fell into great familiarity with a good wench that was a friend of mine, who one day revealed unto me how she was well thought on by a maltman, a wealthy old churl, and that ordinarily twice a week he did visit her, and therefore bade me plot some means to fetch him over for some crowns. I was not to seek for a quick invention, and resolved at his coming to cross-bite him, which was (as luck served) the next day. Monsieur the maltman coming according to his custom, was no sooner secretly shut in the chamber with the wench, but I came stepping in with a terrible look, swearing as if I meant to have challenged the earth to have opened and swallowed me quick, and presently fell upon her and beat her: then I turned to the maltman, and lent him a blow or two, for he would take no more: he was a stout stiff old tough churl, and then I railed upon them both, and objected to him how long he had kept my wife, how my neighbours could tell me of it, how the Lane thought ill of me for suffering it, and now that I had myself taken them together, I would make both him and her smart for it before we parted.

The old fox that knew the ox by the horn, was subtle enough to spy a pad in the straw, and to see that we went about to cross-bite him: wherefore he stood stiff, and denied all, and although the whore cunningly on her knees weeping did confess it, yet the maltman faced her down, and said she was an honest woman for all him, and that this was but a cozenage compacted between her and me to verse and cross-bite him for some piece of money for amends, but sith he knew himself clear, he would never grant to pay one penny. I was straight in mine oaths and braved him with sending for the constable, but in vain: all our policies could not draw one cross from this crafty old carl, till I gathering my wits together, came over his fallows thus. I kept him still in the chamber, & sent (as though I had sent for the constable) for a friend of mine, an ancient cozener, and one that had a long time been a Knight of the Post<32>: marry he had a fair cloak and a damask coat, that served him to hale men withal. To this perjured companion I sent to come as a constable, to make the maltman stoop, who (ready to execute any villainy that I should plot) came speedily like an ancient wealthy citizen, and taking the office of a Constable in hand, began very sternly to examine the matter, and to deal indifferently, rather favouring the maltman than me: but I complained how long he had kept my wife: he answered I lied, & that it was a cozenage to cross-bite him of his money. Master Constable cunningly made this reply to us both: My friends, this matter is bad, and truly I cannot in conscience but look into it. For you Browne, you complain how he hath abused your wife a long time, & she partly confesseth as much: he (who seems to be an honest man, and of some countenance amongst his neighbours) forswears it, and saith, it is but a device to strip him of his money: I know not whom to believe, and therefore this is my best course: because the one of you shall not laugh the other to scorn. I'll send you all three to the Compter, so to answer it before some justice that may take examination of the matter. The maltman loath to go to prison, and yet unwilling to part from any pence, said he was willing to answer the matter before any man of worship, but he desired the constable to favour him that he might not go to ward, and he would send for a brewer a friend of his to be his bail.

In faith says this cunning old cozener, you offer like an honest man, but I cannot stay so long till he be sent for, but if you mean as you protest to answer the matter, then leave some pawn and I will let you go whither you will while tomorrow, and then come to my house here hard by at a grocer's shop, and you and I will go before a justice, and then clear yourself as you may. The maltman taking this crafty knave to be some substantial citizen, thanked him for his friendship and gave him a seal ring that he wore on his fore-finger, promising the next morning to meet him at his house. As soon as my friend had the ring, away walks he, and while we stood

## The Complete Cony-catching

brabbling together he went to the brewer's house, with whom this maltman traded, and delivered the brewer the ring as a token from the maltman, saying he was in trouble, and that he desired him by that token to send him ten pound. The brewer seeing an ancient citizen bringing the message and knowing the maltman's ring, stood upon no terms, sith he knew his chapman would and was able to answer it again if it were a brace of hundred pounds, delivered him the money without any more ado: which ten pound at night we shared betwixt us, and left the maltman to talk with the brewer about the repayment. Tush, this was one of my ordinary shifts, for I was holden in my time the most famous cross-biter in all London.

Well at length, as wedding and hanging comes by destiny, I would to avoid the speech of the world be married forsooth and keep a house, but (gentlemen) I hope you that hear me talk of marriage, do presently imagine that sure she was some virtuous matron that I chose out. Shall I say my conscience, she was a little snoutfair, but the commonest harlot and hackster that ever made fray under the shadow of Colman hedge<46>: wedded to this trull, what villainy could I devise but she would put in practise, and yet though she could foist a pocket well, and get me some pence, and lift now and then for a need, and with the lightness of her heels bring me in some crowns: yet I waxed weary, and stuck to the old proverb, that change of pasture makes fat calves: I thought that in living with me two years she lived a year too long, and therefore casting mine eye on a pretty wench, a man's wife well known about London, I fell in love with her, and that so deeply that I broke the matter to her husband, that I loved his wife, and must needs have her, and confirmed it with many oaths, that if he did not consent to it, I would be his death: whereupon her husband, a kind knave, and one every way as base a companion as myself, agreed to me, and we beat a bargain, that I should have his wife, and he should have mine, conditionally, that I should give him five pounds to boot, which I promised, though he never had it: so we like two good horse-copers, made a chop and change, and swapped up a roguish bargain, and so he married my wife and I his. Thus gentlemen did I neither fear God nor his laws, nor regarded honesty, manhood, or conscience: but these be trifles and venial sins.

Now sir, let me boast of myself a little, in that I came to the credit of a high lawyer, and with my sword freebooted abroad in the country like a cavalier on horseback, wherein I did excel for subtlety: For I had first for myself an artificial hair, and a beard so naturally made, that I could talk, dine, and sup in it, and yet it should never be spied. I will tell you there rests no greater villainy than in this practise, for I have robbed a man in the morning, and come to the same inn and baited, yea and dined with him the same day: and for my horse that he might not be known I could ride him one part of the day like a goodly gelding with a large tail hanging to his fetlock, and the other part of the day I could make him a cut, for I had an artificial tail so cunningly counterfeited, that the ostler when he dressed him could not perceive it. By these policies I little cared for hues and cries, but straight with disguising myself, would outslip them all, and as for my cloak it was *Tarmosind* (as they do term it) made with two outsides that I could turn it how I list, for howsoever I wore it the right side still seemed to be outward.

## A Merry Tale how Ned Browne Used a Priest.

I remember how prettily once I served a priest, and because one death dischargeth all, and is as good as a general pardon, hear how I served him.

I chanced as I rode into Berkshire to light in the company of a fat priest that had hanging at his saddle bow a cap-case well stuffed with crowns that he went to pay for the purchase of some lands: Falling in talk with him (as communication will grow betwixt travellers) I behaved myself so demurely, that he took me for a very honest man, & was glad of my company, although ere we parted it cost him very dear: and amongst other chat he questioned me if I would sell my horse (for he was a fair large gelding well spread and foreheaded and so easily and swiftly paced, that I could well ride him seven mile an hour): I made him answer that I was loath to part from my gelding, and so shaped him a slight reply, but before we came at our bait he was so in love with him that I might say him no nay, so that when we came at our inn and were at dinner together we swapped a bargain: I had the priest's and twenty nobles to boot for mine. Well as soon as we had changed, I got me unto the stable, and there secretly I knit a hair about the horse's fetlock so straight upon the vein that he began a little to check of that foot, so that when he was brought forth the horse began to halt; which the priest espying marvelled at it, and began to accuse me that I had deceived him. Well, quoth I, 'tis nothing but a blood, and as soon as he is warm he will go well, and if in riding you like him not, for twenty shillings loss, I'll change with you at night: the priest was glad of this, and caused his saddle to be set on my gelding, and so having his cap-case on the saddle pommel, rode on his way, and I with him, but still his horse halted, and by that time we were two miles out of the town he halted right down: at which the priest chafed, and I said I wondered at it, and thought he was pricked, bade him alight, and I would see what he ailed, and wished him to get up on my horse that I had of him for a mile or two, and I would ride on his, to try if I could drive him from his halt. The priest thanked me, and was sorrowful, and I feeling about his foot cracked the hair asunder, and when I had done, got up on him, smiling to myself to see the cap-case hang so mannerly before me, and putting spurs to the horse, made him give way a little, but being somewhat stiff, he halted for half a mile, and then began to fall into his old pace, which the priest spying, said: Methinks my gelding begins to leave his halting. Aye marry doth he master parson (quoth I) I'll warrant you he'll gallop too fast for you to overtake, and so good Priest farewell, and take no thought for the carriage of your cap-case. With that I put spurs to him lustily, and away flung I like the wind: the Parson called to me, and said he hoped that I was but in jest, but he found it in earnest, for he never had his horse nor his cap-case after.

Gentlemen, this is but a jest to a number of villainies that I have acted, so graceless hath my life been. The most expert and skilful alchemist, never took more pains in experience of his metals, the physician in his simples, the mechanical man in the mystery of his occupation, than I have done in plotting precepts, rules, axioms, and principles, how smoothly and neatly to foist a pocket, or nip a bung.

It were too tedious to hold you with tales of the wonders I have acted, seeing almost they be numberless, or to make report how desperately I did execute them, either without fear of God, dread of the law, or love to my country: for I was so resolutely, or rather reprobately given, that I held death only as nature's due, and howsoever ignominiously it might happen unto me, that I little regarded: which careless disdain to die, made me thrust myself into every brawl, quarrel, and other bad action whatsoever, running headlong into all mischief, neither respecting the end, nor foreseeing the danger: and that secure life hath brought me to this dishonourable death. But what should I stand here preaching? I lived wantonly, and therefore let me end merrily, and tell you two or three of my mad pranks and so bid you farewell.

## **A Pleasant Tale how Ned Brown Kissed a Gentlewoman and Cut Her Purse.**

Amongst the rest I remember once walking up and down Smithfield, very quaintly attired in a fustian doublet and buff hose, both laid down with gold lace, a silk stock and a new cloak: I traced up and down very solemnly, as having never a cross to bless me withal, where being in my dumps there happened to me this accident following.

Thus gentlemen being in my dumps, I saw a brave country gentlewoman coming along from Saint Bartholomew's in a satin gown and four men attending upon her: by her side she had hanging a marvellous rich purse embroidered, and not so fair without, but it seemed to be as well lined within: At this my teeth watered, and as the prey makes the thief, so necessity, and the sight of such a fair purse began to muster a thousand inventions in my head how to come by it: to go by her and nip it I could not, because she had so many men attending on her: to watch her into a press that was in vain, for going towards S. John's street, I guessed her about to take horse to ride home, because all her men were booted. Thus perplexed for this purse, and yet not so much for the bung as the shells: I at last resolutely vowed in myself to have it though I stretched a halter for it: and so calling in my head how to bring my fine mistress to the blow, at last I performed it thus. She standing and talking a while with a gentleman, I stepped before her and leaned at the bar till I saw her leave him, and then stalking towards her very stoutly as if I had been some young cavalier or captain, I met her and courteously saluted her, & not only greeted her, but as if I had been acquainted with her I gave her a kiss, and so in taking acquaintance closing very familiarly to her I cut her purse: the gentlewoman seeing me so brave used me kindly, & blushing said, she knew me not. Are you not mistress, quoth I, such a gentlewoman, and such a man's wife? No truly sir, quoth she, you mistake me: then I cry you mercy, quoth I, and am sorry that I was so saucily bold. There is no harm done sir, said she, because there is no offence taken, and so we parted, I with a good bung, and my gentlewoman with a kiss, which I dare safely swear, she bought as dear as ever she did thing in her life, for what I found in the purse that I keep to myself. Thus did I plot devices in my head how to profit myself, though it were to the utter undoing of anyone: I was the first that invented the letting fall of the key, which had like to cost me dear, but it is all one, as good then as now: and thus it was.

### **How Ned Brown Let Fall a Key.**

Walking up and down Paul's, I saw where a nobleman's brother in England came with certain gentlemen his friends in at the West door, and how he put up his purse, as having bought some thing in the Churchyard: I having an eagle's eye, spied a good bung containing many shells as I guessed, carelessly put up into his sleeve, which drave me straight into a mutiny with myself how to come by it. I looked about me if I could see any of my fellow friends walking there, & straight I found out three or four trusty foists with whom I talked and conferred about this purse: we all concluded it were necessary to have it, so we could plot a means how to catch it. At last I set down the course thus: as soon as the throng grew great, and that there was jostling in Paul's for room, I stepped before the gentleman and let fall a key, which stooping to take up, I staid the gentleman that he was fain to thrust by me, while in the press two of my friends foisted his purse, and away they went withal, and in it there was some twenty pound in gold: presently putting his hand in his pocket for his handkerchief, he missed his purse, and suspected that he that let fall the key had it; but suppositions are vain, and so was his thinking seeing he knew me not, for till this day he never set eye on his purse.

## The Species of Cony-Catchers.

There are a number of my companions yet living in England, who being men for all companies, will by once conversing with a man, so draw him to them, that he shall think nothing in the world too dear for them, and never be able to part from them, until he hath spent all he hath.

If he be lasciviously addicted, they have *Aretine's Tables*<47> at their fingers' ends, to feed him on with new kind of filthiness: they will come in with *Rous* the French Painter, and what unusual vein in bawdry he had: not a whore or quean about the town but they know, and can tell you her marks, and where and with whom she hosts.

If they see you covetously bent, they will tell you wonders of the philosophers' stone, and make you believe they can make gold of goose-grease: only you must be at some two or three hundred pounds cost, or such a trifling matter, to help to set up their stills, and then you need not care where you beg your bread, for they will make you do little better if you follow their prescriptions.

Discourse with them of countries, they will set you on fire with travelling, yea what place is it they will not swear they have been in, and I warrant you tell such a sound tale, as if it were all Gospel they spake: not a corner in France but they can describe. Venice, why it is nothing, for they have intelligence from it every hour, & at every word will come in with *Strado Curtizano*, and tell you such miracles of *Madam Padilia* and *Romana Imperia*,<48> that you will be mad till you be out of England. And if he see you are caught with that bait, he will make as though he would leave you, and feign business about the Court, or that such a nobleman sent for him, when you will rather consent to rob all your friends, than be severed from him one hour. If you request his company to travel, he will say In faith I cannot tell: I would sooner spend my life in your company than in any man's in England, but at this time, I am not so provided of money as I would, therefore I can make you no promise: and if a man should adventure upon such a journey without money, it were miserable and base, and no man will care for us. Tut, money say you (like a liberal young master) take no care for that, for I have so much land and I will sell it, my credit is so much, and I will use it: I have the keeping of a Cousin's chamber of mine, which is an old Counsellor, & he this vacation time is gone down into the country, we will break up his study, rifle his chests, dive in to the bottom of his bags, but we will have to serve our turn: rather than fail, we will sell his books, pawn his bedding and hangings, & make riddance of all his household stuff to set us packing. To this he listens a little, & says: These are some hopes yet, but if he should go with you, and you have money & he none, you will domineer over him at your pleasure, and then he were well set up, to leave such possibilities in England, and be made a slave in another country: With that you offer to part halves with him, or put all you have into his custody, before he should think you meant otherwise then well with him. He takes you at your offer, and promiseth to husband it so for you, that you shall spend with the best and yet not waste so much as you do: which makes you (meaning simply) put him in trust and give him the purse: Then all a boon voyage into the low Countries you trudge, so to travel up into Italy, but *per varios casus & tot discrimina rerum*,<49> in a town of garrison he leaves you, runs away with your money, and makes you glad to betake yourself to provant, and to be a gentleman of a company. If he fear you will make after him, he will change his name, and if there be any better gentleman than other in the country where he sojourns, his name he will borrow, and creep into his kindred, or it shall cost him a fall, and make him pay sweetly for it in the end, if he take not the better heed. Thus will he be sure to have one ass or other afoot, on whom he may prey, and ever to have new inventions to keep himself in pleasing.

There is no art but he will have a superficial sight into, and put down every man with talk. and when he hath uttered the most he can, he makes men believe that he knows ten times more than he will put into their heads, which are secrets not to be made common to every one.

He will persuade you he hath twenty receipts of love powders: that he can frame a ring with such a quaint device, that if a wench put it on her finger, she shall not choose but follow you up and down the streets.

If you have an enemy that you would fain be rid of, he'll teach you to poison him with your very looks. To stand on the top of Paul's with a burning glass in your hand, and cast the Sun with such a force on a man's face that walks under, that it shall strike him stark dead more violently than lightning.

To fill a letter full of needles, which shall be laid after such a mathematical order, that when he opens it to whom it is sent, they shall all spring up and fly into his body as forceably as if they had been blown up with gunpowder, or sent from a caliver's mouth like small shot.

To conclude, he will have such probable reasons to procure belief to his lies, such a smooth tongue to deliver them, and set them forth with such a grace, that a very wise man he should be that did not swallow the gudgeon at his hands.

In this sort have I known sundry young gentlemen of England trained forth to their own destruction, which makes me the more willing to forewarn other of such base companions.

Wherefore, for the rooting out of these sly insinuating mothworms, that eat men out of their substance unseen, and are the decay of the forwardest gentlemen and best wits: it were to be wished that Amasis' Law<50> were revived, who ordained that every man at the year's end should give account to the magistrate how he lived, and he that did not so, or could not make an account of an honest life, to be put to death as a felon without favour or pardon.

Ye have about London, that (to the disgrace of gentlemen) live gentleman-like of themselves, having neither money nor land, nor any lawful means to maintain them: some by play, and they go a-mumming into the country all Christmas time with false dice, or if there be any place where gentlemen or merchants frequent in the city or town corporate, thither will they, either disguised like young merchants, or substantial citizens, and draw them all dry that ever deal with them.

There are some do nothing but walk up & down Paul's, or come to men's shops to buy wares, with budgets of writings under their arms, & these will talk with any man about their suits in law, and discourse unto them how these and these men's bonds they have for money, that are the chieftest dealers in London, Norwich, Bristol, and such like places, & complain that they cannot get one penny. Why if such a man doth owe it you, (will some man say that knows him) I durst buy the debt of you, let me get it of him as I can: O sayeth my budget man, I have his hand and seal to show, look here else, and with that plucks out a counterfeit bond, (as all his other writings are,) and reads it to him: whereupon, for half in half they presently compound, and after he hath that ten pound paid him for his bond of twenty, besides the forfeiture, or so forth, he says faith these lawyers drink me as dry as a sieve, and I have money to pay at such a day, and I doubt I shall not be able to compass it. Here are all the leases and evidences of my land lying in such a shire, could you lend me forty pound on them till the next Term, or for some six months? and it shall then be repaid with interest, or I'll forfeit my whole inheritance, which is better worth than a hundred marks a year.

The wealthy gentleman, or young novice, that hath store of crowns lying by him, greedy of such a bargain, thinking (perhaps) by one clause or other to defeat him of all he hath, lends him money, and takes a fair Statute Merchant<51>of his lands before a judge; but when all

## The Complete Cony-catching

comes to all, he hath no more land in England then a younger brother's inheritance, nor doth any such great occupier as he feigneth, know him: much less owe him any money: whereby my covetous master is cheated forty or fifty pound thick at one clap.

Not unlike to these are they, that coming to ordinaries about the Exchange, where merchants do table for the most part, will say they have two or three ships of coals new come from Newcastle, and wish they could light on a good chapman, that would deal for them altogether. What's your price saith one? What's your price? saith another. He holds them at the first at a very high rate, and sets a good face on it, as though he had such traffic indeed, but afterward comes down so low, that every man strives who shall give him earnest first, and ere he be aware, he hath forty shillings clapped in his hand, to assure the bargain to some one of them: he puts it up quietly, and bids them enquire for him at such a sign and place, where he never came, signifying also his name: when in troth he is but a cozening companion, and no such man to be found. Thus goes he clear away with forty shillings in his purse for nothing, and they unlike to see him any more.

## **A Merry Jest how Ned Browne's Wife Was Cross-Bitten in her Own Art.**

But here note (gentlemen) though I have done many sleights, and cross-bitten sundry persons: yet so long goes the pitcher to the water, that at length it comes broken home. Which proverb I have seen verified: for I remember once that I supposing to cross-bite a gentleman who had some ten pound in his sleeve, left my wife to perform the accident, who in the end was cross-bitten herself, and thus it fell out. She compacted with a hooker, whom some call a curber, & having before bargained with the gentleman to tell her tales in her ear all night, he came according to promise, who having supped and going to bed, was advised by my wife to lay his clothes in the window where the hooker's crome might cross-bite them from him: yet secretly intending before in the night time to steal his money forth of his sleeve. They being in bed together slept soundly: yet such was his chance that he suddenly wakened long before her, & being sore troubled with a lask, rose up and made a double use of his chamberpot: that done, he intended to throw it forth at the window, which the better to perform, he first removed his clothes from thence; at which instant the spring of the window rose up of the own accord. This suddenly amazed him so, that he leapt back, leaving the chamber pot still standing in the window, fearing that the devil had been at hand. By & by he espied a fair iron crome come marching in at the window, which instead of the doublet and hose he sought for, suddenly took hold of that homely service in the member vessel, and so plucked goodman jordan with all his contents down pat on the curber's pate. Never was gentle angler so dressed, for his face, his head, and his neck, were all besmeared with the soft sir-reverence, so as he stunk worse than a jakes farmer<38>. The gentleman hearing one cry out, and seeing his mess of altogether so strangely taken away, began to take heart to him, and looking out perceived the curber lie almost brained, almost drowned, & well near poisoned therewith: whereat laughing heartily to himself, he put on his own clothes, and got him secretly away, laying my wife's clothes in the same place, which the gentle angler soon after took; but never could she get them again till this day.

## Ned Browne's Farewell

"This (gentlemen) was my course of life, and thus I got much by villainy, and spent it amongst whores as carelessly: I seldom or never listened to the admonition of my friends, neither did the fall of other men learn me to beware, and therefore am I brought now to this end: yet little did I think to have laid my bones in France: I thought indeed that Tyburn would at last have shaken me by the neck: but having done villainy in England, this was always my course, to slip over into the Low Countries, and there for a while play the soldier, and partly that was the cause of my coming hither: for growing odious in and about London, for my filching, lifting, nipping, foisting and cross-biting, that every one held me in contempt, and almost disdained my company, I resolved to come over into France: by bearing arms to win some credit, determining with myself to become a true man. But as men, though they change countries, alter not their minds: so given over by God into a reprobate sense, I had no feeling of goodness, but with the dog fell to my old vomit, and here most wickedly I have committed sacrilege, robbed a Church, and done other mischeevous pranks, for which justly I am condemned and must suffer death: whereby I learn, that revenge deferred is not quittanced: that though God suffer the wicked for a time yet he pays home at length; for while I lasciviously led a careless life, if my friends warned me of it, I scoffed at them, & if they told me of the gallows, I would swear it was my destiny, and now I have proved myself no liar: yet must I die more basely and be hanged out at a window.

"Oh countrymen and gentlemen, I have held you long, as good at the first as at the last, take then this for a farewell: Trust not in your own wits, for they will become too wilful oft, and so deceive you. Boast not in strength, nor stand not on your manhood so to maintain quarrels; for the end of brawling is confusion: but use your courage in defence of your country, and then fear not to die; for the bullet is an honourable death. Beware of whores, for they be the sirens that draw men on to destruction, their sweet words are enchantments, their eyes allure, and their beauties bewitch: Oh take heed of their persuasions, for they be crocodiles, that when they weep, destroy. Truth is honourable, and better is it to be a poor honest man, than a rich & wealthy thief: for the first end is the gallows, and what a shame is it to a man's friends, when he dies so basely. Scorn not labour (gentlemen) nor hold not any course of life bad or servile, that is profitable and honest, lest in giving yourselves over to idleness, and having no yearly maintenance, you fall into many prejudicial mischiefs. Contemn not the virtuous counsel of a friend, despise not the hearing of God's ministers, scoff not at the magistrates, but fear God, honour your Prince, and love your country, then God will bless you, as I hope he will do me for all my manifold offences, and so Lord into thy hands I commit my spirit:" and with that he himself sprung out at the window and died.

Here by the way you shall understand, that going over into France, he near unto Arx<52> robbed a church, & was therefore condemned, and having no gallows by, they hanged him out at a window, fastening the rope about the bar: and thus this Ned Browne died miserably, that all his lifetime had been full of mischief & villainy, sleightly at his death regarding the state of his soul. But note a wonderful judgement of God showed upon him after his death: his body being taken down, & buried without the town, it is verified, that in the night time there came a company of wolves, and tore him out of his grave, and eat him up, whereas there lay many soldiers buried, & many dead carcasses, that they might have preyed on to have filled their hungry paunches. But the judgments of God as they are just, so they are inscrutable: yet thus much we may conjecture, that as he was one that delighted in rapine and stealth in his life, so at his death the ravenous wolves devoured him, & plucked him out of his grave, as a man not worthy to be admitted to the honour of any burial. Thus have I set down the life and

Robert Greene

death of Ned Browne, a famous cutpurse and cony-catcher, by whose example if any be profited, I have the desired end of my labour.

**FINIS.**

**THE DEFENCE OF CONY-CATCHING.**

Robert Greene

**Title Page**

THE DEFENCE OF

Conny catching.

OR

A CONFVTATION OF THOSE

two iniurious Pamphlets published by R. G. against  
the practitioners of many Nimble-witted

and mysticall Sciences.

By Cuthbert Cunny-catcher, Licentiate in Whit-

tington Colledge.<42>

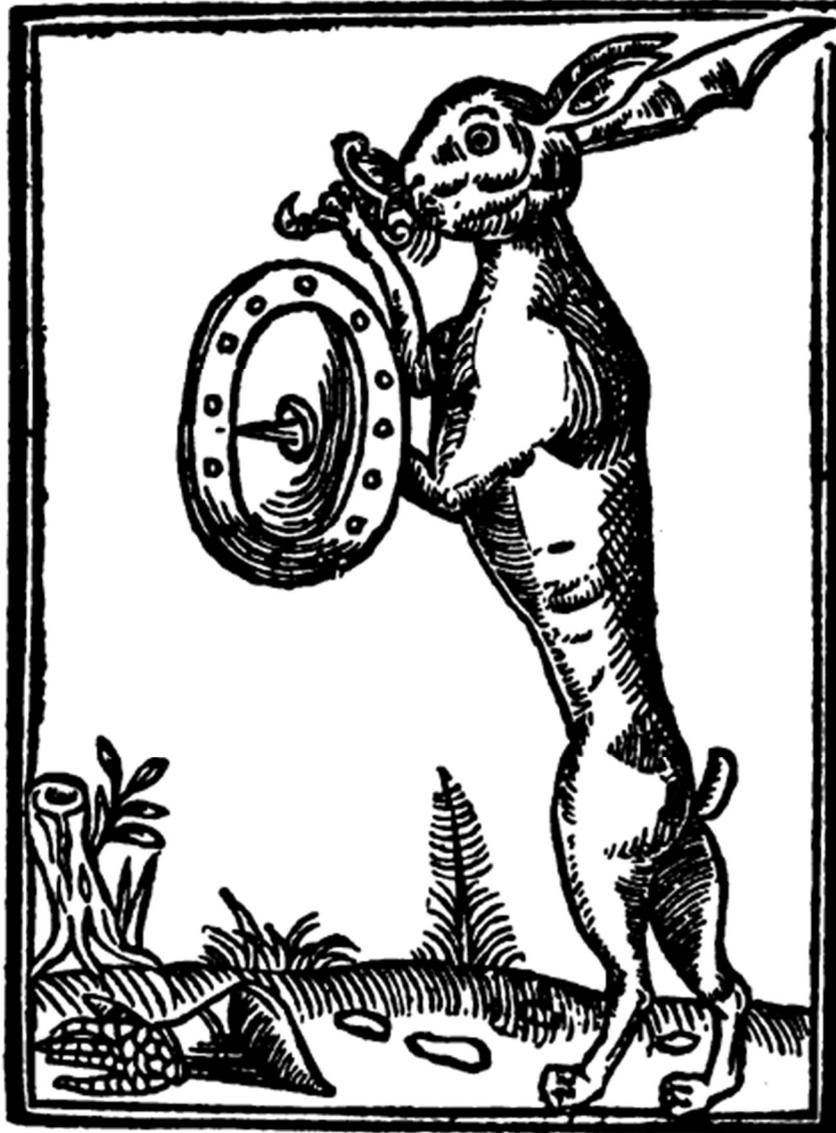
*Qui bene latuit bene vixit, dominatur enim*

*fraus in omnibus.* <53>

Printed at London by A. I. for *Thomas Gubbins*

and are to be sold by *Iohn Busbie*. 1592. (4°)

Frontispiece



Frontispiece – A Rabbit with sword and shield

## To The Readers

### To All my Good Friends Health

As Plato (my good friends) travelled from Athens to Egypt and from thence through sundry climes to increase his knowledge: so I as desirous as he to search the depth of those liberal arts wherein I was a professor, left my study in Whittington College<sup><54></sup> & traced the country to grow famous in my faculty, so that I was so expert in the art of cony-catching by my continual practice that that learned philosopher Jack Cuttes, whose deep insight into this science had drawn him thrice through every gaol in England, meeting of me at Maidstone, gave me the bucklers<sup><55></sup> as the subtlest that ever he saw in that quaint and mystical form of foolosophy: for if ever I brought my cony but to crush a pot of ale with me, I was as sure of all the crowns in his purse, as if he had conveyed them into my proper possession by a deed of gift with his own hand.

At dequoy, mumchance, catch-dolt, oure-le-bourse, non est possible, Dutch nobby or Irish one and thirty<sup><56></sup> none durst ever make compare with me for excellence: but as so many heads so many wits, so some that would not stoop a farthing at cards would venture all the bite in their bung<sup><57></sup> at dice. Therefore had I cheats for the very sice, of the squariers, langrets, gourds, stop-dice, highmen, lowmen, and dice barred for all advantages<sup><58></sup>: that if I fetched in any novice either at tables or any other game of hazard, I would be sure to strip him of all that his purse had *in esse* or his credit *in posse*<sup><59></sup> ere the simple cony and I parted.

When neither of these would serve, I had consorts that could verse, nip, and foist, so that I had a superficial sight into every profitable faculty. Insomuch that my principles grew authentical, and I so famous that had I not been crossed by those two peevish pamphlets, I might at the next midsummer have worn Doctor Storie's cap for a favour. For I travelled almost throughout all England, admired for my ingenious capacity, till coming about Exeter, I began to exercise my art, and drawing in a tanner for a tame cony, as soon as he had lost two shillings he made this reply. Sirrah, although you have a livery on your back<sup><60></sup> and a cognizance to countenance you withal, and bear the port of a gentleman, yet I see you are a false knave and a cony-catcher, and this companion your setter, and that before you and I part, I'll prove.

At these words cony-catcher and setter, I was driven into as great a maze as if one had dropped out of the clouds, to hear a peasant cant the words of art belonging to our trade: yet I set a good face on the matter and asked him what he meant by cony-catching. Marry (quoth he), although it is your practice, yet I have for 3 pence bought a little pamphlet that hath taught me to smoke such a couple of knaves as you be. When I heard him talk of smoking, my heart waxed cold and I began to gather into him gently. No no (quoth he), you cannot verse upon me; this book hath taught me to beware of cross-biting. And so to be brief, he used me courteously, and that night caused the constable to lodge me in prison, & the next morning I was carried before the justice, where likewise he had this cursed book of cony-catching, so that he could tell the secrets of mine art better than myself: whereupon after strict examination I was sent to the gaol, & at the sessions, by good hap & some friend that my money procured me, I was delivered. As soon as I was at liberty, I got one of these books & began to toss it over very devoutly, wherein I found our art so perfectly anatomized as if he had been practitioner in our faculty forty winters before. Then with a deep sigh I began to curse this R.G. that had made a public spoil of so noble a science, and to exclaim against that palpable ass whosoever, that would make any penman privy to our secret sciences. But see the sequel, I smothered my sorrow in silence, and away I trudged out of Devonshire & went towards Cornwall, & coming to a simple ale-house to lodge, I found at a square table hard by the fire half a dozen country farmers at cards. The sight of these penny-fathers at play drove me straight into a pleasant passion to bless fortune that had offered such sweet opportunity to exercise my wits & fill my purse with crowns, for I counted all the money they had mine by proper interest. As thus I stood

## The Complete Cony-catching

looking on them playing at cross-ruff, one was taken revoking, whereat the other said: What, neighbour, will you play the cony-catcher with us? no, no, we have read the book as well as you. Never went a cup of small beer so sorrowfully down an ale-knight's belly in a frosty morning as that word struck to my heart, so that for fear of trouble I was fain to try my good hap at square play, at which, fortune favouring me, I won twenty shillings, and yet do as simply as I could, I was not only suspected, but called cony-catcher and cross-biter. But away I went with the money and came presently to London, where I no sooner arrived amongst the crew but I heard of a second part worse than the first, which drave me into such a great choler that I began to inquire what this R.G. should be. At last I learned that he was a scholar and a Master of Arts and a cony-catcher in his kind, though not at cards, and one that favoured good fellows, so they were not palpable offenders in such desperate laws: whereupon reading his books and surveying every line with deep judgement, I began to note folly in the man, that would strain a gnat and let pass an elephant, that would touch small scapes, and let gross faults pass without any reprehension. Insomuch that I resolved to make an apology, and to answer his libellous invectives, and to prove that we cony-catchers are like little flies in the grass which live on little leaves and do no more harm, whereas there be in England other professions that be great cony-catchers and caterpillars that make barren the field wherein they bait.

Therefore, all my good friends vouch of my pains and pray for my proceedings, for I mean to have a bout with this R.G. and to give him such a veny that he shall be afraid hereafter to disparage that mystical science of cony-catching: if not, and that I prove too weak for him in sophistry, I mean to borrow Will Bickerton's blade, of as good a temper as Morglay King Arthur's sword was, and so challenge him to the single combat. But desirous to end the quarrel with the pen if it be possible, hear what I have learned in Whittington College.<42>

*Yours in cards and dice*

Cuthbert Cony-catcher.

## The Defence of Cony-Catching.

I cannot but wonder, Master R.G. what poetical fury made you so fantastic to write against cony-catchers? Was your brain so barren that you had no other subject? or your wits so dried with dreaming of love-pamphlets that you had no other humour left but satirically with Diogenes to snarl at all men's matters? You never found in Tully<sup><61></sup> nor Aristotle what a setter or a verser was.

It had been the part of a scholar, to have written seriously of some grave subject, either philosophically to have shown how you were proficient in Cambridge, or divinely to have manifested your religion to the world. Such trivial trinkets and threadbare trash had better seemed T.D.<sup><62></sup>, whose brains beaten to the yarking up of ballads, might more lawfully have glanced at the quaint conceits of cony-catching and cross-biting.

But to this my objection methinks I hear your mastership learnedly reply, *Nascimur pro patria*:<sup><1></sup> Every man is not born for himself, but for his country: and that the end of all studious endeavours ought to tend to the advancing of virtue, or suppressing of vice in the commonwealth. So that you have herein done the part of a good subject and a good scholar, to anatomize such secret villainies as are practised by cozening companions to the overthrow of the simple people, for by the discovery of such pernicious laws you seek to root out of the commonwealth such ill and licentious-living persons as do *Ex alieno succo vivere*, live of the sweat of other men's brows, and under subtle shifts of wit abused, seek to ruin the flourishing estate of England. These you call vipers, moths of the commonwealth, caterpillars worse than God rained down on Egypt, rotten flesh which must be divided from the whole.

*Ense resecaudum est ne pars sincera trahitur.*<sup><27></sup>

This Master R.G. I know will be your answer, as it is the pretended cause of your injurious pamphlets. And indeed it is very well done, but greater had your praise been if you had entered into the nature of more gross abuses, and set down the particular enormities that grow from such palpable villainies. For truth it is that this is the iron age<sup><63></sup>, wherein iniquity hath the upper hand, and all conditions and estates of men seek to live by their wits, and he is counted wisest that hath the deepest insight into the getting of gains: everything now that is found profitable is counted honest and lawful: and men are valued by their wealth, not by their virtues. He that cannot dissemble cannot live, and men put their sons nowadays apprentices not to learn trades and occupations but crafts and mysteries.

If then wit in this age be counted a great patrimony, and subtlety an inseparable accident to all estates, why should you be so spiteful, Master R.G., to poor cony-catchers above all the rest, sith they are the simplest souls of all in shifting to live in this over-wise world?

But you play like the spider that makes her web to entrap and snare little flies, but weaves it so slenderly that the great ones break through without any damage. You strain gnats, and pass over elephants: you scour the pond of a few croaking frogs and leave behind an infinite number of most venomous scorpions. You decipher poor cony-catchers, that perhaps with a trick at cards win forty shillings from a churl that can spare it, and never talk of those caterpillars that undo the poor, ruin whole Lordships, infect the commonwealth, and delight in nothing but in wrongful extorting and purloining of pelf, whenas such be the greatest cony-catchers of all, as by your leave, Master R.G., I will make manifest.

Sir-reverence on your worship, had you such a mote in your eye that you could not see those fox-furred gentlemen that hide under their gowns faced with foins, more falsehood than all the cony-catchers in England beside, those miserable usurers (I mean) that like vultures prey upon the spoil of the poor, sleeping with his neighbour's pledges all night in his bosom, and feeding upon forfeits and penalties as the ravens do upon carrion? If his poor neighbour want to supply his need, either for his household necessities or his rent at the day, he will not lend a penny for charity, all his money is abroad, but if he offer him either cow or sow, mare or horse, or the very corn scarce sprouted out of the ground to sell, so the bargain may be cheap, though

## The Complete Cony-catching

to the beggary of the poor man, he chops with him straight, and makes the poor cony fare the worse all the year after. Why write you not of these cony-catchers Master R.G.?

Besides if pawns come, as the lease of a house, or the fee-simple in mortgage, he can out of his furred cassock draw money to lend: but the old cole hath such quirks and quiddities in the conveyance, such provisos, such days, hours, nay minutes of payment that if his neighbour break but a moment, he takes the forfeit, and like a pink-eyed ferret so claws the poor cony in the burrow that he leaves no hair on his breech nor on his back ere he parts with him. Are not these vipers of the commonwealth, and to be exclaimed against not in small pamphlets but in great volumes?

You set down how there be requisite setters and versers in cony-catching, and be there not so, I pray you, in usury? for when a young youthful gentleman, given a little to lash out liberally, wanteth money, makes he not his moan first to the broker, as subtle a knave to induce him to his overthrow as the wiliest setter or verser in England, and he must be feed to speak to the usurer, and have so much in the pound for his labour; then he shall have grant of money and commodities together, so that if he borrow a hundred pound he shall have forty in silver and threescore in wares, dead stuff, God wot, as lute-strings, hobby-horses, or (if he be greatly favoured) brown paper or cloth, and that shoots out in the lash. Then his land is turned over in statute or recognizance for six months and six months, so that he pays some thirty in the hundred to the usurer, beside the scrivener, he hath a blind share: but when he comes to sell his threescore pound commodities, 'tis well if he get five and thirty.

Thus is the poor gentleman made a mere and simple cony, and versed upon to the uttermost, and yet if he break his day, loseth as much land as cost his father a thousand marks.

Is not this cozenage and cony-catching, Master R.G., and more daily practiced in England, and more hurtful than our poor shifting at cards, and yet your mastership can wink at the cause? They be wealthy, but Cuthbert Cony-catcher cares for none of them, no more than they care for him, and therefore will reveal all. And because, Master R.G., you were pleasant in examples, I'll tell you a tale of a usurer, done within a mile of a knave's head, and since the cuckoo sung last, and it fell out thus.

## A Pleasant Tale of an Usurer.

It fortuned that a young gentleman not far off from Cockermouth was somewhat slipped behindhand and grown in debt so that he durst hardly show his head for fear of his creditors, and having wife and children to maintain, although he had a proper land, yet wanting money to stock his ground, he lived very bare: whereupon he determined with himself to go to an old penny-father that dwelt hard by him and to borrow some money of him, and so to lay his land in mortgage for the repayment of it.

He no sooner made the motion but it was accepted, for it was a goodly lordship worth in rent of assize seven score pound by the year, and did abut upon the usurer's ground which drew the old churl to be marvellous willing to disburse money, so that he was content to lend him two hundred marks for three year according to the statute, so that he might have the land for assurance of his money.

The gentleman agreed to that, and promised to acknowledge a statute staple to him, with letters of defeasance<64>. The usurer (although he liked this well, and saw the young man offered more than reason required) yet had a further fetch to have the land his whatsoever should chance, and therefore he began to verse upon the poor cony thus.

Sir (quoth he) if I did not pity your estate, I would not lend you my money at such a rate, for whereas you have it after ten pounds in the hundred, I can make it worth thirty. But seeing the distress you, your wife, and children are in, and considering all grows through your own liberal nature, I compassionate you the more, and would do for you as for mine own son; therefore if you shall think good to follow it, I will give you fatherly advice: I know you are greatly indebted, and have many unmerciful creditors, and they have you in suit and I doubt ere long will have some extent against your lands; so shall you be utterly undone, and I greatly encumbered. Therefore to avoid all this, in my judgement it were best for you to make a deed of gift of all your lands without condition or promise to some one faithful friend or other in whom you may repose credit, so shall your enemies have no advantage against you: and seeing they shall have nothing but your bare body liable to their executions, they will take the more easy and speedy composition. I think this the surest way, and if you durst repose yourself in me, God is my witness I would be to you as your father if he lived. How say you to this compendious tale, Master R.G., could the proudest setter or verser in the world have drawn on a cony more cunningly?

Well, again to our young gentleman, who simply (with tears in his eyes to hear the kindness of the usurer) thanked him heartily, and deferred not to put in practice his counsel, for he made an absolute deed of gift from wife and children to this usurer of all his lordship, and so had the two hundred marks upon the plain forfeit of a bond.

To be short, the money made him and his merry, and yet he did husband it so well, that he not only duly paid the interest but stocked his grounds and began to grow out of debt, so that his creditors were willing to bear with him. Against the three years were expired, he made shift by the help of his friends for the money, and carried it home to the usurer, thanking him greatly and craving a return of his deed of gift. Nay, soft, sir (saith the old churl), that bargain is yet to make; the land is mine, to me and mine heirs forever by a deed of gift from your own hand, and what can be more sure: take the money if you please, and there is your bond, but for the lordship, I will enter on it tomorrow: yet if you will be my tenant, you shall have it before another, and that is all the favour you shall have of me.

At this the gentleman was amazed, and began to plead conscience with him, but in vain, whereupon he went sorrowfully home and told his wife, who as a woman half lunatic ran with her little children to his house, and cried out, but bootless: for although they called him before the chief of the country, yet sith the law had granted him the fee simple thereof, he would not part withal: so that this distressed gentleman was fain to become tenant to this usurer, and for two hundred marks to lose a lordship worth six or seven thousand pounds. I pray you, was not

## The Complete Cony-catching

this an old cony-catcher, Mr. R.G., that could lurch a poor cony of so many thousands at one time? whether is our crossing of cards more perilous to the commonwealth than this cozenage for land? you wink at it, but I will tell all; yet hear out the end of my tale, for as fortune fell out, the usurer was made a cony himself.

The gentleman and his wife smothering this with patience, she that had a reaching wit & hair brain revenge in her head, counselled her husband to make a voyage from home & to stay a week or two, and (quoth she) before you come again you shall see me venture fair for the land. The gentleman, willing to let his wife practise her wits, went his way, and left all to his wife's discretion. She after her husband was four or five days from home, was visited by the usurer, who used her very kindly, and sent victuals to her house, promising to sup with her that night, and that she should not want anything in her husband's absence. The gentlewoman with gracious acceptance thanked him, and bade divers of her neighbours to bear him company, having a further reach in her head than he suspected. For the old churl coming an hour before supper-time, even as she herself would wish, for an amorous wehee or two, as old jades whinny when they cannot wag the tail, began to be very pleasant with his tenant, and desired her to show him all the rooms in her house, and happily (saith he) if I die without issue, I may give it to your children, for my conscience bids me be favourable to you.

The gentlewoman led him through every part, and at last brought him into a back room much like a back-house, where she said thus unto him.

Sir, this room is the most unhandsomest in all the house, but if there were a dormer built to it, and these shut windows made bay windows and glazed, it would make the properest parlour in all the house: for (saith she) put your head out at this window, and look what a sweet prospect belongs unto it.

The usurer mistrusting nothing, thrust out his crafty sconce, and the gentlewoman shut to the window, and called her maids to help, where they bound and pinioned the caterpillar's arms fast, and then stood he with his head into a back-yard, as if he had been on a pillory, and struggle he durst not for stifling himself. When she had him thus at the vantage, she got a couple of sixpenny nails and a hammer, and went into the yard, having her children attending upon her, every one with a sharp knife in their hands, and then coming to him with a stern countenance, she looked as Medea did when she attempted revenge against Jason. The usurer, seeing this tragedy, was afraid of his life and cried out, but in vain, for her maids made such a noise that his shriking could not be heard whilst she nailed one ear fast to the window and the other to the stanchel. Then began she to use these words unto him.

Ah, vile and injurious caterpillar, God hath sent thee to seek thine own revenge, and now I and my children will perform it. For sith thy wealth doth so countenance thee that we cannot have thee punished for thy cozenage, I myself will be justice, judge, and executioner, for as the pillory belongs to such a villain, so have I nailed thy ears, and they shall be cut off to the perpetual example of such purloining reprobates, and the executors shall be these little infants whose right without conscience or mercy thou so wrongfully detainest. Look on this old churl little babes, this is he that with his cozenage will drive you to beg and want in your age, and at this instant brings your father to all this present misery, have no pity upon him, but you two cut off his ears, and thou (quoth she to the eldest) cut off his nose, and so be revenged on the villain whatsoever fortune me for my labour. At this the usurer cried out, and bade her stay her children, and he would restore the house & land again to her husband. I cannot believe thee, base churl, quoth she, for thou that wouldst perjure thyself against so honest a gentleman as my husband will not stick to forswear thyself were thou at liberty, and therefore I will mangle thee to the uttermost. As thus she was ready to have her children fall upon him, one of her maids came running in and told her her neighbours were come to supper: Bid them come in, quoth she, and behold this spectacle. Although the usurer was passing loath to have his neighbours see him thus tyrannously used, yet in they came, and when they saw him thus

mannerly in a new-made pillory, and his ears fast nailed, some wondered, some laughed, and all stood amazed till the gentlewoman discoursed to them all the cozenage, and how she meant to be revenged: some of them persuaded her to let him go; others were silent, and some bade him confess: he hearing them debate the matter, and not to offer to help him, cried out: Why, and stand you staring on me, neighbours, and will not you save my life? No, quoth the gentlewoman, he or she that stirs to help thee shall pay dearly for it, and therefore, my boys, off with his ears: then he cried out, but stay, and he would confess all, when from point to point he rehearsed how he had cozened her husband by a deed of gift only made to him in trust, and there was content to give him the two hundred marks freely for amends, and to yield up before any man of worship the land again into his possession, and upon that he bade them all bear witness. Then the gentlewoman let loose his ears, and let slip his head, and away went he home with his bloody lugs, and tarried not to take part of the meat he had sent, but the gentlewoman & her neighbours made merry therewith, and laughed heartily at the usage of the usurer. The next day it was bruited abroad, and came to the ears of the worshipful of the country, who sat in commission upon it, and found out the cozenage of the usurer, so they praised the wit of the gentlewoman, restored her husband to the land, and the old churl remained in discredit, and was a laughing-stock to all the country all his life after.

## **Cony-catching Millers, and a Pleasant Tale of a Miller and an Ale-wife's Boy of Edmonton.**

I pray you, what say you to Monsieur the Miller with the golden thumb, whether think you him a cony-catcher or no? that robs every poor man of his meal and corn, and takes toll at his own pleasure, how many conies doth he take up in a year? for when he brings their wheat to the mill he sells them meal of their own corn in the market. I omit Miles the miller's cozenage for wenching affairs, as no doubt in these causes they be mighty cony-catchers, and mean to speak of their policy in filching and stealing of meal. For you must note, that our jolly miller doth not only verse upon the poor and rich for their toll, but hath false hoppers conveyed under the fall of his mill, where all the best of the meal runs by, this is, if the party be by that bringeth the corn, but because many men have many eyes, the miller will drive them off for their grist for a day or two, and then he plays his pranks at his own pleasure. I need not tell that stale jest of the gentleman's miller that kept court and leet once every week, and used to set in every sack a candle, and so summon the owners to appear by their names: if they came not, as they were far enough from that place, then he amerced them, and so took triple toll of every sack. One night amongst the rest, the gentleman his master was under the mill and heard all his knavery, how everyone was called and paid his amerciament: at last he heard his own name called, and then stepping up the ladder he bade stay, for he was there to make his appearance. I do imagine that the miller was blank, and perhaps his master called him knave, but the fox, the more he is cursed the better he fares, and the oftener the miller is called thief, the richer he waxeth: and therefore do men rightly by a by word bid the miller put out, and if he asketh what, they say a thief's head and a thief's pair of ears, for such grand cony-catchers are these millers, that he that cannot verse upon a poor man's sack is said to be born with a golden thumb. But that you may see more plainly their knavery, I'll tell you a pleasant tale performed not many years since by a miller in Enfield mill, ten miles from London, and an ale-wife's boy of Edmonton, but because they are all at this present alive I will conceal their names, but thus it fell out.

An ale-wife of Edmonton who had a great vent for spiced cakes, sent her son often to Enfield mill for to have her wheat ground, so that the boy, who was of a quick spirit & ripe wit, grew very familiar both with the miller and his man, and could get his corn sooner put in the mill than any boy in the country beside. It fortun'd on a time that this goodwife wanting meal, bade her boy hie to the mill, and be at home that night without fail, for she had not a pint of flour in the house. Jack her son, for so we will call his name, lays his sack on his mare's back, and away he rides singing towards Enfield: as he rode he met at The Washes<sup><65></sup> with the miller, and gave him the time of the day, Godfather, quoth he, whither ride you? To London, Jack, quoth the miller. Oh good godfather, quoth the boy, tell me what store of grist is at the mill? marry great store quoth the miller: but Jack if thou wilt do me an errand to my man, I'll send thee by a token that thou shalt have thy corn cast on & ground as soon as thou comest. I'll say and do what you will to be dispatched, for my mother hath neither cakes nor flour at home: Then, Jack, saith the miller, bid my man grind thy corn next, by that token he look to my bitch and feed her well. I will godfather, saith the boy, and rides his way, and marvelled with himself what bitch it was that he bade his man feed, considering for two or three years he had used to the mill, and never saw a dog nor bitch but a little prick-eared sholt that kept the mill door. Riding thus musing with himself, at last he came to Enfield, and there he had his corn wound up: as soon as he came up the stairs, the miller's man, being somewhat sleepy, began to ask Jack drowsily what news. Marry, quoth the boy, the news is this, that I must have my corn laid on next: Soft, Jack, quoth the miller's man, your turn will not come afore midnight, but ye are always in haste, soft fire makes sweet malt, your betters shall be served afore you this time. Not so quoth the boy, for I met my godfather at the Washes riding to London, and told him what haste I had, and so he bids my grist shall be laid on next, by that token you must look to

his bitch, and feed her well. At that the miller's man smiled, and said he should be the next, and so rose up and turned a pin behind the hopper. Jack marked all this, and being a wily and a witty boy, mused where this bitch should be, and seeing none began to suspect some knavery, and therefore being very familiar was bold to look about in every corner while the man was busy about the hopper; at last Jack turning up a cloth that hung before the trough spied under the hopper below, where a great poke was tied with a cord almost full of fine flour, that ran at a false hole underneath, and could not be spied by any means. Jack, seeing this, began to suspect this was the miller's bitch that he commanded his man to feed, and so smiled and let it alone: at last when the corn was ground off that was in the hopper, Jack laid on his, and was very busy about it himself, so that the miller's man set him down and took a nap, knowing the boy could look to the mill almost as well as himself: Jack all this while had an eye to the bitch, and determined at last to slip her halter, which he warily performed, for when his corn was ground and he had put up his meal, he whipped asunder the cord with his knife that held the poke, and thrust it into the mouth of his sack: now there was in the poke a bushel and more of passing fine flour, that the miller's bitch had eaten that day; as soon as Jack had tied up his sack, there was striving who should lay on corn next, so that the miller's man waked, and Jack desiring one to help him up with his corn, took his leave and went his way, riding merrily homeward, smiling to think how he had cozened the miller: as he rode, at that same place where he met the miller outward, he met him homeward. How now Jack quoth the miller, hast ground? Aye, I thank you, godfather, quoth the boy. But didst remember my errand to my man, says he; didst bid him look to my bitch well? Oh godfather quoth the boy, take no care for your bitch; she is well, for I have her here in my sack, whelps and all: Away rides Jack at this, laughing, and the miller grinning, but when he found it true, I leave you to guess how he and his man dealt together, but how the ale-wife sported at the knavery of her son when he told her all the jest, that imagine, but howsoever, for all that Jack was ever welcome to the mill, and ground before any, and whosesoever sack fed the bitch, Jack scaped ever toll-free, that he might conceal the miller's subtlety.

Was not this miller a cony-catcher, Master R.G.? What should I talk of the baser sort of men whose occupation cannot be upholden without craft, there is no mystery nor science almost wherein a man might thrive without it be linked to this famous art of cony-catching. The ale-wife unless she nick her pots and cony-catch her guests with stone pots and petty cans, can hardly pay her brewer, nay, and yet that will not serve, the chalk must walk to set up now & then a shilling or two too much, or else the rent will not be answered at the quarter-day, besides hostry, faggots, and fair chambering, & pretty wenches that have no wages but what they get by making of beds. I know some tap-houses about the suburbs where they buy a shoulder of mutton for two groats, and sell it to their guest for two shillings, and yet have no female friends to sup withal: let such take heed lest my father's white horse lose saddle & bridle & they go on foot to the devil on pilgrimage. Tush Master R.G. God is my witness I have seen chandlers about London have two pair of weights, and when the searchers come, they show them those that are sealed, but when their poor neighbours buy wax, they use them that lack weight. I condemn not all, but let such amend as are touched at the quick. And is not this flat cony-catching; yes, if it please your mastership, & worsen. Why, the base sort of ostlers have their shifts, & the crew of St. Patrick's costermongers can sell a simple man a crab for a pippin. And but that I have loved wine well, I would touch both the vintner and his bush, for they have such brewing and tunning, such chopping and changing, such mingling & mixing, what of wine with water in the quart-pot, and tempering one wine with another in the vessel, that it is hard to get a neat cup of wine and simple of itself, in most of our ordinary taverns, & do not they make poor men conies, that for their current money give them counterfeit wine.

What say you to the butcher with his pricks, that hath policies to puff up his meat to please the eye? is not all his craft used to draw the poor cony to rid him of his ware? Hath not

## The Complete Cony-catching

the draper his dark shop to shadow the dye and wool of his cloth, and all to make the country gentleman or farmer a cony? What trade can maintain his traffic? what science uphold itself? what man live, unless he grow into the nature of a cony-catcher? Do not the lawyers make long pleas, stand upon their demurs, and have their quirks and quiddities to make his poor client a cony: I speak not generally, for so they be the ministers of justice and the patrons of the poor men's right, but particularly of such as hold gains their God, and esteem more of coin than of conscience.

### **A Pleasant Tale Of Will Sommers.**

I remember by the way a merry jest performed by a fool, yet wittily hit home at hazard, as blind men shoot the crow.

King Henry the Eighth of famous memory, walking one day in his privy garden with Will Sommers his fool, it fortun'd that two lawyers had a suit unto his Majesty for one piece of ground that was almost out of lease and in the King's gift, and at time put up their supplication to his Highness, and at that instant one of the Pantry<sup><67></sup> that had been a long serviture, had spied out the same land and exhibited his petition for the same gift, so that in one hour all the three supplications were given to the King, which his Highness noting, and being as then pleasantly disposed, he revealed it to them that were by him, how there were three fishes at one bait, and all gaped for a benefice, and he stood in doubt on whom to bestow it, and so showed them the supplications: the courtiers spoke for their fellow, except two that were feed by the lawyers, and they particularly pleaded for their friends, yielding many reasons to the King on both sides. At last his Majesty said he would refer the matter to Will Sommers, which of them his fool thought most worthy of it should have the land. Will was glad of this, and loved him of the Pantry well, and resolv'd he should have the ground, but the fool brought it about with this pretty jest: Marry quoth he, what are these? two lawyers? Aye, Will, said the King. Then, quoth the fool, I will use them as they use their poor clients. Look here, quoth he, I have a walnut in my hand, and I will divide it among the three, so Will crack'd it, and gave to one lawyer one shell, and to another the other shell, and to him of the Pantry the meat, so shall thy gift be, Harry, quoth he, this lawyer shall have good books, and this, fair promises, but my fellow of the Pantry shall have the land. For thus deal they with their clients; two men go to two, and spend all they have upon the law, and at last have nothing but bare shells for their labour. At this the King and his noblemen laugh'd, the Yeoman of the Pantry had the gift, and the lawyers went home with fleas in their ears by a fool's verdict. I rehearsed this act to show how men-of-law feed on poor men's purses and make their country clients oftentimes simple conies. But leaving their common courses and trivial examples, I will show you, Master R.G., of a kind of cony-catchers that as yet passeth all these.

## Gentlemen Cony-Catchers

There be in England, but especially about London, certain quaint, picked, and neat companions, attired in their apparel either *a la mode de France*, with a side cloak and a hat of a high block and a broad brim, as if he could with his head cosmographize the world in a moment, or else *al espagnol*, with a straight bombast sleeve like a quail-pipe, his short cloak, and his rapier hanging as if he were entering the list to a desperate combat: his beard squared with such art, either with his moustaches after the lash of lions<68>, standing as stiff as if he wore a ruler in his mouth, or else nicked off with the Italian cut, as if he meant to profess one faith with the upper lip, and another with his nether lip, and then he must be marquisadoed, with a side peak pendent<69>, either sharp like the single of a deer<70>, or curtailed like the broad end of a mole spade. This gentleman, forsooth, haunteth tabling-houses, taverns, and such places where young novices resort, & can fit his humour to all companies, and openly shadoweth his disguise with the name of a traveller, so that he will have a superficial insight into certain phrases of every language, and pronounce them in such a grace as if almost he were that countryman born: then shall you hear him vaunt of his travels and tell what wonders he hath seen in strange countries: how he hath been at Saint James of Compostella in Spain, at Madrid in the King's court, and then drawing out his blade he claps it on the board and swears he bought that in Toledo: then will he rove to Venice, and with a sigh discover the situation of the city, how it is seated two leagues from *terra firma* in the sea, and speak of Rialto, Treviso and Murano where they make glasses, and to set the young gentleman's teeth on edge, he will make a long tale of La Strado Courtizano where the beautiful courtesans dwell, describing their excellency and what angelical creatures they be, and how amorously they will entertain strangers. Tush, he will discourse the state of Barbary<71>, and there to Eschites and Alcaires<72>, and from thence leap to France, Denmark, and Germany. After all concluding thus.

What is a gentleman (saith he) without travel? even as a man without one eye. The sight of sundry countries made Ulysses so famous: bought wit is the sweetest, and experience goeth beyond all patrimonies. Did young gentlemen as well as I know the pleasure & profit of travel, they would not keep them at home within their native continent but visit the world, & win more wisdom in travelling two or three years than all the wealth their ancestors left them to possess. Ah, the sweet sight of ladies, the strange wonders in cities, and the divers manners of men and their conditions were able to ravish a young gentleman's senses with the surfeit of content, and what is a thousand pound spent to the obtaining of those pleasures?

All these novelties doth this pippined braggart boast on, when his only travel hath been to look on a fair day from Dover cliffs to Calais, never having stepped a foot out of England, but surveyed the maps, and heard others talk what they knew by experience. Thus decking himself like the daw with the fair feathers of other birds, and discoursing what he heard other men report, he grew so plausible among young gentlemen that he got his ordinary at the least, and some gracious thanks for his labour. But haply some amongst many, tickled with the desire to see strange countries, and drawn on by his alluring words, would join with him, and question if he meant ever to travel again. He straight after he hath bitten his peak by the end, *alla Neopolitano*, begins thus to reply.

Sir, although a man of my travel and experience might be satisfied in the sight of countries, yet so insatiate is the desire of travelling that if perhaps a young gentleman of a liberal and courteous nature were desirous to see Jerusalem or Constantinople, would he well acquit my pains and follow my counsel, I would bestow a year or two with him out of England. To be brief, if the gentleman jump with him, then doth he cause him to sell some lordship, and put some thousand or two thousand pound in the bank to be received by letters of exchange, and because the gentleman is ignorant, my young master his guide must have the disposing of it: which he so well sets out that the poor gentleman never sees any return of his money after.

Then must store of suits of apparel be bought and furnished every way: at last, he names a ship wherein they should pass, and so down to Gravesend they go, and there he leaves the young novice, fleeced of his money and woe-begone, as far from travel as Miles the merry cobbler of Shoreditch, that swore he would never travel further than from his shop to the ale-house. I pray you, call you not these fine-witted fellows cony-catchers, Master R.G.?

But now sir by your leave a little, what if I should prove you a cony-catcher Master R.G.? Would it not make you blush at the matter? I'll go as near to it as the friar did to his hostess's maid when the clerk of the parish took him at *levatum* at midnight. Ask the Queen's players if you sold them not Orlando Furioso for twenty nobles, and when they were in the country, sold the same play to the Lord Admiral's men for as much more? Was not this plain cony-catching, Master R.G.?

But I hear when this was objected, that you made this excuse: that there was no more faith to be held with players than with them that valued faith at the price of a feather: for as they were comedians to act, so the actions of their lives were chameleon-like, that they were uncertain, variable, time pleasers, men that measured honesty by profit, and that regarded their authors not by desert, but by necessity of time. If this may serve you for a shadow, let me use it for an excuse of our card cony-catching, for when we meet a country farmer with a full purse, a miserable miser that either racks his tenants' rents or sells his grain in the market at an unreasonable rate: we hold it a devotion to make him a cony in that he is a caterpillar to others, and gets that by pilling and polling of the poor that we strip him of by sleight and agility of wit.

Is there not here resident about London a crew of terrible hacksters in the habit of gentlemen, well apparelled, and yet some wear boots for want of stockings, with a lock worn at their left ear for their mistress' favour, his rapier *alla revolto*, his poignado pendent ready for the stab, and cavilevarst<73> like a warlike magnifico, yet for all this outward show of pride, inwardly they be humble in mind and despise worldly wealth, for you shall never take them with a penny in their purse. These soldados, for under that profession most of them wander, have a policy to scourge ale-houses, for where they light in, they never leap out till they have showed their arithmetic with chalk on every post in the house figured in ciphers like round Os, till they make the goodman cry O, O, O as if he should call an *Oyez* at assize or sessions. Now sir they have sundry shifts to maintain them in this versing, for either they creep in with the goodwife and so undo the goodman, or else they bear it out with great brags if the host be simple, or else they trip him in some words when he is tipsy that he hath spoken against some justice of peace or other, or some other great man, and then they hold him at a bay with that, till his back almost break. Thus shift they from house to house, having this proverb amongst them: Such must eat as are hungry, and they must pay that have money. Call you not these cony-catchers, Master R.G.?

It were an endless piece of work to discover the abominable life of brokers, whose shops are the very temples of the devil, themselves his priests, and their books of account more damnable than the Alcoran set out by Mahomet: for as they induce young gentlemen to pawn their lands, as I said before, so they are ready (the more is the pity that it is suffered) to receive any goods, howsoever it be come by, having their shops (as they say) a lawful market to buy and sell in, so that whence grows so many lifts about London but in that they have brokers their friends to buy whatsoever they purloin & steal? And yet is the picklock, lift, or hooker that brings the stolen goods made a flat cony, and used as an instrument only of their villainy: for suppose he hath lifted a gown or a cloak or so many parcels as are worth ten pounds, and ventures his life in hazard for the obtaining of it: the miserable caterpillar the broker will think he dealeth liberally with him if he give him forty shillings; so doth he not only maintain felony, but like a thief cozens the thief. And are not these grand cony-catchers, Master R.G.?

I knew not far from Fleet bridge a haberdasher: it were a good deed to take Paine to tell his name, that took of a boy of seven year old<74> a rapier worth forty shillings and a stitched

## The Complete Cony-catching

taffeta hat worth ten, and all for five shillings: the gentleman, father to the child, was sick when necessity drove him thus nigh to lay his weapon and his bonnet to pawn, and as soon as he recovered, which was within six weeks after, sent the money, and twelve pence for the loan, to have the parcels again. But this cut-throat's answer was, the boy had made him a bill of sale of his hand for a month, and the day was broken, and he had made the best of the rapier and hat. Was not this a Jew and a notable cony-catcher, Master R.G.?

It had been well if you had rolled out your rhetoric against such a rake-hell. But come to their honest kind of life, and you shall see how they stand upon circumstances: if you borrow but two shillings, there must be a groat for the money and a groat for the bill of sale, and this must be renewed every month, so that they resemble the box at dice, which being well paid all night will in the morning be the greatest winner.

## A Pleasant Tale How A Holy Brother Cony-catched For A Wife.

Wer't not a merry jest to have a bout again Master R.G. with your poetical brethren: amongst the which, one learned hypocrite, that could brook no abuses in the commonwealth, was so zealous that he began to put an English she-saint in the Legend<sup><75></sup> for the holiness of her life: and forgot not so much as her dog, as Toby's was remembered, that wagged his tail at the sight of his old mistress. This pure Martinist<sup><76></sup> (if he were not worse) had a combat between the flesh and the spirit that he must needs have a wife, which he cunningly cony-catched in this manner.

First you must understand, that he was a kind of scholastical companion, nursed up only at grammar school, lest going to the university, through his nimble wit, too much learning should make him mad. So he had passed *As in praesenti* and was gone a proficient as far as *Carmen Heroicum*<sup><77></sup>, for he pronounced his words like a braggart, and held up his head like a malt-horse, and could talk against bishops, and wish very mannerly the discipline of the primitive church were restored. Now sir, this gentleman had espied (I dare not say about Fleet street) a proper maid who had given her by the decease of her father four hundred pound in money, besides certain fair houses in the city; to this girl goeth this proper Greek a-wooing, naming himself to be a gentleman of Cheshire, and only son and heir to his father, who was a man of great revenues: and to make the matter more plausible, he had attired his own brother very orderly in a blue coat and made him his serving-man, who though he were eldest, yet to advance his younger brother to so good a marriage was content to lie, cog, and flatter, and to take any servile pains, to soothe up the matter, insomuch that when her father-in-law (for her mother was married again, to an honest, virtuous, and substantial man in Fleet Street or thereabouts) heard how this young gentleman was a suitor to his daughter-in-law, careful she should do well, called the serving-man aside, which by his outward behaviour seemed to be an honest and discreet man, and began to question with him what his master was, of what parentage, of what possibility of living after his father's decease, and how many children he had beside him.

This fellow, well instructed by his holy brother, without distrust to the man, simply as he thought, said that he was the son and heir of one Master &c, dwelling in Cheshire at the manor of &c., and that he had a younger brother, but this was heir to all, and rehearsed a proper living of some five hundred marks a year. The honest man, knowing divers Cheshire gentlemen of that name, gave credit to the fellow and made no further inquiry, but gave countenance to my young master, who by his flattering speeches had won, not only the maid's favour unto the full, but also the goodwill of her mother, so that the match shortly was made up, and married they should be forsooth, and then should she, her father, and her mother ride home to his father in Cheshire to have sufficient dowry appointed.

To be brief, wedded they were, and bedded they had been three or four nights, and yet for all this fair show the father was a little jealous, and smoked him, but durst say nothing. But at last, after the marriage had been past over three or four days, it chanced that her father and this serving-man went abroad and passed though St. Paul's Churchyard amongst the stationers, a prentice amongst the rest, that was a Cheshire man and knew this counterfeit serving-man and his brother, as being born in the same parish where his father dwelt, called to him, and said: What, I, how doth your brother, P.? how doth your father? lives he still? The fellow answered him all were well, and loath his brother's wife's father should hear anything, made no stay but departed.

This acquaintance naming the fellow by his name and asking for his brother drove the honest citizen into a great maze, and doubted he, his wife, and his daughter were made conies. Well, he smoothed all up as if he had heard nothing, and let it pass till he had sent the man about necessary business, and then secretly returned again unto the stationer's shop, and began

## The Complete Cony-catching

to question with the boy if he knew the serving-man well that he called to him of late. Aye, marry, do I, sir, quoth he; I know both him and his brother P. I can tell you they have an honest poor man to their father, and though now in his old age he be scarce able to live without the help of the parish, yet he is well beloved of all his neighbours. The man hearing this, although it grieved him that he was thus cozened by a palliard, yet seeing no means to amend it he thought to gird his son pleasantly, & therefore had divers of his friends and honest wealthy neighbours to a supper: well, they being at the time appointed come, come all welcome, who must sit at the board's end but my young master? and he very coyly bade them all welcome to his father's house: they all gave him reverent thanks, esteeming him to be a man of worship and worth. As soon as all were set, and the meat served in, and the gentleman's serving-man stood mannerly waiting on his brother's trencher, at last the goodman of the house smiling said: Son P., I pray you, let your man sit down and eat such part with us as God hath sent us. Marry quoth Master P. that were well, to make my man my companion, he is well enough, let him sup with his fellows. Why sir saith he, in faith be plain, call him brother, and bid him sit down. Come, cousin I. quoth he, make not strange; I am sure your brother P. will give you leave. At this Master P. blushed, and asked his father-in-law what he meant by those words, and whether he thought his man his brother or no? Aye, by my faith do I son, quoth he, and account thee no honest man that wilt deny thine own brother and thy father: for, sir, know I have learned your pedigree. Alas daughter quoth he, you are well married, for his father lives of the alms of the parish, and this poor fellow which he hath made his slave, is his eldest brother. At this his wife began to weep, all was dashed, and what she thought, God knows. Her mother cried out, but all was bootless; Master P. confessed the truth, and his brother sat down at supper, and for all that he had the wench. I pray you, was not this a cony-catcher, Master R.G.?

## **A Pleasant Tale Of A Man That Was Married To Sixteen Wives, And How Courteously His Last Wife Entreated Him.**

But now to be a little pleasant with you, let me have your opinion what you deem of those *amorosos* here in England & about London that (because the old proverb saith change of pasture makes fat calves) will have in every shire in England a sundry wife, as for an instance your countryman R.B. Are not they right cony-catchers? enter into the nature of them, and see whether your pen had been better employed in discovering their villainies, than a simple legerdemain at cards. For suppose a man hath but one daughter, and hath no other dowry but her beauty and honesty, what a spoil is it for her to light in the hands of such an adulterous and incestuous rascal? had not her father been better to have lost forty shillings at cards than to have his daughter so cony-catched and spoiled forever after? These youths are proper fellows, never without good apparel and store of crowns, well horsed, and of so quaint & fine behaviour, & so eloquent, that they are able to induce a young girl to folly, especially since they shadow their villainy with the honest pretence of marriage, for their custom is this.

When they come into the city or other place of credit, or sometime in a country village, as the fortune of their villainy leads them, they make inquiry what good marriages are abroad, & on the Sunday make survey what fair and beautiful maids or widows are in the parish; then as their licentious lust leads them, whether the eye for favour or the ear for riches, so they set down their rest, & sojourn either there or thereabouts, having money at will, and their companions to soothe up whatsoever damnably they shall protest, courting the maid or widow with such fair words & sweet promises that she is often so set on fire that neither the report of others nor the admonition of their friends can draw them from the love of the *Poligamoi* or belswaggers of the country. And when the wretches have by the space of a month or two satisfied their lust, they wax weary, & either feign some great journey for awhile to be absent, & so go & visit some other of his wives, or else if he mean to give her the bag, he selleth whatsoever he can, and so leaves her spoiled both of her wealth and honesty, than which there is nothing more precious to an honest woman. And because you shall see an instance, I will tell you a pleasant tale performed by our villains in Wiltshire not long since; I will conceal the parties' names, because I think the woman is yet alive.

In Wiltshire there dwelt a farmer of indifferent wealth that had but only one child, and that was a daughter, a maid of excellent beauty and good behaviour, and so honest in her conversation, that the good report of her virtues was well spoken of in all the country, so that what for her good qualities, & sufficient dowry that was like to fall to her she had many suitors, men's sons of good wealth and honest conversation. But whether this maid had no mind to wed, or she liked none that made love to her, or she was afraid to match in haste lest she might repent at leisure, I know not, but she refused all, & kept her still a virgin. But as we see oftentimes the coyest maids happen on the coldest marriages, playing like the beetle that makes scorn all day of the daintiest flowers and at night takes up his lodging in a cowshard, so this maid, whom we will call Marian, refused many honest and wealthy farmers' sons and at last lighted on a match that forever after marred her market: for it fell out thus. One of these notable rogues, by occupation a tailor, and a fine workman, a reprobate given over to the spoil of honest maids & to the deflowering of virgins, hearing as he travelled abroad of this Marian, did mean to have a fling at her, and therefore came into the town where her father dwelt, and asked work. A very honest man of that trade, seeing him a passing proper man and of a very good and honest countenance, and not simply apparelled, said he would make trial of him for a garment or two, and so took him into service: as soon as he saw him use his needle he wondered not only at his workmanship but at the swiftness of his hand. At last the fellow (whom we will name William) desired his master that he might use his shears but once for the cutting out of a doublet, which his master granted, and he used so excellently well that although his master was counted the

## The Complete Cony-catching

best tailor in Wiltshire yet he found himself a botcher in respect of his new entertained journeyman, so that from that time forward he was made foreman of the shop, & so pleased the gentlemen of that shire, that who but William was talked on for a good tailor in that shire. Well, as young men and maids meet on Sundays & holy-days, so this tailor was passing brave, & began to frolic it amongst the maids, & to be very liberal, being full of silver and gold, & for his personage a properer man than any was in all the parish, and made afar off a kind of love to this Marian: who seeing this William to be a very handsome man began somewhat to affect him, so that in short time she thought well of his favours, & there grew some love between them, insomuch that it came to her father's ears, who began to school his daughter for such foolish affection towards one she knew not what he was nor whither he would: but in vain, Marian could not but think well of him, so that her father one day sent for his master, and began to question of the disposition of his man. The master told the farmer friendly that what he was he knew not, as being a mere stranger unto him: but for his workmanship, he was one of the most excellent both for needle and shears in England; for his behaviour since he came into his house, he had behaved himself very honestly and courteously: well appalled he was, and well moneyed, & might for his good qualities seem to be a good woman's fellow. Although this somewhat satisfied the father, yet he was loath a tailor should carry away his daughter & that she should be driven to live of a bare occupation whereas she might have landed men to her husbands, so that he and her friends called her aside and persuaded her from him, but she flatly told them she never loved any but him, and sith it was her first love she would not now be turned from it, whatsoever hap did afterward befall unto her. Her father, that loved her dearly, seeing no persuasions could draw her from the tailor, left her to her own liberty, and so she and William agreed together, that in short time they were married, and had a good portion, and set up shop, and lived together by the space of a quarter of a year very orderly. At last satisfied with the lust of his new wife, he thought it good to visit some other of his wives (for at that instant he had sixteen alive), and made a scuse to his wife and his wife's father to go into Yorkshire (which was his native country) and visit his friends and crave somewhat of his father towards household. Although his wife was loath to part from her sweet Wil., yet she must be content, and so, well horsed and provided, away he rides for a month or two, that was his furthest day, and down goes he into some other country to solace himself with some other of his wives. In this meanwhile, one of his wives that he married in or about Taunton in Somersetshire had learned of his villainy, and how many wives he had, and by long travail had got a note of their names and dwelling, and the hands and seals of every parish where he was married, and now by fortune she heard that he had married a wife in Wiltshire, not far from Marlborough: thither hies she with warrants from the bishop and divers justices to apprehend him, and coming to the town where he dwelt, very subtly inquired at her host of his estate, who told her that he had married a rich farmer's daughter, but now was gone down to his friends in Yorkshire, and would be at home again within a week, for he had been eight weeks already from home. The woman inquired no further for that time, but the next morning went home to the farmer's house, and desired him to send for his daughter, for she would speak with her from her husband. The man straight did so, and she hearing she should have news from her William, came very hastily. Then the woman said, she was sorry for her, in that their misfortunes were alike in being married to such a runagate as this tailor, for (quoth she) it is not yet a year and a half since he was married to me in Somersetshire. As this went cold to the old man's heart, so struck it deadly into the mind of Marian, who desiring her to tell the truth, she out with her testimony, and showed them how he had at that instant sixteen wives alive. When they read the certificate, and saw the hands and seals of every parish, the old man fell a-weeping, but such was the grief of Marian, that her sorrow stopped her tears, and she sat as a woman in a trance till at last fetching a great sigh she called God to witness she would be revenged on him for all his wives, and would make him a general example of all such graceless runagates. So she

concealed the matter, and placed this her fellow in misfortune in a kinswoman's house of hers, so secretly as might be, attending the coming of her treacherous husband, who returned within a fortnight, having in the space he was absent visited three or four of his wives, and now meant to make a short cut of the matter, & sell all that his new wife had, and to travel into some other shire, for he had heard how his Somersetshire wife had made inquiry after him in divers places. Being come home he was wonderfully welcome to Marian, who entertained him with such courtesies as a kind wife could any ways afford him, only the use of her body she denied, saying her natural disease was upon her. Well, to be brief, a great supper was made, and all her friends was bidden, & he every way so welcome as if it had been the day of his bridal, yea all things was smoothed up so cunningly, that he suspected nothing less than the revenge intended against him. As soon as supper was ended, & all had taken their leave, our tailor would to bed, and his wife with her own hands helped to undress him very lovingly, and being laid down she kissed him & said she would go to her father's & come again straight, bidding him fall asleep the whilst: He, that was drowsy with travel & drinking at supper, had no need of great entreaty, for he straight fell into a sound slumber; the whilst she had sent for his other wife, & other her neighbours disguised, and coming softly into the parlour where he lay, she turned up his clothes at his feet & tied his legs fast together with a rope, then waking him, she asked him what reason he had to sleep so soundly. He, new waked out of his sleep, began to stretch himself, and galled his legs with the cord, whereat he wondering said; How now, wife, what's that hurts my legs; what, are my feet bound together? Marian, looking on him with looks full of death, made him this answer: Aye, villain, thy legs are bound, but hadst thou thy just desert, thy neck had long since been stretched at the gallows, but before thou and I part I will make thee a just spectacle unto the world for thy abominable treachery: and with that she clapped her hand fast on the hair of his head and held him down to the pillow. William, driven into a wondrous amaze at these words, said trembling: Sweet wife, what sudden alteration is this? what mean these words wife? Traitor (quoth she) I am none of thy wife, neither is this thy wife: & with that she brought her forth that he was married in Somersetshire, although thou art married to her as well as to me, and hast like a villain sought the spoil of fifteen women beside myself, & that thou shalt hear by just certificate: & with that there was read the bead-roll of his wives, where he married them, and where they dwelt. At this he lay mute as in a trance, & only for answer help up his hands and desired them both to be merciful unto him, for he confessed all was truth, that he had been a heinous offender, and deserved death. Tush, saith Marian, but how canst thou make any one of us amends? If a man kill the father, he may satisfy the blood in the son: if a man steal, he may make restitution: but he that robs a woman of her honesty & virginity can never make any satisfaction: and therefore for all the rest I will be revenged. With that his other wife and the women clapped hold on him, & held him fast while Marian with a sharp razor cut off his stones and made him a gelding. I think she had little respect where the sign was, or observed little art for the string, but off they went, & then she cast them in his face & said: Now lustful whoremaster, go & deceive other women as thou hast done us, if thou canst: so they sent in a surgeon to him that they had provided, and away they went. The man lying in great pain of body & agony of mind, the surgeon looking to his wound had much ado to stanch the blood, & always he laughed heartily when he thought on the revenge, and bade a vengeance on such sow-gelders as made such large slits: but at last he laid a blood-plaster to him, & stopped his bleeding, and to be brief, in time healed him, but with much pain. As soon as he was whole, and might go abroad without danger, he was committed to the gaol, and after some other punishment, banished out of Wiltshire and Somersetshire forever after. Thus was this lusty cock of the game made a capon, and as I heard, had little lust to marry any more wives to his dying day.

## **Cony-Catching Tailors, and a Pleasant Tale of a Tailor, how he Cony-catched a Gentlewoman, and Was Made Himself a Cony Afterwards by His Man.**

How like you of this cony-catching Mr. R.G? But because now we have entered talk of tailors, let me have a bout with them, for they be mighty cony-catchers in sundry kinds. I pray you what poet hath so many fictions, what painter so many fancies, as a tailor hath fashions, to show the variety of his art? changing every week the shape of his apparel into new forms, or else he is counted a mere botcher. The Venetian and the galligaskins is stale, and trunk-slop<78> out of use, the round hose bum-basted close to the breech, and ruffed about the neck with a curl, is now common to every cullion in the country, & doublets be they never so quaintly quilted yet forsooth the swain at plough must have his belly as side as the courtier, that he may piss out at a button-hole at the least. And all these strange devices doth the tailor invent to make poor gentlemen conies: for if they were tied to one fashion, then still might they know how much velvet to send to the tailor, and then would his filching abate. But to prevent them, if he have a French belly, he will have a Spanish skirt, and an Italian wing, seamed and quartered at the elbows, as if he were a soldado ready to put on an armour of proof to fight in Mile-end under the bloody ensign of the Duke of Shoreditch. Thus will the fantastic tailor make poor gentlemen conies, & ever ask more velvet by a yard and a half than the doublet in conscience requires. But herein lies the least part of their cony-catching, for those grand tailors that have all the right properties of the mystery, which is to be knavish, thievish, and proud, take this course with courtiers and courtly gentlemen, the stade outside, inside, lace, drawing out, and making, and then set down their parcels in a bill, which they so overprice, that some of them with very pricking up of doublets, have fleeced young gentleman of whole lordships, & call you not this cony-catching, M. R.G.? To use the figure *pleonasmos*<79>, *hisce oculis*, with these eyes I have seen tailors' prentices sell as much vails<80> in a week in cloth of gold, velvet, satin, taffeta, and lace as hath been worth thirty shillings, and these ears hath heard them scorn when their vails came but to ten shillings, and yet there were four prentices in the shop. If the prentices could lurch so mightily, then what did the master? But you must imagine this was a woman's tailor, that could in a gown put seventeen yards of ell-broad taffeta: blest be the French sleeves & breech farthingales that grants them liberty to cony-catch so mightily. But this I talk of our London and courtly tailors, but even the poor prick-louse the country tailor, that hath scarce any more wealth than his thimble, his needle, his pressing iron and his shears, will stitch as well as the proudest of that trade in England; they will to snip and snap that all the reversion goes into hell. Now sir, this hell is a place that the tailors have under their shop-board, where all their stolen shreds is thrust, and I pray you, call you not this pilling & polling and flat cony-catching, Master R.G.? But because you may see whether I speak truth or no, I'll tell you a merry jest of a tailor in York, not far from Petergate, done about fourteen year ago, and thus it fell out.

In Yorkshire there dwelt a woman's tailor famous for his art, but noted for his filching, which although he was light-fingered, yet for the excellency of his workmanship he was much sought to, and kept more journeymen, than any five in that city did: and albeit he would have his share of velvet, satin, or cloth of gold, yet they must find no fault with him lest he half spoiled their garment in the making. Besides, he was passing proud, and had as haughty a look as if his father had with the devil looked over Lincoln: his ordinary doublets were taffeta, cut in the summer upon a wrought shirt, and his cloak faced with velvet, his stockings of the purest Granado silk, with a French paned hose of the richest biliment lace<81>, a beaver hat turfed with velvet, so quaintly as if he had been some Espagnolo tricked up to go court some quaint courtesan, insomuch that a plain serving-man once meeting him in this attire going through Walmgate to take air in the field thought him at the least some esquire, and off with his hat and

gave his worship the time of the day; this clawed this *glorioso* by the elbow so that if a tavern had been by, a pottle of wine should have been the least reward for a largess to the simple serving-man, but this bowical huff-snuff, not content to pass away with one worship, began to hold the fellow in prate, and to question whose man he was. The fellow courteously making a low cringe said: May it please your Worship, I serve such a gentleman dwelling in such a place: as thus he answered him, he spied in the gentleman's bosom a needle and a thread, whereupon the fellow simply said to him: Fie your Worship's man in looking this morning to your doublet, hath left a needle and a thread on your Worship's breast, you had best take if off lest some think your Worship to be a tailor. The tailor not thinking the fellow had spoken simply, but frumped him, made this reply: What, saucy knave, dost thou mock me? what if I be a tailor? what's that to thee? wer't not for shame I would lend thee a box on the ear or two: the fellow being plain, but peevish and an old knave, gathering by his own words that he was a tailor, said, fie, so God help me, I mock you not, but are you a tailor? Aye marry am I quoth he: Why then, says the serving-man, all my caps, knees, and worships, I did to thy apparel, and therefore, master, thank me, for it 'twas against my will, but now I know thee, farewell good honest pricklouse, and look not behind you, for if you do, I'll swinge you with my scabbard of my sword till I can stand over thee: away went Monsieur Magnifico frowning, and the servingman went into the city laughing.

But all this is but to describe the nature of the man, now to the secrets of his art: all the gentlewomen of the country cried out upon him, yet could they not part from him because he so quaintly fitted their humours: at last it so fell out, that a gentlewoman not far from Ferrybridge had a taffeta gown to make, and he would have no less at those days than eleven ells of ell-broad taffeta, so she bought so much, and ready to send it, she said to her husband in hearing of all her serving-men: What a spite is this, seeing that I must send always to yonder knave tailor two yards more than is necessary, but how can we amend us? all the rest are but botchers in respect of him, and yet nothing grieves me but we can never take him with it, & yet I and mine have stood by while he hath cut my gown out: a pleasant fellow that was new come to serve her husband, one that was his clerk and a pretty scholar, answered, Good mistress give me leave to carry your taffeta and see it cut out, and if I spy not out his knavery laugh at me when I come home: marry, I prithe, do, quoth his M. and mistress, but whatsoever thou seest say nothing lest he be angry and spoil my gown; let me alone mistress quoth he, and so away he goes to York, & coming to this tailor found him in his shop, & delivered him the taffeta with this message, that his mistress had charged him to see it cut out, not that she suspected him, but that else he would let it lie long by him and take other work in hand: the tailor scornfully said he should, & asked him if he had any spectacles about him? no, quoth the fellow, my sight is young enough, I need no glasses: if you do put them on quoth he, and see if you can see me steal a yard of taffeta out of your mistress' gown: and so taking his shears in hand, he cut it out so nimbly that he cut three foreparts to the gown, and four side pieces, that by computation the fellow guessed he had stolen two ells & a half: but say nothing he durst. As soon as he had done, there came in more gentlemen's men with work, that the tailor was very busy & regarded not the serving-man, who seeing the tailor's cloak lying loose, lifted it away & carried it home with him to his mistress' house, where he discoursed to his master & his mistress what he had seen, & how he had stole the tailor's cloak, not to that intent to filch, but to try an experiment upon him: for master quoth he, when he brings home my mistress' gown, he will complain of the loss of his cloak, & then see, do you but tell him that I am experienced in magic, & can cast a figure, and will tell him where his cloak is without fail: say but this, sir, and let me alone; they all agreed, & resolved to try the wit of their young man. But leaving him, again to our tailor: who when he had dispatched his customers, was ready to walk with one of them to the tavern, & then missed his cloak, searched all about, but find it he could not, neither knew he whom to suspect: so with much grief he passed it over, & when he had ended the gentlewoman's

## The Complete Cony-catching

gown (because she was a good customer of his) he himself took his nag & rid home withal: welcome he was to the gentlewoman and her husband, and the gown was passing fit, so that it could not be amended, insomuch that the gentlewoman praised it and highly thanked him. Oh mistress (quoth he) though it is a good gown to you, 'tis an infortunate gown to me, for that day your man brought the taffeta I had a cloak stolen that stood me but one fortnight before in four pound, and never since could I hear any word of it. Truly, said the gentleman, I am passing sorry for your loss, but that same man that was at your house is passing skilful in necromancy, and if any man in England can tell you where your cloak is, my man can: marry, quoth he, and I will give him a brace of angels for his labour: so the fellow was called and talked with all, and at his mistress' request was content to do it, but he would have his twenty shillings in hand, and promised if he told him not where it was, who had it, and caused it to be delivered to him again, for his two angels he would give him ten pounds: upon this the tailor willingly gave him the money, and up went he into a closet like a learned clerk, and there was three or four hours laughing at the tailor, he thinking he had been all this while at Caurake. At last down comes the fellow with a figure drawn in a paper in his hand, & smiling called for a Bible, and told the tailor he would tell him who had his cloak, where it was, & help him to it again, so that he would be sworn on a Bible to answer to all questions that he demanded of him faithfully: the tailor granted and swore on a Bible: then he commanded all should go out but his master, his mistress, the tailor, and himself. Then he began thus: well, you have taken your oath on the holy Bible, tell me, quoth he, did you not cut three foreparts for my mistress' gown? At this the tailor blushed & began to be in a chafe and would have flung out of the door, but the serving-man said: Nay, never start, man, for before thou goest out of this parlour, if thou deniest it, I will bring the taffeta thou stolest into this place wrapped in thine own cloak: & therefore answer directly to my question lest to your discredit I show you the trick of a scholar: the tailor, half afraid, said he did so indeed: and quoth he, did you not cut four side pieces where you have cut but two? yes all is true quoth the tailor; why then as true it is, that to deceive the deceiver is no deceit, for as truly as you stole my mistress' taffeta, so truly did I steal your cloak and here it is. At this the tailor was amazed, the gentleman and his wife laughed heartily, & so all was turned to a merriment; the tailor had his cloak again, the gentlewoman her taffeta, and the serving-man twenty shillings: was not this pretty and witty cony-catching, M. R.G.?

## **Conclusion.**

Thus have I proved to your masterships how there is no estate, trade, occupation, nor mystery, but lives by cony-catching, and that our shift at cards, compared to the rest, is the simplest of all, & yet forsooth you could bestow the pains to write two whole pamphlets against us poor cony-catchers; think, Mr. R.G., it shall not be put up except you grant us our request. It is informed us that you are in hand with a book named The Repentance Of A Cony-catcher, with a discovery of secret villainies, wherein you mean to discourse at full the nature of the stripping law, which is the abuse offered by the keepers of Newgate to poor prisoners, and some that belong to the Marshalsea. If you do so, ye shall do not only a charitable but a meritorious deed: for the occasion of most mischief, of greatest nipping and foisting, and of all villainies, comes through the extorting bribery of some cozening and counterfeit keepers and companions that carry unlawful warrants about them to take up men. Will your Worship therefore stand to your word and set out the discovery of that, all we of Whittington College will rest your beadmen. Otherwise look that I will have the crew of cony-catchers swear themselves your professed enemies forever.  
Farewell.

Cuthbert Cony-catcher.

FINIS.

**A DISPUTATION BETWEEN A HE CONY-CATCHER AND A  
SHE CONY-CATCHER.**

Robert Greene

**Title Page**

A DISPVTATION

Betweene a Hee Conny-catcher, and a  
Shee Conny-catcher, whether a Theefe or a Whoore, is  
most hurtfull in Cousonage to the Com-

mon-wealth

DISCOVERING THE SECRET VILLA-

*nies of alluring strumpets.*

With the Conversion of an English courtesan, reformed  
this present year. 1592.

Reade, laugh and learne.

*Nascimur pro patria.*<1>

R.G.

(Printer's emblem)

Imprinted at London, by A. I. for T. G. and are to be solde at  
the west end of Paul's. 1592

## The Epistle

To all gentlemen, merchants, apprentices and country farmers, health.

Gentlemen, countrymen, and kind friends, for so I value all that are honest and enemies of bad actions, although in my books of cony-catching I have discovered divers forms of cozenings, and painted out both the sacking and cross-biting laws, which strumpets use to the destruction of the simple, yet willing to search all the substance, as I have glanced at the shadow, & to enter into the nature of villainy, as I have broached up the secrets of vice, I have thought good to publish this dialogue, or disputation between a he cony-catcher, and a she cony-catcher, whether of them are most prejudicial to the commonwealth: discoursing the base qualities of them both, and discovering the inconvenience that grows to men, through the lightness of inconstant wantons, who being wholly given to the spoil, seek the ruin of such as light into their company. In this dialogue, loving countrymen, shall you find what prejudice ensues by haunting of whore-houses, what dangers grows by dallying with common harlots, what inconvenience follows the inordinate pleasures of unchaste libertines, (not only by their consuming of their wealth and impoverishment of their goods and lands, but to the great endangering of their health). For in conversing with them they aim not simply at the loss of goods and blemish of their good names, but they fish for diseases, sickness, sores incurable, ulcers bursting out of the joints, and salt rheums, which by the humour of that villainy leapt from Naples into France, and from France into the bowels of England: which makes many cry out in their bones, whilst goodman surgeon laughs in his purse: a thing to be feared as deadly while men live, as Hell is to be dreaded after death, for it not only infecteth the body, consumeth the soul, and wasteth wealth and worship, but engraves a perpetual shame in the forehead of the party so abused. Whereof Master Higgins hath well written in his *Mirror of Magistrates*<82> in the person of Mempricius exclaiming against harlots: The verses be these:  
Eschew vile Venus' toys, she cuts off age,  
And learn this lesson oft, and tell thy friend,

By pox, death sudden, begging, harlots end.

Besides, I have laid open the wily wisdom of over-wise courtesans, that with their cunning, can draw on, not only poor novices, but such as hold themselves masters of their occupation. What flatteries they use to bewitch, what sweet words to inveigle, what simple holiness to entrap, what amorous glances, what smirking *œillades*, what cringing courtesies, what stretching *adieux*, following a man like a bloodhound, with their eyes white, laying out of hair: what frowning of tresses, what paintings, what ruffs, cuffs and braveries, and all to betray the eyes of the innocent novice: whom when they have drawn on to the bent of their bow, they strip like the prodigal child and turn out of doors like an outcast of the world. The crocodile hath not more tears, Proteus, more shape, Janus more faces, the Hieria<83>, more sundry tunes to entrap the passengers than our English courtesans, to be plain, our English whores: to set on fire the hearts of lascivious and gazing strangers. These common, or rather consuming strumpets, whose throats are softer than oil, and yet whose steps lead unto death. They have their ruffians to rifle, when they cannot fetch over with other cunning, their cross-biters attending upon them, their foists, their busts, their nips, and such like. Being waited on by these villains as by ordinary servants, so that who thinks himself wise enough to escape their flatteries, him they cross-bite; who holds himself to rule, to be bitten with a counterfeit apparitor, him they rifle: if he be not so to be *versed* upon, they have a foist or a nip upon him, and so sting him to the quick. Thus he that meddles with pitch, cannot but be defiled, and he that acquainteth himself or converseth with any of these cony-catching strumpets, cannot but by some way or other be brought to confusion: for either he must hazard his soul, blemish his

good name, lose his goods, light upon diseases, or at the least have been tied to the humour of an harlot, whose quiver is open to every arrow, who likes all that have fat purses, and loves not any that are destitute of pence. I remember a monk in *diebus illis*<84> writ his opinion of the end of an adulterer thus:

*Quatuor his casibus, sine dubio cadet adulter,  
Aut hic pauper erit, aut hic subito morietur,  
Aut cadet in causum qua debet iudice vinci,*

*Aut aliquod membrum casu vell crimine perdet.<85>*

Which I Englished thus:

He that to harlots' lures do yield him thrall,  
Through sour misfortune to bad end shall fall:  
Or sudden death, or beggary shall him chance,  
Or guilt before a judge his shame enhance:  
Or else by fault or fortune he shall leese

Some member, sure, escaped from one of these.

Seeing then such inconvenience grows from the caterpillars of the commonwealth, and that a multitude of the monsters here about London, particularly and generally abroad in England, to the great overthrow of many simple men that are inveigled by their flatteries, I thought good not only to discover their villainies in a dialogue, but also to manifest by an example, how prejudicial their life is to the state of the land: that such as are warned by an instance, may learn and look before they leap: To that end, kind countrymen, I have set down at the end of the disputation the wonderful life of a courtesan, not a fiction, but a truth of one that yet lives, not now in another form repentant. In the discourse of whose life you shall see how dangerous such trulls be to all estates that be so simple as to trust their feigned subtleties: here shall parents learn how hurtful it is to cocker up their youth in their follies, and have a deep insight how to bridle their daughters, if they see them any ways grow wantons: wishing therefore my labours may be a caveat to my countrymen to avoid the company of such cozening courtesans

Farewell.

R.G.

**A disputation between Laurence a foist and Fair Nan a traffic,  
whether a whore or a thief is most prejudicial.**

*Laurence.* Nan, well met, what news about your Vine Court that you look so blithe? Your cherry cheeks discovers your good fare, and your brave apparel bewrays a fat purse: is fortune now of late grown so favourable to foists, that your husband hath lighted on some large purchase, or hath your smooth looks linked in some young novice to sweat for a favour all the bite in his bung,<86> and to leave himself as many crowns as thou hast got good conditions, and then he shall be one of Pierce Penniless'<87> fraternity: How is it, sweet wench, goes the world on wheels, that you tread so daintily on your tiptoes?

*Nan.* Why, Laurence, are you pleasant or peevish, that you quip with such brief girds? Think you a quartern-wind cannot make a quick sail, that easy lifts cannot make heavy burdens, that women have not wiles to compass crowns as well as men? Yes & more, for though they be not so strong in the fists, they be more ripe in their wits: and 'tis by wit that I live and will live, in despite of that peevish scholar, that thought with his cony-catching books to have cross-bit our trade. Dost thou marvel to see me thus brisked? fair wenches cannot want favours, while the world is so full of amorous fools. Where can such girls as myself be blemished with a threadbare coat as long as country farmers have full purses, and wanton citizens pockets full of pence?

*Laur.* Truth, if fortune so favour thy husband, that he be neither smoked nor clyed, for I am sure all thy bravery comes by his nipping, foisting and lifting.

*Nan.* In faith sir, no. Did I get no more by mine own wit than I reap by his purchase, I might both go bare & penniless the whole year, but mine eyes are stalls, & my hands lime twigs<88>, else were I not worthy the name of a she cony-catcher. Circe had never more charms, Calypso more enchantments, the Sirens more subtle tunes, than I have crafty sleights to inveigle a cony, and fetch in a country farmer. Laurence, believe me, you men are but fools, your gettings is uncertain, and yet you still fish for the gallows? Though by some great chance you light upon a good bung, yet you fast a great while after, whereas, as we mad wenches have our tenants (for so I call every simple lecher and amorous fox) as well out of term as in term to bring us our rents, alas, were not my wits and my wanton pranks more profitable than my husband's foisting, we might often go to bed supperless for want of surfeiting: and yet I dare swear, my husband gets a hundred pounds a year by bungs.

*Laur.* Why, Nan, are you grown so stiff, to think your fair looks can get as much as our nimble fingers, or that your sacking can gain as much as our foisting? No, no, Nan, you are two bows down the wind; our foist will get more than twenty the proudest wenches in all London.

*Nan.* Lie a little further & give me some room. What Laurence your tongue is too lavish, all stands upon proof, and sith I have leisure, and you no great business, as being now when Paul's is shut up and all purchases and conies in their burrows, let us to the tavern and take a room to ourselves, and there for the price of our suppers, I will prove that women, I mean of our faculty, a traffic, or as base knaves term us, strumpets, are more subtle, more dangerous in the commonwealth, and more full of wiles to get crowns than the cunningest foist, nip, lift, prigs, or whatsoever that lives at this day.

*Laur.* Content, but who shall be moderator in our controversies, sith in disputing *pro & contra* betwixt ourselves, it is but your yea and my nay, and so neither of us will yield to other's victories.

*Nan.* Trust me, Laurence, I am so assured of the conquest, affying so in the strength of mine own arguments, that when I have reasoned, I will refer it to your judgment and censure.

*Laur.* And trust me as I am an honest man, I will be indifferent.

*Nan.* Oh, swear not so deeply, but let me first hear what you can say for yourself.

*Laur.* What? Why more, Nan, than can be painted out in a great volume, but briefly this. I need not describe the laws of villainy, because R.G. hath so amply penned them down in the first Part of Cony-catching, that though I be one of the faculty, yet I cannot discover more than he hath laid open. Therefore first to the gentleman foist, I pray you, what finer quality: what art is more excellent either to try the ripeness of the wit, or the agility of the hand than that? for him that will be master of his trade, must pass the proudest juggler alive, the points of *leger de main*: he must have an eye to spy the bung or purse, and then a heart to dare to attempt it, for this by the way, he that fears the gallows shall never be good thief while he lives: he must as the cat watch for a mouse, and walk Paul's, Westminster, the Exchange, and such common haunted places, and there have a curious eye to the person, whether he be a gentleman, citizen or farmer, and note either where his bung lies, whether in his hose or pockets, and then dog the party into a press where his stall with heaving and shoving shall so molest him that he shall not feel when we strip him of his bung, although it be never so fast or cunningly couched about him: What poor farmer almost can come to plead his case at the bar, to attend upon his lawyers at the bench, but look he never so narrowly to it, we have his purse, wherein sometimes there is fat purchase, twenty or thirty pounds: and I pray you, how long would one of your traffics be, earning so much with your chamber-work? Besides, in fairs and markets, and in the circuits after judges, what infinite money is gotten from honest meaning men, that either busy about their necessary affairs or carelessly looking to their crowns, light amongst us that be foists: tush, we dissemble in show, we go so neat in apparel, so orderly in outward appearance, some like lawyers' clerks, others like serving-men that attended there about their masters' business, that we are hardly smoked: versing upon all men with kind courtesies and fair words, and yet being so warily watchful that a good purse cannot be put up in a fair, but we sigh if we share it not amongst us, and though the books of cony-catching hath somewhat hindered us, and brought many brave foists to the halter, yet some of our country farmers, nay of our gentleman and citizens, are so careless in a throng of people that they show us the prey, and so draw on a thief, and bequeath us their purses whether we will or no: for who loves wine so ill, that he will not eat grapes if they fall into his mouth, and who is so base, that if he see a pocket fair before him, will not foist in if he may, or if foisting will not serve, use his knife and nip? for although there be some foists that will not use their knives, yet I hold him not a perfect workman or master of his mystery, that will not cut a purse as well as foist a pocket, and hazard any limb for so sweet a gain as gold: how answer you me this brief objection Nan? Can you compare with either our cunning to get our gains in purchase?

*Nan.* And have you no stronger arguments goodman Laurence, to argue your excellency in villainy but this? Then in faith put up your pipes, and give me leave to speak: your chop-logic hath no great subtlety for simple: you reason of foisting, & appropriate that to yourselves, to you men I mean, as though there were not women foists and nips, as neat in that trade as you, of as good an eye, as fine and nimble a hand, and of as resolute a heart, yes, Laurence, and your good mistresses in that mystery: for we without like suspicion can pass in your walks under the colour of simplicity to Westminster, with a paper in our hand as if we were distressed women, that had some supplication to put up to the judges or some bill of information to deliver to our lawyers when God wot, we shuffle in for a bung as well as the best of you all, yea, as yourself Laurence, though you be called king of cutpurses: for though they smoke you, they will hardly mistrust us, and suppose our stomach stand against it to foist, yet who can better play the stall

## The Complete Cony-catching

or the shadow than we? for in a thrust or throng if we shove hard, who is he that will not favour a woman, and in giving place to us, give you free passage for his purse? Again, in the market, when every wife hath almost her hand on her bung, and that they cry: Beware the cutpurse and cony-catchers, then I as fast as the best with my handbasket as mannerly as if I were to buy great store of butter and eggs for provision of my house, do exclaim against them with my hand on my purse, and say the world is bad when a woman cannot walk safely to market for fear of these villainous cutpurses, whenas the first bung I come to, I either nip or foist, or else stall another while he hath stroken, dispatched, and gone: now I pray you gentle sir, wherein are we inferior to you in foisting? and yet this is nothing to the purpose. For it is one of our most simplest shifts: but yet I pray you, what think you when a farmer, gentleman or citizen come to the term, perhaps he is wary of his purse, and watch him never so warily, yet he will never be brought to the blow, is it not possible for us to pinch him ere he pass? he that is most chary of his crowns abroad, and will cry ware the cony-catchers, will not be afraid to drink a pint of wine with a pretty wench, and perhaps go to a trugging-house to ferry out one for his purpose: then with what cunning we can feed the simple fop, with what fair words, sweet kisses, feigned sighs, as if at that instant we fell in love with him that we never saw before: if we meet him in an evening in the street, if the farmer or other whatsoever be not so forward as to motion some courtesy to us, we straight insinuate into his company, and claim acquaintance of him by some means or other, and if his mind be set for lust, and the devil drive him on to match himself with some dishonest wanton, then let him look to his purse, for if he do but kiss me in the street, I'll have his purse for a farewell, although he never commit any other act at all. I speak not this only by myself, Laurence, for there be a hundred in London more cunning than myself in this kind of cony-catching. But if he come into a house, then let our trade alone to verse upon him: for first we feign ourselves hungry for the benefit of the house, although our bellies were never so full, and no doubt the good pander or bawd, she comes forth like a sober matron, and sets store of cates on the table, and then I fall aboard on them, and though I can eat little, yet I make havoc of all, and let him be sure every dish is well sauced, for he shall pay for a pippin pie that cost in the market four pence, at one of the trugging-houses xviii pence. Thus, what is dainty if it be not dear bought? And yet he must come off for crowns besides, and when I see him draw to his purse, I note the putting up of it well, and ere we part, that world goes hard if I foist him not of all that he hath: and then suppose the worst, that he miss it, am I so simply acquainted or badly provided, that I have not a friend, which with a few terrible oaths and countenance set as if he were the proudest soldado that ever bare arms against Don John of Austria, will face him quite out of his money and make him walk like a woodcock homeward by Weeping Cross, and so buy repentance with all the crowns in his purse? How say you to this, Laurence, whether are women foists inferior to you in ordinary cozenage or no?

*Laur.* Excellently well reasoned, Nan, thou hast told me wonders. But wench, though you be wily and strike often, your blows are not so big as ours.

*Nan.* Oh, but note the subject of our disputation, and that is this, which are more subtle and dangerous to the commonwealth? and to that I argue.

*Laur.* Aye and beshrew me, but you reason quaintly, yet will I prove your wits are not so ripe as ours, nor so ready to reach into the subtleties of kind cozenage, and though you appropriate to yourself the excellency of cony-catching, and that you do it with more art than we men do because of your painted flatteries and sugared words, that you flourish rhetorically like nets to catch fools, yet will I manifest with a merry instance a feat done by a foist, that exceeded any that ever was done by any mad wench in England.

*A pleasant tale of a country farmer, that took it in scorn to have his purse cut or drawn from him, and how a foist served him.*

It was told me for a truth that not long since here in London, there lay a country farmer, with divers of his neighbours about law matters, amongst whom, one of them going to Westminster Hall, was by a foist stripped of all the pence in his purse, and coming home made great complaint of his misfortune: some lamented his loss, and others exclaimed against the cutpurses, but this farmer he laughed loudly at the matter, and said such fools as could not keep their purses no surer, were well served, and for my part quoth he, I so much scorn the cutpurses, that I would thank him heartily that would take pains to foist mine: well says his neighbour, then you may thank me, sith my harms learns you to beware, but if it be true, that many things fall out between the cup and the lip, you know not what hands fortune may light in your own lap: tush quoth the farmer, here's forty pounds in this purse in gold; the proudest cutpurse in England win and wear it: as thus he boasted, there stood a subtle foist by and heard all, smiling to himself at the folly of the proud farmer, and vowed to have his purse or venture his neck for it, and so went home and bewrayed it to a crew of his companions, who taking it in dudgeon that they should be put down by a peasant, met either at Laurence Pickering's or at Lambeth: let the Blackamoor take heed I name him not, lest an honourable neighbour of his frown at it, but wheresoever they met, they held a convocation, and both consulted and concluded all by a general consent to bend all their wits to be possessors of this farmer's bung, and for the execution of this their vow they haunted about the inn where he lay, and dogged him into divers places, both to Westminster Hall and other places, and yet could never light upon it: he was so watchful, and smoked them so narrowly that all their travail was in vain: at last one of them fled to a more cunning policy, and went and learned the man's name and where he dwelt, and then hied him to the Compter and entered an action against him of trespass, damages two hundred pounds: when he had thus done, he feed the sergeants, and carried them down with him to the man's lodging, wishing them not to arrest him till he commanded them: well agreed they were, and down to the farmer's lodging they came, where were a crew of foists, whom he had made privy to the end of his practice stood waiting, but he took no knowledge at all of them, but walked up and down: The farmer came out, and went to Paul's, The cutpurse bade stay, and would not yet suffer the officers to meddle with him, till he came into the west end of Paul's Churchyard, and there he willed them to do their office, and they stepping to the farmer, arrested him: The farmer, amazed, being amongst his neighbours, asked the sergeant at whose suit he was troubled? At whose suit soever it be, said one of the cutpurses that stood by, you are wronged honest man, for he hath arrested you here in a place of privilege, where the sheriffs nor the officers have nothing to do with you, and therefore you are unwise if you obey him: tush says another cutpurse, though the man were so simple of himself, yet shall he not offer the church so much wrong as by yielding to the mace, to abolish Paul's liberty, and therefore I will take his part, and with that he drew his sword: another took the man and haled him away, the officer he stuck hard to him, and said he was his true prisoner, and cried clubs: The prentices arose, and there was a great hurlyburly, for they took the officer's part, so that the poor farmer was mightily turmoiled amongst them, and almost haled in pieces: whilst thus the strife was, one of the foists had taken his purse away and was gone, and the officer carried the man away to a tavern, for he swore he knew no such man, nor any man that he was indebted to: as then they sat drinking of a quart of wine, the foist that had caused him to be arrested sent a note by a porter to the officer that he should release the farmer, for he had mistaken the man, which note the officer showed him and bade him pay his fees and go his ways: the poor countryman was content with that, and put his hand in his pocket to feel for his purse, and God wot there was none, which made his heart far more cold than the arrest did, and with that, fetching a great sigh, he said, alas masters I am undone, my purse in this fray is taken out of my pocket, and ten pounds in gold in it besides white money. Indeed said the sergeant, commonly in such brawls the cutpurses be busy, and I pray God the quarrel was not made upon purpose by the pickpockets: well, says his neighbour, who shall smile at you now? The other

## The Complete Cony-catching

day when I lost my purse you laughed at me. The farmer brook all, and sat malcontent, and borrowed money of his neighbours to pay the sergeant, and had a learning, I believe, never after to brave the cutpurse.

How say you to this, Mistress Nan, Was it not well done? What choice-witted wench of your faculty, or she foist, hath ever done the like? tush, Nan, if we begin once to apply our wits, all your inventions are follies towards ours.

*Nan.* You say good goodman Laurence, as though your subtleties were sudden as women's are, come but to the old proverb, and I put you down, 'Tis as hard to find a hare without a meuse, as a woman without a 'scuse, and that wit that can devise a cunning lie can plot the intent of deep villainies: I grant this fetch of the foist was pretty, but nothing in respect of that we wantons can compass, and therefore to quit your tale with another, hear what a mad wench of my profession did of late to one of your faculty.

### *A passing pleasant Tale, how a whore Cony-catched a Foist*

There came out of the country a foist, to try his experience here in Westminster Hall, and stroke a hand or two, but the devil a snap he would give to our citizen foists, but wrought warily, and could not be fetched off by no means, and yet it was known he had some twenty pounds about him, but he had planted it so cunningly in his doublet that it was sure enough for finding. Although the city foists laid all the plots they could, as well by discovering him to the gaolers as other ways, yet he was so politic, that they could not verse upon him by any means, which grieved them so, that one day at a dinner, they held a council amongst themselves how to cozen him, but in vain, till at last a good wench that sat by undertook it, so they would swear to let her have all that he had: they confirmed it solemnly, and she put it in practice thus: she subtly insinuated herself into this foist's company, who seeing her a pretty wench, began after twice meeting to wax familiar with her and to question about a night's lodging: after a little nice loving & bidding, she was content for her supper and what else he would of courtesy bestow upon her, for she held it scorn she said, to set a salary price on her body: the foist was glad of this, and yet he would not trust her, so that he put no more but ten shillings in his pocket, but he had above twenty pounds twilted in his doublet. Well, to be short, supertime came, and thither comes my gentle foist, who making good cheer, was so eager of his game that he would straight to bed by the leave of dame bawd, who had her fee too, and there he lay till about midnight, when three or four old hacksters whom she had provided upon purpose came to the door and rapped lustily: Who is there? says the bawd looking out of the window: Marry, say they, such a justice, and named one about the city that is a mortal enemy to cutpurses: who is come to search your house for a Jesuit and other suspected persons: alas sir says she I have none here: well quoth they, open the door: I will says she, and with that she came into the foist's chamber, who heard all this, and was afraid it was some search for him, so that he desired the bawd to help him that he might not be seen: why then quoth she step into this closet: he whipped in hastily, and never remembered his clothes. She locked him in safe, and then let in the crew of rake-hells, who making as though they searched every chamber, came at last into that where his leman lay, and asked her what she was? She as if she had been afraid, desired their Worships to be good to her, she was a poor country maid come up to the term: and who is that, quoth they, that was in bed with you? None forsooth says she. No says one, that is a lie, here is the print of two, and besides, wheresoever the fox is, here is his skin, for this is his doublet and hose: then down she falls upon her knees and says indeed it was her husband: Your husband quoth they, nay, that cannot be so minion, for why then would you have denied him at the first: With that, one of them turned to the bawd and did question with her what he was, and where he was. Truly sir says she, they came to my house and said they were man and wife, and for my part I know them for no other: And he being afraid, is indeed to confess the truth, shut up

in the closet. No doubt, if it please your Worships, says one rake-hell I warrant you he is some notable cutpurse or pickpocket that is afraid to show his face. Come and open the closet, and let us look on him: nay, sir, says she, not for tonight, I beseech your worship, carry no man out of my house: I will give my word he shall be forthcoming tomorrow morning: Your word dame bawd says one, 'tis not worth a straw: you hussy that says ye are his wife, ye shall go with us, and for him that we may be sure he may not start, I'll take his doublet, hose and cloak, and tomorrow I'll send them to him by one of my men. Were there a thousand pounds in them, there shall not be a penny diminished: The whore kneeled down on her knees and feigned to cry pitifully, and desired the justice which was one of her companions not to carry her to prison: yes, hussy quoth he, your mate and you shall not tarry together in one house, that you may make your tales all one: and therefore bring her away, and after ye dame bawd see you lend him no other clothes, for I will send his in the morning betimes, and come you with him to answer for lodging him. I will sir says she, and so away goes the wench & her companions laughing, and left the bawd and the foist: as soon as the bawd thought good, she unlocked the closet and cursed the time that ever they came in her house: now, quoth she, here will be a fair ado, how will you answer for yourself? I fear me I shall be in danger of the cart:<89> well quoth he, to be short, I would not for forty pounds come afore the justice: marry no more would I quoth she, let me shift if you were conveyed hence, but I have not a rag of man's apparel in the house: why quoth he, seeing it is early morning, lend me a blanket to put about me, and I will 'scape to a friend's house of mine: Then leave me a pawn, quoth the bawd: alas I have none says he, but this ring on my finger: why that quoth she, or tarry while the justice comes: so he gave it her, took the blanket and went his ways, whither I know not but to some friend's house of his. Thus was this wily foist by the wit of a subtle wench, cunningly stripped of all that he had, and turned to grass to get more fat.

*Nan.* How say you to this device, Laurence? Was it not excellent? What think you of a woman's wit if it can work such wonders?

*Laur.* Marry I think my mother was wiser than all the honest women of the parish besides.

*Nan.* Why then belike she was of our faculty, and a matron of my profession, nimble of her hands, quick of tongue, and light of her tail: I should have put in sir-reverence, but a foul word is good enough for a filthy knave.

*Laur.* I am glad you are so pleasant, Nan, you were not so merry when you went to Dunstable: but indeed I must needs confess that women foists, if they be careful in their trades, are (though not so common) yet more dangerous than men foists. Women have quick wits, as they have short heels, and they can get with pleasure what we fish for with danger: but now giving you the bucklers<55> at this weapon, let me have a blow with you at another.

*Nan.* But before you induce any more arguments, by your leave in a little by-talk, you know, Laurence, that though you can foist, nip, prig, lift, courb and use the black art, yet you cannot cross-bite without the help of a woman, which cross-biting now-a-days is grown to a marvellous profitable exercise: for some cowardly knaves, that for fear of the gallows leave nipping and foisting, become cross-bites, knowing there is no danger therein but a little punishment, at the most the pillory, and that is saved with a little *unguentum aureum*<90>. As for example, Jack Rhoades is now a reformed man: whatsoever he hath been in his youth, now in his latter days he is grown a corrector of vice, for whomsoever he takes suspicious with his wife, I warrant you he sets a sure fine on head, though he hath nothing for his money but a bare kiss, and in this art we poor wenches are your surest props and stay. If you will not believe me, ask poor A.B. in Turnmill Street what a saucy signor there is, whose purblind eyes can scarcely discern a louse from a flea, and yet he hath such insight into the mystical trade of cross-biting, that he can furnish his board with a hundred pounds worth of plate? I doubt the sand-eyed ass

## The Complete Cony-catching

will kick like a Western prig if I rub him on the gall, but 'tis no matter if he find himself touched and stir; although he boasts of the chief of the clergy's favour, yet I'll so set his name out that the boys at Smithfield bars shall chalk him on the back for a cross-bite: Tush, you men are fops in fetching novices over the coals: Harken to me, Laurence; I'll tell thee a wonder. Not far from Hoxton, perhaps it was there, and if you think I lie, ask Master Richard Chot, and Master Richard Strong, two honest gentlemen that can witness as well as I, this proof of a woman's wit. There dwelt here sometimes a good ancient matron that had a fair wench to her daughter, as young and tender as a morrow-mass priest's<sup><91></sup> leman: her, she set out to sale in her youth, and drew on sundry to be suitors to her daughter, some wooers, and some speeders, yet none married her, but of her beauty they made a profit, and inveigled all, till they had spent upon her what they had, and then, forsooth, she and her young pigeon turned them out of doors like prodigal children: she was acquainted with Dutch & French, Italian and Spaniard, as well as English, & at last, as so often the pitcher goes to the brook that it comes broken home, my fair daughter was hit on the master vein, and gotten with child: now the mother to colour this matter to save her daughter's marriage, begins to wear a cushion under her own kirtle, and to feign herself with child, but let her daughter pass as though she ailed nothing: when the forty weeks were come, & that my young mistress must needs cry out forsooth, this old B. had gotten housewives answerable to herself, and so brought her daughter to bed, and let her go up and down the house, and the old crone lay in childbed as though she had been delivered, and said the child was hers, and so saved her daughter's 'scape. Was not this a witty wonder Master Laurence, wrought by an old witch, to have a child in her age, and make a young whore seem an honest virgin: tush, this is little to the purpose, if I should recite all, how many she had cozened under the pretence of marriage: well, poor plain Signor See, you were not stiff enough for her, although it cost you many crowns and the loss of your service. I'll say no more; perhaps she will amend her manners. Ah, Laurence, how like you of this gear? In cross-biting we put you down, God wot it is little looked to in and about London, and yet I may say to thee, many a good citizen is cross-bit in the year by odd Walkers abroad: I heard some named the other day as I was drinking at the Swan in Lambeth Marsh: But let them alone, 'tis a foul bird that defiles their own nest, and it were a shame for me to speak against any good wenches or boon companions, that by their wits can wrest money from a churl. I fear me R.G. will name them too soon in his Black Book, a pestilence on him. They say he hath there set down my husband's pedigree, and yours too, Laurence: if he do it, I fear me your brother-in-law Bull<sup><22></sup> is like to be troubled with you both.

*Laur.* I know not what to say to him, Nan; he hath plagued me already. I hope he hath done with me, and yet I heard say he would have a bout at my nine bowls<sup><92></sup>. But leaving him as an enemy of our trade, again to our disputation. I cannot deny, Nan, but you have set down strange precedents of women's prejudicial wits, but yet though you be cross-bites, foists and nips, yet you are not good lifts, which is a great help to our faculty, to filch a bolt of satin or velvet.

*Nan.* Stay thee a word; I thought thou hadst spoken of R.B. of Long Lane and his wife: take heed, they be parlous folks, and greatly acquainted with keepers and gaolers: therefore meddle not you with them, for I hear say R.G. hath sworn, in despite of the brazil staff, to tell such a foul tale of him in his Black Book, that it will cost him a dangerous jaunt.

*Laur.* Nan, Nan, let R.G. beware, for had not an ill fortune fallen to one of his friends R.B., he could take little harm.

*Nan.* Who is that Laurence?

*Laur.* Nay I will not name him.

*Nan.* Why then I prithee what misfortune befell him?

*Laur.* Marry Nan, he was strangely washed of late by a French barber, and had all the hair of his face miraculously shaved off by the scythe of God's vengeance, insomuch that some said he had that he had not, but as hap was howsoever his hair fell off it stood him in some stead when the brawl was of late, for if he had not cast off his beard and so being unknown, it had cost him some knocks, but it fell out to the best.

*Nan.* The more hard fortune that he had such ill hap, but hasty journeys breed dangerous sweats, and the physicians call it the alopecia. Yet omitting all this, again to where you left.

*Laur.* You have almost brought me out of my matter, but I was talking about the lift, commending what a good quality it was, and how hurtful it was, seeing we practise it in mercers' shops, with haberdashers of small wares, haberdashers of hats and caps, amongst merchant tailors for hose and doublets, and in such places getting much gains by lifting, when there is no good purchase abroad for foisting.

*Nan.* Suppose you are good at the lift, who be more cunning than we women in that we are more trusted, for they little suspect us, and we have as close conveyance as you men: though you have cloaks, we have skirts of gowns, handbaskets, and the crowns of our hats, our plackets, and for a need, false bags under our smocks, wherein we can convey more closely than you.

*Laur.* I know not where to touch you, you are so witty in your answers, and have so many starting-holes, but let me be pleasant with you a little, what say you to priggings or horse-stealing? I hope you never had experience in that faculty.

*Nan.* Alas simple sot, yes and more shift to shun the gallows than you.

*Laur.* Why 'tis impossible.

*Nan.* In faith, sir, no, and for proof, I will put you down with a story of a mad merry little dapper fine wench who at Spilsby fair had three horses of her own or another man's to sell: as she, her husband and another good fellow walked them up and down the fair, the owner came and apprehended them all, and clapped them in prison. The gaoler not keeping them close prisoners, but letting them lie all in a chamber, by her wit she so instructed them in a formal tale that she saved all their lives thus. Being brought the next morrow after their apprehension before the justices, they examined the men how they came by those horses, and they confessed they met her with them, but where she had them they knew not: Then was my pretty pet brought in, who being a handsome trull, blushed as if she had been full of grace, and being demanded where she had the horses, made this answer, may it please your worships, this man, being my husband, playing the unthrift as many more have done was absent from me for a quarter of a year, which grieved me not a little, insomuch that desirous to see him, and having intelligence he would be at Spilsby fair, I went thither even for pure love of him on foot, and being within some ten miles of the town, I waxed passing weary, and rested me often, and grew very faint. At last there came riding by me a serving-man in a blue coat, with three horses tied one at another's tail, which he led as I guessed, to sell at the fair: the serving-man, seeing me so tired, took pity on me, and asked me if I would ride on one of his empty horses, for his own would not bear double: I thanked him heartily, and at the next hill got up, and rode till we came to a town within three miles of Spilsby, where the serving-man alighted at a house, and bade me ride on afore, and he would presently overtake me: Well, forward I rode half a mile, and looking behind me could see nobody, so being alone, my heart began to rise, and I to think on my husband: As I had rid a little farther, looking down a lane I saw two men coming lustily up as if they were weary, & marking them earnestly, I saw one of them was my husband, which made my heart as light as before it was sad, so staying for them, after a little unkind greeting betwixt

## The Complete Cony-catching

us, for I chid him for his unthriftiness, he asked me where I had the horse, and I told him how courteously the serving-man had used me: Why then says he, stay for him: nay quoth I, let's ride on, and get you two up on the empty horses, for he will overtake us ere we come at the town: he rides on a stout lusty young gelding: so forward we went, and looked often behind us, but our serving-man came not: At last we coming to Spilsby alighted, & broke our fast, and tied our horses at the door, that if he passed by, seeing them, he might call in: after we had broke our fast, thinking he had gone some other way, we went into the horse-fair and there walked our horses up and down to meet with the serving-man, not for the intent to sell them. Now, may it please your Worship, whether he had stolen the horses from this honest man or no, I know not, but alas, simply I brought them to the horse-fair, to let him that delivered me them have them again, for I hope your Worships doth imagine, if I had stolen them as it is suspected, I would never have brought them into so public a place to sell, yet if the law be any way dangerous for the foolish deed, because I know not the serving-man it is, I must bide the punishment, and as guiltless as any here. And so, making a low curtsy, she ended, the justice holding up his hand and wondering at the woman's wit that had cleared her husband and his friend, and saved herself without compass of law. How like you of this, Laurence; cannot we wenches prig well?

*Laur.* By God, Nan, I think I shall be fain to give you the bucklers<125>.

*Nan.* Alas, good Laurence, thou art no logician, thou canst not reason for thyself, nor hast no witty arguments to draw me to an exigent, and therefore give me leave at large to reason for this supper: remember the subject of our disputation, is this positive question, whether whores or thieves are most prejudicial to the commonwealth? Alas, you poor thieves do only steal and purloin from men, and the harm you do is to imbolish men's goods and bring them to poverty. This is the only end of men's thievery, and the greatest prejudice that grows from robbing or filching: So much do we by our theft, and more by our lechery, for what is the end of whoredom but consuming of goods and beggary? And besides perpetual infamy, we bring young youths (*sic*) to ruin and utter destruction: I pray you Laurence whether had a merchant's son having wealthy parents better light upon a whore than a cutpurse, the one only taking his money, the other bringing him to utter confusion? For if the foist light upon him, or the cony-catcher, he loseth at the most some hundred pounds, but if he fall into the company of a whore, she flatters him, she inveigles him, she bewitcheth him, that he spareth neither goods nor lands to content her, that is only in love with his coin: if he be married, he forsakes his wife, leaves his children, despiseth his friends, only to satisfy his lust with the love of a base whore, who, when he hath spent all upon her, and he brought to beggary, beateth him out like the prodigal child, and for a small reward, brings him, if to the fairest end, to beg, if to the second, to the gallows; or at the last and worst, to the pox or as prejudicial diseases. I pray you, Laurence when any of you come to your confession at Tyburn, what is your last sermon that you make? that you were brought to that wicked and shameful end by following of harlots, for to that end do you steal to maintain whores, and to content their bad humours. Oh Laurence enter into your own thoughts, and think what the fair words of a wanton will do, what the smiles of a strumpet will drive a man to act, into what jeopardy a man will thrust himself for her that he loves, although for his sweet villainy, he be brought to loathsome leprosy. Tush, Laurence, they say the pox came from Naples, some from Spain, some from France, but wheresoever it first grew, it is so surely now rooted in England that, by S. Sith, it may better be called a *morbis Anglicus* than *Gallicus*,<93> and I hope you will grant all these French favours grew from whores: besides, in my high loving or rather creeping, I mean where men and women do rob together, there always the woman is most bloody, for she always urgeth unto death, and though the men would only satisfy themselves with the parties' coin, yet she endeth her theft in blood, murdering parties so deeply as she is malicious. I hope gentle Laurence, you cannot contradict these

reasons they be so openly manifestly probable. For mine own part, I hope you do not imagine but I have had some friends besides poor George my husband: alas, he knows it, and is content like an honest simple suffragan, to be co-rival with a number of other good companions, and I have made many a good man, I mean a man that hath a household, for the love of me to go home and beat his poor wife, when God wot I mock him for the money he spent, and he had nothing for his pence but the waste belevings of others' beastly labours. Laurence, Laurence, if concubines could inveigle Solomon, if Delilah could betray Sampson, then wonder not if we more nice in our wickedness than a thousand such Delilahs, can seduce poor young novices to their utter destructions. Search the gaols; there you shall hear complaints of whores, look into the spitals and hospitals; there you shall see men diseased of the French marbles<94> giving instruction to others that are said, to beware of whores: be an auditor or ear-witness at the death of any thief, and his last testament is: Take heed of a whore: I dare scarce speak of Bridewell because my shoulders tremble at the name of it, I have so often deserved it, yet look but in there, and you shall hear poor men with their hands in their pigeon-holes<95> cry: Oh fie upon whores, when Fowler gives them the terrible lash: examine beggars that lie lame by the highway, and they say they came to that misery by whores. Some threadbare citizens that from merchants and other good trades grow to be base informers and knights of the post<32> cry out when they dine with Duke Humphrey<96>: O, what wickedness comes from whores. prentices that runs from their masters, cries out upon whores. Tush, Laurence, what enormities proceeds more in the commonwealth than from whoredom? But sith 'tis almost supper-time, and mirth is the friend to digestion, I mean a little to be pleasant. I pray you, how many bad profits again grows from whores? Bridewell would have very few tenants, the hospital would want patients and the surgeons much work, the apothecaries would have surfling water and potato-roots lie dead on their hands, the painters could not dispatch and make away their vermilion, if tallow-faced whores used it not for their cheeks: How should Sir John's broadsmen do if we were not? Why Laurence, the Galley would be moored and the Blue Boar so lean, that he would not be man's meat if we of the trade were not to supply his wants: do you think in conscience the Peacock could burnish his fair tail were it not the whore of Babylon and suchlike makes him lusty with crowns? no no, though the Talbot hath bitten some at the game, yet new fresh huntsmen shake the she crew out of the couples. What should I say more Laurence, The suburbs should have a great miss of us, and Shoreditch would complain to Dame Anne a Cleare if we of the sisterhood should not uphold her jollity: Who is that, Laurence, comes in to hear our talk? O 'tis the boy, Nan, that tells us supper is ready. Why then, Laurence, what say you to me? Have I not proved that in foisting and nipping we excel you, that there is none so great inconvenience in the commonwealth as grows from whores, first for the corrupting of youth, infecting of age, for breeding of brawls, whereof ensues murder, insomuch that the ruin of many men comes from us, and the fall of many youths of good hope, if they were not seduced by us, do proclaim at Tyburn, that we be the means of their misery: you men thieves touch the body and wealth, but we ruin the soul, and endanger that which is more precious than the world's treasure: you make work only for the gallows, we both for the gallows and the devil, aye and for the surgeon too, that some lives like loathsome lazars, and die with the French marbles<94>. Whereupon I conclude that I have won the supper.

*Laur.* I confess it, Nan, for thou hast told me such wondrous villainies, as I thought never could have been in women, I mean of your profession: why, you are crocodiles when you weep, basilisks when you smile, serpents when you devise, and devils' chiefest brokers to bring the world to destruction. And so, Nan, let's sit down to our meat and be merry.

Thus countrymen, you have heard the disputation between these two cozening companions wherein I have shaken out the notable villainy of whores, although Mistress Nan this good oratress, hath sworn to wear a long Hamburg knife to stab me, and all the crew have protested

## The Complete Cony-catching

my death: and to prove they meant good earnest, they beleaguered me about in the Saint John's Head within Ludgate: being at supper, there were some fourteen or fifteen of them met, and thought to have made that the fatal night of my overthrow but that the courteous citizens and apprentices took my part, and so two or three of them were carried to the Compter, although a gentleman in my company was sore hurt. I cannot deny but they begin to waste away about London, and Tyburn (since the setting out of my book) hath eaten up many of them: and I will plague them to the extremity. Let them do what they dare with their bilbo blades; I fear them not. And to give them their last adieu, look shortly, countrymen, for a pamphlet against them called The Black Book containing four new laws never spoken of yet: the *creeping law* of petty thieves, that rob about the suburbs, the *limiting law*, discoursing the orders of such as follow judges, in their circuits and go about from fair to fair. The *jugging law*, wherein I will set out the disorders at nine-holes and rifling, how they are only for the benefit of the cutpurses. The *stripping law*, wherein I will lay open the lewd abuses of sundry gaolers in England. Beside, you shall see there what houses there be about the suburbs and town's end that are receivers of cutpurses' stolen goods, lifts, and suchlike. And lastly, look for a bead-roll or catalogue of all the names of the foists, nips, lifts and priggers in and about London, and although some say I dare not do it, yet I will shortly set it abroach, and whosoever I name or touch, if he think himself grieved I will answer him before the honourable Privy Council.

## The Conversion of an English courtesan

Sith to discover my parentage would double the grief of my living parents, and revive in them, the memory of my great amiss, and that my untoward fall, would be a dishonour to the house from whence I came. Sith to manifest the place of my birth would be a blemish (through my beastly life so badly misled) to the shire were I was born: sith to discourse my name might be holden a blot in my kindred's brow, to have a sinew in their stock of so little grace. I will conceal my parents, kin, and country, and shroud my name with silence, lest envy might taunt others for my wantonness. Know therefore I was born about threescore miles from London of honest and wealthy parents, who had many children, but I their only daughter, and therefore the jewel wherein they most delighted, and more, the youngest of all, and therefore the more favoured: for being gotten in the waning of my parents' age, they doted on me above the rest, and so set their hearts the more on fire. I was the fairest of all, and yet not more beautiful than I was witty, insomuch that being a pretty parrot, I had such quaint conceits, and witty words in my mouth that the neighbours said I was too soon wise, to be long old. Would to God, either the proverb had been authentical, or their sayings prophecies; then had I by death in my nonage, buried many blemishes that my riper years brought me to. For the extreme love of my parents, was the very efficient cause of my follies, resembling herein the nature of the ape, that ever killeth that young one which he loveth most, with embracing it too fervently. So my father and mother, but she most of all, although he too much, so cockered me up in my wantonness, that my wit grew to the worst, and I waxed upwards with the ill weeds: whatsoever I did, be it never so bad, might not be found fault withal, my father would smile at it and say 'twas but the trick of a child, and my mother allowed of my unhappy parts, alluding to this profane and old proverb, An untoward girl makes a good woman

But now I find, in sparing the rod they hate the child, that over-kind fathers make unruly daughters. Had they bent the wand while it had been green, it would have been pliant, but I, ill-grown in my years, am almost remediless. The hawk that is most perfect for the flight and will, seldom proveth haggard and children that are virtuously nurtured in youth will be honestly matured in age: fie upon such as say, young saints, old devils: it is no doubt a devilish and damnable saying, for what is not bent in the cradle, will hardly be bowed in the saddle. Myself am an instance, who after I grew to be six years old was set to school, where I profited so much that I write and read excellently well, played upon the virginals, lute & cithern, and could sing prick-song<97> at the first sight, insomuch as by that time I was twelve years old, I was holden for the most fair and best qualified young girl in all that country, but with this, bewailed of my well-wishers, in that my parents suffered me to be so wanton.

But they so tenderly affected me, and were so blinded with my excellent qualities that they had no insight into my ensuing follies. For I growing to be thirteen year old, feeling the reins of liberty loose on mine own neck, began with the wanton heifer<98> to aim at mine own will, and to measure content, by the sweetness of mine own thought, insomuch, that pride creeping on, I began to prank myself with the proudest, and to hold it in disdain, that any in the parish, should exceed me in bravery. As my apparel was costly, so I grew to be licentious, and to delight to be looked on, so that I haunted and frequented all feasts and weddings, & other places of merry meetings, where, as I was gazed on of many, so I spared no glances to survey all with a curious eye-favour. I observed Ovid's rule right: *Spectatum veniunt, veniunt spectentur ut ipsi.*<99>

I went to see & be seen, and decked myself in the highest degree of bravery, holding it a glory when I was waited on with many eyes to make censure of my birth. Beside, I was an ordinary dancer<100>, and grew in that quality so famous that I was noted as the chiefest

## The Complete Cony-catching

thereat in all the country, yea, and to soothe me up in these follies, my parents took a pride in my dancing, which afterward proved my overthrow and their heart-breaking.

Thus, as an unbridled colt, I carelessly led forth my youth and wantonly spent the flower of my years, holding such maidens as were modest, fools, and such as were not as wilfully wanton as myself, puppies, ill brought up and without manners: growing on in years, as tide nor time tarrieth no man, I began to wax passion-proud, and think her not worthy to live that was not a little in love: that as divers young men began to favour me for my beauty, so I began to censure of some of them partially, and to delight in the multitude of many wooers, being ready to fall from the tree before I was come to the perfection of a blossom: which an uncle of mine seeing, who was my mother's brother, as careful of my welfare as nigh to me in kin, finding fit opportunity to talk with me, gave me this wholesome exhortation.

### *A Watchword to Wanton Maidens.*

“Cousin, I see the fairest hawk hath oftentimes the sickest feathers, that the hottest day hath the most sharpest thunders; the brightest sun, the most sudden shower, & the youngest virgins, the most dangerous fortunes: I speak as a kinsman, and wish as a friend: the blossom of a maiden's youth, (such as yourself) hath attending upon it many frosts to nip it, and many cares to consume it, so that if it be not carefully looked unto, it will perish before it come to any perfection.

“A virgin's honour, consisteth not only in the gifts of nature, as to be fair and beautiful, though they be favours that grace maidens much: for as they be glistening, so they be momentary, ready to be worn with every winter's blast, and parched with every summer's sun: There is no face so fair but the least mole, the slenderest scar, the smallest brunt of sickness will quickly blemish.

“Beauty, cousin, as it flourisheth in youth, so it fadeth in age, it is but a folly that feedeth man's eye, a painting that nature lends for a time, and men allow on for a while, insomuch that such as only aim at your fair looks, tie but their loves to an apprenticeship of beauty: which broken either with cares, misfortune or years, their destinies are at liberty, and they begin to loathe you, and like of others.

*Forma bonum fragile est quantumque accedit ad annos*

*Fit minor et spacio carpitur ipsa suo*<101>

“Then cousin, stand not too much on such a slippery glory, that is as brittle as glass; be not proud of beauty's painting, that hatched by time, perisheth in short time: neither are women the more admirable of wise men for their gay apparel, though fools are fed with gauds: for a woman's ornaments, is the excellency of her virtues: and her inward good qualities, are of far more worth than her outward braveries: embroidered hair, bracelets, silks, rich attire and such trash do rather bring the name of a young maid in question, than add to her fame any title of honour.

“The Vestal Virgins were not revered of the senators for their curious clothing, but for their chastity. Cornelia<102> was not famous for ornaments of gold, but for excellent virtues. Superfluity in apparel, showeth rather lightness of mind than it importeth any other inward good quality: and men judge of maidens' rareness by the modesty of their raiment, holding it rather garish than glorious, to be tricked up in superfluous and exceeding braveries. Neither cousin, is it seemly for maids to jet abroad, or to frequent too much company.

“For she that is looked on by many cannot choose but be hardly spoken of by some, for report hath a blister on her tongue, and maidens' actions are narrowly measured. Therefore would not the ancient Romans, suffer their daughters, to go any further than their mothers'

looks guided them. And therefore Diana is painted with a tortoise under her feet, meaning that a maid should not be a straggler, but like the snail, carry her house on her head, and keep at home at her work, for to keep her name without blemish, and her virtues from the slander of envy.

“A maid that hazards herself in much company, may venture the freedom of her heart by the folly of her eye: for so long the pot goes to the water, that it comes broken home, and such as look much must needs like at last: the fly dallies with a flame, but at length she burneth, flax and fire put together will kindle, a maid in company of young men shall be constrained to listen to the wanton allurements of many cunning speeches: If she hath not either with Ulysses tasted of Moly<103>, or stopped her ears warily, she may either be enticed with the Sirens or enchanted by Circes: youth is apt to yield to sweet persuasions, and therefore cousin, think nothing more dangerous than to gad abroad: neither cousin do I allow this wanton dancing in young virgins: 'tis more commendation for them to moderate their manners, than to measure their feet, and better to hear nothing than to listen unto unreverent music: Silence is a precious jewel, and nothing so much worth as a countenance full of chastity: light behaviour is a sign of lewd thoughts, and men will say, there goes a wanton that will not want one, if a place and person were agreeable to her desires: if a maiden's honour be blemished, or her honesty called in question, she is half deflowered, and therefore had maidens need to be chary, lest envy report them for unchaste. Cousin I speak this generally, which if you apply particularly to yourself, you shall find in time my words were well said.”

I gave him slender thanks, but with such a frump that he perceived how light I made of his counsel: which he perceiving, shook his head, and with tears in his eyes departed. But I whom wanton desires had drawn in delight, still presumed in my former follies, and gave myself either to gad abroad, or else at home to read dissolute pamphlets, which bred in me many ill-affected wishes, so that I gave leave to love and lust to enter into the centre of my heart, where they harboured till they wrought my final and fatal prejudice.

Thus leading my life loosely, and being soothed up with the applause of my too kind and loving parents, I had many of every degree that made love unto me, as well for my beauty, as for the hope of wealth that my father would bestow upon me: sundry suitors I had, and I allowed of all, although I particularly granted love to none, yielding them friendly favours, as being proud I had more wooers than any maid in the parish beside: amongst the rest there was a wealthy farmer that wished me well, a man of some forty years of age, one too worthy for one of so little worth as myself, and him my father, mother, and other friends would have had me match myself withal: but I that had had the reins of liberty too long in mine own hands, refused him and would not be ruled by their persuasions, and though my mother with tears entreated me to consider of mine own estate, & how well I sped if I wedded with him, yet carelessly I despised her counsel, and flatly made answer that I would none of him: which though it pinched my parents at the quick, yet rather than they would displease me, they left me in mine own liberty to love. Many there were beside him, men's sons of no mean worth, that were wooers unto me, but in vain: either my fortune or destiny drove me to a worse end, for I refused them all, and with the beetle, refusing to light on the sweetest flowers all day, nestled at night in a cowshard.

It fortuneed that as many sought to win me, so amongst the rest there was an odd companion that dwelt with a gentleman hard by, a fellow of small reputation, and of no living, neither had he any excellent qualities but thrumming on the gittern, but of pleasant disposition he was, and could bawl out many quaint & ribaldrous jigs & songs, and so was favoured of the foolish sect for his foppery. This shifting companion, suitable to myself in vanity, would oft-times be jesting with me, and I so long dallying with him, that I began deeply (oh, let me blush

## The Complete Cony-catching

at this confession) to fall in love with him, and so construed of all his actions that I consented to my own overthrow: for as smoke will hardly be concealed, so love will not be long smothered, but will bewray her own secrets: which was manifest in me, who in my sporting with him so bewrayed my affection that he spying I favoured him, began to strike when the iron was hot and to take opportunity by the forehead: and one day finding me in a merry vein, began to question with me of love: which although at the first I slenderly denied him, yet at last I granted, so that not only I agreed to plight him my faith, but that night meeting to have farther talk, I lasciviously consented that he cropped the flower of my virginity. When thus I was spoiled by such a base companion, I gave myself to content his humour, and to satisfy the sweet of mine own wanton desires. Oh, let me here breathe, and with tears bewail the beginning of my miseries, and to exclaim against the folly of my parents, who by too much favouring me in my vanity in my tender youth laid the first plot of my ensuing repentance: Had they with one correction chastised my wantonness, and suppressed my foolish will with their grave advice, they had made me more virtuous and themselves less sorrowful. A father's frown is a bridle to the child, and a mother's check is a stay to the stubborn daughter. Oh, had my parents in over-loving me not hated me, I had not at this time cause to complain. Oh, had my father regarded the saying of the wise man, I had not been thus woe-begone.

*If thy daughter be not shamefast hold her straitly, lest she abuse herself through overmuch liberty.*

*Take heed of her that hath an unshamefast eye, & marvel not if she trespass against thee.*

*The daughter maketh the father to watch secretly, and the carefulness he hath for her taketh away his sleep.*

*In her virginity, lest she should be deflowered in her father's house.*

*If therefore thy daughter be unshamefast in her youth, keep her straitly, lest she cause thine enemies to laugh thee to scorn, and make thee a common talk in the city, and defame thee among the people, and bring thee to public shame.<104>*

Had my parents with care considered of this holy counsel, and levelled my life by the loadstone of virtue, had they looked narrowly into the faults of my youth, and bent the tree while it was a wand, and taught the hound while he was a puppy, this blemish had never befotuned me, nor so great dishonour had not befallen them. Then by my example let all parents take heed, lest in loving their children too tenderly they subvert them utterly, lest in manuring the ground too much with the unskilful husbandman, it wax too fat and bring forth more weeds than flowers, lest cockering their children under their wings without correction, they make them careless and bring them to destruction: as their nurture is in youth, so will their nature grow in age. If the palm-tree be suppressed while it is a scion, it will contrary to nature be crooked when it is a tree.

*Quo semel est imbuta recens servabit odorem testa diu. <105>*

If then virtue be to be engrafted in youth, lest they prove obstinate in age, reform your children betimes both with correction and counsel, so shall you that are parents glory in the honour of their good endeavours: but leaving this digression, again to the looseness of mine own life, who now having lost the glory of my youth, and suffered such a base slave to possess it, which many men of worth had desired to enjoy, I waxed bold in sin & grew shameless, insomuch he could not desire so much as I did grant: whereupon, seeing he durst not reveal it to my father to demand me in marriage, he resolved to carry me away secretly, and therefore wished me to provide for myself, and to furnish me every way both with money and apparel, hoping, as he said, that after we were departed, and my father saw we were married and that no means was to amend it, he would give his free consent, and use us as kindly and deal with us as liberally as if we had matched with his goodwill. I that was apt to any ill, agreed to this, and so wrought the matter that he carried me away into a strange place, and then using me

awhile as his wife, when our money began to wax low, he resolved secretly to go into the country where my father dwelt, to hear not only how my father took my departure but what hope we had of his ensuing favour: Although I was loath to be left alone in a strange place, yet I was willing to hear from my friends, who no doubt conceived much heart-sorrow for my unhappy fortunes, so that I parted with a few tears and enjoined him, to make all the haste he might to return. He being gone, as the eagles always resort where the carrion is, so the bruit being spread abroad of my beauty, and that at such an inn lay such a fair young gentlewoman, there resorted thither many brave young gentlemen, and cutting companions that, tickled with lust, aimed at the possession of my favour, and by sundry means sought to have a sight of me: which I easily granted to all, as a woman that counted it a glory to be wondered at by many men's eyes, insomuch that, coming amongst them, I set their hearts more and more on fire, that there rose divers brawls who should be most in my company: being thus haunted by such a troop of lusty rufflers, I began to find mine own folly, that had placed my first affection so loosely, and therefore began as deeply to loathe him that was departed, as erst I liked him when he was present, vowing in myself though he had the spoil of my virginity, yet never after should he triumph in the possession of my favour, and therefore began I to affection these new-come guests, and one above the rest, who was a brave young gentleman, and no less addicted unto me than I devoted unto him, for daily he courted me with amorous sonnets, and curious proud letters, and sent me jewels, and all that I might grace him with the name of my servant: I returned him as loving lines at last, and so contented his lusting desire that secretly and unknown to all the rest, I made him sundry nights my bedfellow, where I so bewitched him with sweet words that he began deeply to dote upon me, insomuch that selling some portion of land that he had, he put it into ready money, and providing horse and all things convenient, carried me secretly away, almost as far as Bath. This was my second choice, and my second shame: thus I went forward in wickedness and delighted in change, having left mine old love to look after some other mate more fit for her purpose: how he took my departure when he returned I little cared, for now I had my content, a gentleman, young, lusty and endued with good qualities, and one that loved me more tenderly than himself: thus lived this new-entertained friend and I together unmarried, yet as man and wife for awhile, so lovingly as was to his content and my credit: but as the tiger though for awhile she hide her claws, yet at last she will reveal her cruelty, and as the *agnus castus* leaf when it looks most dry, is the most full of moisture, so women's wantonness is not qualified by their wariness, nor does their chariness for a month, warrant their chastity forever, which I proved true, for my supposed husband, being every way a man of worth, could not covertly hide himself in the country, though a stranger, but that he fell in acquaintance with many brave gentlemen whom he brought home to his lodging, not only to honour them with his liberal courtesy but also to see me, being proud if any man of worth applauded my beauty. Alas poor gentleman, too much bewitched by the wiliness of a woman, had he deemed my heart to be a harbour for every new desire, or mine eye a suitor to every new face, he would not have been so fond as to have brought his companions into my company, but rather would have mewed me up as a hen, to have kept that several to himself by force which he could not retain by kindness: but the honest minded novice little suspected my change, although I God wot placed my delight, in nothing more than the desire of new choice, which fell out thus:

Amongst the rest of the gentlemen that kept him company, there was one that was his most familiar, and he reposed more trust and confidence in him than in all the rest: this gentleman began to be deeply enamoured of me, and showed it by many signs which I easily perceived, and I whose ear was pliant to every sweet word, and who so allowed of all that were beautiful, affected him no less, so that love prevailing above friendship, he broke the matter with me, and made not many suits in vain before he obtained his purpose, for he had what he wished, and I had what contented me. I will not confess that any of the rest had some seldom

## The Complete Cony-catching

favours, but this gentleman was my second self, and I loved him more for the time at the heel than the other at the heart, so that although the other youth bare the charges and was made Sir Pay-for-all, yet this new friend was he that was master of my affections: which kindness betwixt us was so unwisely cloaked, that in short time it was manifest to all our familiars, which made my supposed husband to sigh, and others to smile, but he that was hit with the horn was pinched at the heart. Yet so extreme was the affection he bare to me that he had rather conceal his grief than any way make me discontent, so that he smothered his sorrow with patience, and brooked the injury with silence, till our loves grew so broad before, that it was a wonder to the world: whereupon one day at dinner, I being very pleasant with his chosen friend and my choice lover, I know not how, but either by fortune or it may be some set match, there was by a gentleman, there present a question popped in about women's passions and their mutability in affections, that the controversy was defended *pro* and *contra* with arguments whether a woman might have a second friend or no? At last it was concluded, that love and lordship brooks no fellowship, and therefore none so baseminded to bear a rival. Hereupon arose a question about friends that were put in trust, how it was a high point of treason, for one to betray another, especially in love, insomuch that one gentleman at the board, protested by a solemn oath, that if any friend of his, made privy and favoured with the sight of his mistress whom he loved, whether it were his wife or no, should secretly seek to encroach into his room and offer him the dishonour to partake his love, he would not use any other revenge but at the next greeting stab him with his poignado, though he were condemned to death for the action. All this fitted for the humour of my supposed husband, and struck both me and my friend into a quandary, but I scornfully jested at it, whenas my husband, taking the ball before it fell to the ground, began to make a long discourse what faithless friends they were that would fail in love, especially where a resolved trust of the party beloved was committed unto them: and hereupon to make the matter more credulous, and to quip my folly, and to taunt the baseness of his friend's mind, that so he might with courtesy both warn us of our wantonness, and reclaim us from ill, he promised to tell a pleasant story, performed as he said, not long since in England, and it was to this effect.

### *A pleasant discourse how a wise wanton by her husband's gentle warning became to be a modest matron*

There was a gentleman (to give him his due) an esquire here in England, that was married to a young gentlewoman, fair and of a modest behaviour, virtuous in her looks, howsoever she was in her thoughts, and one that every way with her dutiful endeavour and outward apparance of honesty did breed her husband's content, insomuch that the gentleman so deeply affected her, as he counted all those hours ill spent which he passed not away in her company: besotting so himself in the beauty of his wife that his only care was to have her every way delighted: living thus pleasantly together, he had one special friend amongst the rest whom he so dearly affected, as ever Damon did his Pythias, Pylades his Orestes, or Titus his Gisippus<106>, he unfolded all his secrets in his bosom, and what passion he had in his mind that either joyed him or perplexed him, he revealed unto his friend & directed his actions according to the sequel of his counsels, so that they were two bodies and one soul. This gentleman for all the inward favour shown him by his faithful friend, could not so withstand the force of fancy, but he grew enamoured of his friend's wife, whom he courted with many sweet words and fair promises, charms that are able to enchant almost the chastest ears, and so subtly couched his arguments, discovered such love in his eyes, and such sorrow in his looks that despair seemed to sit in his face, and swore that if she granted not him *le don du merci*<107>, the end of a lover's sighs, then would present his heart as a tragic sacrifice to the sight of his cruel mistress: the gentlewoman waxing pitiful, as women are kind-hearted and are loath gentlemen should die for love, after a few excuses, let him dub her husband knight of the

forked order<sup><108></sup>, and so to satisfy his humour, made forfeit of her own honour. Thus these two lovers continued by a great space in such pleasures as unchaste wantons count their felicity, having continually such opportunity to exercise their wicked purpose, sith the gentleman himself did give them free liberty to love, neither suspecting his wife or suspecting his friend: at last, as such traitorous abuses will burst forth, it fell so out, that a maid who had been an old servant in the house began to grow suspicious, that there was too much familiarity between the mistress and her master's friend, and upon this watched them divers times so narrowly, that at last she found them more private than either agreed with her master's honour, or her own honesty, and thereupon revealed it one day unto her master: he little credulous of the light behaviour of his wife, blamed the maid, and bade her take heed lest she sought to blemish her virtues with slander, whom he loved more tenderly than his own life: the maid replied, that she spake not of envy to him, but of mere love she bare unto him, and the rather that he might shadow such a fault in time, and by some means prevent it, lest if others should note it as well as she, his wife's good name and his friend's should be called in question: At these wise words spoken by so base a drudge as his maid, the gentleman waxed astonished, and listened to her discourse, wishing her to discover how she knew or was so privy to the folly of her mistress, or by what means he might have assured proof of it: she told him that her own eyes were witnesses, for she saw them unlawfully together, and please you sir quoth she, to feign yourself to go from home, and then in the back house to keep you secret, I will let you see as much as I have manifested unto you: upon this the master agreed, and warned his maid not so much as to make it known to any of her fellows. Within a day or two after, the gentleman said he would go a-hunting, and so rise very early, and causing his men to couple up his hounds, left his wife in bed and went abroad: as soon as he was gone a mile from the house he commanded his men to ride afore, and to start the hare and follow the chase, and we will come fair and softly after: they obeying their master's charge, went their ways, and he returned by a back way to his house and went secretly to the place where his maid and he had appointed. In the meantime, the mistress thinking her husband safe with his hounds, sent for her friend to her bedchamber, by a trusty servant of hers, in whom she assured that was a secret pander in such affairs, and the gentleman was not slack to come, but making all the haste he could, came and went into the chamber, asking for the master of the house very familiarly: the old maid noting all this, as soon as she knew them together, went and called her master, and carried him up by a secret pair of stairs to her mistress' chamber door, where peeping in at a place that the maid before had made for the purpose, he saw more than he looked for, and so much as pinched him at the very heart, causing him to accuse his wife for a strumpet and his friend for a traitor: yet for all this, valuing his own honour more than their dishonesty, thinking if he should make an uproar, he should but aim at his own discredit, and cause himself to be a laughing game to his enemies, he concealed his sorrow with silence, and taking the maid apart, charged her to keep all secret, whatsoever she had seen, even as she esteemed of her own life, for if she did bewray it to any, he himself would with his sword make an end of her days, and with that, putting his hand in his sleeve, gave the poor maid six angels to buy her a new gown. The wench, glad of this gift, swore solemnly to tread it underfoot, and sith it pleased him to conceal it, never to reveal it as long as she lived: upon this they parted, she to her drudgery and he to the field to his men where after he had killed the hare, he returned home, and finding his friend in the garden, that in his absence had been grafting horns in the chimneys, and entertained him with his wonted familiarity, and showed no bad countenance to his wife, but dissembled all his thoughts, to the full. As soon as dinner was done, and that he was gotten solitary by himself, he began to determine of revenge, but not as every man would have done, how to have brought his wife to shame & her love to confusion, but he busied his brains how he might reserve his honour inviolate, reclaim his wife, and keep his friend: meditating a long time how he might bring all this to pass, at last a humour fell into his head, how cunningly to compass all three, and

## The Complete Cony-catching

therefore he went & got him certain slips, which are counterfeit pieces of money, being brass, & covered over with silver, which the common people call slips: having furnished himself with these, he put them in his purse, and at night went to bed as he was wont to do, yet not using the kind familiarity that he accustomed: notwithstanding, he abstained not from the use of her body, but knew his wife as aforesaid, and every time he committed the act with her, he laid the next morning in the window a slip where he was sure she might find it, and so many times as it pleased him to be carnally pleasant with his wife, so many slips he still laid down upon her cushionet. This he used for the space of a fortnight, till at last his wife, finding every day a slip, or sometime more or less, wondered how they came there, and examining her waiting-maids, none of them could tell her anything touching them, whereupon she thought to question with her husband about it, but being out of her remembrance, the next morning as he & she lay dallying in bed it came into her mind, and she asked her husband if he laid those slips on her cushioned, that she of late found there, having never seen any before. Aye marry did I, quoth he, and I have laid them there upon special reason, and it is this. Ever since I have been married to thee, I have deemed thee honest, and therefore used and honoured thee as my wife, parting coequal favours betwixt us as true loves, but of late finding the contrary, & with these eyes seeing thee play the whore with my friend in whom I did repose all my trust, I sought not as many would have done, to have revenged in blood, but for the safety of mine own honour, which otherwise would have been blemished by thy dishonesty, I have been silent, and have neither wronged my quondam friend, nor abused thee, but still do hold bed with thee, that the world should not suspect anything, and to quench the desire of lust I do use thy body, but not so lovingly as I would a wife, but carelessly as I would a strumpet, and therefore even as to a whore, so I give thee hire, which is for every time a slip, a counterfeit coin: which is good enough for such a slippery wanton, that will wrong her husband that loved her so tenderly: and thus will I use thee for the safety of mine own honour till I have assured proof that thou becomest honest: And thus with tears in his eyes, and his heart ready to burst with sighs, he was silent, when his wife, stricken with remorse of conscience, leaping out of her bed in her smock, humbly confessing all, craved pardon, promising if he should pardon this offence which was new begun in her, she would become a new reformed woman, and never after so much as in thought, give him any occasion of suspicion of jealousy: The patient husband not willing to urge his wife, took her at her word, and told her that when he found her so reclaimed, he would as afore he had done, use her lovingly and as his wife, but till he was so persuaded of her honesty, he would pay her still slips for his pleasure, charging her not to reveal anything to his friend, or to make it known to him that he was privy to their loves. Thus the debate ended, I guess, in some kind greeting, and the gentleman went abroad to see his pastures, leaving his wife in bed full of sorrow and almost rending her heart asunder with sighs. As soon as he was walked abroad, the gentleman his friend came to the house and asked for the goodman: the pander that was privy to all their practices, said, that his master was gone abroad to see his pastures, but his mistress was in bed: why then says he, I will go and raise her up: so coming into the chamber and kissing her, meaning as he was wont to have used other accustomed dalliance, she desired him to abstain, with broken sighs & her eyes full of tears: he, wondering what should make her thus discontent, asked her what was the cause of her sorrow, protesting with a solemn oath, that if any had done her injury, he would revenge it, were it with hazard of his life: She then told him, scarce being able to speak for weeping, that she had a suit to move him in, which if he granted unto her, she would hold him in love and affection without change next her husband forever: he promised to do whatsoever it was: then says she, swear upon a bible you will do it without exception: with that he took a bible that lay in the window & swore, that whatsoever she requested him to do, were it to the loss of his life, he would without exception perform it. Then she, holding down her head and blushing, began thus. I need not quoth she make manifest how grossly and grievously you and I have both offended God and

wronged the honest gentleman my husband and your friend, he putting a special trust in us both, & assuring such earnest affiance in your unfeigned friendship that he even committeth me, his wife, his love, his second life, into your bosom: this love have I requited with inconstancy, in playing the harlot, that faith that he reposes in you, have you returned with treachery and falsehood, in abusing mine honesty and his honour, now a remorse of conscience toucheth me for my sins, that I heartily repent, and vow ever hereafter to live only to my husband, and therefore my suit is to you, that from henceforth you shall never so much as motion any dishonest question unto me, nor seek any unlawful pleasure or conversing at my hands: This is my suit, and hereunto I have sworn you, which oath if you observe as a faithful gentleman, I will conceal from my husband what is past, and rest in honest sort your faithful friend forever: at this she burst into tears, and uttered such sighs, that he thought for very grief her heart would have clave asunder. The gentleman, astonished at this strange metamorphosis of his mistress, sat a good while in a maze, and at last taking her by the hand, made this reply, so God help me, fair sweeting, I am glad of this motion, and wondrous joyful that God hath put such honest thoughts into your mind, & hath made you the means to reclaim me from my folly: I feel no less remorse than you do in wronging so honest a friend as your husband, but this is the frailness of man: and therefore to make amends I protest anew, never hereafter so much as in thought, as to motion you of dishonesty, only I crave you be silent: she promised that and so they ended. And so for that time they parted: at noon the gentleman came home, and cheerfully saluted his wife and asked if dinner were ready, and sent for his friend, using him wonderfully familiarly, giving him no occasion of mistrust, and so pleasantly they passed away the day together: at night, when his wife and he went to bed, she told him all what had passed between her and his friend, and how she had bound him with an oath, and that he voluntarily of himself swore as much, being heartily sorry that he had so deeply offended so kind a friend: the gentleman commended her wit, and found her afterward a reclaimed woman, she living so honestly that she never gave him any occasion of mistrust. Thus the wise gentleman reclaimed with silence a wanton wife, and retained an assured friend.

At this pleasant tale all the board was at a mutiny, and they said the gentleman did passing wisely that wrought so cunningly for the safety of his own honour, but highly exclaiming against such a friend as would to his friend offer such villainy, all condemning her that would be false to so loving a husband. Thus they did diversely descant, & passed away dinner, but this tale wrought little effect in me, for as one past grace, I delighted in change, but the gentleman that was his familiar and my paramour was so touched that never after he would touch me dishonestly, but reclaimed himself, abstained from me, and became true to his friend. I, wondering that according to his wonted custom he did not seek my company, he and I being one day in the chamber alone, and he in his dumps, I began to dally with him, and to ask him why he was so strange, and used not his accustomed favours to me. He solemnly made answer that though he had played the fool in setting his fancy upon another man's wife, & in wronging his friend, yet his conscience was now touched with remorse: & ever since he heard the tale afore rehearsed he had vowed in himself never to do my husband the like wrong again: my husband, quoth I, he is none of mine; he hath brought me from my friends, and keeps me here unmarried, and therefore am I as free for you as for him, & thus began to grow clamorous because I was debarred of my lust. The gentleman, seeing me shameless, wished me to be silent, and said: although you be but his friend, yet he holds you as dear as his wife, and therefore I will not abuse him, neither would I wish you to be familiar with any other, seeing you have a friend that loves you so tenderly: much good counsel he gave me, but all in vain, for I scorned it, and began to hate him, and resolved both to be rid of him and my supposed husband, for falling in with another familiar of my husband's, I so inveigled him with sweet words that I caused him to make a piece of money to steal me away, and so carry me to London, where I had not lived long with him, ere he seeing my light behaviour, left me to the world,

## The Complete Cony-catching

and to shift for myself. Here by my example may you note the inconstant life of courtesans and common harlots, who after they have lost their honesty, care not who grow into their favour nor what villainy they commit: they fancy all as long as crowns last, and only aim at pleasure and ease: They cleave like caterpillars to the tree, and consume the fruit where they fall; they be vultures that prey on men alive, and like the serpent sting the bosom wherein they are nourished. I may best discourse their nature because I was one of their profession, but now being metamorphosed, I hold it meritorious for me to warn women from being such wantons, and to give a caveat to men lest they addict themselves to such straggling strumpets as love none though they like all, but affectionate only for profit, and when he hath spent all, they beat him out of doors with the prodigal child. But stopping here till occasion serve me fitter to discover the manner of courtesans, to myself, who now being brought to London and left here at random, was not such a house-dove while any friend stayed with me, but that I had visited some houses in London that could harbour as honest a woman as myself: whenas therefore I was left to myself, I removed my lodging and got me into one of those houses of good hospitality whereunto persons resort commonly called a trugging-house, or to be plain, a whore-house, where I gave myself to entertain all companions, sitting or standing at the door like a stall, to allure or draw in wanton passengers, refusing none that would with his purse purchase me to be his, to satisfy the disordinate desire of his filthy lust: now I began not to respect personage, good qualities, to the gracious favour of the man when eye had no respect of person, for the oldest lecher was as welcome as the youngest lover, so he brought meat in his mouth; otherwise I pronounced against him:

*Si nihil attuleris ibis Homere foras*<109>

I waxed thus in this hell of voluptuousness, daily worse & worse, yet having, as they term it, a respect to the main chance, as near as I could to avoid diseases, and to keep myself brave in apparel, although I paid a kind of tribute to the bawd, according as the number and benefit of my companions did exceed, but never could I be brought to be a pickpocket or thievish by any of their persuasions, although I wanted daily no instructions to allure me to that villainy: for I think nature had wrought in me a contrary humour, otherwise my bad nurture and conversing with such bad company had brought me to it: marry in all their vices I carried a brazen face & was shameless, for what ruffian was there in London that would utter more desperate oaths than I in mine anger? what to spit, quaff, or carouse more devilishly or rather damnable than myself? and for beastly communication, Messalina of Rome<110> might have been waiting-maid: Besides, I grew so grafted in sin that *consuetu[de]o peccandi tollebat sensum peccati*, custom of sin, took away the feeling of the sin, for I so accustomed myself to all kind of vice, that I accounted swearing no sin: whoredom, why I smiled at that, and could profanely say, that it was a sin which God laughed at: gluttony I held good fellowship, & wrath, honour and resolution: I despised God, nay in my conscience I might easily have been persuaded there was no God: I contemned the preachers, and when any wished me to reform my life, I bade away with the Puritan, and if any young woman refused to be as vicious every way as myself, I would then say, Gip fine soul, a young saint will prove an old devil. I never would go to the church, and sermons, I utterly refused, holding them as needless tales told in a pulpit: I would not bend mine ears to the hearing of any good discourse, but still delighted in jangling ditties of ribaldry.

Thus to the grief of my friends, hazard of my soul and consuming of my body, I spent a year or two in this base and bad kind of life, subject to the whistle of every desperate ruffian, till on a time there resorted to our house a clothier, a proper young man, who by fortune, coming first to drink, espying me, asked me if I would drink with him: there needed no great entreaty, for as then I wanted company, and so clapped me down by him, and began very pleasantly to welcome him: the man, being of himself modest and honest, noted my personage and judiciously

reasoned of my strumpetlike behaviour, and inwardly, as after he reported unto me, grieved that so foul properties were hidden in so good a proportion, and that such rare wit and excellent beauty was blemished with whoredom's base deformity: insomuch that he began to think well of me, and to wish that I were as honest as I was beautiful. Again, see how God wrought for my conversion, since I gave myself to my loose kind of life I never liked any so well as him, insomuch that I began to judge of every part, and methought he was the properest man that ever I saw: thus we sat, both amorous of other, I lasciviously, & he honestly: at last he questioned with me what country woman I was and why, being so proper a woman, I would beseem to dwell or live in a base ale-house, especially in one that had a bad name: I warrant he wanted no knavish reply to fit him, for I told him the house was as honest as his mother's: marry, if there were in it a good wench or two that would pleasure their friends at a need, I guessed by his nose what porridge he loved, and that he hated none such: well, seeing me in that voice, he said little, but shook his head, paid for the beer, and went his way, only taking his leave of me with a kiss, which methought was the sweetest that ever was given me: as soon as he was gone I began to think what a handsome man he was, and wished that he would come and take a night's lodging with me: sitting in a dump to think of the quaintness of his personage till other companions came in that shook me out of that melancholy, but as soon again as I was secret to myself, he came into my remembrance.

Passing over thus a day or two, this clothier came again to our house, whose sight cheered me up, for that spying him out at a casement, I ran down the stairs and met him at the door and heartily welcomed him, & asked him if he would drink: I come for that purpose says he, but I will drink no more below, but in a chamber: marry sir quoth I, you shall, and so brought him into the fairest room. In there sitting together drinking: at last the clothier fell to kissing and other dalliance, wherein he found me not coy: at last told me that he would willingly have his pleasure of me, but the room was too lightsome, for of all things in the world he could not in such actions away with a light chamber: I consented unto him, and brought him into a room more dark, but still he said it was too light: then I carried him into a farther chamber, where drawing a buckram curtain afore the window, and closing the curtains of the bed, I asked him smiling if that were close enough. No, sweet love, says he the curtain is thin, & not broad enough for the window; peradventure some watching eye may espy us. My heart misdoubts, & my credit is my life: good love if thou hast a more close room than this, bring me to it: why then quoth I follow me, & with that I brought him into a back loft, where stood a little bed only appointed to lodge suspicious persons, so dark that at noondays it was impossible for any man to see his own hands: How now sir quoth I, is not this dark enough? He sitting him down on the bedside, fetched a deep sigh, & said, indifferent, so, so, but there is a glimpse of light in at the tiles. Somebody may by fortune see us: in faith no quoth I, none but God: God says he, why can God see us here? good sir quoth I, why I hope you are not so simple, but God's eyes are so clear and penetrating that they can pierce through walls of brass, and that were we enclosed never so secretly, yet we are manifestly seen to him and alas quoth he sweet love, if God see us shall we not be more ashamed to do such a filthy act before him than before men? I am sure thou art not so shameless but thou wouldst blush & be afraid to have the meanest commoner in London see thee in the action of thy filthy lust, and dost thou not shame more to have God the maker of all things see thee, who revengeth sin with death, he whose eyes are clearer than the sun, who is the searcher of the heart, and holdeth vengeance in his hands to punish sinners? Consider, sweet love, that if man and wife would be ashamed to have any of their friends see them in the act of generation, or performing the rights of marriage which is lawful, and allowed before God, yet for modesty do it in the most covert they may, then how impudent or graceless should we be, to fulfil our filthy lust before the eyes of the Almighty, who is greater than all kings or princes on the earth. Oh, let us tremble that we but once durst have such wanton

## The Complete Cony-catching

communication in the hearing of his divine Majesty, who pronounceth damnation for such as give themselves over to adultery.

It is not possible, saith the Lord, for any whoremaster or lascivious wanton to enter into the kingdom of God: for such sins whole cities have sunk, kingdoms have been destroyed: and though God suffereth such wicked livers to escape for a while, yet at length he payeth home, in this world with beggary, shame, diseases or infamy, and in the other life with perpetual damnation: weigh but the inconvenience that grows through thy loose life, thou art hated of all that are good, despised of the virtuous, and only well thought of, of reprobates, rascals, ruffians, and such as the world hates, subject to their lust and gaining thy living at the hands of every diseased lecher. Oh what a miserable trade of life is thine that livest of the vomit of sin, in hunting after maladies: but suppose, while thou art young thou art favoured of thy companions, when thou waxest old, and that thy beauty is faded, then thou shalt be loathed and despised, even of them that professed most love unto thee: then good sister, call to mind the baseness of thy life, the heinous outrage of thy sin, that God doth punish it with the rigour of his justice: oh thou art made beautiful, fair and well formed, and wilt thou then by thy filthy lust make thy body, which if thou be honest is the temple of God, the habitation of the devil? Consider this, and call to God for mercy, and amend thy life: leave this house, and I will become thy faithful friend in all honesty, and use thee as mine own sister: at this such a remorse of conscience, such a fearful terror of my sin struck into my mind that I kneeled down at his feet, and with tears besought him he would help me out of that misery, for his exhortation had caused in me a loathing of my wicked life, and I would not only become a reformed woman, but hold him as dear as my father that gave me life: whereupon he kissed me with tears, and so we went down together, where we had further communication, and presently he provided me another lodging, where I not only used myself so honestly, but also was so penitent every day in tears for my former folly, that he took me to his wife: and how I have lived since, and loathed filthy lust, I refer myself to the majesty of God, who knoweth the secrets of all hearts.

Thus countrymen I have published the conversion of an English courtesan, which if any way it be profitable either to forewarn youth or withdraw bad persons to goodness, I have the whole end of my desire, only craving every father would bring up his children with careful nurture, and every young woman respect the honour of her virginity.

FINIS

**NOTES**

## A Notable Discovery of Cozenage

1. *Nascimur pro patria*: "We are born for our country."
2. *Omnia sub sole vanitas*: "All is vanity under the sun" (Ecclesiastes.).
3. *Patres patriæ*: "Fathers of the country."
4. *With a langret, cut contrary to the vantage, will cross-bite a card cater tray*: i.e., will swindle a victim by throwing a four and a three with dice which have been cut in such a way that they are not exactly cubical, and so will fall with the smaller face on top.
5. *Quis nisi mentis inops ollatum respuit aurum*: "Who but a madman rejects money."
6. *Vie and Revie*: to raise and re-raise the stakes.
7. *Summum ius*: "The greatest force of the law."
8. *Cum multis aliis quæ nunc præscribere longum est*: "With many others which would be too long to describe now."
9. *Multa latent quæ non patent*: "Many things are hidden that are not seen."
10. *No cozen to grime with his stop dice*: i.e. No victim to swindle with his loaded dice.
11. *Polyphemus*: a savage man-eating giant in the ninth book of Homer's *Odyssey*
12. *By his ownes*: A minced oath = by his (Jesus') wounds.
13. *A shameless woman* etc: Proverbs 22:26
14. *Si quis*: A public notice advertising lost property or wanted men.
15. *Exordium*: The beginning or introduction of a speech or court plea.
16. *Neapolitan favour*: Syphilis, the first major outbreak of which in Europe was at the siege of Naples, 1495.
17. *Parators and sumners*: Minor court officials.
18. *The Arches*: An ecclesiastical court (still in existence) which dealt with religious and moral matters, including adultery, illegitimacy, etc.
19. *Venus in vinis, ignis in igne fuit*: "Love and wine together are like adding fuel to fire" (Ovid, *The Art of Love*).
20. *gogs nownes*: A minced oath = God's (Jesus') wounds.
21. *Fallere fallentem non est fraus*: "It's no sin to cheat the cheaters."
22. *Bull*: Samuel Bull, hangman of London.
23. *Ne Hercules contra duos*: "Not even Hercules (could win a fight) against two."
24. *Jack Drum*: *Jack* (or *John* or *Tom*) *Drum's* entertainment was to be dragged into the house, beaten and thrown out again. See Shakespeare: *All's Well that Ends Well*, iii. 6. A comedy called *Jack Drum's Entertainment* by John Marston was performed several times in 1599-1600 and published in 1601.

## The Second Part of Cony-Catching

25. *Mallem non esse quam non prodesse patriæ*: "Better not to live than not to be of service to my country."
26. *το πρεπον [to prepon]*: "Fittingly."
27. *Immedicabile vulnus, Ense reseandum est ne pars sincera trahitur*: "The infected part which cannot be cured must be cut away, lest it infect the healthy parts." Ovid, *Metamorphoses* Bk. 1 l. 190-91.
28. *Summum bonum*: "Greatest good."
29. *Keep him at hard meat*: Feed the horse on hay and oats while keeping him stabled, rather than on grass in a field where it could be seen.

30. *The slop of a man's hose*: The wide parts of a pair of baggy breeches
31. An Act to avoid Horse Stealing, 31 Eliz c. 12 (1592).
32. *Knights of the post*: Fellows who could be hired at the posts outside the Courts of Law to swear anything or go bail for any one.
33. *Benevolentiam captare*: "To persuade by flattery."
34. *Bathyllus*: A bad poet who tried to pass off as his own, a poem by Virgil.
35. *Neckverse*: The beginning of Psalm 50/51 *Miserere mei, Deus, secundum misericordiam tuam; et secundum multitudinem miserationum tuarum, dele iniquitatem meam*. ("Have mercy on me, O God, according to thy great mercy. And according to the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my iniquity.") This was the prayer of those about to be executed.
36. *Lento gradu*: "By slow degrees."
37. *The Accidence*: Part of a grammar textbook dealing with parts of speech and their inflections. The eight parts are verbs, nouns, pronouns, adverbs, adjectives, prepositions, articles, and conjunctions.
38. *Jakes farmers*: Contractors who carried off the human excrement from the city's privies and cesspits.
39. *With advantage*: with a little extra, as a tip
40. *Upon their pantofles*: On their dignity.
41. *Mittimus*: A warrant to imprison a named person.

### **The Third and Last Part of Cony-Catching**

42. *Whittington College*: Newgate Prison, which was first built when Dick Whittington was mayor of London.
43. *Their journey westward, but not of their return*: They travelled from Newgate to Tyburn, and were hanged.

### **The Black Book's Messenger**

44. *He leapt at a daisy*: He was hanged.
45. *Senex Fornicator*: A dirty old man.
46. *Colman hedge*: A garden in Fenchurch St. near the church of St. Catherine Coleman, where street-walkers were wont to take their clients.
47. *Aretine's Tables: I Modi*, an album of erotic engravings by Marcantonio Raimondi with text by Pietro Aretino.
48. *Strado Curtizano*: The Street of the Courtesans; *Madam Padilia* and *Romana Imperia*: Famous courtesans.
49. *per varios casus & tot discrimina rerum*: "Through various adventures and many dangerous things" Virgil, *Aeneid* I. 204.
50. *Amasis' Law*: Amasis was Pharaoh of Egypt 570 BC – 526 BC. "It was Amasis too who established the law that every year each one of the Egyptians should declare to the ruler of his district, from what source he got his livelihood, and if any man did not do this or did not make declaration of an honest way of living, he should be punished with death. Now Solon the Athenian received from Egypt this law and had it enacted for the Athenians, and they have continued to observe it, since it is a law with which none can find fault." Herodotus, *Histories* 2.177.

51. *Statute merchant*: "A bond of record, acknowledged before the chief magistrate of a trading town, giving to the obligee power of seizure of the land of the obligor if he failed to pay his debt at the appointed time." OED.
52. *Arx*: A small village in southwestern France.

### The Defence of Cony-Catching

53. *Qui bene latuit bene vixit, dominatur enim fraus in omnibus*: "He who lives hidden, lives well, for falsehood rules over all"
54. Marginal Note: Newgate builded by one Whittington.
55. *Give you the bucklers*: Confess that you have won. A buckler was a small shield, often offered as a prize in a tourney
56. Marginal Note: The names of such games as cony-catchers use.
57. Marginal Note: All the money in their purse.
58. *Squariers, langrets, gourds, stop-dice, highmen, lowmen, and dice barred for all advantages*: Types of rigged dice
59. *All that his purse had in esse or his credit in posse*: All that his purse actually held or what he could borrow.
60. Marginal Note: Some cony-catchers wear noblemen's livery, as W. Bickerton and others.
61. *Tully*: Cicero, the Roman orator, whose full name was Marcus *Tullius* Cicero.
62. *T.D.*: Thomas Deloney 1543–1600, novelist and ballad-writer.
63. *Iron age*: The Greek writer Hesiod (c. 600 B.C.) wrote of five ages of mankind; the Golden age, a time of peace and plenty, the the Silver, Bronze and Heroic ages, each worse than the previous one; and finally the Iron age, in which we are now living, a time of toil and misery, and constant selfishness, strife, crime and violence.
64. *Promised to acknowledge a statute staple to him, with letters of defeasance*: To lend money under a bond, witnessed before the mayor of the town, allowing the lender to seize the property of the debtor if the debt was not repaid.
65. *The Washes*: A former ford, in the area now called Enfield Wash
66. *Hostry*: Sticks used for kindling; *Faggots*: Bundles of firewood; *Fair chambering*: Expensive hanging, bedclothes etc.
67. *The Pantry*: The division of the King's Household which dealt with the provision, cooking and serving of food.
68. *Lash of lions*: Lions' whiskers
69. *Marquisadoed, with a side peak pendent*: Having no beard but long moustaches or long side whiskers hanging down.
70. *Single of a deer*: a deer's tail.
71. *Barbary*: The North Coast of Africa
72. *Alcaires*: Cairo in Egypt
73. *Cavilavarst*: ? Perhaps a misprint for *cavalierest* i.e. most like a *cavalier*, or strutting gallant.
74. Marginal note: A boy of vii years old to make a bill of sale.
75. *The Legend*: The Golden Legend, a compendium of lives of the saints, a book very popular in the late Mediaeval and early modern period
76. *Martinist*: A follower of "Martin Marprelate", the pseudonymous author of several works attacking the bishops of the Church of England, published in 1588-89 until their printer was discovered and executed.
77. *As in praesenti*: A rule in Latin grammar for forming certain verb tenses; *Carmen Heroicum*: "Song of Heroes", an example given in Latin grammars of the period.

78. *Galligaskins*: A kind of wide hose or breeches. *Trunk-slops*: Full bag-like breeches covering the hips and upper thighs, and sometimes stuffed with wool or the like, worn in the 16th and early 17th c.
79. *Pleonasmos*: Elaborate speech; using more words than are necessary to describe something.
80. *Vails*: Additional rewards or perquisites of an employment: as here, the right to sell the offcuts of cloth left over after making a garment.
81. *Granado silk*: From *Granada* in Spain; *Paned*: Made of strips of different coloured cloth sewn together; *Biliment*: Costly lace used for trimming garments.

## A Disputation between a He Cony-catcher and a She Cony-catcher.

82. *The Mirror of Magistrates*: The Mirror for [not of] Magistrates is a collection of poems about the lives of various historical figures. It had several editions from rival printers during the second half of the sixteenth Century; one was written mostly by John Higgins.
83. *Hieria*: The Hyena from Pliny's days was said to counterfeit men's voices in order to entrap them and others (though not to sing),—"In the Hyena itself there is a certain magical virtue, attributing a wonderful power thereto, in transporting the mind of man or woman, and ravishing their senses so as that it will allure them unto her very strangely." (Natural History, B. 28, c. 8 trans. Philemon Holland) But qy.—odd as the misprint is, is it a blunder for *Sirens*, Greek mythological creatures resembling women, who with their singing enchanted sailors, and then ate them? The context 'tunes' and 'passengers' suggests this.
84. *diebus illis*: Those days.
85. *Quatuor hic casibus etc*: This quatrain has been attributed to St. Augustine of Hippo, but is probably not by him.
86. *All the bite in his bung*: All the money in his purse.
87. *Pierce Penniless*: The protagonist of Pierce Penniless, His Supplication to the Devil, a story by Thomas Nashe published in 1592, wherein Pierce laments the misfortunes which have brought him to destitution.
88. *Lime twigs*: Twigs smeared with bird-lime, a sticky substance used to catch birds, which stick to it when they perch, and cannot fly away, and so are taken.
89. *In danger of the cart*: To which criminals were tied to be flogged though the streets.
90. *Unguentum aureum*: "Golden grease" i.e. a bribe.
91. *Morrow-mass priest*: A priest appointed to celebrate the first mass of the day very early in the morning. The task usually fell to the most junior priest of the parish or community.
92. *Have a bout at my nine bowls*: = bowl at my skittles i.e. try to knock me down.
93. *morbus Anglicus*: English disease; *Gallicus*: French.
94. *French marbles*: Syphilis
95. *pigeon-holes*: Holes in a pillory-like structure used to hold men while being flogged.
96. *To dine with Duke Humphrey*: To go without dinner.
97. *Prick-song*: music pricked or noted down; when opposed to plain song, it meant counterpoint, as distinguished from mere melody.
98. *A wanton heifer*: *Hosea* 4:16. "For Israel hath gone astray like a wanton heifer: now will the Lord feed them, as a lamb in a spacious place."
99. *Spectatum veniunt, veniunt spectentur ut ipsi*: "They come to watch; they come to be looked at themselves" Ovid, *Art of Love*, Book 1 l. 90.
100. *An ordinary dancer*: one very accurate in her steps.
101. *Forma bonum fragile est quantumque accedit ad annos*

## The Complete Cony-catching

*Fit minor et spacio carpitur ipsa suo* "Beauty is a fleeting boon; it fades with the passing years, and the longer it lives, the more surely it dies." Ovid, *Art of Love*, Book 3 l. 132-3.

102. *Cornelia*: Presumably Cornelia Africana (c. 190–c.100 BC) daughter of Scipio Africanus, who defeated Hannibal, and mother of the Gracchi, who pressed for reform of Roman corruption. She is remembered as a prototypical example of a virtuous Roman woman. (Julius Caesar's first wife was also called Cornelia.)

103. *Moly*: A magic herb with the aid of which Ulysses resisted the spells of the witch Circe, who turned all his men into swine. (Homer, *Odyssey*, Book 10.)

104. *Sirach (Ecclesiasticus)* 12.10-11; 42. 9-11.

105. *Quo semel est imbuta recens servabit odorem testa diu.* "The jar will long retain the odour of the liquor with which, when new, it was once saturated" Horace, *Epistles*, Book 1 Epistle 2, (to Lollius) l. 69-70.

106. *Damon & Pythias, Pylades & Orestes, Titus & Gisippus*: Famously devoted friends from classical mythology.

Pythias was accused of plotting against the tyrannical Dionysius I of Syracuse. Pythias requested Dionysius that he be allowed to settle his affairs on the condition that he leave his friend, Damon, as a hostage, so if Pythias did not return, Damon would be executed. Eventually, Pythias returned to face execution to the amazement of Dionysius, who because of the sincere trust and love of their friendship, then let both Damon and Pythias go free.[Cicero, *De Officiis*]

Orestes was the son of Agamemnon, king of Mycenae, and Clytemnestra who murdered him when he came home from Troy. Pylades was the companion and friend of Orestes, and helped him in his wanderings and attempts to avenge his father. [Aeschylus, *The Oresteia*]

There are different versions of the story of Titus and Gisippus, either that one gave the other his wife Sophronia because of his greater love for her; or that one confessed to a murder for which the other had been condemned. [Boccaccio, *Decameron*. 10.8; Shakespeare, *The Two Gentleman of Verona* (with the names changed to Valentine and Proteus)]

107. *Le don de merci*: "The gift of compassion."

108. *Knight of the Forked Order*: A man whose wife or mistress was unfaithful was said to wear horns or antlers—hence the joke that cuckoldry was an order of Knighthood, whose emblem was a pair of (forked) antlers.

109. *Si nihil attuleris ibis Homere foras*: "If Homer came without money, he would be driven out." Ovid, *Art of Love*, Book 2 l.297

110. *Messalina*: Wife of the Roman emperor Claudius, notorious for her sexual voracity.

## **GLOSSARY**

## The Complete Cony-catching

### Glossary

Of obsolete words, or words used in an obsolete sense

Aconiton	A deadly poison prepared from the plant <i>Aconitum napellus</i> (monkshood or wolfsbane)
Affiance	Absolute confidence or trust.
Affying	Trusting
Alla revolto	Carried upside down, with the hilt below the point
Alopecia	Baldness caused by illness
Ambuscado	Ambush
Amerced; amerciament	Fined; a fine
Amort	Dejected, vexed
Angel	A gold coin worth 10 shillings
Artificial	Artful, clever
Bait	Food
Baited	Fed
Bandore	A musical instrument resembling a guitar, used as a bass accompaniment
Basil	An iron ring fastened around the ankle of a prisoner
Belswagger	A swaggering pimp or bully
Bewray	To betray, expose
Bilbo blade	A sword made in Bilbao, in Spain
Blackjack	A leather drinking vessel
Blind	Secluded, out of the way
Bombast	Cotton, or cotton-wool used for padding out clothes.
Bowed	Of a coin, bent; such a coin was given as a token of affection
Brack:	A flaw in the weaving of cloth
Braves	Boastful or threatening behaviour
Brazil	An exceptionally hard wood
Brisk	To dress finely
Bruit	Something spoken of widely
Caliver	A kind of harquebus or musket
Cap-case	A travelling bag
Caterpillar	An extortioner, one who preys on others.
Cates	provisions
Cautels	Tricks, deceits
Cly	To take, seize
Cocker	To spoil or pamper a child
Cole	A swindler
Commodity	Benefit
Compter	A small prison run by the sheriff, used to hold debtors and petty offenders.
Contemn	To despise
Copesmate	A colleague or accomplice, especially of a thief or swindler
Cowshard	A pat of cow-dung
Crome	A hook

Robert Greene

Cross	A small coin, which had a cross stamped on the reverse side
Cullion	A low-class scoundrel or ruffian
Cushionet	a pin-cushion
Cuttle-bung	a knife for cutting purses
Decipher	To show
Delay	Occupy, use up
Descant	To discourse, make a statement
Dicker	A package of ten hides
Drab	A whore
Drift	A course of action
Dump	A state of bewilderment or depression
Exigent	A summons to attend court under pain of outlawry.
Fadge	Suitable
Fairing	A gift or free sample
Featly	Neatly, elegantly
Figging	Thieving
Flax-wife	A woman who makes a living by preparing or spinning flax into linen thread.
Foins	Marten fur
Forfend	Prevent, avoid
Frump	A derisive snort.
Garded	(Of garments) with ornamented fringes or hems
Gauds	Flashy finery of any kind
Gins	Equipment
Gird	A jibe or sarcastic crack at someone
Gittern	A musical instrument resembling a guitar.
Gran	A rustic or yokel
Hackster	A prostitute or thief (or both).
Haggard	A wild and untameable hawk, also used of an unbiddable woman.
Handsel	A small gift of money
Headboroughs	Local police or watchmen
Hippocras	Spiced wine
Hippocras	Spiced wine
Holp	Helped
Huff-snuff	A hectoring braggart
Imbolish	To steal, make off with
Incestuous	Adulterous or immoral
Jet	Prance or swagger
Lamback	A heavy blow
Lask	Diarrhoea.
Leese	Lose
Legerdemain	Nimbleness or skill with the hands
Leman	A lover or mistress
Levatum	Comforting
List	To want or desire to do something

## The Complete Cony-catching

Mark	Thirteen shillings and four pence i.e. two-thirds of a pound.
Marshal-man	An official of the royal court or of the Mayor of London, whose function it was to walk ahead of the coach in procession in order to clear the way
Mate	Used contemptuously for a man
Meuse	An opening or gap in a fence or hedge through which a hare can escape when pursued
Mithridate	An antidote to all poisons
Mouthfair	Handsome
Mutiny	A dispute or quarrel
Nappy Ale	Strong, well flavoured ale
Nick	To hammer up the bottom of a metal container so as to reduce the amount it will hold
Noble	A gold coin worth (in Greene's day) ten shillings
Nonage	Childhood
Oeillade	An amorous glance or ogle
Ordinary	An eating-house where a set meal could be had at a fixed price; the meal itself
Pair	A pack of cards
Palliard	A beggar or vagabond
Pelf	Money or possessions, regarded as the root of all evil.
Penny-father	A miser
Pillow-bere	a pillow case
Placket	A pocket on the inside of a skirt or petticoat.
Poignado	A dagger
Pottle	Half a gallon
Prank	To show oneself off
Pranker	Thieves' slang for a lively horse
Provant	Soldier's rations
Quean	A whore
Quittanced	Cancelled, discharged
Several	Exclusive
Shells	Money
Sholt	A cur dog
Shore	A curve shot
Shot	The bill
Shruff dust	Powdered cinders.
Sice	The six on a die.
Simple	A medicinal herb
Sir-reverence	An expression used before, or instead of, a word or words considered offensive.
Sith	Since
Smoke	To detect, find out
Snout-fair	Pretty
Soldados	Soldiers of fortune.
Spanish pip	Syphilis
Speed of	To succeed in obtaining.
Speeder	One who is successful in love

Robert Greene

Stade	A kind of cloth
Stale, stall	A decoy; something (or someone) who distracts the attention of a victim
Stanchel	The upright of a window-frame.
Starting-hole	Literally, a hole in which a hunted animal can hide; metaphorically, a loophole, or "get-out."
Surfling water	A liquid cosmetic
Swinge	To beat someone with a club
Tabling Houses	Taverns or houses where backgammon was played
Term	A session of the law courts
Termer	A litigant in court
Toy	A lively tune or song
Traffic	A whore
Train	A deceitful trick
Treacher	A treacherous person
Trug	A whore
Trugging-house	A brothel
Twilted	Sewn in
Vent	Sale
Vent	The business of selling a commodity
Veny	A thrust or wound in fencing
Verse	To swindle
Virginals	A musical instrument resembling a small piano
Wehee	The sound of a whinnying horse
Yarking up	Preparing
Younker	A young man