

SUMMARY: *The Black Book's Messenger* (STC 12223) was entered in the Stationers' Register to John Danter on 21 August 1592, a few weeks before Robert Greene's death on 3 September 1592, as *The Repentance of a Conycatcher, with the life and death of [blank] Mourton and Ned Browne, two notable conycatchers The one latelie executed at Tyborne the other at Aix in Ffraunce* (see Jowett, John, 'Johannes Factotum: Henry Chettle and Greene's Groatsworth of Wit', *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, December 1993, 87:4, pp.453-86 at p.464). As the entry in the Stationers' Register indicates, the material published under the new title of *The Black Book's Messenger* was originally part of a larger work which would have encompassed the lives and deaths of both Ned Browne and Mourton. Only the material involving the life and repentance of Ned Browne appeared in *The Black Book's Messenger*, and it seems likely that the material concerning the life and repentance of Mourton was revised and published in 1592 after Greene's death as *The Repentance of Robert Greene*. If this is in fact what occurred, all the biographical material contained in *The Repentance of Robert Greene* becomes, by definition, highly suspect. The modern spelling version of *The Black Book's Messenger* below was prepared from the University of Michigan microfilm of the copy of *The Black Book's Messenger* in the Huntington Library in San Marino, California.

#### THE BLACK BOOK'S MESSENGER

Laying open the life and death of Ned Browne, one of the most notable cutpurses,  
crossbiters, and cony-catchers that ever lived in England.

Herein he telleth very pleasantly in his own person such strange pranks and monstrous  
villainies by him and his consort performed, as the like was yet never heard of in any of  
the former books of cony-catching.

Read and be warned, laugh as you like, judge as you find.

*Nascimur pro patria.*

By R.G.

Printed at London by John Danter for Thomas Nelson dwelling in Silver Street near to  
the sign of the Red Cross.

1592.

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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 wonderful 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 martial man, who when he had nipped a bung or cut a good purse, he would steal over in the Low Countries, there to taste three or four stoups 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.

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A table of the words of art lately devised by Ned Browne and his associates to crossbite  
the old phrases used in the manner of cony-catching.

He that draws the fish to the bait	the beater
The tavern where they go	the bush
The fool that is caught	the bird
Cony-catching to be called	bat-fowling
The wine to be called	the shrape
The cards to be called	the lime-twigs
The fetching in a cony	beating the bush
The good ass, if he be won	stooping to the lure
If he keep aloof	a haggard
The verser in cony-catching is called	the retriever
And the barnacle	the pot-hunter

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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 selfsame 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, pettilashery, and such trifling toys, but with these follies I enured 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 torth [sic]? 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 crossbite 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 crossbit 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 crossbit 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.

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A pleasant tale how Ned Browne crossbit a maltman

This senex fornicator, 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 crossbite 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 subtile enough to spy a pad in the straw and to see that we went about to crossbite 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 crossbite 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; marry, he had a fair cloak and a damask coat that served him to bail 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 crossbite him of his money. Mas 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 devise 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 Counter, 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 forefinger, 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 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 wogld [sic for '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 crossbiter 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 snout-fair, but the commonest harlot and hackster that ever made fray under the shadow of Coleman hedge. Wedded to this trull, what villainy could I devise but she would put in practice, 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 bet 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-corsers, 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 free-booted abroad in the country like a cavalier on horseback, wherein I did excel for subtilty, 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 practice, 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 fetlocks, 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 taromosind [sic for 'turned?'] (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. 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.

#### A merry tale how Ned Browne used a priest

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 into the stable, and there secretly I knit a hair about the horse' fetlock so strait 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, 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 pummel, 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 of my horse that I had of him for a mile or two, and I would ride of 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 espying, said: *Methinks my gelding begins to leave his halting.* *Aye, marry, doth he, Master Parson, quoth I. I 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. Amongst the rest, I remember once walking up and down Smithfield very quaintly attired in a fustian doublet and a 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.

#### A pleasant tale how Ned Browne kissed a gentlewoman and cut her purse

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 St. 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 casting in my head how to bring my fine mistress to the blow, at last I performed it thus. She standing and talking awhile 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 devise 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 Browne 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 something 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 drove 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 justling in Paul's for room, I stepped before the gentleman and let fall a key, which stooping to take up, I stayed 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 of his purse.

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 at their fingers'-ends to feed him on with new kind of filthiness. They will come in with Rous, the French painter, and what an 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 philosopher's 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 traveling. 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 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 councillor, & he this vacation-time is gone down into the country; we will break up his study, rifle his chests, dive into 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 than 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* 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 that 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 it [sic for '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, 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 everyone.

He will persuade you he hath twenty receipts of love powders, that he can frame a ring with such a quaint devise 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 forcibly 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 gentleman 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 moth-worms 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 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.

We have about London that (to the disgrace of gentlemen) live gentlemenlike 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 chiefest dealers in London, Norwich, Bristol, and suchlike 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 if of him as I can. O, saith my budget-man, I have his hand and seal to show; look here else, and with that plucks out a counterfeit band (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 band 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 of his lands before a judge, but when all comes to all, he hath no more land in England than 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 inquire 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 crossbitten in her own art

But here note (gentlemen), though I have done many sleights and crossbitten 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 crossbite a gentleman who had some ten pound in his sleeve, left my wife to perform the accident, who in the end was crossbitten 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 crossbite 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 chamber-pot. 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 and 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 delineated with the soft sir-reverence, so as he stunk worse than a jakes-farmer. 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.

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 crossbiting, that everyone 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 mischievous pranks for which justly I am condemned and must suffer death, whereby I learn that revenge deferred is not quitted, 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 fairest 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 [sic for Aix] 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, slightly at his death regarding the state of his soul. But note a wonderful judgment 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 solders 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 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