
THE DEFENCE OF CONY-CATCHING

Or

The confutation of those two injurious pamphlets published by R.G. against the practitioners of many nimble-witted and mystical sciences.

By Cuthbert Cony-catcher, licentiate in Whittington College.

Qui bene latuit bene vixit, dominatur enim fraus in omnibus.

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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 & 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 Cutts, whose deep insight into this science had drawn him thrice through every jail in England, meeting of me at Maidstone, gave me the bucklers 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.

Newgate
builded by
one
Whittington.

At decoy, mumchance, catch-dolt, oure-le-bourse, non est possible, Dutch nobby or Irish one-and-thirty 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 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, 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* ere the simple cony and I parted.

The names of
such games as
cony-catchers
use.

All the money
in their purse.

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 Story'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 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.

Some cony-
catchers wear
noblemen's
livery, as W.
Bickerton and
others.

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 (quod 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, sir (q. he), you cannot verse upon me; this book hath taught me to beware of crossbiting. 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 jail, & 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 drave 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 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 crossbiter. 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 goodfellows, 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.

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 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., whose brains, beaten to the yarking up of ballads, might more lawfully have glanced at the quaint conceits of cony-catching and crossbiting.

But to this my objection methinks I hear your maship learnedly reply, *Nascimur pro patria*, 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 subtile 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 resecandum est ne pars sincera trahatur.

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, 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 now-a-days apprentices not to learn trades and occupations but crafts and mysteries.

If then wit in this age be counted a great patrimony, and subtlity 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 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 subtile 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 maship 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 A 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. 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 band.

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 this an old cony-catcher, M. 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 & hare-brain revenge in her head, counselled her husband to make a voyage from home & to stay a week or two, and (q. 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 had 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 shrieking 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 executers 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, q. 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.

I pray you, what say you to Monsieur the Miller with the gilden 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 them [sic?] 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 americiament; 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 byword 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.

A Pleasant Tale Of A Miller And An Ale-wife's Boy Of Edmonton.

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, had 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 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, & 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 grieving, 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 subtilty.

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

A Pleasant Tale Of Will Sommers.

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 that had been a long servitor 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 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 cracked 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 [sic?], 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 [sic?], 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 laughed, 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 makes 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.

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 *alla espagnole*, with a straight bombasta(?) 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 mustaches after the lash of lions, 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, either sharp like the single of a deer, 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 Gompostella [sic] in Spain, at Madril 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 frenia* [sic] in the sea, and speak of Rialto Treviso and Murano where they make glasses, and to set the young gentleman's teeth an 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, and there to Éschites and Alcaires, 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 (?) bragout 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 happily 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 *levatem* 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 appalled, 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 poynado pendent ready for the stab, and cavalierest(?) 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 size 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.?

Paine.

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 a rapier worth forty shillings and a stitched 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.?

A boy of vii
years old to
make a bill of
sale.

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.

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* 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 (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.

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

First you must understand that he was a kind of scholastical panion, 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*, for he pronounced his words like a bragout 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 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.?

But now to be a little pleasant with you, let me have your opinion what you deem of those amarusos 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.

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

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 cow-shard, 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 appalled, 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 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 share [sic?] that who but William 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 Will, 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 Tanton 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 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 (q. 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 had 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 jail, 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.

How like you of this cony-catching, M. 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 galligaskin is stale, and trunk-slop out of use; the round hose bombasted 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: they stade (?) outside, inside, lace, drawing out, and making, and then set down their parcels in a bill which they so overprize 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, *hisce oculis*, with these eyes I have seen tailors' prentices sell as much vails 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 vardingales that grants them liberty to cony-catch so mightily. But this I talk of our London and courtly tailors, but even the poor pricklouse the country tailor, that hath scarce

any more wealth than his thimble, his needle, his pressing-iron and his shears, will stitch [sic?] as well as the proudest of that trade in England; they will to [sic?] 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 Peter gate, done about fourteen year ago, and thus it fell out.

A Pleasant Tale Of A Tailor, How He Cony-catched A Gentlewoman, And Was Made
Himself A Cony Afterwards By His Man.

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, 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 Walm gate 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 it 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 [sic] 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 in my scabbard of my sword till I can stand over thee; away went Monsieur Magnifico frowning, and the serving-man 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 prithee, do, q. his m. and mistress, but whatsoever thou seest, say nothing lest he be angry and spoil my gown; let me alone, mistress, q. 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, q. the fellow, my sight is young enough I need no glasses; if you do, put them, 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, q. 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 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 unfortunate 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, q. he, and I will give him a brace of angels for his labour, so the fellow was called and talked withal, 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 [sic]. 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, q. 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, q. he, did you not cut four side pieces where you have cut but two? yes, all is true, q. 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.?

Thus have I proved to your maships 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, M. 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.