
A NOTABLE DISCOVERY OF COZENAGE

Now daily practiced by sundry lewd persons called cony-catchers and crossbiters,
Plainly [l]aying open those pernicious sleights that hath brought many ignorant men to
confusion.

Written for the general benefit of all gentlemen, citizens, apprentices, country farmers
and yeomen that may hap to fall into the company of such cozening companions.

With a delightful discourse of the cozenage of colliers.

Nascimur pro patria

By R. Greene, Master of Arts

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To the young gentlemen, merchants, apprentices, farmers and plain countrymen, health

Diogenes, gentlemen, from a counterfeit coiner of money became a current corrector [sic for 'corrector'] of manners, as absolute in the one as dissolute in the other. Time refineth men's affects, and their humours grow different by the distinction of age. Poor Ovid, that amorously writ in his youth *The Art of Love*, complained in his exile amongst the Getes of his wanton follies, and Socrates' age was virtuous though his prime was licentious. So, gentlemen, my younger years had uncertain thoughts, but now my ripe days calls on to repentant deeds, and I sorrow as much to see others wilful as I delighted once to be wanton. The odd madcaps I have been mate to, not as a companion but as a spy to have an insight into their knaveries that seeing their trains I might eschew their snares, those mad fellows I learned at last to loathe by their own graceless villainies, and what I saw in them to their confusion I can forewarn in others to my country's commodity. None could decipher tyranny better than Aristippus, not that his nature was cruel, but that he was nurtured with Dionysius. The simple swain that cuts the lapidary's stones can distinguish a ruby from a diamond only by his labour. Though I have not practised their deceits, yet conversing by fortune and talking upon purpose with such copesmates hath given me light into their conceits, and I can decipher their qualities though I utterly mislike of their practices.

To be brief, gentlemen, I have seen the world and rounded it, though not with travel, yet with experience, and I cry out with Solomon: *Omnia sub sole vanitas* [=All things under the sun is vanity]. I have smiled with the Italian, and worn the viper's head in my hand, and yet stopped his venom. I have eaten Spanish myrobalans, and yet am nothing the more metamorphosed. France, Germany, Poland, Denmark, I know them all, yet not affected to any in the form of my life. Only I am English born, and I have English thoughts, not a devil incarnate because I am Italianate, but hating the pride of Italy because I know their peevishness, yet in all these countries where I have travelled I have not seen more excess of vanity than we Englishmen practise through vainglory, for as our wits be as ripe as any, so our wills are more ready than they all to put in effect any of their licentious abuses.

Yet amongst the rest, letting ordinary sins pass because custom hath almost made them a law, I will only speak of two such notable abuses which the practitioners of them shadow with the name of arts, as never have been heard of in any age before. The first and chief is called the art of cony-catching; the second, the art of crossbiting, two such pestilent and prejudicial practices as of late have been the ruin of infinite persons and the subversion and overthrow of many merchants, farmers and honest-minded yeomen. The first is a deceit at cards, which growing by enormity to a cozenage, is able to draw (by the subtile show thereof) a man of great judgment to consent to his own confusion. Yet, gentlemen, when you shall read this book written faithfully to discover these cozening practices, think I go not about to disprove or disallow the most ancient and honest pastime or recreation of card-play, for thus much I know by reading: when the city of Thebes was besieged by them of Lacedaemonia, being girt within strong-fenced walls, and having men enough and able to rebate the enemy, they found no inconvenience of force to breed their ensuing bane but famine, in that when victuals waxed scant, hunger

would either make them yield by a fainting composition or a miserable death, whereupon to weary the foe with wintering at the siege, the Thebans devised this policy. They found out the method of cards and dice, and so busied their brains with the pleasantness of that new invention, passing away the time with strange recreations and pastimes, beguiling hunger with the delight of the new sports, and eating but every third day and playing two, so their frugal sparing of victuals kept them from famine, the city from sacking, and raised the foe from a mortal siege. Thus was the use of cards and dice first invented, and since amongst princes highly esteemed, and allowed in all commonwealths as a necessary recreation for the mind.

But as in time and malice of man's nature hatcheth abuse, so good things by ill wits are wrested to the worse, and so in cards, for from an honest recreation it is grown to a prejudicial practice and most high degree of cozenage, as shall be discovered in my *Art of Cony-catching*, for not only simple swains whose wits is in their hands, but young gentlemen and merchants are all caught like conies in the hay, and so led like lambs to their confusion. The poor man that cometh to the term to try his right, and layeth his land to mortgage to get some crowns in his purse to see his lawyer, is drawn in by these devilish cony-catchers, that at one cut at cards loseth all his money, by which means he, his wife and children is brought to utter ruin and misery. The poor prentice whose honest mind aimeth only at his master's profits, by these pestilent vipers of the commonwealth is smoothly enticed to the hazard of this game at cards and robbed of his master's money, which forceth him oft-times either to run away or bankrupt all, to the overthrow of some honest and wealthy citizen.

Seeing then such a dangerous enormity groweth by them to the discredit of the estate of England, I would wish the justices to show themselves *patres patriae* [=fathers of the country] by weeding out such worms as eat away the sap of the tree, and rooting this base degree of cozeners out of so peaceable and prosperous a country, for of all devilish practices this is the most prejudicial. The high-lawyer that challengeth a purse by the highway side, the foist, the nip, the stale, the snap, I mean the pickpockets and cutpurses, are nothing so dangerous to meet withal as these cozening cony-catchers. The cheaters that with their false dice make a hand & strike in at hazard or passage with their dice of advantage are nothing so dangerous as these base-minded caterpillars, for they have their vies and their revies upon the poor cony's back that they so ferret-beat him that they leave him neither hair on his skin nor hole to harbour in.

There was before this many years ago a practice put in use by such shifting companions which was called the barnard's law, wherein, as in the art of cony-catching, four persons were required to perform their cozening commodity: the taker-up, the verser, the barnard and the rutter, and the manner of it indeed was thus. The taker-up seemeth a skilful man in all things, who hath by long travail learned without book a thousand policies to insinuate himself into a man's acquaintance. Talk of matters in law, he hath plenty of casis [sic for 'cases'] at his fingers'-ends, and he hath seen and tried and ruled in the king's courts; speak of grazing and husbandry, no man knoweth more shires than he, nor better which way to raise a gainful commodity, and how the abuses and overture of prices might be redressed; finally, enter into what discourse they list, were it into a bromeman's

[sic] faculty, he knoweth what gains they have for old boots and shoes. Yea, and it shall scape him hardly but that ere your talk break off, he will be your countryman at least, and peradventure either of kin, ally, or stale sib to you, if your reach far surmount not his. In case he bring to pass that you be glad of his acquaintance, then doth he carry you to the taverns, and with him goes the verser, a man of more worship than the taker-up, and he hath the countenance of a landed man. As they are set, comes in the barnard, stumbling into your company like some aged farmer of the country, a stranger unto you all, that had been at some market town thereabout, buying and selling, and there tippled so much malmsey that he had never a ready word in his mouth, is so careless of his money that out he throweth some forty angels on the board's end, and standing somewhat aloof, calleth for a pint of wine and saith: *Masters, I am somewhat bold with you, I pray you be not grieved if I drink my drink by you*, and thus ministers such idle drunken talk that the verser, who counterfeited the landed man, comes and draws more near to the plain honest-dealing man, and prayeth him to call the barnard more near to laugh at his folly.

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

Thus, gentlemen, I have glanced at the barnard's law, which though you may perceive it to be a prejudicial insinuating cozenage, yet is the art of cony-catching so far beyond it in subtilty as the devil is more honest than the holiest angel, for so unlikely is it for the poor cony to leese that, might he pawn his stake to a pound, he would lay it that he cannot be crossbitten in the cut at cards, as you shall perceive by my present discovery.

Yet, gentlemen, am I sore threatened by the hucksters of that filthy faculty that if I set their practices in print they will cut off the hand that writes the pamphlet, but how I fear their bravadoes you shall perceive by my plain painting out of them; yea, so little do I esteem such base-minded braggarts that were it not I hope of their amendment, I would in a schedule set down the names of such cozening cony-catchers.

Well, leaving them and their course of life to the honourable and the worshipful of the land to be censors of with justice, have about for a blow at the art of crossbiting. I mean not crossbiters at dice, when the cheater, with a langret cut contrary to the vantage will crossbite a card cater-trey; nor I mean not when a broking knave crossbiteth a gentleman with a bad commodity; nor when the foist (the pickpockets, sir reverence, I mean) is

crossbitten by the snap, and so smoked for his purchase; nor when the nip, which the common people call a cutpurse, hath a crossbite by some bribing officer, who threatening to carry him to prison, takes away all the money and lets him slip without any punishment, but I mean a more dishonourable art, when a base rogue either keepeth a whore as his friend, or marries one to be his maintainer, and with her not only crossbites men of good calling, but especially poor ignorant country farmers, who, God wot, be by them led like sheep to the slaughter.

Thus, gentle readers, have I given you a light in brief what I mean to prosecute at large, and so with an humble suit to all justices that they will seek to root out these two roguish arts, I commit you to the Almighty.

Yours, Rob. Greene.

THE ART OF CONY-CATCHING

There be requisite effectually to act the art of cony-catching three several parties: the setter, the verser and the barnacle. The nature of the setter is to draw any person familiarly to drink with him, which person they call the cony, & their method is according to the man they aim at: if a gentleman, merchant or apprentice, the cony is the more easily caught in that they are soon induced to play, and therefore I omit the circumstance which they use in catching of them. And for because the poor country farmer or yeoman is the mark which they most of all shoot at, who they know comes not empty to the term, I will discover the means they put in practice to bring in some honest, simple & ignorant men to their purpose.

The cony-catchers, appavelled like honest civil gentlemen or good-fellows, with a smooth face as if butter would not melt in their mouths, after dinner, when the clients are come from Westminster Hall, and are at leisure to walk up and down Paul's, Fleet Street, Holborn, the Strand, and such common-haunted places where these cozening companions attend only to spy out a prey, who as soon as they see a plain country fellow well and cleanly appavelled either in a coat of homespun russet or of frieze, as the time requires, and a side pouch at his side, *There is a cony*, saith one. At that word out flies the setter, and overtaking the man, begins to salute him thus: *Sir, God save you; you are welcome to London. How doth all our good friends in the country? I hope they be all in health?*

The countryman, seeing a man so courteous he knows not, half in a brown study at this strange salutation, perhaps makes him this answer: *Sir, all our friends in the country are well, thanks be to God, but truly I know you not, you must pardon me.*

Why sir, saith the setter, guessing by his tongue what countryman he is, *are you not such a countryman?* If he says yes, then he creeps upon him closely; if he say no, then straight the setter comes over him thus: *In good sooth, sir, I know you by your face, & have been in your company before. I pray you (if without offence), let me crave your name and the place of your abode.* The simple man straight tells him where he dwells, his name, and who be his next neighbours, and what gentlemen dwell about him. After he hath learned all of him, then he comes over his fallows kindly: *Sir, though I have been somewhat bold to be inquisitive of your name, yet hold me excused, for I took you for a friend of mine, but since by mistaking I have made you slack your business, we'll drink a quart of wine or a pot of ale together.* If the fool be so ready as to go, then the cony is caught, but if he smack the setter, and smells a rat by his clawing, and will not drink with him, then away goes the setter, and discourseth to the verser the name of the man, the parish he dwells in, and what gentlemen are his near neighbours. With that, away goes he, & crossing the man at some turning, meets him full in the face, and greets him thus: *What, Goodman Barton, how fare all our friends about you? You are well met; I have the wine for you; you are welcome to town.* The poor countryman, hearing himself named by a man he knows not, marvels, & answers that he knows him not, and craves pardon. *Not [+know] me, Goodman Barton; have you forgot me? Why I am such a ma[n]'s kinsman, your neighbour not far off. How doth this or that good gentleman, my friend? Good Lord, that I should be out of your remembrance; I have been at your house divers times.*

Indeed sir, saith the farmer, are you such a man's kinsman? Surely, sir, if you had not challenged acquaintance of me, I should never have known you. I have clean forgot you, but I know the good gentleman your cousin well; he is my very good neighbour. And for his sake, saith ye verser, we'll drink afore we part.

Haply the man thanks him, and to the wine or ale they go. Then, ere they part, they make him a cony, & so ferret-claw him at cards that they leave him as bare of money as an ape of a tail. Thus have the filthy fellows their subtle fetches to draw on poor men to fall into their cozening practices; thus like consuming moths of the commonwealth they prey upon the ignorance of such plain souls as measure all by their own honesty, not regarding either conscience or the fatal revenge that's threatened for such idle & licentious persons, but do employ all their wits to overthrow such as with their handythrift satisfy their hearty thirst, they preferring cozenage before labour, and choosing an idle practice before any honest form of good living.

Well, to ye method again of taking up their conies. If the poor countryman smoke them still, and will not stoop unto either of their lures, then one, either the verser or the setter or some of their crew, for there is a general fraternity betwixt them, steppeth before the cony as he goeth, and lets drop twelve pence in the highway, that of force the cony must see it. The countryman, spying the shilling, maketh not dainty, for *Quis nisi mentis inops oblatum respuit aurum*, but stoopeth very mannerly and taketh it up. Then one of the cony-catchers behind crieth: *Half part*, and so challengeth half of his finding. The countryman, content, offereth to change the money. *Nay, faith, friend*, saith the verser, *'tis ill luck to keep found money; we'll go spend it in a pottle of wine, or in a breakfast, dinner or supper, as the time of day requires.* If the cony say he will not, then answers the verser: *Spend my part.* If still the cony refuse, he taketh half and away.

If they spy the countryman to be of a having and covetous mind, then have they a further policy to draw him on. Another that knoweth the place of his abode meeteth him and saith: *Sir, well met; I have run hastily to overtake you. I pray you, dwell you not in Derbyshire, in such a village? Yes, marry, do I, friend*, saith the cony. *Then replies the verser: Truly, sir, I have a suit to you. I am going out of town, & must send a letter to the parson of your parish. You shall not refuse to do a stranger such a favour as to carry it him. Haply, as men may in time meet, it may lie in my lot to do you as good a turn, and for your pains, I will give you 12 pence.* The poor cony in mere simplicity saith: *Sir, I'll do so much for you with all my heart. Where is your letter? I have it not, good sir, ready written, but may I entreat you to step into some tavern or ale-house? We'll drink the while, and I will write but a line or two.* At this the cony stoops, and for greediness of the money and upon courtesy goes with the setter into the tavern. As they walk, they meet the verser, and then they all three go into the tavern together.

See, gentlemen, what great logicians these cony-catchers be, that have such rhetorical persuasions to induce the poor countryman to his confusion, and what variety of villainy they have to strip the poor farmer of his money.

Well, imagine the cony is in the tavern. Then sits down the verser, and saith to the setter: *What, sirrah, wilt thou give me a quart of wine, or shall I give thee one? We'll drink a pint, faith,* saith the setter, & *play a game at cards for it, respecting more the sport than the loss.* Content, quod the verser, *go call for a pair.* And while he is gone to fetch them, he saith to the cony: *You shall see me fetch over my young master for a quart of wine finely, but this you must do for me. When I cut the cards, as I will not cut above five off, mark then of all the greatest pack which is undermost, & when I bid you call a card for me, name that, and you shall see we'll make him pay for a quart of wine straight.* Truly, saith the cony, *I am no great player at cards, and I do not well understand your meaning.* Why, saith he, *it is thus: I will play at mumchance or decoy, that he shall shuffle the cards, and I will cut. Now either of us must call a card. You shall call for me, and he for himself, and whose card comes first wins. Therefore when I have cut ye cards, then mark the nethermost of the greatest heap that I set upon the cards which I cut off, & always all that for me.* O, now, saith the cony, *I understand you; let me alone, I warrant I'll fit your turn.*

With that in comes the setter with his cards and asketh at what game they shall play. Why, saith the verser, *at a new game called mumchance, that hath no policy nor knavery, but plain as a pikestaff.* You shall shuffle, and I'll cut. You shall call a card, and this honest man, a stranger almost to us both, shall call another for me, and which of our cards comes first shall win. Content, saith the setter, *for that's but mere hazard,* & so he shuffles the cards, and the verser cuts off some four cards, and then taking up the heap to set upon them, giveth the cony a glance of the bottom card of that heap, and saith: *Now, sir, call for me.* The cony, to blind the setter's eyes, asketh, as though he were not made privy to the game: *What shall I cut [sic for 'call']? What card?* saith the verser. Why, *what you will, either heart, spade, club or diamond, coat-card or other.* O, *is it so?* saith the cony. Why, *then you shall have the four of hearts,* which was the card he had a glance of. And, saith the setter (holding the cards in his hand and turning up the uppermost card, as if he knew not well the game), *I'll have the knave of trumps.* Nay, saith the verser, *there is no trump.* You may call what card you will. Then, saith he, *I'll have the ten of spades.* With that he draws, and the four of hearts comes first. Well, saith the setter, *'tis but hazard; mine might have come as well as yours. Five is up; I fear not ye set.* So they shuffle and cut, but the verser wins. Well, saith the setter, *no butter will cleave on my bread. What, not one draught among five? Drawer, a fresh pint. I'll have another bout with you. But sir, I believe,* saith he to the cony, *you see some card, that it goes so cross on my side. I?* saith the cony, *nay, I hope you think not so of me. 'Tis but hazard and chance, for I am but a mere stranger unto the game; as I am an honest man, I never saw it before.*

Thus this simple cony closeth up smoothly to take the verser's part, only for greediness to have him win the wine. Well, answers the setter, *then I'll have one cast more,* and to it they go, but he loseth all, and beginneth to chafe in this manner. *Were it not,* quoth he, *that I care not for a quart of wine, I could swear as many oaths for anger as there be hairs on my head. Why should not my luck be as good as yours, and fortune favour me as well as you? What, not one called card in ten cuts? I'll forswear the game forever.* What, *chafe not man,* saith the verser, *seeing we have your quart of wine, I'll show you*

the game, and with that discourseth all to him as if he knew it not. The setter, as simply as if the knave were ignorant, saith: Aye, marry, I think so; you must needs win when he knows what card to call. I might have played long enough before I had got a set. Truly, says the cony, 'tis a pretty game, for 'tis not possible for him to lose that cuts the cards. I warrant the other that shuffles may lose Saint Peter's cope if he had it. Well, I'll carry this home with me into the country, and win many a pot of ale with it.

A fresh pint, saith the verser, and then we'll away. But seeing, sir, you are going homeward, I'll learn you a trick worth the noting, that you shall win many a pot with in the winter nights. With that he culls out the four knaves, & pricks one in the top, one in the midst, and one in the bottom. Now, sir, saith he, you see these three knaves apparently; thrust them down with your hand, & cut where you will, & though they be so far asunder, I'll make them all come together. I pray you, let's see that trick, saith the cony. Methinks it should be impossible. So the verser draws, and all the three knaves comes in one heap. This he doth once or twice. Then the cony wonders at it, and offers him a pint of wine to teach it him. Nay, saith the verser, I'll do it for thanks, and therefore mark me where you have taken out the four knaves, lay two together above, and draw up one of them that it may be seen, then prick the other in the midst, & the third in the bottom so when any cuts, cut he never so warily, three knaves must of force come together, for the bottom knave is cut to lie upon both the upper knaves. Aye, marry, saith the setter, but then the 3 knaves you showed come not together. Truth, saith the verser, but one among a thousand mark not that. It requires a quick eye, a sharp wit, and a reaching head to spy at the first. Now, gramercy, sir, for this trick, saith the cony. I'll domineer with this amongst my neighbours. Thus doth the verser and the setter feign friendship to the cony, offering him no show of cozenage, nor once to draw him in for a pint of wine, ye more to shadow their villainy.

But now begins the sport. As thus they sit tippling, comes the barnacle, and thrusts open the door, looking into the room where they are, and as one bashful steppeth back again, and: *Faith, I cry you mercy, gentlemen, I thought a friend of mine had been here. Pardon my boldness. No harm, saith the verser, I pray you drink a cup of wine with us, and welcome. So in comes the barnacle, and taking the cup, drinks to the cony, and then saith: What, at cards, gentlemen? Were it not I should be offensive to the company, I would play for a pint till my friend come that I look for. Why, sir, saith the verser, if you will sit down you shall be taken up for a quart of wine. With all my heart, saith the barnacle. What will you play at, at primero, prima vista, cent, one-and-thirty, new-cut, or what shall be the game? Sir, saith the verser, I am but an ignorant man at cards, & I see you have them at your fingers'-end; I will play with you at a game wherein can be no deceit. It is called mumchance at cards, and it is thus: you shall shuffle the cards and I will cut. You shall call one, and this honest country yeoman shall call a card for me, and which of our cards comes first shall win. Here you see is no deceit, and this I'll play. No, truly, saith the cony, methinks there can be no great craft in this. Well, saith the barnacle, for a pint of wine, have at you.*

So they play as before, five up, and the verser wins. *This is hard luck, saith the barnacle, and I believe the honest man spies some card in the bottom, and therefore I'll make this,*

always to prick the bottom card. Content, saith the verser and the cony, to cloak the matter, saith: Sir, you offer me injury to think that I can call a card when I neither touch them, shuffle, cut nor draw them. Ah, sir, saith the barnacle, give losers leave to speak.

Well, to it they go again, and then the barnacle, knowing the game best, by chopping a card wins two of the five but lets the verser win the set. Then in a chafe he sweareth 'tis but his ill luck, and he can see no deceit in it, and therefore he will play 12d a cut. The verser is content, & wins 2 or 3s of the barnacle, whereat he chafes, and saith: *I came hither in an ill hour, but I will win my money again, or lose all in my purse.* With that he draws out a purse with some three or four pound, & claps it on the board. The verser asketh the cony secretly by signs if he will be his half. He says aye, and straight seeks for his purse. Well, the barnacle shuffles the cards throughly, and the verser cuts as before. The barnacle, when he hath drawn one card, saith: *I'll either win something or lose something; therefore I'll vie and revie every card at my pleasure, till either yours or mine come out, and therefore twelve pence upon this card; my card comes first for twelve pence.* No, saith the verser. *Aye, saith the cony, and I durst hold twelve pence more. Why, I hold you,* saith the barnacle. And so they vie and revie till some ten shillings be on the stake, and then next comes forth the verser's card that the cony called, and so the barnacle loseth. Well, this flesheth the cony. The sweetness of gain maketh him frolic, and no man is more ready to vie and revie than he. Thus for three or four times the barnacle loseth. At last, to whet on the cony, he striketh his chopped card, and winneth a good stake. *Away with the witch,* cries the barnacle, *I hope the cards will turn at last.* *Aye, much,* thinketh the cony, *'twas but a chance that you asked so right, to ask one of the five that was cut off; I am sure there was forty to one on my side, and I'll have you on the lurch anon.* So still they vie and revie, and for one that the barnacle wins, the cony gets five.

At last, when they mean to shave the cony clean of all his coin, the barnacle chafeth, and upon a pawn borroweth some money of the tapster, & swears he will vie it to the uttermost. Then thus he chops his card to crossbite the cony: he first looks on the bottom card, which he knows to be uppermost, then sets he down the cards, and the verser, to encourage the cony, cuts off but three cards, whereof the barnacle's card must needs be the uppermost. Then shows he the bottom card of the other heap cut off to the cony, and sets it upon the barnacle's card which he knows, so that of force the card that was laid uppermost must come forth first, and then the barnacle calls that card. They draw a card, and then the barnacle vies, and the countryman vies upon him, for this is the law, as often as one vies or revies, the other must see it, else he loseth the stake.

Well, at last the barnacle plies it so that perhaps he vies more money than the cony hath in his purse. The cony upon this, knowing his card is the third or fourth card, and that he hath forty to one against the barnacle, pawns his rings, if he have any, his sword, his cloak, or else what he hath about him to maintain the vie, and when he laughs in his sleeve, thinking he hath fleeced the barnacle of all, then the barnacle's card comes forth, and strikes such a cold humour unto his heart that he sits as a man in a trance, not knowing what to do, and sighing while his heart is ready to break, thinking on the money that he hath lost. Perhaps the man is very simple and patient, and whatsoever he thinks,

for fear goes his way quiet with his loss while the cony-catchers laugh and divide the spoil, and being out of the doors, poor man, goes to his lodging with a heavy heart, pensive & sorrowful, but too late, for perhaps his state did depend on that money, and so he, his wife, his children and his family are brought to extreme misery. Another, perhaps more hardy and subtile, smokes the cony-catchers, and smelleth cozenage, and saith they shall not have his money so, but they answer him with braves, and though he bring them before an officer, yet the knaves are so favoured that the man never recovers his money, and yet he is let slip unpunished.

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

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

Near to St. Edmundsbury in Suffolk there dwelt an honest man, a shoemaker, that having some twenty marks in his purse, long a-gathering and nearly kept, came to the market to

buy a dicker of hides, and by chance fell among cony-catchers, whose names I omit because I hope of their amendment. This plain countryman, drawn in by these former devises, was made a cony, and so strait stripped of all his 20 mark, to his utter undoing. The knaves scaped, and he went home a sorrowful man. Shortly after, one of these cony-catchers was taken for a suspected person, and laid in Bury jail. The sessions coming, and he produced to the bar, it was the fortune of this poor shoemaker to be there, who spying this rogue to be arraigned, was glad, and said nothing unto him, but looked what would be the issue of his appearance.

At the last he was brought before the justices, where he was examined of his life, and being demanded what occupation he was, said: *None. What profession then are you of; how live you?* Marry, quoth he, *I am a gentleman, and live of my friends.* Nay, that is a lie, quoth the poor shoemaker. *Under correction of the worshipful of the bench, you have a trade, and are by your art a cony-catcher.* A cony-catcher? said one of the justices, and smiled. *What, is he a warrener, fellow? Whose warren keepeth he, canst thou tell?* Nay, sir, your *Worship mistaketh me*, quod the shoemaker. *He is not a warrener, but a cony-catcher.* The bench, that never heard this name before, smiled, attributing the name to the man's simplicity thought he mean a warrener, which the shoemaker spying, answered that some conies this fellow caught were worth twenty mark apiece. *And for proof*, quoth he, *I am one of them*, and so discoursed the whole order of the art, and the baseness of the cozening, whereupon the justices, looking into his life, appointed him to be whipped, and the shoemaker desired that he might give him his payment, which was granted. When he came to his punishment, the shoemaker laughed, saying: *'Tis a mad world when poor conies are able to beat their catchers*, but he lent him so friendly lashes that almost he made him pay an ounce of blood for every pound of silver.

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

But leaving them till time and place, coming down Turnmill Street the other day, I met one whom I suspected a cony-catcher. I drew him on to ye tavern, and after a cup of wine or two, I talked with him of the manner of his life, & told him I was sorry for his

friends' sake that he took so bad a course as to live upon the spoil of poor men, and specially to deserve the name of cony-catching, dissuading him from that base kind of life that was so ignominious in the world and so loathsome in the sight of God.

Tut, sir, quoth he, calling me by my name, as my religion is small, so my devotion is less. I leave God to be disputed on by divines. The two ends I aim at are gain and ease, but by what honest gains I may get never comes within ye compass of my thoughts. Though your experience in travel be great, yet in home matters mine be more; yea, I am sure you are not so ignorant but you know that few men can live uprightly unless he have some pretty way more than the world is witness to to help him withal. Think you some lawyers could be such purchasers if all their pleas were short and their proceedings justice and conscience; that offices would be so dearly bought, and the buyers so soon enriched, if they counted not pillage an honest kind of purchase? Or do you think that men of handy trades make all their commodities without falsehood, when so many of them are become daily purchasers? Nay, what will you more? Whoso hath not some sinister way to help himself, but followeth his nose always straight forward, may well hold up the head for a year or two, but ye third he must needs sink, and gather the wind into beggars' haven. Therefore, sir, cease to persuade me to the contrary, for my resolution is to beat my wits and spare not to busy my brains to save and help me, by what means soever I care not, so I may avoid the danger of the law.

Whereupon, seeing this cony-catcher resolved in his form of life, leaving him to his lewdness I went away wondering at the baseness of their minds that would spend their time in such detestable sort. But no marvel, for they are given up into a reprobate sense, and are in religion mere atheists, as they are in trade flat dissemblers. If I should spend many sheets in deciphering their shifts it were frivolous in that they be many and full of variety, for every day they invent new tricks and such quaint devises as are secret yet passing dangerous, that if a man had Argus' eyes he could scant pry into the bottom of their practices. Thus for the benefit of my country I have briefly discovered the law of cony-catching, desiring all justices, if such cozeners light in their precinct, even to use *summum ius* against them, because it is the basest of all villainies, and that London prentices, if they chance in such cony-catchers' company, may teach them London law, that is, to defend the poor men that are wronged and learn the caterpillars the highway to Newgate, where if Hind favour them with the heaviest irons in all the house, & give them his unkindest entertainment, no doubt his other petty sins shall be half pardoned for his labour. But I would it might be their fortune to happen in Noble's, northward in Whitechapel; there, in faith, Round Robin his deputy would make them like wretches feel the weight of his heaviest fetters. And so desiring both honourable and worshipful, as well justices as other officers, and all estates from the prince to the beggar to rest professed enemies to these base-minded cony-catchers, I take my leave.

Nascimur pro patria.

A table of the words of art used in the effecting these base villainies wherein is discovered the nature of every term, being proper to none but to the professors thereof.

1 High-law	robbing by the highway side
2 Sacking-law	lechery
3 Cheating law	play at false dice
4 Crossbiting law	cozenage by whores
5 Cony-catching law	cozenage by cards
6 Versing law	cozenage by false gold
7 Figging law	cutting of purses & picking of pockets
8 Barnard's law	a drunken cozenage by cards

The art of cony-catching

These are the eight laws of villainy leading the highway to infamy

In high-law:

The thief is called a high-lawyer.
 He that setteth the watch, a scrippet.
 He that standeth to watch, an oak.
 He that is robbed, the martin.
 When he yieldeth, stooping.

In sacking law:

The bawd, if it be a woman, a pander.
 The bawd, if it be a man, an apple-squire.
 The whore, a commodity.
 The whore-house, a trugging-place.

In cheating law:

Pardon me, gentlemen, for although no man could better than myself discover this law and his terms, and the name of their cheats, bard-dice, flats, forgers [sic for 'fargers'?], langrets, gourds, demies and many other, with their nature, & the crosses and contraries to them upon advantage, yet for some special reasons herein, I will be silent.

In crossbiting law:

The whore, the traffic.
 The man that is brought in, the simpler.
 The villainies that take them, the crossbiters.

In cony-catching law:

The party that taketh up the cony, the setter.

He that playeth the game, the verser.
 He that is cozened, the cony.
 He that comes in to them, the barnacle.
 The money that is won, purchase.

In versing law:

He that bringeth them in, the verser.
 The poor countryman, the cousin.
 And the drunkard that comes in, the suffier.

In figging law:

He that bringeth him in, a nip.
 He that is half with him, the snap.
 The knife, the cuttle-bung.
 The pickpocket, a foin.
 He that faceth the man, the stale.
 Taking the purse, drawing.
 Spying of him, smoking.
 The purse, the bung.
 The money, the shells.
 The act doing, striking.

In barnard's law:

He that fetcheth the man, the taker.
 He that is taken, the cousin.
 The landed man, the verser.
 The drunken man, the barnard.
 And he that makes the fray, the rutter.

Cum multis aliis quae nunc praescribere longum est [=With many others which now to write were long].

These quaint terms do these base arts use to shadow their villainy withal, for *multa latent quae non patent* [=many things lie hidden which are not exposed], obscuring their filthy crafts with these fair colours, that the ignorant may not espy what their subtilty is, but their end will be like their beginning, hatched with Cain and consumed with Judas. And so bidding them adieu to the devil, and you farewell to God, I end. And now to the art of crossbiting.

The art of crossbiting

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

They have sundry preys that they call simplers, which are men fondly and wantonly given, whom for a penalty of their lust they fleece of all that ever they have, some merchants, prentices, serving-men, gentlemen, yeomen farmers and all degrees, and this is their form. There are resident in London & the suburbs certain men attired like gentlemen, brave fellows, but basely minded, who living in want, as their last refuge fall unto this crossbiting law, and to maintain themselves either marry with some stale whore, or else, forsooth, keep one as their friend, and these persons be commonly men of the eight laws before rehearsed, either high-lawyers, versers, nips, cony-catchers, or such of the like fraternity. These, when their other trades fail, as the cheater, when he has no cousin to grime with his stop-dice, or ye high-lawyer, when he hath no set match to ride about, and the nip, when there is no term, fair, nor time of great assembly, then to maintain the main chance they use the benefit of their wives or friends to the crossbiting of such as lust after their filthy enormities. Some simple men are drawn on by subtle means which never intended such a bad matter. In summer evenings, and in the winter nights, these traffics, these common trulls I mean, walk abroad, either in the fields or streets that are commonly haunted, as stales to draw men into hell, and afar off, as attending apple-squires, certain crossbiters stand aloof, as if they knew them not. Now, so many men, so many affections. Some unruly mates that place their content in lust, letting slip the liberty of their eyes on their painted faces, feed upon their unchaste beauties till their hearts be set on fire. Then come they to these minions, and court them with many sweet words. Alas, their loves needs no long suits, for they are forthwith entertained, and either they go to the tavern to seal up the match with a pottle of hippocras, or straight she carries him to some bad place, and there picks his pocket, or else the crossbiters comes swearing in, & so outface the dismayed companion that rather than he would be brought in question he would disburse all that he hath present.

But this is but an easy cozenage. Some other, meeting with one of that profession in the street, will question if she will drink with him a pint of wine. Their trade is never to refuse and if for manners they do, it is but once, & then scarce shall they be warm in the room but in comes a terrible fellow with a side hair & a fearful beard as though he were one of Polyphemus' cut, & he comes frowning in & saith: *What hast thou to do, base knave, to carry my sister or my wife to the tavern? By his wounds, you whore, 'tis some of your companions. I will have you both before the justice, deputy or constable to be examined.* The poor serving-man, apprentice, farmer or whatsoever he is, seeing such a terrible huff-snuff swearing with his dagger in his hand, is fearful both of him and to be brought in trouble, and therefore speaks kindly and courteously unto him, and desires him

to be content, he meant no harm. The whore, that hath tears at command, falls a-weeping, and cries him mercy. At this submission of them both, he triumphs like a braggart, and will take no compassion, yet at last, through entreaty of other his companions coming in as strangers, he is pacified with some forty shillings, and the poor man goes sorrowful away, sighing out that which Solomon hath in his proverbs: *A shameless woman hath honey in her lips, and her throat as sweet as honey, her throat as soft as oil, but the end of her is more bitter than aloes, and her tongue is more sharp than a two-edged sword; her feet go unto death, and her steps lead unto hell.* Again these trulls, when they have got in a novice, then straight they pick his purse, and then have they their crossbiters ready, to whom they convey the money, and so offer themselves to be searched, but the poor man is so outfaced by these crossbiting ruffians that he is glad to go away content with his loss.

Yet are these easy practices. O might the justices send out spials in the night, they should see how these street-walkers will jet in rich guarded gowns, quaint periwigs, ruffs of the largest size, quarter and half deep, gloried richly with blue starch, their cheeks dyed with surfling water. Thus are they tricked up, and either walk like stales up and down the streets, or stand like the devil's *Si quis* at a tavern or ale-house, as if who should say: *If any be so minded to satisfy his filthy lust, to lend me his purse and the devil his soul, let him come in and be welcome.*

Now, sir, comes by a country farmer, walking from his inn to perform some business, and seeing such a gorgeous damsel, he, wondering at such a brave wench, stands staring her on the face, or perhaps doth but cast a glance and bid her good speed, as plain simple swains have their lusty humours as well as others. The trull, straight beginning her exordium with a smile, saith: *How now, my friend; what want you? Would you speak with anybody here?* If the fellow have any bold spirit, perhaps he will offer the wine, & then he is caught. 'Tis enough; in he goes and they are chambered. Then sends she for her husband, or her friend, and there either the farmer's pocket is stripped or else the crossbiters fall upon him and threaten him with Bridewell and the law. Then for fear he gives them all in his purse, and makes them some bill to pay a sum of money at a certain day.

If the poor farmer be bashful, and passeth by one of these shameless strumpets, then will she verse it with him, and claim acquaintance of him, and by some policy or other fall aboard on him and carry him into some house or other. If he but enter in at the doors with her (though the poor farmer never kissed her), yet then the crossbiters, like vultures, will prey upon his purse and rob him of every penny. If there be any young gentleman that is a novice and hath not seen their trains, to him will some common filth, that never knew love, feign an ardent and honest affection till she and her crossbiters have versed him to the beggar's estate.

Ah, gentlemen, merchants, yeomen and farmers, let this to you all and to every degree else be a caveat to warn you from lust, that your inordinate desire be not a mean to impoverish your purses, discredit your good names, condemn your souls, but also that your wealth, got with the sweat of your brows or left by your parents as a patrimony,

shall be a prey to those cozening crossbiters. Some fond men are so far in with these detestable trugs that they consume what they have upon them, and find nothing but a Neapolitan favour for their labour. Read the seventh of Solomon's proverbs, and there at large view the description of a shameless and impudent courtesan.

Yet there is another kind of crossbiting which is most pestilent, and that is this. There lives about this town certain householders, yet mere shifters and cozeners, who learning some insight in the civil law, walk abroad like paritors, sumners and informers, being none at all either in office or credit, and they go spying about where any merchant or merchant's prentice, citizen, wealthy farmer or other of credit either accompany with any woman familiarly, or else hath gotten some maid with child, as men's natures be prone to sin. Straight they come over his fallows thus. They send for him to a tavern, & there open the matter unto him which they have cunningly larned [sic for 'learned?'] out, telling him he must be presented to the Arches, & the citation shall be peremptorily served in his parish church. The party, afraid to have his credit cracked with the worshipful of the city and the rest of his neighbours, & grieving highly his wife should hear of it, straight takes composition with this cozener for some twenty marks (nay, I heard of forty pound crossbitten at one time), & then the cozening informer or crossbiter promiseth to wipe him out of the book & discharge him from the matter when it was neither known nor presented. So go they to the woman, and fetch her off if she be married, and though they have this gross sum, yet oft-times they crossbite her for more. Nay, thus do they fear citizens, prentices & farmers that they find by any way suspicious of the like fault. The crossbiting bawds, for no better can I term them, in that for lucre they conceal the sin and smother up lust, do not only enrich themselves mightily thereby, but also discredit, hinder and prejudice the Court of the Arches and the officers belonging to the same. There are some poor blind patches of that faculty that have their tenements purchased and their plate on the board very solemnly, who only get their gains by crossbiting, as is afore rehearsed.

But leaving them to the deep insight of such as be appointed with justice to correct vice, again to the crew of my former crossbiters, whose fee simple to live upon is nothing but the following of common, dishonest and idle trulls, and thereby maintain themselves brave, and the strumpets in handsome furniture. And to end this art with an English demonstration, I'll tell you a pretty tale of late performed in Bishopsgate Street. There was there five traffics, pretty but common housewives, that stood fast by a tavern-door, looking if some prey would pass by for their purpose. Anon the eldest of them and most experienced in that law, called Mall B., spied a master of a ship coming along. *Here is a simpler, quoth she, I'll verse him, or hang me. Sir, said she, God even. What, are you so liberal to bestow on three good wenches that are dry a pint of wine? In faith, fair women, quod he, I was never niggard for so much, and with that he takes one of them by the hand and carries them all into the tavern. There he bestowed cheer and hippocras upon them, drinking hard till the shot came to a noble, so that they 3 carousing to the gentleman made him somewhat tipsy, and then & *Venus in vinis ignis in igne fuit* [= & Venus is in wine as fire in fire].*

Well, night grew on, and he would away, but this Mistress Mall B. stopped his journey thus: *Gentleman, quod she, this undeserved favour of yours makes us so deeply beholding to you that our ability is not able any way to make sufficient satisfaction, yet to show us kind in what we can, you shall not deny me this request, to see my simple house before you go.* The gentleman, a little whittled, consented, & went with them.

So the shot was paid, & away they go. Without the tavern-door stood two of their husbands, J.B. & J.R., and they were made privy to the practice. Home goes the gentleman with these lusty housewives, stumbling. At last he was welcome to Mistress Mall's house, and one of the three went into a chamber and got to bed, whose name was A.B. After they had chatted awhile, the gentleman would have been gone, but she told him that before he went he should see all the rooms of her house, and so led him up into the chamber where the party lay in bed. *Who is here?* said the gentleman. *Marry, saith Mall, a good pretty wench, sir, and if you be not well, lie down by her. You can take no harm of her.* Drunkenness desires lust, and so the gentleman begins to dally, and away goes she with the candle, and at last he put off his clothes and went to bed. Yet he was not so drunk but he could after a while remember his money, and feeling for his purse, all was gone, and three links of his whistle broken off. The sum that was in his purse was in gold and silver twenty nobles.

As thus he was in a maze, though his head were well laden, in comes J.B., the goodman of the house, and two other with him, and speaking somewhat loud, *Peace husband, quoth she, there is one in bed; speak not so loud.* *In bed, saith he, Gog's wounds, I'll go see.* *And so will I, saith the other.* *You shall not, saith his wife, but strove against him, but up goes he and his crossbiters with him, & seeing the gentleman in bed, out with his dagger, and asked what base villain it was that there sought to dishonest his wife.* Well, he sent one of them for a constable, and made the gentleman rise, who, half-drunk, yet had that remembrance to speak fair, and to entreat him to keep his credit, but no entreaty could serve, but to the Counter he must, & the constable must be sent for. Yet at the last one of them entreated that the gentleman might be honestly used, and carried to a tavern to talk of the matter till a constable come. *Tut, saith J.B., I will have law upon him,* but the base crossbiter at last stooped, and to the tavern they go, where the gentleman laid his whistle to pawn for money, & there bestowed as much of them as came to ten shillings, and sat drinking and talking until the next morrow.

By that the gentleman had stolen a nap, and waking, it was daylight, and then seeing himself compassed with these crossbiters, and remembering his night's work, soberly smiling, asked them if they knew what he was. They answered, not well. *Why, then, quoth he, you base cozening rogues, you shall ere we part,* and with that, drawing his sword, kept them into the chamber, desiring that the constable might be sent for. But this brave of his could not dismay Mistress Mall, for she had bidden a sharper brunt before, witness the time of her martyrdom when upon her shoulders was engraven the history of her whorish qualities, but she replying swore, sith he was so lusty, her husband should not put it up by no means. *I will tell thee, thou base crossbiting bawd, quoth he, and you cozening companions, I serve a nobleman, & for my credit with him I refer me to the penalty he will impose on you, for by God I will make you an example to all crossbiters*

*ere I end with you. I tell you, villains, I serve, and with that he named his lord. When the guilty whores and cozeners heard of his credit and service, they began humbly to entreat him to be good to them. Then, quoth he, first deliver me my money. They upon that gladly gave him all, and restored the links of his chain. When he had all, he smiled, and sware afresh that he would torment them for all this, that the severity of their punishment might be a caveat to others to beware of the like cozenage, and upon that knocked with his foot, and said he would not let them go till he had a constable. Then in general they humbled themselves, so recompensing the party that he agreed to pass over the matter, conditionally beside that they would pay the sixteen shillings he had spent in charges, which they also performed. The gentleman stepped his way and said: *You may see the old proverb fulfilled, Fallere fallentem non est fraus* [=To deceive the deceiver is no deceit].*

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

Nascimur pro patria

FINIS

A pleasant discovery of the cozenage of colliers

Although, courteous readers, I did not put in amongst the laws of cozening the law of legering, which is a deceit wherewith colliers abuse the commonwealth in having unlawful sacks, yet take it for a petty kind of craft or mystery, as prejudicial to the poor as any of the other two, for I omitted divers other devilish vices, as the nature of the lift, the black art, & the curbing law, which is the filchers and thieves that come into houses or shops & lift away anything, or picklocks, or hookers at windows, though they be as species and branches to the table before rehearsed.

But leaving them, again to our law of legering. Know therefore that there be inhabiting in & about London certain caterpillars (colliers, I should say) that term themselves (among themselves) by the name of legers, who, for that the honourable the Lord Mayor of the city of London & his officers look straitly to the measuring of coals, do (to prevent the execution of his justice) plant themselves in & about the suburbs of London, as Shoreditch, Whitechapel, Southwark & such places, and there they have a house or yard that hath a back-gate because it is the more convenient for their cozening purpose, and the reason is this. The leger (the crafty collier, I mean) riseth very early in the morning, and either goeth towards Croydon, Whetstone, Greenwich or Romford, and there meeteth the country colliers who bring coals to serve the market. There, in a forestalling manner, this leger bargaineth with the country collier for his coals, and payeth for them nineteen

shillings or twenty at the most, but commonly fifteen and sixteen, and there is in the load 36 sacks, so that they pay for every couple about fourteen pence. Now having bought his coals, every sack containing full four bushels, he carrieth the country collier home to his legering place, and there at the back-gate causeth him to unload, and as they say, shoot the coals down. As soon as the country collier hath dispatched and is gone, then the leger who hath three or four hired men under him, bringeth forth his own sacks, which be long and narrow, holding at the most not three bushels, so that they gain in the change of every sack a bushel for their pains. Tush, yet this were somewhat to be borne withal, although the gain is monstrous, but this sufficeth not, for they fill not these sacks full by far, but put into them some two bushels & a half, laying in the mouth of the sack certain great coals, which they call fillers, to make the sack show fair, although the rest be small willow coals and half dross.

When they have thus not filled their sacks, but thrust coals into them, that which they lay uppermost is best filled, to make the greater show. Then a tall sturdy knave that is all ragged and dirty on his legs, as though he came out of the country (for they dirty their hose and shoes on purpose to make themselves seem country colliers), thus with two sacks apiece they either go out at the back-gate or steal out at the street-side, and so up and down the suburbs, & sell their coals in summer for fourteen and sixteen pence a couple, and in winter for eighteen or twenty. The poor cooks & other citizens that buy them think they be country colliers that have left some coals of their load and would gladly have money, supposing (as the statute is) they be good and lawful sacks, are thus cozened by the legers, & have but two bushels and a half for four bushels, and yet are extremely racked in the price, which is not only a great hindrance to her Majesty's poor commons, but greatly prejudicial to the master colliers that bring true sacks & measure out of the country.

Then consider, gentle readers, what kind of cozenage these legers use, that make of thirty sacks some 56, which I have seen, for I have set down with my pen how many turns they have made of a load, and they make 28, every turn being two sacks, so that they have got an intolerable gains by their false measure. I could not be silent, seeing this abuse, but thought to reveal it for my country's commodity, and to give light to the worshipful justices and other her Majesty's officers in Middlesex, Surrey and elsewhere to look to such a gross cozenage as, contrary to a direct statute, doth defraud & impoverish her Majesty's poor commons. Well may the honourable and worshipful of London flourish, who carefully look to the country coals, & if they find not 4 bushels in every sack, do sell them to the poor as forfeit, & distribute the money to them that have need, burning the sack & honouring, or rather dishonouring the pillory with the colliers' dirty faces, & well may the honourable & worshipful of the suburbs prosper if they look in justice to these legers, who deserve more punishment than the statute appoints for them, which is whipping at a cart's-tail, or with favour, the pillory.

[-A plain discovery?]

For fuel or firing being a thing necessary in a commonwealth, and charcoal used more than any other, the poor, not able to buy by the load, are fain to get in their fire by the

sack, & so are greatly cozened by the retail. Seeing therefore the careful laws her Majesty hath appointed for the wealth of her commons and succour of the poor, I would humbly entreat all her Majesty's officers to look into the life of these legers, and to root them out, that the poor feel not the burden of their unconscionable gains.

I heard with my ears a poor woman of Shoreditch, who had bought coals of a leger, with weeping tears complain and rail against him in the street, in her rough eloquence calling him cozening knave, & saying *'Tis no marvel, villain, quoth she, if men compare you colliers to the devil, seeing your consciences are worser than the devil's, for he takes none but those souls whom God hates, and you undo the poor, whom God loves. What is the matter, goodwife, quoth I, that you use such invective words against the collier? A collier, sir? saith she. He is a thief and a robber of the common people. I'll tell you, sir, I bought of a country collier two sacks for thirteen pence, & I bought of this knave three sacks, which cost me 22 pence, and sir, when I measured both their sacks, I had more in the two sacks by three pecks than I had in the three. I would, quoth she, the justices would look into this abuse, and that my neighbours would join with me in a supplication, and by God, I would kneel before the Queen and entreat that such cozening colliers might not only be punished with the bare pillory (for they have such black faces that no man knows them again, and so are they careless), but that they might leave their ears behind them for a forfeit, & if that would not mend them, that Bull with a fair halter might root them out of the world that live in the world by such gross and dishonest cozenage.* The collier, hearing this, went smiling away because he knew his life was not looked into, & the woman wept with anger that she had not someone by that might with justice revenge her quarrel.

There be also certain colliers that bring coals to London in barges, and they be called gripers. To these comes the leger, & bargains with him for his coals, & sells by retail with the like cozenage of sacks as I rehearsed before. But these mad legers (not content with this monstrous gain) do besides mix among their other sacks of coals stores of shruff dust and small coal, to their great advantage. And for proof hereof, I will recite you a matter of truth lately performed by a cook's wife upon a cozening collier.

How a cook's wife in London did lately serve a collier for his cozenage

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

whatsoever she durst object against him. *And for pledge hereof*, quoth the collier, *keep my sacks, your money, and the coals also*. Whereupon the woman let him go, but as soon as the collier was out of doors it was needless to bid him run, for down he gets to his boat, & away he thrusts from Billingsgate, and so immediately went down to Wapping, and never after durst return to the cook's wife to demand either money, sacks or coals.

How a flax-wife and her neighbours used a cozening collier

Now gentlemen by your leave, and hear a merry jest. There was in the suburbs of London a flax-wife that wanted coals, and seeing a leger come by with a couple of sacks that had before deceived her in like sort, cheaped, bargained & bought them, & so went in with her [+to] shoot them in her coal-house. As soon as she saw her coals, she easily guessed there was scarce six bushels, yet dissembling the matter, she paid him for them, and bade him bring her two sacks more. The collier went his way, & in the meantime the flax-wife measured the coals, and there was just five bushels and a peck. Hereupon she called to her neighbours, being a company of women that beforetime had also been pinched in their coals, and showed them the cozenage, & desired their aid to her in tormenting the collier, which they promised to perform, & thus it fell out.

She conveyed them into a back room (some sixteen of them), every one having a good cudgel under her apron. Straight comes the collier, and saith: *Mistress, here be your coals. Welcome, good collier*, quoth she. *I pray thee, follow me into the backside, & shoot them in another room*. The collier was content, and went with her, but as soon as he was in, the goodwife locked the door, and the collier, seeing such a troop of wives in the room, was amazed, yet said: *God speed you all, shrews. Welcome*, quoth one jolly dame, being appointed by them all to give sentence against him, who as soon as the collier had shot his sacks said: *Sirrah collier, know that we are here all assembled as a grand jury to determine of thy villainies for selling us false sacks of coals, & know that thou art here indicted upon cozenage. Therefore hold up thy hand at the bar, & either say 'Guilty' or 'Not guilty', and by whom thou wilt be tried, for thou must receive condign punishment for the same ere thou depart*. The collier, who thought they had but jested, smiled & said, *Come on, which of you shall be my judge? Marry*, quoth one jolly dame, *that is I, and by God, you knave, you shall find I will pronounce sentence against you severely if you be found guilty*. When the collier saw they were in earnest, he said: *Come, come, open the door and let me go*. With that five or six started up, and fell upon the collier, and gave unto him half a score of sound lambacks with their cudgels, and bade him speak more reverently to their principal.

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

Collier, thou art condemned here by proof of flat cozenage, and I am now appointed in conscience to give sentence against thee, being not only moved thereunto because of this poor woman, but also for the general commodi[t]y of my country, and therefore this is my sentence. We have no pillory for thee, nor cart to whip thee at, but here I do award that thou shalt have as many bastinadoes as thy bones will bear, and then to be turned out of doors without sacks or money.

This sentence being pronounced, she rose up and gave no respite of time for th' execution, but according to the sentence before expressed, all the women fell upon him, beating him extremely, among whom he lent some lusty buffets. But might overcomes right, and therefore *ne Hercules contra duos* [=not Hercules against two]. The women so crushed him that he was not able to lift his hands to his head, and so with a broken pate or two he was paid, & like Jack Drum, fair and orderly thrust out of doors.

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

FINIS