

A STUDY OF SOME BRITISH CRIME BROADSIDES,
1557-1900

by

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CRIME AND THE COMMON MAN

A discontented wife in California stabs her husband. A 12-year-old in New Jersey shoots his playmate. A sailor in Washington strangles his unfaithful sweetheart. The word "murder" crackles over telegraph wires into scores of newspaper offices across the nation. Editors weigh it against news of national and international importance, and often it wins out. Thousands upon thousands of readers who do not know the murderer, who stand an infinitesimal chance of being murdered by him or anyone else, absorb details of the crime. This interest in crime is not new. Even before Englishmen read their first newspaper in 1622, publishers were capitalizing on interest in wrongdoing.

Scarcely a century after Caxton introduced printing into England in 1476, presses were turning out broadsheet ballads about crime, crude jingles sung to the tunes of popular airs. Pamphlets aided broadsides in reporting crime news. Later both forms were assisted by hastily-printed, journalistic books, which contained accounts of robberies and murders, lives of criminals, reports of trials, sidelights on wrongdoing. All three forms lasted until the eve of the present century, when they became anachronisms. [This is the story of the crime broadside. It is the record of its birth, life and death.]

Broadside readers from the 16th Century far into the 19th had strong stomachs. They liked sheets that fairly dripped gore. [The broadsides quoted from in this study are by no means atypical.]

To understand crime broadsides with their sometimes revolting details, one must first understand the interest in crime in Britain in their time. One should understand that people regarded criminals as celebrities, much as Hollywood movie stars are celebrities today, and flocked by the thousands to witness their performances, which consisted of a cart-ride to the place of execution, a last speech, a drop to eternity. One should know that hanging-days were holidays with much the same carnival atmosphere that now exists on the Saturday of a good football game.

In the England of a few centuries ago, crime was never far from the common man. In Shakespeare's time, crime was rampant in the streets of London, and authorities were powerless to stop the lawlessness of the criminals. Hangings were common. At the end of the 16th Century, when England had a population of scarcely 5,000,000, an estimated 800 persons were hanged each year.¹ Authorities invoked stringent laws to their utmost, sent thousands of felons to the scaffold, even tried executing criminals at the scenes of their crimes. None of these measures did much toward discouraging crime.

In the 18th Century, crime showed no signs of abating. In the first half of the century it seemed to be on the increase. Thefts, highway robberies, murders, street assaults, waylayings, shopliftings were everyday occurrences. Smollett, speaking of conditions in 1730, remarked that "thieves and robbers were now

¹ Arthur Underhill, "Law," Shakespeare's England (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1926), vol. I, p. 398.

more desperate and savage than they had ever appeared since mankind was civilized." Even a man's wig was not safe. Its cost of from 5 to 50 guineas made it well worth stealing. A common practice of the wig-snatcher was to have a small boy hidden in a huge baker's basket that he carried on his head. When a gentleman passed, the boy popped out his hand, snatched the wig and whipped it under cover before the owner missed it.

But the characteristic criminal of the time was the highwayman. All lonely spots, even those close to London itself, were unsafe. In broad daylight, highwaymen stopped coaches and robbed passengers. Five times in five weeks they robbed the Bristol and London mail. Once they spent several hours of daylight plundering a stage wagon between Notting Hill and Tyburn Gate. To journey into London in safety, travelers often met at specified times in appointed places for a united front against highwaymen. "One is forced to travel, even at noon, as if he were going to battle," Turberville quotes Horace Walpole as complaining in 1751.²

By mid-century, murders had become so numerous that Parliament decreed that all felons should be executed the day after sentence was passed. Men were strung from the gallows by tens, by twenties, and some were transported to the Plantations because the scaffold was too busy to accommodate them. Still crime did not diminish.

With lawlessness all about him, the 18th-Century Londoner understandably took a strong interest in crime and criminals.

² A. S. Turberville, English Men and Manners in the Eighteenth Century (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1932), pp. 165-66.

His interest showed itself in several ways. Perhaps he would pay a small fee to see a notorious criminal confined in Newgate. Criminals were considered fit subjects for exhibition. Doctor Dodd, a clergyman convicted of forgery in 1777, was shown at two shillings a head two hours before his execution. The crowds that gaped at highwayman Jack Sheppard brought his gaol-keeper an estimated 200 pounds. Executed at the age of 23 in 1724, Jack Sheppard was for a time the chief topic of conversation in all ranks of society. His adventures, prison-breakings and other dodgings of the law were dramatized in a pantomime, Harlequin Sheppard, at Drury-Lane Theatre. Parts of a three-act farce about him, The Prison-Breaker or The Adventures of John Sheppard, were performed at Bartholomew's Fair under the title The Quakers' Opera. Sir James Thornhill, regarded as an outstanding painter in his day, painted Sheppard's portrait, from which mezzotint engravings were made. Even the upper-classes turned out to see and talk with convicted felons in their cells. Sydney mentions Walpole's writing to Sir Horace Mann of his conversations with McLean, a fashionable highwayman.⁵ Spectators gawked at wretches in the pillory and sometimes pelted them with vegetables, brick-bats and dead cats. A public flogging was certain to attract the curious and the idle. Trevelyan quotes a passage from the diaries of Parson Woodforde, ordinarily a benevolent soul:

⁵ William Connor Sydney, England and the English in the Eighteenth Century (New York: Macmillan and Co., 1892), vol. II, p. 279.

1777. July 22. Robert Biggen, for stealing potatoes, was this afternoon whipped thro' the streets of Cary (Somerset) by the Hangman at the end of a cart. He was whipped from the George Inn to the Angel, from thence back through the street to the Royal Oak in South Cary and so back to the George Inn. He being an old offender there was a collection of 0.17.6 given to the Hangman to do him justice. But it was not much for all that---the Hangman was an old Man and a most villainous looking Fellow indeed. For my Part I would not contribute one Farthing to it.⁴

Of all punishments, however, executions attracted the largest crowds. From time immemorial executions were public, and spectators thronged to see them. In 1664 Pepys noted in his diary that people "flocked in the City" to see a robber named Turner hanged and that he himself paid a shilling to stand on the wheel of a cart in order to see the execution.⁵ More than a century later, even Parson Woodforde permitted his servant leave from work to see a hanging:

1781. April 7. Gave my servant Will leave to go to Norwich ten miles by road this morning to see the three Highwaymen hung there today. Will returned about seven o'clock in the evening. They were all three hung and appeared penitent.⁶

In 18th-Century London, hanging day--jocularly known as "Tyburn Fair"--was a holiday. At an early hour workshops were deserted. Tailors, shoemakers, coachmakers and other craftsmen took these "hanging matches," as they were called, into account when promising finished goods to their customers. "Oh, that will

⁴ G. M. Trevelyan, English Social History (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1942, pp. 349-50.

⁵ Richard LeGallienne, ed., Passages from the Diary of Samuel Pepys (New York: Modern Library, 1923) p. 122.

⁶ Trevelyan, op. cit., p. 350.

be a hanging-day, and my man will not be at work," they would say. Gentlemen formed parties in coffee-houses and taverns in order to attend executions in a body. Witnessing executions was sport for many noblemen. George Selwyn, the celebrated wit, had a peculiar fondness for gazing at corpses and watching executions. Other connoisseurs of hangings included Thomas Wharton and the Duke of Monmouth.

Even before he left Newgate Prison, the condemned man was part of a show. Realizing this, many criminals insisted upon wearing fine and gaudy clothing to their deaths. John Matthews, a young printer executed for high treason in 1719, went to his doom dressed as befitted a gentleman, his coat lined with rich Persian silk. Lord Derwentwater, decapitated on Tower Hill in 1746, was attired "in scarlet, faced with black velvet, trimmed with gold, a gold-laced waistcoat, and a white feather in his hat."⁷ Yet another criminal hanged in early 1765 wore "a black-and-gold frock, and, as an emblem of his innocence, had a white cockade in his hat."⁸ Fine clothes were for those who could afford them, however; the majority wore rags, and some wore only their shrouds.

As the criminals came out from Newgate for the trip to the gallows, their friends were waiting. From the steps of St. Sepulchre's Church, in accordance with an old custom, the friends gave them huge nosegays of flowers as tokens of affection.

⁷ Sydney, op. cit., p. 283.

⁸ Ibid.

A criminal's social position decided his means of conveyance to the place of execution. If he were of some respectability--- as were the previously mentioned Doctor Dodd and the two Perraus, executed for forgery in 1776--he could travel in a mourning-coach preceded by a hearse bearing his coffin. Common criminals were loaded into a cart. Sometimes they were placed on high seats to be more conspicuous.

A large crowd of curious spectators, pushing and jostling one another for choice positions, fell in behind the wagon. More jammed the route to the scaffold. They pressed close against the procession; many joined it. Some paid small fees to sit or stand in carts along the middle of the road that the criminals traveled. The crowd was sometimes so dense that the procession could scarcely make its way. Laurence, Earl Ferrers, who was executed in London in May, 1760, for the murder of his steward, complained on his death ride that "the apparatus of death, and the passing through such crowds, were worse than death itself."⁹ On the way from the Tower of London to the place of execution, he was in his landau for two and three quarters hours. The tightly-packed crowds made faster progress impossible. When he asked to stop at Holborn for a glass of wine, the sheriff pointed out that any delay would necessarily draw a larger crowd about him. Replied his lordship, "That's true---I say no more--let us by no means

⁹ Camden Pelham, The Chronicles of Crime (London: T. Miles and Co., 1891), vol. I, p. 186.

stop."¹⁰

With lusty shouts, the spectators expressed their approval or disapproval of the culprits. If criminals made a show of bravado, they often won the applause of the masses. Friends, waiting for them along the route, held out pots of beer and drams of gin, and sometimes the cart paused so the prisoners could take this refreshment. Friends even clambered into the cart to say a last farewell. Others tossed the prisoners oranges and apples. On street corners along the way ballad-mongers hawked broadsides recounting the lives and deeds of wrongdoers, often of the criminals then passing. Piemen and venders of gingerbread nuts shouted their wares. The procession stopped at a tavern in Holborn where the condemned men fortified themselves with "the parting cup," a tankard of either spiced ale or wine. Then the cart proceeded. By this time the crowd frequently was so dense that it filled the street from house to house on either side.

Finally the procession reached Tyburn. Near what is now Marble Arch, Tyburn was for six centuries the most common execution site. Although the exact location of the scaffold is unknown, Hayward suggested it stood where Edgware Road joins Oxford Street and Bayswater Road.¹¹ Originally the gallows was two uprights with a crosspiece, but in 1571 it was fashioned into a triangular structure sometimes referred to as "the three-legged mare." It was capable of suspending 24 criminals at a time.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Arthur L. Hayward, ed., Lives of the Most Remarkable Criminals (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1927), p. ix.

In 1759 this scaffold was replaced by a movable gibbet, which was trundled up in a cart when needed until Newgate Prison succeeded Tyburn as the place of execution in 1783.

The crowd waiting at Tyburn for a sight of the condemned men was enormous. Before 1758, seats in bleachers from which people could view the hangings were rented by a woman known as "Mammy Douglas." At a slightly later period, the widow of a cowkeeper named Proctor let out seats placed in tiers on a raised plot of ground that she owned. Prices for seats varied with the position of the spectator and the importance of the criminal. Rental of seats for the execution of Earl Ferrers reportedly brought her more than 500 pounds.¹²

As the wagons carrying the condemned men approached, the hangman climbed to the crosspiece of the scaffold and perched there until the first cart rolled beneath him. Before leaving Newgate, the prisoners had fastened halters around their own necks. The hangman reached down for the loose ends of these, or had an assistant hand them to him, and fastened them to the crossbar. Then he dropped to the ground. After the prisoners had spoken their last words--a confession, a prayer, a plea to God for mercy---the hangman drove away the cart. The prisoners were left dangling. Their bodies were usually taken to Surgeons Hall for dissection.

In the case of condemned traitors, the spectacle did not end

¹² Sydney, op. cit., vol. II, p. 236.

with the hanging. Spectators could see the executioner carry out the sentence for high treason, usually similar to the following from 1746:

That you, William Earl of Kilmarnock, George Earl of Cromarty, and Arthur Lord Balmerino, and every of you, return to the Prison of the Tower from whence you came; from thence you must be drawn to the Place of Execution; when you come there, you must be hang'd by the Neck, but not till you are Dead; for you must be cut down alive; then your Bowels must be taken out, and burnt before your Faces; then your Heads must be sever'd from your Bodies, and your Bodies must be divided each into four Quarters; and these must be at the King's Disposal.---And God Almighty be merciful to your Souls.¹³

In this instance, the sentence was not carried out; the three noblemen were instead beheaded. But crowds saw the bloody finish to Christopher Layer, a barrister executed for treason in 1723, who was hanged and quartered, his head afterwards being displayed on Temple Bar. Pelham's description of the execution of Francis Townley and fellow offenders, whose case is of the same period as the three noblemen, suggests what the strong-stomached could witness:

They had not hung above five minutes when Townley was cut down, being yet alive; and his body being placed on the block, the executioner chopped off his head with a cleaver. His heart and bowels were then taken out, and thrown into the fire; and the other parties being separately treated in the same manner, the executioner cried out, "God save King George!"

The bodies were quartered, and delivered to the keepers of the New Jail, who buried them; the heads of some of the parties were sent to Carlisle and Manchester, where they were exposed; but those of Townley

¹³ The Trials of William Earl of Kilmarnock, George Earl of Cromarty, and Arthur Lord Balmerino for High Treason (London: Printed for A. Dickenson, n.d.), p. 12.

and another were fixed on Temple Bar, and after remaining some time, fell down.¹⁴

The processions to Tyburn were abolished in 1783 and the place of execution changed to Newgate Prison. But hangings were still public. They drew enormous crowds until they were closed to the public in the mid-19th Century. Nearly 100,000 persons saw the hanging of Henry Fauntleroy for forgery in November, 1824. People walked for miles to see the execution of William Gorder for the murder of Maria Marten in 1828. A newspaper reporter who covered the hanging said he had heard of several laboring men who had come on foot 30 miles to see it. "The account appears extremely probable," he added, "for on my return to London, the road was lined for several miles with persons returning from the melancholy spectacle."¹⁵ His paper's account of the hanging estimated that 7,000 spectators were present. Some were not content with just witnessing the execution; afterwards they bid as high as five guineas an inch for the hangman's rope and offered large sums for the murder weapons.

In Edinburgh a crowd estimated at between 20,000 and 25,000 turned out in January, 1829, to see the hanging of William Burke, who with his partner William Hare had murdered a number of casual acquaintances in order to sell their corpses to the dissectionists. Spectators paid from 5 to 20 shillings for space in windows from which to view the execution. In Burke's case, as in

¹⁴ Pelham, op. cit., p. 124.

¹⁵ London Weekly Dispatch, August 17, 1828.

Corder's, their morbid interest did not cease with the criminal's death. His skin was tanned and sold in pieces of varying sizes to the curious; Roughhead, who himself owns a bit of it, reports that one gentleman had a tobacco pouch made of the material.¹⁶

At the execution of murderers Bishop and Williams in London in 1831 the crowd, between 30,000 and 40,000 persons, became so unruly at the sight of the condemned men that it broke down barriers that the police had set up. Several persons were taken to the hospital.

Nineteenth-century trials were so well-attended that officers and jurors sometimes had difficulty forcing their way into the courtroom. Hundreds of people stood in a downpour for five hours for admittance to Corder's trial at Bury St. Edmunds in 1828. They were so densely packed that it took nearly an hour for the sheriff to squeeze jurors into the courtroom.

The rule rather than the exception, these examples indicate that from the 17th well into the 19th Century, crime held a strange fascination for the British people. This fascination showed itself in what they read. The Elizabethan period was the golden age of murder literature, as Roughhead has pointed out.¹⁷ Murderers stalk through the tragedies of Shakespeare, and John Webster's White Devil and Duchess of Malfi are drenched with blood. With crime and criminals glorified, it is not strange

¹⁶ William Roughhead, Knave's Looking-Glass (London: Cassell and Co., 1935), pp. 292-93.

¹⁷ William Roughhead, Neck or Nothing (London: Cassell and Co., 1939), p. 7.

that the 18th-Century Londoner loved to read Capt. Charles Johnson's History of the Pyrates, with its tales of Bluebeard, Thatch, England and Roberts; The Newgate Calendar; and Capt. Alexander Smith's Lives of the Highwaymen. Bleyer quotes Eustace Budgell, a cousin of Addison, as saying in 1735 that news of crime was what many newspaper readers wanted and that the popularity of Amplbee's Original Weekly Journal was due largely to its published confessions of criminals about to be executed. He promised readers of his own Bee similar fare.¹⁸

But when the British people first became anxious to learn of the transgressions of their neighbors, there were no newspapers to satisfy their curiosity. The fledgling newspaper of the 18th Century had not space to give them the details they wanted. The press of the early 19th Century could not keep pace of the demand for crime news. Inevitably, then, other printed means catered to this appetite for the bloody. And in a world hungry for news of sin, the broadside prospered.

¹⁸ William Grosvenor Bleyer, Main Currents in the History of American Journalism (New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1927), p. 25.

SURVEY OF CRIME BROADSIDE PUBLISHING

From the mid-16th Century down to the tag end of the 19th, broadsides were a popular medium of reporting crime news in the British Isles. Two of the earliest broadsides dealing with crime chronicled the hanging of a titled criminal, after the hatred simmering for years between Lord Stourton and William and John Hartgill ended in murder. Early in 1557, disappointed in his own attempts at revenge, Lord Stourton had four of his servants kill his two enemies. The servants were duly punished for the crime. So was Lord Stourton. Found guilty of murder, he was hanged by a silken rope--in lieu of hemp in deference to his rank--at Salisbury, England, on March 6, 1557.

His execution inspired two broadsides.¹ Wyllyam Pickeringe, "dwellynge upon London Brydge," brought out a broadside titled, The Copye of the self same wordee that ni Lorde Sturton [sic] spake presently at his Death...amonge the people as his Confession, desiringe the people to take example by hym. and to kepe no Envy in their hertes for that is the roote of all evylles.

The broadside was divided into two portions. First came Lord Stourton's speech, illustrated by a drawing of one man murdering another prostrate on the ground. The second part was, "The praler of the Lord Stourton which he spake kneling on his

¹ Robert Lemon, ed., Catalogue of a Collection of Printed Broad-sides in the Possession of the Society of Antiquaries of London (London: Society of Antiquaries, 1866), pp. 14-15.

knees, desiring the people to pray for hym, and also say with him." A second broadside, similar in content but with the prayer before the speech, was published by Thomas Marshe of London, "in Fletestrete nere to Saint Dunstans churche."

From the time of Lord Stourton onward, broadsides played an important part in getting crime news to the masses.² The broadside was a single sheet, usually folio in size and printed on one side. The quality of the printing varied with the times and with the printer, but it was never high. The copy was frequently printed in two columns. No generalization is safe, however; the number of columns might run from one to five. As with the broadside about Lord Stourton, the sheets were invariably illustrated; but the printer was satisfied if the woodcut dealt only remotely with the subject of the paper. A picture purporting to be that of a highwayman in the news might later turn up on another sheet as the likeness of a murderer whose case had caught the public fancy. Throughout the entire period, the copy itself was of three forms: ballads, quite often doggerel; prose, invariably strongly partisan or sternly moralizing; or a combination of verse and prose.

Subject matter was universally gruesome. For the greater part of the more than three centuries that the sheets existed, a murder amounted to little unless it were recognized by the broadside press. Murders were staples for the publishers. A good

² For a brief survey of crime reporting by pamphlet and book, other non-newspaper media, see Ted Peterson, "British Crime Pamphleteers: Forgotten Journalists," Journalism Quarterly, December, 1945.

murder--especially in the 18th and 19th Centuries--had many angles for broadside reports. One sheet might give an account of the crime, another of the murderer's life. Still another might give excerpts of trial testimony. But the big press run seems to have been reserved for the murderer's confession and execution.

All criminals furnished raw materials for the sheets, however; and the wrongdoing of traitors, witches, pirates, highwaymen and petty pilferers were recorded in their columns. Even a good crime could be improved upon. If Satan showed up in person to punish the offender or if the ghost of the murdered man put in an appearance, the sheets told the story without restraint and with solemn assurances of its truth. The perennially favorite topic of all publishers for the whole period seems to have been the dying speech--commonly called the "good-night"--of a condemned criminal.

Just when British publishers began turning out these crime sheets, it is difficult to say. Shaaber mentions that the broadside about Lord Stourton's execution in 1557 is the earliest one dealing with crime that he has found.⁵ Perhaps others were published earlier; it seems too much a matter of coincidence that the first broadside about crime should have been published the same year that London printers began registering their productions with the Stationers' Company. Ephemeral as they were, crime broadsides printed before 1557 might well have become lost

⁵ Matthias A. Shaaber, Some Forerunners of the Newspaper in England 1476-1622 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1929), p. 141.

and left no record of their production.

A broadside recounting the life and execution of Sir John Oldcastle at St. Giles for high treason in 1417--about 60 years before Caxton introduced printing in England--is reprinted by Charles Hindley.⁴ As the sheet gives neither the name of the printer nor the date of publication--Hindley himself is silent on both points--one cannot tell how long after the execution the broadside circulated among Londoners. One possibility is that the sheet circulated in manuscript form. More likely, however, the broadside was published long after printing had made headway. Since broadside publishers sometimes rehashed old crimes and served them up as new, it is possible that the sheet was published many years after the execution.

Certain it is, in any case, that Lord Stourton's execution was among the earliest to set the crime press working, although broadsides did not fully exploit the sensational aspects of crime until about 1575.⁵ Certain it is, too, that the earliest examples of crime reporting in England are in the broadside ballad, forerunner of the modern newspaper.

The first traces of printed journalism are in the broadside ballad--a song of some event, a battle, the death or misfortune of some great man, murder or an execution at Tyburn.⁶ And very

⁴ Charles Hindley, Curiosities of Street Literature (London: Reeves and Turner, 1871), p. 161.

⁵ Shaaber, loc. cit.

⁶ J. B. Williams, A History of English Journalism to the Foundation of the Gazette (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1908), p. 4.

rarely was the broadside used for news, except in the form of ballads or proclamations from the time Caxton introduced printing in England to 1622, the year of the first newspaper.⁷ Therefore, in the earliest years of crime reporting by broadside, the ballad had the field almost exclusively to itself.

That many of the early ballads dealt with crime is not surprising. As has been pointed out, executions from time immemorial were public, and crime was never far from the common man. Fully as important, news worthy of print had to be unusual, exciting; and its worthiness seems to have been in almost direct ratio to the extent it stirred the reader's emotions. Ordinary happenings in the daily life of the common man did not get significant attention from the press until the second quarter of the 19th Century.⁸ Still another explanation for the fact that news of wrongdoing was perennially popular might be that with shifting restrictions on the press, crime was generally a safe subject. By cloaking it in moralizing, publishers could excuse it on the grounds that it was an edifying influence.

By the tenth year of Elizabeth, broadside ballads were the main production of London printers, and the crime sheet was fairly well established. The ballad seems to have predominated over prose accounts of crime in the 17th Century. If it did, the fact is not surprising. Ballads were exceedingly popular. Mopsa spoke not only for herself but for a sizeable share of the popu-

⁷ Shaaber, op. cit., p. 11.

⁸ Ibid., p. 9.

lation when she said, "I love a ballad in print, o' life, for then we are sure they are real."

Perhaps because it had the momentum of an early start, the crime ballad was printed almost as long as broadsides were hawked on the streets. Crime broadsides that were exclusively prose appear to have been increasingly numerous in the 18th Century and even more so in the 19th. But even in the 19th Century, when prose accounts seem to have dominated the broadside field, the ballad of wrongdoing retained some of its earlier popularity. As late as 1864, when Franz Muller murdered Thomas Briggs in a railway carriage, for instance, one sheet reported the crime in verse without prose assistance. About the same period, verse alone was relied on to chronicle the murder of "the parson's servant named Sarah Bell," by Miles Weatherhill, a young weaver.

Until the broadside faded out of existence in the last half of the 19th Century, an indispensable part of most prose accounts of crime was a supplementary "copy of verses." They rehashed in poesy the crime reported elsewhere on the sheet. Sometimes they were purportedly the work of the criminal himself, though in fact they were not. Just as often they were third-person productions of ill-paid versifiers. In either case, they seem to have been a somewhat decayed version of the crime ballad that delighted Samuel Pepys and Anthony Wood. The prose account of a crime may have edged the ballad somewhat into the background--perhaps by the 18th Century, certainly by the 19th. But the broadside ballad was tenacious. It remained, in some form, until mature newspapers drove both the prose and poetic broadsides from

the streets.

Newspapers were a long time in driving the broadside from the streets. The broadside was born into an England without newspapers. Its reporting, from a modern viewpoint, was crude and often sensational. Ballads of the 17th Century were scanty in detail. They editorialized, they commented upon crime news more than they reported it. They often were parasitical, drawing for raw material upon the news pamphlets that were issuing from the infant press. Yet they performed a service that the populace wanted. In the Elizabethan period, when bloodshed seems to have been one of the preoccupations of the major dramatists and one of the interests of the groundlings in the pit, the broadside ballads served up news of crime to those who wanted a bit of it in their reading diet.

Though the ballads themselves frequently were stingy with details, their copious titles often gave the reader a fair knowledge of the crimes they reported. Detailed titles were common on the early broadsides; they remained a feature of most broadsides, prose or verse, until their end in the 19th Century. They summarized the crime that inspired the ballad or the content of the prose sheet. On the early broadside ballads, titles often supplied details that were lacking or obscure in the text itself. Thus though the names of the murderers and the date and locality of the crime were missing in a ballad of 1684, the title furnished most of the factual information that the reader needed:

THE Unfaithful Servant;

AND The Cruel Husband, Being a perfect and true account of one Judith Brown, who together with her Master Iohn Cupper, conspired the Death of her Mistris, his Wife, which accordingly they did accomplish in the time of Child-bed, when she lay in with two Children, by mixing of her Drink with cruel Poyson; for which Fact she received due Sentence of Death at the late Assizes in the County of Salop, to be Burned; which was accordingly Executed upon the Old Heath near Shrewsbury, on Thursday the Twenty-first day of August, 1684.⁹

In addition to giving the reader most of the facts about a crime, even the early broadsides were relatively timely. Further, they were fairly inexpensive. Consequently, when fledgling newspapers made their appearance in England, the innovation did not threaten the broadside. For years, broadsides--especially those of the prose sort--were able to do a better job of crime-reporting than the newspapers.

One reason was that newspapers for a long time were small in size. The early printed news carriers, the various corantos, diurnals and mercuries, were quarto affairs of only eight pages. These pamphlets evolved into the first "paper," the London Gazette, which appeared in 1665. It was a half-folio single sheet with two columns of type. A broadside had at least as much space as that at its disposal. Later the Gazette expanded to four pages--a folio sheet folded once. When the Daily Courant began publication in 1702, it adopted the size of the Gazette.¹⁰ During most of the 18th Century, the size of English papers kept

⁹ Hyder Edward Rollins, ed., The Pepys Ballads (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1929-32), vol. III, pp. 131-34.

¹⁰ Stanley Morison, The English Newspaper 1632-1932 (Cambridge University Press, 1932), p. 5.

the amount of news in them relatively small. Their two or four little pages could carry only a smattering of news in addition to their essays and advertisements.¹¹ Not until the 19th Century were newspapers able to carry satisfactory long crime stories.

Another reason that crime broadsides were a long time in feeling the effects of newspaper competition was the high price of newspapers. Taxes and relatively heavy production costs made newspapers so expensive that only the wealthy could afford them. Prices of newspapers remained out of reach of the masses until the 19th Century. Still another reason that the broadside was able to flourish alongside the newspaper was the matter of timeliness. A printer could rush out a broadsheet in a matter of hours, as events warranted, with no thought of a regular publication schedule. The sheet could function much as a newspaper "extra" does today.

It must not be supposed that newspapers were entirely lacking in crime items until the 19th Century. The press of both the 17th and 18th Centuries printed criminal reports, and the readers seem to have liked them. A good share of the popularity of Applebee's Journal in the 18th Century has been ascribed to its coverage of crime news. Applebee's Journal employed a reporter who interviewed distinguished criminals in Newgate and pried out the stories of their lives. His name was Daniel Defoe. When Defoe's material was too rich and too plentiful to be confined within the narrow columns of the Journal, he issued it

¹¹ Willard Grosvenor Bleyer, Main Currents in the History of American Journalism (New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1927), p. 24.

in pamphlet form.¹² The fact remained that newspaper space was necessarily limited, and so was the number of readers.

Finding the budget of crime news in papers inadequate, the British reader turned to the medium that had served him for generations, the broadside. And broadside venders were everywhere. On execution day in the 18th Century, they turned out in droves, bawling the dying speeches of condemned criminals. The streets of London swarmed with ragged men, women and children hawking their half-penny sheets. Some of the peddlers blew horns, and the whole lot of them kept up a clamor throughout the morning and into the middle of the afternoon. Francois Place, writing from personal knowledge, said that posterity can form no conception of the huge number of broadside hawkers who roamed London streets in the latter half of the 18th Century.¹³

Circulation of crime broadsides perhaps reached its peak in the first half of the 19th Century. In 1813 James Catnach set up a modest printing shop in Seven Dials, London, and impudently started infringing on the territory of John Pitts, the recognized king of street literature. In their feud (which is discussed more fully in the chapter about publishers) each strained to have his men first on the streets with broadsides when news of a bloody crime broke; and between crimes they busied themselves printing diatribes against one another. Determination and a

¹² William Minto, Daniel Defoe (New York: Harper and Brothers, n.d.), pp. 124-25.

¹³ William Connor Sydney, England and the English in the Eighteenth Century (New York: Macmillan and Co., 1892), vol. II, pp. 292-93.

canny business sense shoved Catnach upwards until he had overtaken Pitts and was acknowledged as leader in his field. Regular correspondents throughout the kingdom furnished Catnach with news of crimes in their localities. Facile-penned ballad writers dashed to Catnach with verses reporting London crimes that showed signs of catching the popular fancy. Their ballads, usually with prose accompaniment and generally with crude woodcuts by way of illustration, made up the broadsides that poured by the thousands from Catnach's presses.

Circulations of some of the sheets were enormous. A broadside reporting a particularly interesting murder in 1823 sold a quarter of a million copies. That was a record for even Catnach, but it did not stand long. He brought out another sheet reporting the trial of the murderers that sold a half million copies. The sheets spewing from the Catnach shop were only a part of the total output in London. Other publishers dumped large quantities on the market--publishers such as T. Birt, T. Evans and of course John Pitts. The combined efforts of all publishers showered Londoners with 2,500,000 copies of broadsides about a man and wife murder team in 1849, with another 2,500,000 copies about the murderous ways of James Bloomfield Rush in the same year.

Between murders, the publishers kept their hand in criminal matters by turning out a type of broadside that had its roots in certain 17th Century ballads, an item known to the trade as a "cock." The cock or "catchpenny" was an account of an imaginary crime, palmed off on unwary readers as a true one. To lend credence to their faked stories, the publishers often printed names

of the supposed murderers and their victims and even fabricated reports of trials, confessions and last letters of the imaginary criminals. Other times, to make their catchpennies adaptable for sale in any locality, they were purposely vague about details of the supposed crime. When their imaginations flagged, some publishers thumbed through a worn Newgate Calendar, chose an old but gory murder, eliminated all references to dates and printed the case as recent news.

Even as hawkers grabbed ream after ream of ink-wet sheets from Catnach and his fellows and hastened to shout them on the streets of London, even as coachmen sped bundles of the latest bills into the provinces, the days of the crime broadside were numbered. After about the middle of the 19th Century, an increasing number of Londoners passed the street-patterers without buying their bills. Presses clicked off fewer copies of a broadside before the demand was met. Catnach retired and died; his sister succeeded him, and later W. S. Fortey took over the shop. In later years Fortey boasted that in 1864 his papers about the execution of five pirates of the bad ship Flowery Land sold 290,000 copies, his largest press run. His boasting would have brought scorn from his former employer Catnach, who 40 years earlier had ground out 500,000 copies of the broadside about the trial of a single murderer. In 1865 Fortey and all his London colleagues together sold only 30,000 copies of sheets about Stephan Forward, murderer of his wife and four children. The day of the broadside was about over.

In his most prosperous days, Catnach could have seen a grow-

ing threat to men of his trade in the rise of large low-priced newspapers. The French war boosted the newspaper business, which expanded steadily throughout the 19th Century. For the price of a broadside, which furnished a few minutes' divertisement, readers could get a weekend newspaper that gave them more than one day's reading. And if they wished, they could choose a paper with a generous splash of crime news; for some London newspaper publishers, recognizing the perennial interest in items on the police blotter, filled column upon column with stories of rapes, murders, seductions and robberies. As newspapers gained readers, the broadsides lost them. The coup de grace to the moribund broadside was the abolition of public executions in 1868. For a large share of their business, broadside publishers had depended on accounts of executions and dying speeches of criminals. The end of public executions and the carnival spirit attending them meant an end to the dying speech broadside. A few execution broadsides stubbornly appeared after the hangman did his job within prison walls; lifeless things, they found few buyers.

By 1870 the few broadside hawkers still wandering about London streets were rarities--nearly perished links, like Hardy's redleman, between an old age and a new.

MURDER BROADSIDES: 1557-1700

Pens of the law were busily scratching offenders' names on British court records in the 16th and 17th Centuries. Though the doors of Newgate and her sister prisons clanged often, though the gallows held high victims by the hundreds, a fair share of the population remained free to live by its wits and wiles.

Vagabonds wandered vaguely about the countryside, avoiding work but not always avoiding crime. The law, in many cases with good reason, saw only a thin line between vagrancy and crime.¹ London itself abounded with rogues, coney-catchers, thieves and sharpers with their own language or canting tongue. The cut-purse--his instruments were a sharp knife and a "horned thumb" or sort of thimble--snipped moneybags of the unwary for his living. Perhaps he had been trained in the academy for pickpockets operated in 1585 by a broken-down merchant named Wotton.² Footpads lay in wait for victims on unlighted, unprotected streets; highwaymen robbed on the open road. Murderers from time to time added climactic peaks to the general sordidness of the time. Try as they would, the catchpoles, watchmen, constables and serjeants were just not able to cope with the criminals who swarmed the streets of the metropolis.

¹ Frederick W. Hackwood, The Good Old Times (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1910), p. 197.

² Ibid., p. 200.

To the north, too, in Scotland, erring folk kept the hangman busy. In 1601 the Scottish borders were "infested by clans of banditti, who transmitted their predatory pursuits from father to son, like a common profession."³ There were criminals such as John Dickson, convicted in 1588 of the murder of his father and sentenced to be "broke" on the wheel at the Cross in Edinburgh. There were criminals such as Robert Erskine and his sisters three--Helen, Isobel and Agnes--who were convicted in 1613 of murdering their nephew with poisonous herbs steeped in ale. There were less vicious criminals such as John Rait and Alexander Dean, hanged in Edinburgh in 1623 for stealing from gardens.

There was the usual quota of persons suspected of witchcraft--persons such as Euphan M'Calzeane, burned alive in 1591 for treasonably conspiring the king's death by enchantment and raising storms to hinder his return from Denmark; such as Patrick Lawrier, committed to the flames in 1605 for consulting with the devil and, among other offences, "betwitching Bessie Sands's corns, and taking the whole strength and substance out of them for ten years successively."⁴

The less brutal crimes of the times were reflected in the contemporary literature of roguery, the subject of many studies hence worth only mention here. Awdley published his Fraternitve of Vacabondes in 1561. The book reflected the lowlife of vaga-

³ Hugo Arnot, A Collection and Abridgement of Celebrated Criminal Trials in Scotland (Glasgow: A. Napier, 1812), p. 146.

⁴ Ibid., pp. 393-94.

bonds, recorded their cant or shoptalk and described their knavery. Thomas Harman borrowed from Awdley but he also relied on his own observations for his Caveat or Warening for common Curssetors Vulgarely Called Vagabones, which appeared in 1566. Rogues threatened to cut off Robert Greene's right hand if he dared expose their tricks in print. So said Greene, who nevertheless in 1591 brought out the first of three pamphlets which edged from fact to fiction in their accounts of roguery. Similar works were written by Thomas Dekker in the early 17th Century. They were advertised as good reading for gentlemen, lawyers, merchants, citizens, farmers--for anyone who did not want to be duped.

While Awdley and his colleagues were reporting only roguery, broadside publishers seem to have been giving their attention to both roguery and villainy, especially the latter. There is a distinction. Roguery is the less vicious. It regards rascality with humor or explains it as the result of social environment. Villainy is shaded with malice or pathological overtones; its evil proceeds to extremes. Murder is the typical crime of the villain as theft is the typical crime of the rogue.⁵

Rogue literature and the broadside have a further connection than their reflecting the crimes of their times. Crime pamphlets glorifying individual English rogues of real life were an offshoot of the works of Awdley and his fellows, with which they

⁵ Frank Wadleigh Chandler, The Literature of Roguery (New York: Houghton Mifflin and Co., 1907), vol. 1, pp. 1-4.

grew up almost side by side. Crime accounts in these tracts often seem to have been the basis of ballads. When fact failed, many a writer of these pamphlets turned to fancy--or to rogue literature. Thus fictitious anecdotes and incidents which appeared in the rogue literature that followed Awdley and his contemporaries turned up years later as true stories about law-breakers currently in the public eye. Undoubtedly some of these stories appeared in the broadside accounts of highwaymen. And they foreshadowed by many years a whole class of crime broadsides based on fiction or old tales and passed off on the public as genuine news.

The roguery and villainy on every hand--the gray crimes and the black--were good raw material for broadside publishers in the 16th and 17th centuries, when the newspaper was in its period of gestation, birth and infancy. They made wide use of it. Their shops sent into the streets of London hundreds of accounts in prose and poesy of the exploits of murderers, traitors, highwaymen, pirates, coiners and thieves.

Because the sheets were ephemeral, because many of the early ones are now known only by entries in the Stationers' Register, it is difficult to state with certainty either when they began or when they became numerous. Likewise, throughout the entire three-centuries' life-span of the crime broadside, it is almost impossible to state with certainty exactly when one fashion of crime reporting faded, when another bloomed.

⁶ Ibid., p. 150.

Probably the crime sheets dealing with the hanging of Lord Stourton in 1557 were part of a meager output. Only after about 1575 do murders and other crimes seem to have been fully exploited by the broadside press. But after 1575 no criminal worthy of the name swung from the gibbet without leaving some broadside as his ephemeral epitaph.⁷ His life and his departure from it might be narrated in prose or in ballad. But they were almost certain to be narrated.

Murderers, the typical villains, were favorite subjects of the broadside writer. Their crimes were dramatic, excited the emotions. Many early broadside ballads moralized more than they reported; and murder, the worst of crimes except treason, gave an almost perfect excuse for moralizing.

Londoners about the year 1638 could buy from Francis Coules at his shop in the Old Bailey a 30-stanza ballad about a "marvellous murther" in Brompton.⁸ The victim was one George Drawnefield, who was murdered in his bed for the "Lucre of his wealth." The four-column sheet was decorated with two woodcuts, one depicting the murder, the other an irrelevant illustration perhaps intended only to brighten appearances.

The ballad clearly pointed a moral or two: "Murther can no way bee hid" and "Beware lest Sathan you possesse with the roote of euil cousteousness." But the ballad was by no means so clear

⁷ Matthias A. Shaaber, Some Forerunners of the Newspaper in England 1476-1622 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1929), pp. 141-42.

⁸ Hyder Edward Rollins, ed., The Pack of Autolycaus (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1927), pp. 15-20.

on all the aspects of the murder. Perplexing omissions were intermingled with curious minutiae. Although three of the four murderers were in jail awaiting trial, the ballad-writer did not mention their names. Nor did he tell how the body came to be discovered. Yet he observed that the discoverers were surprised,

To see the house of all bereft,
And onely two Six-pences left,
Beside a little household trash.

The ballad-writer with bigger eyes for sixpences than for murderers did outline a fair account of the crime. The reader learned that Drawnefield, "through his Industry, Care and paines," accumulated money to the "valeur of three hundred pounds." Leaving his friends after evening prayer on Whitsunday, Drawnefield was seen no more because,

The bloody Homicides i'th night,
Broake in to th' house and killed him quite
But with such deuclish subtilty,
As show'd the Authors policy.

Drawnefield's body was apparently buried the afternoon of the day the murder was discovered. That he had been murdered was not generally recognized, there being "no suspition of the thing, unless some priuate murmuring." But his married sister, who came from her home 20 miles away, suspected foul play.

This Ielousie tooke such effect,
That quickly as she did direct,
The corps were taken vp anon,
The Coroners quest was set thereon.

The coroner's jury found no reason for believing that Drawnefield had been murdered. His body was reburied, and the murderers should have been relieved. They were not.

Yet did their consciences them sting,
 And they i' the night brought euery thing,
 Which from the house they had conueyed,
 And neere without the dore them laid.

Such goings-on apparently nudged the suspicions of the sister's husband, who "caus'd the corps to be once more, tane vp and washed cleane all o're." Again a coroner's jury met, this time in company with a surgeon. The surgeon was not only able to find "by his Art the man was kild"; he was also able to point out some interesting details about the condition of the corpse:

In such a sort it makes me wonder,
 For they had broke his necke in sunder,
 And also in his head and side,
 Some signes of deadly blowes were spide.

With Dough they stopt his nose and eares,
 His mouth and throate to shunne all feares,
 That might insue through bloods effusion,
 As was found out in the conclusion.

Such evidence the jury could not overlook. Arrests followed:

Diuers for this foule fact were tane,
 Three now in Darby Layle remayne,
 One's fled away the other Foure,
 To the asises are bound o're.

There the ballad-writer stopped his account of the crime. He left his readers with a number of unanswered questions. Why was the first coroner's jury so unobservant that it did not notice the evidences of foul play? Why did the murderers return the stolen goods? Why did they not flee the neighborhood after the crime? Were the murderers neighbors of Drawnefield? What were their names? Instead of answering any of those questions, the writer concluded his ballad with two stanzas of sermonizing:

Take heede you bloody minded men,
 For blood still asks for blood agen.
 You see what plots these villaines did
 Yet murthar can no way bee hid.

Beware lest Sathan you possesse
 With the roote of euill couetousness.
 For money Iudas sould his friend,
 And money brought this man to's end.

Compared with other ballads of its time, the Drawnsfield account was not excessively moralizing. Other ballads moralized to greater or lesser degree. Commentary rather than reporting seems to have been characteristic of the crime news-ballad. It was not so much a harbinger of news as a follower in its wake.⁹ Nonetheless, it had a certain timeliness. Although the ballad itself often gave only sketchy details of a crime, it almost always appeared under a generous title. The title often gave a fair summary of the crime that inspired the ballad. Take, for instance, the title of a crime ballad that Londoners could buy from Charles Tyus at the Three Bibles on London Bridge in 1662:

Truth brought to Light. OR,
 Wonderful strange and true news from Gloucester shire,
 concerning one Mr. William Harrison, formerly Stewart
 to the Lady Nowel of Cambden, who was supposed to be
 Murthered by the Widow Pery and two of her Sons, one of
 which was Servant to the said Gentleman. Therefore they
 were all three apprehended and sent to Gloucester Goal
 (sic), and about two years sinos arraigned, found guilty,
 condemned, and Executed upon Broadway hill in sight of
 Cambden, the mother and one Son being then buried under
 the Gibbet, but he that was Mr. Harrison's Servant, hanged
 in Chains in the same place, where that which is remain-
 ing of him may be seen to this day, but at the time of
 their Execution, they said Mr. Harrison was not dead,
 but ere seven years were over should be heard of again,

⁹ Shaaber, op. cit., pp. 193-94.

yst would not confess where he was, but now it appears the Widow Pery was a witch, and after her Sons had rob'd him and east him into a Stone Pit, she by her witchcraft conveyed him upon a Rock in the Sea near Turkey, where he remaind four days and nights, till a Turkish Ship coming by, took him and sold him into Turkey where he remained for a season, but is now through the good providence, of God returned again safe to England, to all great wonder and admiration of all that knew the same. This is undenyably true, as it is sufficiently testified by the Inhabitants of Cambden, and many others thereabouts.¹⁰

True, not many titles were as exhaustive as that one. But even the shorter ones gave a one-sentence summary of the salient points, much in the fashion of the "leads" or beginning paragraphs of present-day news stories. The title of the Drawnfield murder was typical:

A Marvellous Murther,
Committed upon the Body of one George Drawnfield of
Brampton, Two Miles from Chesterfield, in Darbyshire,
who (for Lucre of his wealth) was most cruelly murdered
in his bed, on Whitsunday at night, by certaine bloody
Villaines whereof Three are in Darby Jayle, One fled,
and the rest bound over the Asizes.

The Drawnfield ballad was especially interesting for the attention it gave the victim. In most of the later ballads, in some of the same period, the criminal was the central figure. The victim was generally an insignificant figure who was often all but crowded out of the picture by the criminal or at best shared the stage with him.

Much the same attention to the victim appeared in a crime ballad of 1661, which was an example of more excessive sermonizing verse than the Drawnfield number. To the tune of Troy

¹⁰ Rollins, op. cit., pp. 95-100. For account of case, see Andrew Lang, "The Campden Mystery," Historical Mysteries (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1904), pp. 55-74.

Town, balladmongers sang the lamentable fate of Lawrence Cawthorn, journeyman butcher of the Shambles in Newgate Market, who was buried alive.¹¹ Believed dead, Cawthorn, the title said, was "caused to be presently buried by his Lanlady Mrs. Cook, in Pincock-Lane, only, as is supposed out of her greedy desire to gain his cloathes." In his grave from Friday to Monday, the butcher was heard to moan and groan. On disinterrment, his body was not a pretty sight. The title reported that in his strugglings in the coffin, his arms were beaten "black and blew, his head bruised and swel'd as big as two heads, and his eyes starting almost out of his head."

The ballad moralized. Before reviewing the case, the writer devoted seven stanzas to warning his readers to be ready to die at all times, as death strikes suddenly. He restated his theme in five stanzas, of which the following was an example:

Your daies in length are like a span,
 your life's a vapour, which appears
 But for a little while, and than
 death puts a period to your years;
 O! therefore now, even whilst you may
 prepare you for your dying day.

The sad example of Lawrence Cawthorn, the writer said, illustrated just what he was talking about. It could teach people "to be more wise,"

And live so, that wee alwaies may
 bee ready for our dying day.

After work one evening, Cawthorn tarried in an ale-house with some friends, a bit of idleness almost sure to bring him some mis-

¹¹ Rollins, op. cit., pp. 68-74.

fortune, the writer inferred. Returning home, Cawthorn went to bed. Unable to awaken him in the morning and finding the door locked, the landlord conferred with neighbors.

A Smith was sent for then with speed
 who soon broke ope the Chamber doore;
 Which being done, they then indeed
 began to wonder more and more:
 For why, they surely thought that death
 had quite bereft him of his breath.

* * *

The Searchers then came up, and view'd
 his body o're in every place:
 And to the people then they shew'd,
 what was their judgement in the caso.
 Their Vordict was, that oruel Death
 had by a Quinsy stopt his breath.

Cawthorn's landlady, her eye on his saleable clothes, made it her business to have him buried "quickly out of hand." And so the butcher was laid into his "shallow Grave dig'd with speed." Imprisoned in his coffin, Cawthorn groaned as he fought unsuccessfully for his life. When the body was dug up, people concluded that he had been only in a trance during his hasty burial.

His Landlord and his Landlady
 being suspected for this deed:
 Examined were most certainly
 and unto Newgate sent with speed
 And till themselves they well can clear,
 it is suppos'd they must lye there.

As was the case with the Drawnfield ballad, the account of Cawthorn's misfortune left readers unsatisfied. Was Cawthorn poisoned, was his illness natural or was he dead drunk? What part did the landlord play in the nefarious business? Who ordered the body exhumed? Why, since outsiders had returned the verdict of death, did suspicion fix on the landlord and landlady?

Some of those questions were no doubt answered in a contemporary pamphlet and another broadside about the crime, both mentioned by Rollins.

Both the Drawnefield and Cawthorn ballads emphasized the victims in curious fashion to point their morals. The reader was warned to take his lesson from victims--not, as was the case in most ballads, from the criminal. Drawnefield's savings, the early ballad pointed out, were the cause of the old man's ruin. They aroused envy, so it was "wealth that wrought his death." Cawthorn's death illustrated the need of living each day as if it were one's last. Why the criminals were not held up as wicked examples is hard to explain, since in both cases they were jailed. The obvious explanation--that the criminals were not yet tried--is not entirely satisfactory. When a moral was to be drawn, broadside writers from the 17th Century to the 19th showed little hesitancy in condemning accused persons before their trials. In a ballad of 1660 describing a duel that ended in death, for instance, the murderer was castigated throughout, despite the fact he still awaited trial.¹² He was "wicked," and "mischief harbored in his brest." In noting that the duelist and his seconds were jailed, the ballad commented, "I think theres no man will them bail." The moral stemmed from the murderer's situation:

I wish all Traytors to be ware,
And not to murder as they do,
lest they fall in the hang-mans snare.

¹² Rollins, op. cit., pp. 52-57.

Perhaps not even the publishers took their sermons seriously when they exhorted readers to live so piously that they would not be murdered--or would go to heaven if murder befell them. Undoubtedly the moralizing was a flimsy excuse for printing gory details of murder. More to the point were two other popular forms of moralizing. In one the murderer confessed the awfulness of his crime in first-person, usually in an anguished catalog of his misdeeds. In the other the ballad-writer was the stern moralist who commented upon the barbarity of the crime and the depravity of the criminal. Both devices gave the ballad an opportunity to warn against a host of minor vices in the bargain.

Execution custom from time immemorial demanded that the condemned man give a short speech to the crowd about the scaffold just before the hangman did his work. He was expected to review briefly his sinful existence. He was expected to beg God's forgiveness and perhaps even to ask the spectators to join him in a final prayer. Spectators at executions found the dying speeches of murderers especially interesting. If the criminal were convicted on circumstantial evidence he often waited until the final moment of his life to satisfy public curiosity on the point, "Did he really do it?" The condemned man had good reason for holding off his confession. He hoped to be pardoned. But the delay sometimes stimulated the interest of the execution crowd. These dying speeches became almost as indispensable to a hanging as the gibbet itself. Prisoners in Newgate solemnly discussed the

literary merits of the last speeches of their brethren.¹³

Growing out of these gallows speeches were ballads purporting to have been written by the murderer himself. In these moralizing ballads, the murderer was usually so repentant that even he agreed the world would be better off without him. The stock injunction was that others should profit by his fate.

Such a broadside ballad was one supposedly written by James Selby shortly before a cart rumbled him from Newgate to a gibbet in Goodman's Fields in May, 1691.¹⁴ Less than a month earlier, in the dock of Old Bailey, Selby had heard testimony convicting him of "the Murther of one Mary Bartlett alias Bartley, by Cutting her Throat with a Knife, value 1d. on the 22d of March last, giving her one Mortal Wound of the Breadth of Eight Inches, and of the Depth of Four Inches." The murder took place in a "common Bandy House," kept in Goodman's Fields by Mrs. Bartlett.

The ballad opened with a stanza which with minor variations might have done as a start for any of its genre:

All you that come to see my fatal end,
Unto my dying words I pray attend;
Let my misfortunes now a warning be
To e'ry one of high and low degree.

Selby mulled over his sins for another four stanzas:

Had I been kind and loving to my Wife,
I might have liv'd a long and happy life;
But having run a loose lascivious race,
My days will end in shame and sad disgrace.

¹³ Arthur Griffiths, The Chronicles of Newgate (London: Chapman and Hall, 1884), p. 129.

¹⁴ Hyder Edward Rollins, ed., The Pepys Ballads (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1929-32), vol. VI, pp. 81-90.

My Duty towards God I did neglect,
Therefore what mercy can I now expect;
When I before the mighty Iudge appear;
To answer for my sins committed here.

In wicked pleasures I my days have spent,
And never had the Power to Repent,
Till now at last my dismal doom I see,
The just reward of Cruel Villainy.

Here to the World I solemnly declare,
I seldom did frequent the House of Prayer,
But Harlots Houses and Carousing too,
And now I see what it has brought me to.

Selby reviewed the murder in seven stanzas with proper abhorrence for each detail. A sabbath-day found him in Mrs. Bartlett's house. A "Harlot with a pleasing smile" invited him into an upper room, where they "in sin the Sabbath did consume." The "Glass with Sider," augmented by cherry-brandy, passed often. Nearly stupefied, Selby at length started to leave. Mrs. Bartlett detained him. She suggested that he "all night between her Nurse and she should lye." Selby so despised the offer that:

Then did I take in hand a bloody Knife,
With which I soon bereaved her of life,
For why, I cut her throat immediately,
Thus Drunk I sent her to Eternity.

Selby concluded his tale with three more stanzas of self-reproach and one asking the Lord's forgiveness of his "sins of a scarlet dye."

That Selby wrote or even saw the ballad attributed to him was of course extremely doubtful. Just as modern reporters ghost-write tabloid confessions of murders, so did broadside writers prepare dying verses for condemned men--usually no doubt, without their knowledge. Many of the dying verses were so similar in form that they might have been written by a common hand.

So many of these lamentations were set to the air Fortune My Foe that it came to be known as the "hanging tune." Many of these hack-written ballads vouch for their own authenticity with such statements as "which he wrote the day before his death," "made with his owne hand in the Marshalsee, after his condemnation" and "written by the said Coeby in the time of his imprisonment."¹⁵

Though such claims of veracity may have reassured the gullible, they were of course no guarantee of authenticity. Truth, if it stood in the way of a good story, was brushed aside. It seems to have been in the case of James Bird.¹⁶ A former Oxford student, Bird was hanged at Tyburn September 18, 1691, for the murder of his wife Elizabeth. He had married the girl, his social inferior, while at the University. When she came to London great with child and the marriage outraged Bird's father, the young husband determined to make himself a widower. He lured his wife to a lonely place. There he cut her throat. To the end, he is said to have refused to confess his part in the murder. A single sheet reporting his dying speech said that at the scaffold he spoke as follows:

I know it hath been expected by this Company, that I should give some particular Account to the World of this Fact for which I dye: It is from God alone from whom I must expect a Pardon, and God only knows how far I am concern'd in it; so I shall not trouble myself with any Publick Declaration of the matter here.

The Ordinary of Newgate, too, reported that Bird died without

¹⁵ Shaaber, op. cit., pp. 143-44.

¹⁶ Rollins, The Pepye Ballads, vol. 6, pp. 115-21.

confessing.

Nonetheless, Bird's confession appeared in a broadside ballad printed for P. Brooksby, J. Deacon and J. Back. Its cumbersome title was as follows:

THE Murtherer's Moan;
Or, The Penitent Lamentation of J. B. Gent. for the Murther
of his Wife Elizabeth, which he bitterly lamented, a little
before his Execution, which was at Tyburn, on the 18th of
this Instant September, 1691.

In the broadside ballad, Bird was made to confess to the murder, which he lamented:

For why she like a Lamb indeed,
did to her Slaughter go,
And when she for her Life did plead,
no pity would I show;
But did the bloody Knife extend,
which gave the fatal wound,
For which my life is at an end,
with Sorrows compast round.

The publishers may have decided that the confession was a necessary ingredient of the ballad for street sales whether Bird made it or not. Or they may have published their sheet in advance of the execution on the reasonable assumption that Bird would confess at the gallows.

Although the majority of first person broadside confessions were undoubtedly the work of hacks, impending death did stir the pens of some criminals. The poem written by Chidiock Titchborne on the eve of his execution in 1586, for instance, is included in present day anthologies.¹⁷ Whether or not it appeared in broad-

¹⁷ See, for instance, William Rose Benet and Conrad Aiken, editors, An Anthology of Famous English and American Poetry (New York: Modern Library, 1945), pp. 26-27.

side form, the writer has been unable to discover. Since Titchborne's execution was reported by the broadside press, it probably did. From time to time criminals languishing in prison prepared their own stories for the press. Most of these confessions seem to have been issued in pamphlet form, but the early broadsheet no doubt reaped its share of this execution-eve harvest.

Not always was the broadside scribbler a ghost-writer. As often he was reporter. He reported, however, with a moral for his reader and with reproach and indignation for the murderer. "Monster," "wretch" and "beast" were his synonyms when he apparently could not bear to mention the murderer by name. Thus the murderer of Mary Cox, a London servant girl, was a "barbarous Dame," a "fierce Dame," a "monster," a "merciless savage Dame."¹⁸ Her name was Elizabeth Deacon. The writer who set her story to the tune of Grim King of the Ghosts dubbed her "The Whipster of Woodstreet."

"Wilful murther" was the verdict of the jury when Elizabeth Deacon stood her trial in the Old Bailey in February, 1690. Before the jurymen reached their verdict, according to a contemporary account of the trial reprinted by Rollins, they heard an "abundance of Witnesses." One of the abundance, an apprentice, testified that Mrs. Deacon became suspicious when she discovered her servant maid, Mary Cox, in possession of a shilling. Suspecting the girl of theft, Mrs. Deacon "ty'd her to the Bedpost, and whipt her very sorely." The girl persisted in her

¹⁸ Rollins, The Pepys Ballads, vol. VI, pp. 28-33.

denials. "Extremely enraged at her," Mrs. Deacon whipped her intermittently throughout the week. On Saturday she burned the girl "with the Fire-Poker upon the Head, Shoulders, and Back, after a most inhuman Manner, and then gave her a Blow on the Head with a Hammer." The following Tuesday Mary died. In her defense, Mrs. Deacon said that Mary "had Conversation with a Parcel of Thieves, and was a Girl of a very sullen obstinate, temper."

Damning the murderess, the broadside writer took Mary's side. His account of the crime began:

Assist me some mournful Muse,
 while I a sad Story relate;
 Let all that these Lines peruse,
 lament a poor maids hard fate;
 Who Guiltless and Innocent fell,
 by the hands of a barbarous Dame:
 As fierce as a fury of Hell,
 her sexes eternal shame.

Whereas Mrs. Deacon saw Mary was sullen and obstinate, the broadside reporter viewed her as standing "undaunted and boldly" in her own defense. "Which made the fierce Dame commence," he added, "a Tragedy full of Blood."

she caus'd her to be fast bound
 to the post of her husbands bed,
 where she did her body wound,
 and whipped her almost dead:
 thus did she a Confession extort,
 of Crimes which the Maid never knew,
 tormenting her in such a sort,
 as wou'd make ones heart for to rue.

This monster not satisfied yet,
 tho' the blood run from every part,
 Made an Iron red hot in a pet,
 resolving to give her more smart,
 she burnt her in shoulders and thighs,
 and sev'ral times under her ears,
 she wou'd not come near her Eyes,
 lest th' iron shou'd be quench'd with her tears.

"No Tygress within her Den," the writer observed, "e're shew'd a more savage mind." He seemed satisfied that she would be getting her just deserts when "of the homp she must taste."

For their details of crimes such as that of Mrs. Deacon, many ballad writers drew on printed books of news. Time and again publishers simultaneously entered book and ballad with the Stationers' Company. If they were entered a few days apart, the book generally preceded the ballad. As a rule book and ballad were entered by the same publisher. He had a sort of proprietary right to exploit his news in both book and ballad. Most publishers safeguarded this right by issuing the items together.¹⁹

In addition to the pamphlets reporting individual crimes, the 17th-Century ballad writer had two rich sources of material. One was The Proceedings on the King and Queens Commissions of the Peace, and Oyer and Terminer, and Gaol-Delivery of Newgate...at Justice-Hall in the Old-Baily. This was a regularly issued official, or semi-official, account of criminal trials in the Old Bailey. It continued on into the 18th Century, when its publication changed from the hands of one publisher to another. A second source was the semi-official pamphlets written by the Ordinary of Newgate. Sale of these pamphlets was one of the perquisites of the prison chaplains, and they guarded their rights to it carefully. The ordinary had free access to prisoners at all times, and his duties required extremely confidential relations with them. Hence he was in an excellent position to obtain

¹⁹ Shaaber, op. cit., pp. 196-97.

a great deal of curious and often authentic information from condemned prisoners.²⁰ Much of this information appeared in his pamphlets which included the prison behavior, confessions, last sermons and dying speeches of condemned offenders.

How one of these chaplains gathered his information is described in a story about Samuel Smith, ordinary of Newgate prison in the last years of the 17th Century.²¹ Smith closely examined condemned prisoners in his private closet. When a young prisoner was brought to him one day, he said, "Well, boy, now is the time to unbosom thyself to me. Thou hast been a great sabbath-breaker in thy time I warrant thee? The neglect of going to church has brought thee under these unhappy circumstances." The criminal denied that drinking and the other vices the ordinary mentioned had anything to do with his being under sentence of death. Finding no vice to enlarge upon in his pamphlet, Smith entered the prisoner in his account as an obstinate, case-hardened rogue.

Some murders evoked a surprisingly large number of broadsides. The quantity indicates that even as early as the 17th Century publishers knew a good news story when they saw one. In 1614-15 the murder of Sir Thomas Overbury, one of the celebrated crimes of the time, kept the broadside press busy.²² Four persons were executed for the crime. The Earl and Countess of

²⁰ Griffiths, op. cit., p. 200.

²¹ Ibid., p. 369.

²² For account of case, see William Roughhead, "The Fatal Countess," The Fatal Countess and Other Studies (Edinburgh: W. Green and Son, Ltd., 1927), pp. 3-44.

Somerset were convicted of complicity, and possibly James I himself was involved. Although the broadsides made almost no mention of Somerset and his wife--their position and connections took care of that--publishers thoroughly exploited the lesser figures in the case. Shaaber lists 15 contemporary publications dealing with the case, most of them ballads or broadsides.²³ Some of these broadsides are listed and described by Lemon.²⁴ One, printed after the trials for poisoning had taken place, was The Portraiture of Sir Thomas Overbury, Knight, aetat 52. The basis for all subsequent likenesses of Overbury, the picture showed the murdered knight writing his own epitaph. Another sheet, bearing the imprint of John VWhite, was Sir Thomas Overbury or the Poysoned Knight's Complaint. A short poem by Samuel Rowlands called for justice upon the murderers. The illustration showed a skeleton lying on a tomb, which was flanked by the figures of Time and Justice. On the tomb was the verse:

Within this house of Death a dead man lies,
Whose blood, like Abels, up for vengeance cries:
Time hath revealed what to trusth belongs,
And Justice swords is drawne to right my wrongs.
You poysoned mindes did me with poyson Kill,
Let true repentance purge you from that ill.

Other broadsheets dealing with the case included Mistres Turner's Repentance, Who, about the poysoning of that Ho: Knight Sir Thomas Overbury, VWas executed the fourteenth day of November last, a poem descriptive of Mrs. Turner's conduct at her exe-

²³ Shaaber, loc. cit., pp. 142-44.

²⁴ Robert Lemon, ed., Catalogue of a Collection of Printed Broad-sides in the Possession of the Society of Antiquaries of London (London: Society of Antiquaries, 1856), pp. 44-46.

cution, and James Franklin, A Kentishman of Maidstone, his ovnne Arraignment, Confession, Condemnation, and Judgment of Himselfe, whilst hee lay Prisoner in the Kings Bench for the Poisoning of Sir Thomas Overbury. Hee was executed the 9 of December, 1615.

Mary Compton in 1693 furnished material aplenty to broadside publishers, who dubbed her "The Bloody minded Midwife." She murdered several children put in her care. At least four broadside ballads reported her case at its various stages.²⁵ One reported discovery of "a Barbarous Cruelty to several Children that had been made away, and buried privately in a Sellar, and two hid in a Hand-basket." A second contained an account of "many Infants whom she Murther'd or starv'd to Death." The wicked lady was in Newgate prison when the third was issued. The sheet reported her uneasiness there; she was afraid "of the Devil tearing her alive out of the Bed every Night." Found guilty, she was sentenced to death. Her "Sorrowful Confession and Lamentation" were the stuff of the fourth broadside.

Comparatively soon after its birth, when the newspaper was still in the toddling stage, the broadside was an effective crime reporting medium. Like the literature of roguery, it reflected the crimes of the period. But while rogue pamphlets dealt exclusively with crimes that were gray at the darkest, the broadside showed no such partiality. The broadside could make a good thing of romantic crimes akin to roguery, as the next chapter will illustrate; but as the present chapter has shown, it also

²⁵ Rollins, The Pepys Ballads, vol. VII, pp. 3-20.

recognized the popular appeal of crimes that were brutal. Murder, one of the blackest of crimes, from the beginning was a favorite broadside topic. It would continue so until the end of the broadside.

In its first years, too, the broadside assumed general characteristics that were to stamp its murder reporting for the greater part of three centuries. The broadside account was not always trustworthy. It took liberties with facts and tended to sensationalize. It blended moralizing with reporting; and, especially in the early years, the moralizing often predominated. It was parasitical on other forms of reporting. All of these, as well as the murderer's dying lamentation, were to be features of the broadside until its end.

BROADSIDES ABOUT HIGHWAYMEN

Of all criminals, the darling of the populace was the highwayman, who in the 17th Century infested the lanes and highroads of Britain and had already assumed the brevet rank of captain. Astride his fleet mare, he galloped over the island robbing the mails, merchants, foreigners of note, noblemen, high officials and even the king himself. He also galloped into the hearts of broadside writers and readers.

All manner of men turned to the highwayman's gentlemanly calling. Young boys took to the road; and, if contemporary stories are to be believed, so did young women. Royal guardsmen in their off-duty hours robbed on the highways. Tradesmen, after putting up their shop shutters, rode off to waylay travelers. Even a parson was convicted of being in league with highwaymen. Innkeepers often furnished road robbers information about wealthy travelers.¹ So numerous were the robbers, so frequent and bold their robberies that scarcely a traveler was safe, as has been pointed out in the opening chapter.

Using a forerunner of the modern police line-up, authorities made suspected highwaymen ride their horses back and forth in front of Newgate, where victims could try to identify them. But attempts to curb the banditti were ineffective.

Despite all the inconvenience they caused, however, highway-

¹ Arthur Griffiths, The Chronicles of Newgate (London: Chapman and Hall, 1884), pp. 104-06.

men were regarded by the populace as dashing gallants who lived--and died--colorfully, a notion that the broadside fostered. Even King Charles II took an interest in highwaymen. His favorite was William Nevison. Impressed by Nevison's wit and horsemanship, the king dubbed him "Swift Nicks." The highwaymen lived up to the public's opinion of them by decking themselves out in finery, by combining gallantry with their violence and by assuming non-chalance even in the shadow of the gallows. These virtues did not escape broadside writers' notice.

Highwayman Claude DeVall once played the flageolet as he approached the coach of a knight and lady he planned to rob, according to his biographer.² DuVall charmingly invited the lady to dance with him on the heath, and "scarcely a dancing master in London but would have been proud to show such agility in a pair of pumps as DuVall showed in a pair of French riding-boots." The dance concluded, he returned the lady to her escort, whom he relieved of 100 pounds. He spared the gentleman another 300 pounds because the victim allowed himself to be robbed with such good grace.

When the gallows-noose dangled over their heads, highwaymen retained their devil-may-care spirit. John Rann--better known as Sixteen-String Jack--had seven girls as his guests at a farewell dinner party while awaiting execution.³ For his date with the

² Captain Johnson, Lives of the Highwaymen (London: Sisley's Ltd., n.d.), pp. 144-45.

³ Reprint of The Newgate Calendar, intro. by Henry Savage (Hartford: Edwin Valentine Mitchell, 1926), p. 189.

hangman, Dick Turpin bought a new suit of fuetian and a new pair of pumps. He hired five poor men at 10 shillings a head to mourn at his execution and provided them with mourning-bands.⁴ After hanging, Claude DuVall lay in state in a black-draped tavern room in St. Giles.⁵

The romantic flair of the highwayman put him in a class apart from child-murderers, wife-destroyers, servant-beaters or any of the malefactors discussed in the preceding chapter. The populace took a naive delight in him, and its attitude was reflected in the broadsides of the time. In some of the sheets about the executions of men of the road, the writers plainly indicated they thought it a shame that society should deprive itself of such noble figures. In others there was the customary moralizing. The highwaymen themselves repented their wickedness in prose or verse, or a narrator pointed out the tragic end to which their sin had led them. Yet one gets the impression that no one took these little sermons seriously.

An early highwayman who apparently combined journalism with robbery was Luke Hutton, one-time Cambridge scholar. Sir John Harrington believed Hutton to have been a younger son of Matthew Hutton, archbishop of York; other authorities have said, with more probability, that he was the son of Robert Hutton, rector of Houghton-le-Spring and prebendary of Durham.⁶ Whatever his ante-

⁴ Griffiths, op. cit., p. 169.

⁵ Ibid., p. 110.

⁶ The Dictionary of National Biography (Oxford, reprinted 1921-22), vol. X, pp. 356-57.

cedents, Hutton appears to have been executed at York in 1598 for a robbery committed on St. Luke's Day. Two works ascribed to Hutton are his Repentance, a manuscript poem dedicated to Henry, Earl of Huntington, and The Black Dogge of Newgate, a prose tract. He also was reputedly author of Luke Hutton's Lamentation, a broad-side ballad which he wrote the day before his death.⁷ It was an autobiography in verse reciting the robberies committed by himself and the 12 ruffians he styled his "twelve Apostles." Although the ballad called itself a lamentation, its stanzas of repentance could not hide the attitude that a highwayman's life was a pretty good one, after all. Mourned Luke:

I am a poore prisoner condemned to dye,
 Ah woe is me, woe is me, for my great folly!
 Fast fettered in yrons in place where I lie.
 Be warned yong wantons, homp passeth green holly.

But his reference to his days on the highroad bordered almost on nostalgia:

There was no squire nor barron bold,
 Ah woe is me, woe is men, for my great folly!
 That rode the way with silver and gold,
 Be warned yong wantons, &c.
 But I and my twelve Apostles gaie
 Would lighten their load ere they went away.

Eventually the "shirriffe of Yorke-shire" served Hutton with a warrant and the words, "At Yorke thou must be tride, with me therefore hence must thou ride." Recalling the arrest, Hutton was not all sorrow; he cherished the bravado of the occasion:

Like pangues of death his words did sound:
 Ah woe is me, &c.
 My hands and armes full fast be bound.
 Be warned, &c.

⁷ Charles Hindley, Curiosities of Street Literature (London: Reeves and Turner, 1871), p. 165.

Good sir, quoth I, I had rather stay,
I have no heart to ride that way....

When no entreaty might prevaile,
Ah woe is me, &c.
I calde for beere, for wine and ale;
Be warned, &c.
And when my heart was in wofull case,
I drunke to my friends with a smiling face.

Whether the conclusion was whimsy or Hutton's faith in his salvation, the reader could decide for himself:

When on the ladder you shall me view,
Thinke I am neerer heaven then you.

Hutton himself may have written the broadside, but his authorship is doubtful. If he were its author, the ballad undoubtedly would have contained more factual information about his life.⁸ The ballad was entered in the Stationers' Register in December, 1595, a fact which might seem to cast some doubt on 1598 as the year of Hutton's execution. A likely explanation is that Hutton was pardoned after conviction of a capital crime in 1595.⁹ When Hutton actually did die by the noose, Thomas Millington of London appears to have capitalized on the execution by bringing out the old sheet, since his imprint and year 1598 appear on the broadside reprinted by Hindley.

Hutton's broadside repentance may have been tongue in cheek. When Nevison died, a versifier was openly sorry to see him go. Nevison, who charmed the king, has furnished crime fanciers with what was perhaps the first faked alibi on record. An undated broadside¹⁰ which reviewed Nevison's misdeeds in prose and verse

⁸ A. V. Judges, ed., The Elizabethan Underworld (London: George Routledge and Sons, Ltd., 1930), p. 507.

⁹ Loc. cit.

¹⁰ Hindley, op. cit., p. 169.

After committing a robbery in London, about sunrise, he rode his mare to York in the course of the day, and appeared on the bowling green of that city before sunset. From this latter circumstance, when brought to trial for the offence, he established an alibi to the satisfaction of the jury, though in reality he was guilty.

Nevison has often been cheated of his alibi-making ride, correctly attributed to him by the broadside; later crime chroniclers sometimes have erroneously credited Dick Turpin with it. In further summarizing the fame of Nevison, the prose section of the broadside reported, "In all his exploits, Nevison was tender to the fair sex, and bountiful to the poor." A true loyalist, the sheet continued, he never levied any contributions on the Royalists. After having his life spared by royal clemency, he retired until after his father's death.

But soon after returned to his former courses, his name became the terror of every traveller on the road. He levied a quarterly tribute on all the northern drovers, and in return not only spared them himself, but protected them against all other thieves, and the carriers who frequented the road willingly agreed to leave certain sums at such places as he appointed, to prevent their being stripped of all.

There was little unfavorable to Nevison in the prose. The worst he was called was "the great robber of the north." The versifier was frankly admiring in his section of the sheet, a review of the highwayman's capture and trial under the head, "Bold Nevison, the Highwayman."

He maintained himself like a gentleman,
Besides he was good to the poor;
He rode about like a bold hero,
And he gain's himself favour therefore.

The verse related that Nevison was captured "on the Twenty-first day of last month," which was "an unfortunate day." In his de-

fense at his trial, Nevison was quoted as saying:

"I never robb'd a gentleman of twopence,
But what I gave half to the blost,
But guilty I've been all my life time,
So gentleman do as you list.

* * *

"But peace I have made with my Maker,
And to be with Him I'ready to draw;
So here's adieu! to this world and its vanities,
For I am ready to suffer the law."

It is hardly conceivable that a murderer, say, or an ordinary street robber would have received so favorable a press. One reason of course may well be that the sheet was published years after Nevison's death when glorious legend overlaid the true character of the man; Rollins has pointed out that the sheet is not contemporary.¹¹ But that is not the full explanation. Broadside men were undeniably kind to the highway crew. Glamor did the trick for the highwayman. His crimes were often committed over a long period of time, during which a trivial half-truth could sire a full-length story of chivalry.

Perhaps the legends of Robin Hood and his merry bowmen, legends of outlawry preserved in ballad form but quite beyond the scope of this work, helped to give the highwayman an aura of blessedness. Just as present day writers often compare a shop-girl who rises to romantic heights with Cinderella, broadside scribes saw many an unscrupulous pistol-packer as a contemporary Robin Hood.

¹¹ Hyder Edward Rollins, ed., *The Pepye Ballads* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1929-32), vol. III, p. 124.

The ballad about Nevison quoted him as saying that "whatever I took from the rich, I freely gave to the poor." A broadside writer of the late 17th Century credited a highwayman named Biss with a similar profit-sharing nature. Like most highwaymen, he got respectful broadside treatment. Biss was executed at Salisbury on March 12, 1695, according to the broadside.¹² At his trial, Biss contended that he had obeyed the scriptures despite his unlawful profession. Said he to the judge, "For when the Naked I beheld, I clothed them with speed." He fed the poor, he added, and sent the rich away empty-pocketed.

What say you now my honour'd Lord,
 what harm was there in this?
 Rich wealthy Misers was abhorr'd
 by brave freehearted Biss.
 I never robb'd nor wrong'd the Poor,
 as well it doth appear;
 Be pleas'd to favour me therefore,
 and be not too severe.

The judge was not impressed by these hints that Biss was a latter day Robin Hood. He said:

By Law you are condemn'd to Dye,
 you will no Pardon gain,
 Therefore, Repent, repent with speed,
 for what is gone and past,
 Tho' you the Poor did clothe and feed,
 you suffer must at last.

Biss took his punishment like a man, although the sentence pierced him "like a fatal sword." In the best broadside tradition, the sheet noted his untimely departure from the world:

O kind and loving Friends, he cry'd,
 take warning now by me,
 Who must the pains of Death abide,
 this day in Salisbury.

¹² Ibid., vol. VII, pp. 201-204.

Some good examples of the romantic notions that broadsides fostered about highwaymen appeared in a ballad concerning Captain James Whitney, hanged in 1693.¹³ Whitney appears to have been captured because someone put him on the spot; at least two of his biographers believed that "someone" to have been one Madame Cozens, keeper of a bawdy house. The woman was shorn of all the sordidness of her profession in the ballad, which pictured her as a jealous, love-struck young maiden. And it might be noted that the ballad writer, far from commending the woman for performing her civic duty in bringing a criminal to book, inferred that self-destruction was the only fate left for her after she had played Judas to so gallant a figure as Whitney. She, not the highwayman, was reprimanded. The ballad called itself "Whitney's Dying Letter To his Mistriss that betray'd him: With her Answer." Snarled Whitney:

False Wretch, why would thou thus betray
my Life, whilst in its Prine!
Sure Terror haunts thy breast each day
For so unjust a crime.

His consolation was that:

The World will surely see,
Some dreadful death or misery,
Will doubtless fall on thee.

Repenting her treachery, the woman agreed with almost everything Whitney said against her. Her lamentations, as the ballad writer penned them, extended over six stanzas. Cried she:

¹³ Ibid., vol. VI, pp. 313-19.

But since through Envy I Betray'd
 Poor Whittney [sic] to his fall,
 By my own Treachery I am made
 A Wretch condemned by all.

* * *

With this bright Dagger in my hand,
 I'll give my Woes relief;
 This fatal Stobb shall now Command
 And end to all my grief.
 Dear Whittney [sic] 'tis for thee I bleed,
 I brought thee to thy Doom.
 Which makes me Act this bloody Deed,
 And now dear Soul I come.

Thus the shabby betrayal of a criminal by a bawdy house keeper acquired, at the hands of a ballad writer, the air of great tragedy. Londoners probably loved it. Whitney was their favorite.

Even when the writer felt obliged to condemn the highwayman, his admiration sometimes peeped through his bombast. Such was the case in a ballad that J. Deacon turned out at the Angel "in Guilt-spur-street without Newgate."¹⁴ The epitome of bravado, the incident was summarized in the title:

Summers his Frolick.

Shewing, How he was Condemned (this last Lent Assizes, 1694. at Alisbury) for a Highway-Man. And how he sold his body, in Goal [sic], for eight shillings to a Surgeon, to be made an Anatomy of after it was hang'd, and how he drank the money all out in Wine before he went to be Executed.

True or not, the situation was an interesting one for the ballad writer. He could capitalize on the devil-may-care attitude, but he could not condone it. The writer reported the transaction itself with minor irritation and saved his tirade for

¹⁴ Ibid., vol. VII, pp. 39-43.

the concluding stanzas. Nonetheless, the ballad implies a grudging admiration, at least, for the body-vending badman. The highwayman himself was not entirely to blame for the deed; the Devil had a hand in it. The Devil had a hand in many a crime, as a later chapter will show. The Devil not only prevented prisoners from repenting,

But puts them off to rant and drink,
 damn and curse, and swagger,
 To play at Cards and Dices too
 and all things that are badder.
 And when they mony want, they sell
 their lives and bodys too...

So it was with Summers. He could not sell his soul "for none would bid him mony for 't, it was so black and foul."

A Sargeon then to encrease his skill,
 in bodys to Disect,
 In Goal [sic] did come and there did buy
 his body all compleat.
 The price he paid were shillings eight,
 for more it was not worth...

As soon as Summers was paid, he got so drunk that he could not stand. Grumbled the ballad writer, "O fye on such that thus expose their souls and bodys too!"

In the 18th Century, when highwaymen still ranked several notches above the run of criminals in popular esteem, not all men of the road got a good broadside press. Four highwaymen were thwarted by an ingenious cook-maid in one broadside ballad that must have had little basis in fact. The broadside, which was published about 1750 and which is preserved in the Harvard Library collection, was called The Cook-Maid's Garland.

According to the ballad, five gentlemen traveling from London to Rygate were robbed of all their clothing and their money

by four highwaymen. When the naked gentlemen sought refuge at an inn in Rygate, the staff was so frightened that no one would let them in.

At length a handsome brisk cook-maid
 Unto the door did run.
 With candle in her hand, sir,
 The girl at them did stare;
 The gentlemen most modestly
 With their hands did cover their ware.

After the cook-maid had coaxed the innkeeper into clothing the unexpected guests, she bet them her virtue against 100 pounds that she could capture the highwaymen. Next night the gentlemen were to wait in ambush, she said, and she would drive the robbers into their hands. While the gentlemen scoffed, she went about her secret preparations.

The girl she open'd a bed, sir,
 Was made of coney-wool down,
 Then daubing herself with soot and size,
 She roll'd herself quite o'er;
 So hairy she was from top to toe,
 The like was never seen before
 The horns of a stag of a monstrous size
 She did make fast behind;
 And upon her head a rousing pair,
 Which were of another kind;
 With a hollow truncheon in her hand
 Which was with gunpowder fill'd;
 She look'd like the dragon of Wantley
 Which in the country was kill'd.

Literally looking like the devil, the cook-maid tied herself onto a horse and set out on her errand. The highwaymen thought she was prey for their pistols until one shouted to his comrades that the devil was after them.

One said, I'll shoot him, said another,
 No, that will not be well,
 For fear he should carry us instantly,
 Along with him to hell.

The cook-maid gave hideous yells and fired gunpowder, and the highwaymen were terrified.

They took to their heels and ran away,
 But the devil pursu'd them fast,
 And drove them to the wilderness
 Where they were trapp'd at last.
 There were some on horseback, some on foot,
 Some had arms, and some had none,
 When the devil found they were safe,
 She strait went galloping home.

Back at the inn, the cook-maid collected her money. One gentleman was so impressed by her cleverness and daring that he claimed her for his wife. Only the highwaymen remained unhappy.

These highwaymen they were bound and ty'd,
 And brought unto the inn;
 Then the devil appeared before them all,
 To shew how mump'd they'd been,
 They curs'd their fate, to a justice strait
 All four were soon convey'd,
 And the girl's reward is a portion good,
 Which hath these rogues betray'd.

The long period over which many highwaymen evaded the law belie the suggestion that they were superstitious fools who could be trapped by cook-maids, false-horned or otherwise. On the other hand, some of the deeds they were responsible for belie the suggestion that they were always as gallant as popular tradition and the bulk of the broadside press made them out to be. The crimes committed in the name of highway robbery were frequently as vicious and as sordid as those committed by less glamorous wrongdoers.

Certainly there was nothing romantic about the treatment a poor laboring man named John Spicer received at the hands of John Austin in 1783. Not even the publisher of a contemporary broad-

side¹⁵ reporting the "cruel highway robbery" saw anything but viciousness and depravity in it. Spicer, traveling to London, met up with Austin, who joined him and in the course of their journey pried from him the amount and nature of his small property. When the pair reached London, Austin left Spicer at a public house while pretending to go out in search of lodging for them. Then, reported the broadside:

Under this specious shew of friendship, Spicer was left for three or four hours, when a man whose name is Patrick Bowman (who also stands indicted, but is not yet taken) came to Spicer with a plausible apology for Austin's leaving him so long, and desired Spicer to go with him to Austin, who had got him a lodging.

Bowman and Spicer went to a second public house, where Austin awaited them. On the pretext of taking Spicer to his lodging, the two criminals led him to "the middle of a field, out of the high road, by the side of a ditch, no house near, nor anything to be seen but the light of some distant lamps." Spicer observed that the spot was "a very comical place" to look for a lodging.

Upon which Austin retired a little, and Patrick Bowman drew a cutlass, with which he kept chopping at the hands, wrists, arms, body, and head of the prosecutor, and mangled him in a most shocking manner. Spicer resisted this attack, and would have got the better of Bowman, if Austin had not come to Bowman's assistance; for when the poor wretch, thinking he had a firm friend in Austin, called out, "O John, won't you come and help me!" Austin immediately seized him by the collar with one hand inside the handkerchief, and with the other caught hold of his legs, and threw him down, when they rifled him.

Austin was no DuVall or Hutton, and the broadside publisher gave his crime a bad review. The robbery was "peculiarly inhuman and aggravated," the broadside reported, and the Old Bailey could

¹⁵ Hindley, *op. cit.*, p. 173.

perhaps afford no "instance more odious, or more reflecting on the depravity of human nature." For all his lack of glamor, for all his wickedness, though, Austin was still a highway robber.

Early in the 19th Century, the number of highway robberies dropped abruptly with the establishment of a police horse patrol. Eventually they virtually ceased altogether.¹⁶ If the highwayman was dead in fact, however, he lived on in legend; and the 19th-Century publishers kept the legend alive with an occasional ballad eulogizing vanished heroes, such as one about Turpin printed by James Catnach and recalling that:

Now Turpin in caught, and tried and cast,
And for a game cock must die at last,
One hundred pounds when he did die,
He left Jack Ketch for a legacy.

But the truth was that the highwayman furnished poorer copy than in time past and the number of pennies he could coax into publishers' tills was limited. For almost all of their profitable copy, 19th-Century publishers looked gratefully to the murderers, who were always with them.

¹⁶ Griffiths, op. cit., pp. 324-25.

PIRATES, TRAITORS AND MISCELLANEOUS MALEFACTORS

The highwayman who light-heartedly relieved travelers of their valuables had his sea-going counterpart in the pirate throughout most of the lifetime of the broadside. Highwaymen and pirates, in a sense, were similar. Both were mobile and conducted their depredations over a wide area. Both were numerous. Men of the highroad who roistered in Newgate before their executions often had a number of sea-dogs for company. In the early 18th Century the prison sometimes held as many as 60 or 70 pirates awaiting trial.¹ The two classes of badmen went about their lawlessness in business-like fashion; both used spiss to supply them with intelligence about likely victims. In the first half of the 18th Century especially, pirates were as clever at getting information about rich prizes on the sea as highwaymen were on the highroad.² And despite the fact that pirates were surly, greedy brutes at best, they were often regarded by broadside writers and readers as belonging to a calling as romantic as the highwayman's.

From time to time throughout the age of the broadside, pirates had their day in its columns. They took their turn with a host of less glamorous folks of varying degrees of villainy whose crimes usually lacked the delicious horror of murder but were too wicked or too interesting to be ignored--traitors, mutineers,

¹ Arthur Griffiths, The Chronicles of Newgate (London: Chapman and Hall, 1884), p. 259.

² Loc. cit.

coiners, thieves and abductors.

Pirates were among the first real-life rogues to romp through the pages of criminal pamphlets; and the lamentations in verse of three sea-dogs named Arnold, Clinton and Walton appeared in 1583, the year of their hanging.³ Even after land-locked malefactors supplanted pirates in popular favor, some writers kept an eye on the evil being done at sea. Dying speeches of pirates seem to have been perennially good broadside copy. They appear to have been published from the late 16th Century until 1864, when Londoners bought 290,000 copies of sheets about the execution of five pirates from a ship called the Flowery Land.

Londoners could hear the speeches from the pirates' own lips if they wished, for sea scoundrels were executed in public with a nautical flourish. Their usual hanging place from as early as the reign of Henry VI was Execution Dock, Wapping, in early times a vast, muddy waste, flooded at intervals by the Thames. After the pirates had been hanged, their corpses were chained to a post where they would be washed by the tide. The last execution at Wapping was in 1753.⁴ In later years, pirates kept their appointments with the hemp at Old Bailey, where the Flowery Land crew was hanged.

It was from a hanging at Execution Dock that Charles Barnet,

³ Frank Wadleigh Chandler, The Literature of Roguery (New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1907), vol. I, pp. 140-41.

⁴ Graham Brooks, ed., Trial of Captain Kidd, Notable British Trial Series (Edinburgh: Wm. Hodge and Co., Ltd., 1930), p. 222.

a London publisher, got the stuff of a broadside ballad in 1696.⁵ The sheet moralized more than it reported but it nonetheless gave the reader a glimpse of pirates' adventures. The five condemned men were of the crew of Captain Henry Every, perhaps the most famous pirate of the 17th Century. They had been acquitted at their first trial, but their second trial had ended with the death sentence. The heading of Barnet's sheet advertised that the ballad included the pirates' "free Confession of their most Horrid Crimes." This, however, was journalistic exaggeration. The confession was in disappointingly general terms:

We Robb'd a Ship upon the Seas,
 the Gunsway call'd by name,
 VVhich we met near the East-Indias,
 and Rifled the same;
 In it was Gold and Silver store,
 of which all had a share,
 Each man 600 Pounds and more.
 let Pirates then take care.

Thus for some time we liv'd, and Reign'd
 as masters of the Sea,
 Every Merchant we detain'd,
 and us'd most cruelly,
 The Treasures took, we sunk the Ship,
 with these that in it were,
 That would not unto us submit,
 let Pirates then take care.

In the tradition of the time, the ballad was largely one long moan of repentance offered as a warning to other pirates. Since the five men executed were popularly supposed to represent but a fraction of Every's crew and since many a ship manned by cut-throats prowled the main, there were pirates aplenty to heed the warning if they would.

⁵ Hyder Edward Rollins, ed., The Pepys Ballads (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1929-32), vol. VII, pp. 239-44.

Now farewell to this Wicked VWorld,
 and our Companions too,
 From hence we quickly shall be hurl'd
 to clear the way for you,
 For certainly if e're you come
 to Justice as we are,
 Deserved death will be your doom,
 then Pirates all take care.

Readers who cared less for edification than for news of the wild deeds that the pirates had committed at sea would have passed up the ballad for a prose sheet reprinted by Rollins.⁶ Under the guise of deploring the pirates' transgressions, the publisher made the most of his opportunity for sensational copy:

They perpetrated those unheard-of Barbarities, as such plundering and rifling all the Veseels they met with, Ravishing and Deflowering the Virgine and Women, and then turning them out naked, to starve upon shore, amongst Rocks and Desarte. But above all, nothing was so horrid, as their Surprizing a Ship of the King of the Indie, where they first took away an infinite Treasure, most inhumanely Ravisht a Young Princess, and the rest of her Female Train, and afterwarde left the Ship disarm'd and disabled, floating as a wreck upon the Sea, with near 1000 Souls on Board, thereby exposed to inevitable Starving.

According to the prose version, the pirates were as penitent as the broadside made them out to be; but that was to be expected; most condemned criminals were. Reported the prose sheet:

William Bishop, said but little, but own'd himself as deep a sinner as the others; and that his three years Roving upon the Seas, was now a very Melancholy Thought to his Soul, and so much the more to consider the Brutality of his Crimee, as being one of a more Barbarous Crew than the Generality of Offenders of that kind.

Adam Foresith, was very Penitent, and truly own'd that besides the Guilt of his Offences, and the present capital Punishment, his Wicked Life, attended with the many Hardships and Hazards he had undergone in his Rob-

⁶ Ibid., vol. VII, pp. 239-41.

beries, was little less than a Punishment; for wickedness (let it prosper never so much) brings great many troubles and afflictions with it.

The three comrades who were hanged with Bishop and Foresith were similarly sorry for their wickedness. Although the publishers of both the ballad and the prose sheet outwardly abhorred the pirates' misdeeds, there are indications that the public had a soft spot in its heart for the sea rovers. There are indications of it, for instance, in a broadside ballad making the pirate's life seem a glorious, enviable one. The ballad was allegedly "A Copy of Verses, Composed By Captain Henry Every, Lately Gone to Sea to seek his Fortune."⁷ In it he appealed for men to join his crew:

Come all you brave Boys, whose Courage is bold,
Will you venture with me, I'll glut you with Gold?
Make haste unto Corona, a Ship you will find,
That's called the Fancy, will pleasure your mind.

* * *

Our Names shall be blazed and spread in the Sky,
And many brave Places I hope to descry,
Where never a French man e'er yet has been,
Nor any proud Dutchman can say he has seen.

A public that would tolerate, even pay penalties for, a pirate's advertisement for criminal personnel was not one that considered his type entirely damnable. A broadside⁸ chronicling the execution of the five pirates of the Flowers Land almost two centuries after Captain Every was downright sympathetic. The sheet, from the press of Henry Disley in St. Giles, was a combi-

⁷ Ibid., vol. VII, pp. 234-38.

⁸ Charles Hindley, Curiosities of Street Literature (London: Reeves and Turner, 1871), p. 217. A similar broadside is in Harvard Library collection.

nation of prose and verse. The prose section reported that the hanging of the five foreign sailors in February, 1864, for "the wilful murder of George Smith upon the high seas" brought out the greatest execution crowd "ever remembered by the oldest inhabitant in the City." The spectators were "of the same class as usually attend these exhibitions, with the addition of a fair sprinkling of seafaring men." There was nothing in the details of the execution itself to distinguish it from hundreds of others. The verses affixed to the prose dealt tenderly with the criminals:

Is there not one spark of pity,
 For five poor unhappy men,
 Doomed, alas! in London city,
 On a tree their lives to end?
 The dreadful crime which they committed,
 On the raging, stormy sea,
 By every one must be admitted,
 They each deserved to punished be.

* * *

Their victims they did show no mercy,
 No time for to prepare did give,
 They kill'd them in a barbarous manner,
 And they were not fit to live,
 We pity them on the gallows,
 Englishmen could not deny,
 Now, alas, their days are ended,
 They died on Newgate's gallows high.

Between those two stanzas, the first and last, the verse recalled the crime for which the men suffered, commented on the great excitement their case had caused, described the execution and advised sailors to take warning from it. The verse suggested that the men may have had some justification for the murder:

Sometimes at sea there's cruel usage,
 And men to frenzy oft are drove,
 They're always wrong by men in power,
 And that there's many a sailor knows.

Of course the men should never have committed murder, the sheet added; the whole affair was one of sadness.

Far away from friends and kindred,
 They unpitied on the drop did stand,
 Sad was the deed that they committed,
 On board the fatal Flowery Land.

The pirates little deserved the broadside writer's sympathy. In a plot to murder their officers and seize the ship, they had beaten their first mate unmercifully and tossed him, still alive, into the sea. They had stabbed to death their captain and his brother-in-law. They had robbed the captain's cabin of clothes and money and had divided up much of the merchandise aboard.⁹ All in all, they scarcely warranted the pity that the broadside expressed.

The tears that the broadside shed on pirates flowed not for traitors, who were exploited as fully in the sheets as were villains of the sea; traitors invariably got a hostile press. During the lifetime of the broadside, a long procession of men bared their necks on the chopping block or climbed the scaffold to pay the price for treasonable activities. In troubled seasons, the politics or religion that a man held often decided whether or not he was a traitor. With the definition of treason used as loosely as it was, traitors were numerous; so were broadsheets about them. The unfriendly attitude toward them on the part of the broadside

⁹ Griffiths, op. cit., pp. 538-41.

was logical. Treason at times may have been a crime of futile bravado, but it rarely was a romantic one. The secrecy and skulking that generally went hand in hand with it did not fit in with popular notions about romantic heroes. But more important, treason has always been the most odious of crimes. It is one of the few crimes, if not the only one, that has not been condoned at some stage of history. Traitors were indisputably bad characters. Even if in private a publisher believed a convicted traitor to be the victim of government oppression, he was foolish to parade his views in print; the government, in the entire three centuries of the broadside's life, never took a charitable view of the press.

For these reasons, the broadside from its earliest days gave crimes of a treasonable nature an universally bad press. Whenever a traitor walked his last few steps at Tyburn or at Tower Hill, broadsides snarled at the luckless man and bubbled with effusions of loyalty to the government. Crowed a sheet printed by Richard Jones "dwellinge over agaynst the Faulcon neare Holburne Bridge" when three seminary priests were put to death at Tyburn in 1581: "A Triumph for True Subjects and a Terrour unto al Traitors."¹⁰

Broadsides about treasonable doings were common in the reign of Queen Elizabeth. "The number of men who tried to assassinate Elizabeth in the decade preceding the Armada exceeded the number of those who wanted to marry her during the previous two," one

¹⁰ Robert Lemon, ed., Catalogue of a Collection of Printed Broad-sides in the Possession of the Society of Antiquaries of London (London: Society of Antiquaries, 1866), p. 26.

peral respect; nor had ever attempted them. For his wife, he said, she had good friends, to whose consideration he would leave her; And thus he finished asking Her Majesty forgiveness, and making his prayers in Latin.

The government must have approved of the broadside; its account of the execution should have put treasonable notions of the minds of most malcontents.

Ballard was first executed. He was cut down and bowell'd with great cruelty while he was alive. Babington beheld Ballard's execution without being in the least daunted; whilst the rest turned away their faces, and fell to prayers upon their knees. Babington being taken down from the gallows alive too, and ready to be cut up, he cried aloud several times in Latin. Parce Mihi Domine Jesu, spare or forgive me O Lord Jesus! Savage broke the rope, and fell down from the gallows, and was presently seized on by the Executioner, his privities cut off, and his bowels taken out while he was alive. Barnwell, Titchborne, Tilney, and Abington were executed with equal cruelty.

So died the first seven of the conspirators. The execution of another seven on the following day also was reported by broadside.¹⁵ The sheet remarked:

The Queen being informed of the severity used in the executions the day before, and detesting such cruelty, gave express orders that these should be used more favourably; and accordingly they were permitted to hang till they were quite dead before they were cut down and bowell'd.

The grisly affair stirred the broadside press to reaffirmations of loyalty to Good Queen Boss. Began one verse by Abell Jeeffe "dwelling in the fore-streets without Creeps-gate";

Al English hearts rejoyce and sing,
That feares the Lord and loves our Queens;
Yeld thanks to God our heavenly King
Who hytherto hir guide hath been.¹⁶

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 163.

¹⁶ Lemon, op. cit., p. 23.

But treason did not die with Elizabeth, and in the years after her death the poles over Temple Bar displayed the withering heads of many a traitor. And in prose and poesy, the broadside dutifully recorded the dying speeches and executions of the disloyal until the latter half of the 19th Century. Many of these sheets damned the traitor, reaffirmed allegiance to the crown and vividly reminded the reader with accounts of barbarous executions what happened to the disloyal.

Criminals whose offences lacked the horror of murder, the romance of highway robbery or piracy, the gravity of treason, generally got little attention from the broadside press. In the 18th Century, as is pointed out at length in a subsequent chapter, the broadside did occasionally carry long lists of small-time malefactors whose crimes were saved from oblivion only by a sentence or two. But to rate a sheet all by himself, the robber or coiner had to conduct his transgressions with distinction or singular horror. His personality or the nature of his crime had to place him a cut above the run of malefactors, who were so numerous that the broadside could not begin to notice them all.

The trivial crime for which John Foster was tried in 1693 would never have been worth broadside space had not the trial struck observers as "Comical and very Pleasant."¹⁷ A laborer, Foster was charged with stealing a magpie worth two-pence in a cage worth four-pence, and when his case came to trial the Court remarked, "It is a very small inconsiderable Business to put a

¹⁷ Rollins, op. cit., vol. VI, pp. 339-340.

Man into Newgate for." The owner protested that he had not wanted Foster to be imprisoned, that the committal was the justice's doing. The Court expressed some unfavorable opinions of a justice who would send "a poor Fellow to Gaol for such a silly trifling business" and after hearing a verdict of not guilty, discharged the prisoner with the benediction, "Get you home about your business, but have a care how you meet with a Mag-pye again."

One London publisher brought out "An Excellent New Copy of Verses" in which he reported Foster's imprisonment, trial and acquittal.¹⁸ About the theft, the sheet said:

In new Brandford late
Some Rogue, as he past by,
Spy'd a Cage and a Magpye,
At a Gentleman's Gate,
And took it away...

After the owner "mist Cage and Pye," he had a search made; and as a result, a hasty warrant was granted for the arrest of Foster.

They had him indeed
'Fore a Justice to Answer,
For what he had done Sir,
Who his Mittimus made,
And to Prison him sent;
For three VWeeks or more,
VWith VWant, and Bones sore,
He in Newgate did lye,
Till clear'd at the Sessions,
Till clear'd at the Sessions;
All for the Magpye.

In his defense at his trial, Foster said a man had given him the bird and cage to keep for a few days. The jury acquitted him.

They gave him advice,
For to be more wise,
And nere more comply,
To keep for another,
To keep for another,
A Cage and Magpye.

¹⁸ Ibid., vol. VI, pp. 341-43.

Clipping and coining were such common crimes in 17th-Century England that it was perhaps only the ingenuity of "Mr. Moor a rich Tripeman" that brought him to the attention of the broadside public in 1695. His coining device was "a most Refined peice [sic] of Devilish Ingenuity" which the counterfeiter kept hidden in a cave near his home in Hounslow. On the trap door to the cave, he had craftily planted gooseberry bushes.¹⁹ Charles Barnet published the tripeman's "sorrowful lamentation" as a broadside ballad after the coiner's apprehension.²⁰ In it the prisoner boasted of his success in keeping his operations quiet but in conclusion warned coiners to quit their trade:

Under my Garden I had made
 A Vault to keep the Coyning-Trade:
 A Trap-Door in the Garden too,
 On which Currans & Gooseberys grew,
 Where many Neighbours oft have been
 And yet this Trap-door ne're was seen.

* * *

Now Clippers, ay, and Coyners all,
 Changers of Money, great and small,
 Leave off your Trade ere't be too late,
 Least you all share of my hard fate.
 I once thought none so safe as I,
 But now for Coyning I must dye.

Die the coiner did a few days later, and a broadside printed by "I. Bissel, at the sign of the bible and harp" carried his last speech in ballad form.²¹ Pride in his secret room was gone. Regret and sorrow were all that remained:

¹⁹ Ibid., vol. VII, pp. 79-80.

²⁰ Ibid., vol. VII, pp. 81-82.

²¹ Ibid., vol. VII, pp. 83-87.

Why did I thus increase my store,
 by such a crying sin?
 Whose bags were full enough before,
 had I contented been,
 But O! my greedy, greedy heart,
 no conscience could persuade,
 With life and riches I must part:
 farewell the Coyning-trade.

There is little point in dwelling further on the lesser scoundrels who were rescued from obscurity by the broadside because they introduced a distinctive touch to routine crimes. The point is that they were rescued, from the first days of the broadside to the last. Murderers may have been neat and drink to the publishers, but those guessers of public taste overlooked no off-the-track case with street-sale possibilities. As a matter of fact, one 18th Century case that kept Londoners in broadside reading for weeks, that split the city into factions, involved no bloodshed, no villains who fell into the neat categories of murderer, highwayman, pirate or traitor. It involved a servant-girl who disappeared from her home for a month. Her name was Elizabeth Ganning, and broadsides about her are the subject of the next chapter.

CRIME BROADSIDES IN THE 18TH CENTURY

On January 1, 1753, an 18-year-old girl named Elizabeth Canning walked into the London night with results that have kept mystery-fanciers scratching their heads in puzzlement from that day to this. Attempts to explain the mystery have been numerous; the most recent--and an excellent attempt it is--is that of Lillian de la Torre.¹

The case evoked a spate of broadsides. Covering a wide range of subject matter, illustrating a variety of news-handling techniques, the sheets furnished good material for a representative case study of the 18th-Century broadside. The mystery began simply enough.

Elizabeth, a short, ruddy daughter of a carpenter's widow in Aldermanbury, in her version of what happened, said that she had visited her aunt and uncle on New Year's Day. About nine o'clock at night, her two relatives accompanied her part of the way home. As Elizabeth walked alone over Moorfields by Bedlam Wall, she was seized by "two lusty men, both in great coats." They robbed her of money and stripped her of gown, apron and hat, which items they put into a greatcoat pocket. Elizabeth screamed. One of the men clouted her. Elizabeth lost consciousness (she was subject to "convulsion-fits").

When Elizabeth came to her senses, the two men were dragging

¹ Lillian de la Torre, Elizabeth Is Missing (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1945).

her along a large road. They took her to the home of a woman later identified as Susannah Wells at Enfield Wash, about 11 miles from London. Leaving her there, the men vanished. In the kitchen was one Mary Squires, a gypsy, who asked Elizabeth if she "chose to go their way." Assuming "their way" to be a bad one, Elizabeth said "no." Then the gypsy woman cut Elizabeth's stays with a knife, kept them, slapped the girl and pushed her into a hayloft, a few steps off the kitchen. In that loft Elizabeth said she remained for nearly a month--until January 29, to be exact--when she escaped and returned home. She lived on some fragments of dry bread and some water in a pitcher. That, briefly, was Elizabeth's story.

Meanwhile Elizabeth's mother had been anxiously searching for her daughter. She had prayed, advertised in the papers and even consulted a cheap "wise man." She was on her knees praying when her vanished daughter returned.

Elizabeth told her story to her mother, to friends and to the law. She was taken to Mother Wells' house at Enfield Wash to point out the place of her imprisonment. Actually, the place differed in several respects from the place Elizabeth had previously described. Nevertheless, Mary Squires and Susannah Wells were brought to trial in the Old Bailey in February, 1753, for robbing and manhandling the girl. The gypsy introduced witnesses who swore that she had been miles from Enfield Wash during the first half of January. But the jury found the pair guilty. Mary Squires was sentenced to death--the theft of 10 shilling, the value of Elizabeth's stays, was a capital offense--and Mother

Wells as accomplice was sentenced to be branded and to prison for six months.

Some persons in authority questioned the verdict. Was Elizabeth's story really true? Then how account for the testimony of the three witnesses who swore that the gypsy had indeed been away from London at the time the girl disappeared? And what about those discrepancies in Elizabeth's accounts? Where had she been during her month's absence? Factions--for and against Elizabeth--sprang up. Henry Fielding was one of Elizabeth's champions. Each side peppered the other with pamphlets, broadsides.² This is not the place for a complete review of the case, which is worthy of the book-length treatments it already has received. It is enough to say that eventually the old gypsy woman was pardoned, that Elizabeth in 1754 was charged with perjury at the trial of the two women. Found guilty, Elizabeth was transported to New England. She died in Connecticut.

Apart from the question of what really happened to Elizabeth Canning in her month away from home, the affair has a special interest for the student of broadsides. For from the popular clamor, from the bitter battle that the case caused in London, came forth a number of broadsheets that illustrated the wide range of such productions in the 18th Century. Sheets reporting the case typified the broadsides of the period. As Lillian de la Torre has pointed out,³ broadsides in the Canning affair included

² For bibliography, see Lillian Bueno McCue, "Elizabeth Canning in Print," University of Colorado Studies, Series B, October, 1945, pp. 223-52.

³ Letter to author, January 22, 1948.

the pictorial, the sensational, the comic, the downright foolish, the seriously factual, the poetic, the news-reporting and the legal. Even an appeal for funds in the case of Elizabeth Canning was made on broadsides, distributed gratis by her friends to every coffee-house and affixed to every post. Not even after Elizabeth had sailed for America aboard the Myrtilda was the broadside press silent about the case. A sheet printing "a Letter from a Merchant in Boston, to his Correspondent in London" contributed a curious if incredulous postscript to the affair. What were they like, these representative broadsides of the 18th Century?

Pictorially, the Canning affair had a copious press. Numbered among its output were adulatory portraits of Elizabeth, seriously factual sheets showing the house in Enfield Wash and its loft, a picture solution to the mystery, foolish items about Mary Squires and a news picture of Elizabeth in the dock.

Elizabeth alone or in company, figured in most of the pictorial broadsides. One was a full portrait of her, "Drawn from the Life," and "With a Representation of her being Drag'd by two Villains to Enfield Wash And an Exact View of Mother Wells' House, where she said she was Confin'd."⁴ Throwing truth and probability aside, W. Herbert on London Bridge set his presses working on a sheet dated March 3, 1753, when interest in the case was high. The sheet must have been a best-seller. It had individual head and shoulders portraits of Elizabeth and the gypsy

⁴ Use has been made in this chapter of microfilm reproductions of Canning broadsides and pamphlets from Connecticut State Library.

Squires. But these were just by way of lagniappe. The feast, the sensation, was a cut "Drawn from the Life" of Elizabeth Canning at the home of Mother Wells in Enfield Wash.

The sheet was all that a Canning partisan could wish. There was Mary Squires (the outline gave her name as "Elizabeth Squires") brandishing a knife--a trifle awkwardly, it is true--with her right hand and with Elizabeth's stays tucked safely under her left arm. Elizabeth was the central figure. She sat on a chair before the cold fireplace in the hayloft at Enfield Wash, a frown on her face. The artist, possibly with an eye to street sales, left Elizabeth's breasts exposed above her carelessly drawn gown. Behind Elizabeth, glowering fiercely, was Mother Wells herself. Three white blotches on the wall were identified as "The Holes which Elizabeth Canning made with her fingers, thro' which she Escap'd." Outlines abridged the story of the Canning affair:

This young Creature, whose Modesty and General Conduct had always recommended her where known, was kidnap't on the 1st of January last, under Bedlam Wall, by two Ruffians; who, after depriving her of her Sences by Blows they gave her, forcibly Carried her to the infamous House aforesaid; where, having been first stripp'd by Elizabeth Squires the Gipsy, she was closely shut up in a dismal Room, and supported only with stale Crusts and Water, for a whole Month, in order to force her to Prostitution. From these dreadful Circumstances this resolutely Creature happily made her Escape, by scratching a way thro' the Wall; whereby she recovered her Liberty, and returned to her Mother's in Rosemary Lane, almost naked, and in a condition too deplorable to be describ'd.

The sheet was a fairly good example of 18th-Century sensationalism. Since the only time that the three principals might have been together was while Elizabeth was in captivity--and it is an open question whether or not they were together then--the

artist must have been enterprising indeed. The outlines played up the angle that the virtuous maiden escaped from white slavers after horrible hardships. It treated only one side of the case--that of the Canningites--and gave no account to Elizabeth's detractors. A skeptical reader might have asked this: If the gypsy really wanted to force Elizabeth into prostitution, why did she keep her prisoner close to London for nearly a month, when the girl's friends would certainly be searching for her? Why did not her captives look in during the month to see if she were still alive? The last phrase of the outline--"a condition too deplorable to be describ'd"--hinted darkly that Elizabeth had been forced to surrender her virtue during her imprisonment. As a matter of fact, Elizabeth was still a virgin when she returned home.

Just as sensational was a broadside that offered a picture explanation of the mystery of Elizabeth's month away from home. Pictured were Elizabeth, her lover and her mother. Broadside fans unable to draw the proper conclusions from the picture found them stated baldly in the text. Proclaimed the heading: "TRUTH WILL COME OUT or Miss in her Mouth." A quatrain summarized the situation:

When Girls kiss without Licence from Parson & Proctor,
The Lover sometimes takes upon him the Doctor,
By whose vile Prescriptions, the Child is forbid Life,
The Girl saves her Credit, and cheats the poor Midwife.

Outlines to the picture expanded upon the explanation:

SCENE: an attic hide-away...On the table: "Instructions what you are to swear, take care to burn them as soon as you have got them by heart" and a box of "Hooper's Female Pills."

THE LOVER (displaying an embryo in a bottle): The Juice of s(avi?)ne has done the Jobb.

ELIZABETH'S MOTHER: Ay ay that & the Pills have sav'd my Child's Honour.

ELIZABETH: Yes Mummy & we shall raise money from the credulous World in reward of my Virtue.

Foolishness and fact were about equally combined in another pictorial broadside concerning the case. Again there was the portrait of Elizabeth, "from Life." Another picture showed "the Front and Back of S. Wells's House at Enfield Wash." An identification system called attention to such features as "the great Road to Hertford," "the Window thro' which she said she escaped" and "the Loft her pretended Prison." Less accurate was a picture of the "Gypsy conversing with ye Inspector General of Great Britain." Simply foolish was the fourth picture on the sheet. Three spectators in the foreground gazed at Mary Squires flying through the air on a broomstick. By reading "balloons" like those in modern comic strips, the reader was let in on the following conversation:

First: "There she goes."

Second: "The Witches Act must be put in force again."

Squires: "I can be at Abbotsbury & Enfield-Wash both at one Time."

Meaning of the last picture is not clear, but perhaps the print was satire directed against the Canning side. There are indications that the publisher was not sold on Elizabeth's story; he said "her pretended Prison" and "she said she escaped." Since at least three witnesses swore the gypsy was in Abbotsbury at the time Elizabeth said she was at Enfield Wash, the print said in

effect, "Well, if Elizabeth isn't lying, this must be the only way the woman could be in two places at once."

Also in the comic vein of the period was "A New Address Diversified," a broadside verse issued July 16, 1754. The verse, in Miss de la Torre's phrase, "purports to be a paean of self-praise by 'Inspector' John Hill," who was active in getting Elizabeth tried for perjury. In maliciously light manner, it summed up the attitude of some of Elizabeth's supporters when she was bound for America and the gypsy and Mother Wells were free.

All ye Strollers Whores of London
Come to me, or you'll be undone,
I'm your Guardian and Protector,
Stout as e'er a bouncing Hector.
(refrain) Doodle, Doodle Doc.

When the Gipsy and Bawdy-Matron
Destitute where of a Patron
I no sooner the Case Inspected,
Than I bravely both Protected.

Newgate of the one I Cleared,
And the other from Tyburn Spared.
Here's Rare News for Bawds and gipsys-
Now Their Enemy in Eclipses,

That poor Girl young Betty Canning,
Charged with Perjury and Trepanning,
Now must make a long Voyage,
While Egyptians sing Courragio,

Drink a Health to your Grand Protector,
Not forgetting the Bright Inspector.
Natus, Ford and Dainty Davy,
They are the worthies that did save ye.

But this is anticipating. Before Elizabeth sailed on the Myrtilda to her punishment, she had to be tried, and her trial in the Old Bailey was not slighted by the broadside press. For "Six-pence Plain, One Shilling, Colour'd," booksellers in town and country sold a news picture of her, "Drawn from Life, as she

stood at the Bar to receive her Sentence." Drawn from life Elizabeth may have been, but the rest of the picture came from a 1750 cut of James MacLaine, the highwayman, as he stood at the bar. The engraver simply ground out the highwayman and put Elizabeth--a good head shorter--in his place.⁵

At that, purchasers had no cause for complaint. For their money, they got in addition to the timely picture a lengthy review of the entire case in the prolix prose of the 18th Century.

"This unfortunate young Girl," the sheet explained by way of beginning, "was indicted for wilful and corrupt Perjury, for swearing against Mary Squires, commonly called the OLD GYPSEY...." Elizabeth's evidence against the gypsy had been seconded, the sheet continued, by Virtue Hall (who lived in "a House of Ill Fame" kept by Mother Wells). After the gypsy and Mother Wells had been found guilty, "that abandon'd Wench Virtue Hall recanted" and said that her previous testimony had been "intirely false."

"This Recantation," observed the broadside, "occasion'd a strict Enquiry into this mysterious Affair." The sheet then followed Elizabeth from her appearance at the bar, through her "Tryal, which lasted that Day, and the six successive Days following," to her committal to Newgate. After recording her sentence, it mentioned the attempts to get her a new trial. It left her aboard the sea-tossed vessel carrying her away from England forever:

⁵ McCue, op. cit., pp. 228-29.

And July 20th, about Four in the Afternoon, she was by a Warrant directed to the Keeper of Newgate, ordering him immediately to deliver her to her Friends, to transport herself according to the Contract....and on Wednesday [sic], August the 7th, she embark'd on board the Myrtilda, Capt. Budden, bound for Philadelphia.

Her departure from England, one might think, would have ended the broadsides. But though an ocean separated them from her, broadside men were averse to relinquishing so profitable a subject. Beneath a cut of Elizabeth and prophetess Mether Shipton, a broadsheet account gave a curious epilogue to the Canning affair. The story, the headline said, was told in a letter dated November 5, 1754 and written by a Boston merchant to his correspondent in London. It was about Elizabeth's "Dream for ye good of her Native country, which she Dreamt soon after her arrival in America."

The dream, "believed by many Persons of Probity resident in this Province," came to Elizabeth on the night of October 30, the alleged letter related. The "pious virgin" dreamed that a venerable matron in a high crowned hat and ancient garb appeared before her. The stranger introduced herself as Shipton, "a prophetess of her native country some hundred years ago." For the good of her country, the prophetess said, Elizabeth should imitate the Maid of Orleans. When Elizabeth said she did not know who the Maid of Orleans was, the old woman was patient. "As your Situation has always been that of Servitude," she replied, "which may have hindered you the Study of History, I will in brief relate to you her Story." After she had finished the story, the old woman continued:

As Providence has in Store a Relief for all Countries, so you, my dear Babe, are destined to be in Revenge the Scourge of the French by the English; for which Purpose, behold I have brought you a Khevenhuller Hat, with a large Cockade, a fine feather Coat richly trim'd, adorned with a long Shoulder-knot, and other military Equipments suitable to the present Age; as to the Sword which shall render you victorious, that must be procured from the Royal Abbey of Westminster, which, as it has before vanquished the Monsieurs, I prophesy shall in your Hands do it once more.

Elizabeth liked the story "except the fatal Catastrophe of the poor Maid of Orleans being burnt for a Witch." The old woman assured Elizabeth that she should never burn for a witch "but sooner the old Gipsy Mary Sq---rs." When Elizabeth heard that last name, she woke up. She never attempted to fulfill the prophecy, in the doubtful event that it was made to her. Hanging would have been her fate had she returned from transportation to fetch the sword from Westminster Abbey. And hemp was as sure death as the witches' pyre.

In time the Atlantic washed the story of Elizabeth Gaming from the minds of the busy broadside men, who found new sensations to exploit. Their sheets about Elizabeth while she was worth their attention demonstrated in miniature the scope of 18th-Century broadsides. They could be seriously reportorial, factual, sensational, imaginative, comic, poetic, partisan.

In their variety, the broadsides could scarcely help reflecting the life of their times, although that was not their aim. The brutal treatment of men at sea, the viciousness of the London mob, the casualness with which justices handed down the death sentence, the sorry attempts of the government to stamp out crime by barbaric punishments, the importance attached to prop-

erty and the unimportance attached to human life, all of these things and more were recorded by the broadsides as they went about their business of giving customers their pennyworth of sensation.

From a broadside issued in 1752, the reader got a fleeting glimpse of life aboard the merchant ship Molly, commanded by James Lowry.⁶ In February, the High Court of Admiralty heard and the broadsheet reported the case of Lowry, charged with the death at sea of Kenith Hossick, mariner. The indictment set forth that Lowry did "cruelly and violently assault, strike, and beat... Hossick...with a rope of the thickness of one inch and a half, over the back, loins, shoulders, head, face, and temples; of which beatings, wounds, and bruises he instantly died." The commander's crew testified to his cruelty. At his execution, he declared himself "innocent of any intention of murder" with the remark that he "gave no more than five or six stripes at the most," a deserved punishment. After Lowry had swung, the law hung his body "upon a gibbet in the gallions below Woolwich, on the river Thames."

Only slightly less vicious than Lowry was the London mob towards John Lingard, pilloried in Southwark for perjury. Since he had been found guilty of swearing away a man's life, the mob showed him small sympathy. He was lucky to get off alive. The executioner had difficulty in getting Lingard's head fixed in the pillory, a contemporary broadside observed.⁷ Once Lingard was

⁶ Charles Hindley, Curiosities of Street Literature (London: Reeves and Turner, 1871), p. 170.

⁷ Ibid., p. 174.

helpless in the pillory, the mob showed its abhorrence of him by furiously throwing at him

...mid, stones, and sticks, so that it was imagined he would not get off alive; however, the mob, which was very great, moderated their rage, and though the pelting never entirely ceased, it, at last considerably abated; he got his head twice out of the hole, but it was soon fixed again by some who used him but roughly. He waved his hands in a suppliant manner, begging for mercy, and though he had a tin scull plate under his cap, he was cut in the left side of his head, and the blood ran down his face, [sic] He was taken down in a dirty condition, about a quarter before one, and had not been kept in the pillory above half an hour.

Despite his treatment by the crowd, Lingard was fortunate. His offence had been swearing away the life of a fellowman, a crime not punished by death. Death might have been his punishment had he stolen a watch, robbed a dwelling house, forged a note--had his crime been against property instead of human life. Broad-sides of the 18th Century recorded the steady procession from Newgate to the gallows of men--and women--whose crimes today would be regarded as comparatively slight. Sandwiched between the accounts of the trial and execution of James Lowry was a single paragraph noting that 13 malefactors received sentence of death at the sessions gaol delivery:

James Hays, Richard Broughton, and James Davis, for street robbery; John Powney, for house-breaking; Bernard Angua, Thomas Fox, and Thomas Gale, for forging a note of twenty-four guineas; Ann Lewis for forging a seaman's power of attorney...

How the law treated coiners--and it was indifferent to their sex--was described in a sheet reporting the execution of Phoebe Harris in 1786.⁸

⁸ Ibid., p. 177.

She was immediately tied by the neck to an iron bolt fixed near the top of the stake, and after praying very fervently for a few minutes, the steps on which she stood were drawn away, and she immediately became suspended. The executioner, with some assistants, put a chain round her body, which was fastened by strong nails to the stake. Two cart-loads of faggots were then piled round her, and after she had hung about half an hour, the fire was kindled. The flames presently burning the halter, the convict fell a few inches, and was then suspended by the iron chain passed over her chest and affixed to the stakes. Some scattered remains of the body were perceptible in the fire at half-past ten o'clock. The fire had not quite burnt out even at twelve.

Such shabby little crimes as robbery, forgery or even coin-ing did not rate much space, let alone individual broadsides, for their perpetrators. Phoebe Harris had to share space with another "six unfortunate malefactors," despite the spectacle her execution afforded. News of the minor crimes was generally squeezed onto sheets about more colorful offenders. The broad-side that reported in full Lingard's ordeal at the pillory mentioned the fate of all his fellow prisoners without mentioning a single name:

On the 14th, The sessions ended at the Old-Bailey, when fourteen prisoners were tried, seven were cast for transportation, and seven acquitted. Seven received sentence of death. One transported for fourteen years. Twenty-nine transported for seven years. Two branded. Three whipp'd. One pillory'd, and transported.

TRANSITIONS IN BROADSIDE REPORTING

The 18th Century that saw London divided over the case of Elizabeth Canning was an age of crime publications and a period of transition for the broadside. Pamphlets and books dealing with matters criminal issued in large quantities from presses all over the island but especially in London, and these made their way into inns, coffee-houses and even homes of the humble. Despite the increasing mass of pamphlets and books that shared its function, the crime broadside flourished in the 18th Century. It showed some of the hardihood it would exhibit in the 19th Century, when for several decades it remained a profitable publishers' item in the face of cheap, mass-circulation newspapers that infringed upon its territory.

Pamphlet accounts of crimes and trials in the 18th Century bore the imprints of scores of publishers: M. Cooper at the Globe, Paternoster Row; C. Sympson at the Bible Warehouse, Chancery Lane; T. Bailey, opposite Pewter-Pot Inn, Leadenhall Street; J. Wenman, Fleet Street; John Marshall at the Bible in Grace-Church Street; A. Robertson at the Foot of the Horse Wynd, Edinburgh; J. Stewart, Lawnmarket, Edinburgh. Most of the pamphlets were octavo in size and their length varied from a dozen or so pages to nearly threescore. Their titles were long-winded summaries of their contents.

One of the tireless publishers of crime pamphlets was J. Roberts, who kept shop at the Oxford Arms in Warwick Lane, London.

In 1732 he published regularly issued sessions papers, pamphlets of 6-by-8 inches and averaging perhaps 24 double-column pages. These six-pence booklets gave almost verbatim reports of the trials in London during the week, the crimes ranging from petty theft to murder. The pamphlets seem to have been intended for popular consumption, although Roberts suggested that they were especially valuable to lawyers:

These Trials are taken in a fuller and larger Manner than ever any Trials yet was done in the Sessions-Paper; therefore wou'd be of great Use to Lawyers, &c. to collect together, and bind up at Year's end.¹

From time to time, Roberts seems to have dealt in reports of individual crimes; a murder trial of Mrs. Branch and her daughter in 1740 bears his name.² Helping Roberts report the crime scene in the early 18th Century was John Applebee "in Bolt-Court, near the Leg-Taver, Fleet-Street," who printed periodically in pamphlet form the Ordinary of Newgate's account of the "Behaviour, Confessions, and Dying Words" of the wrongdoers executed at Tyburn.³

In the 18th Century many of the men who turned to crime were

¹ The Proceedings at the Sessions of the Peace, and Oyer and Terminer, for the City of London, and County of Middlesex (February, 1732), no. III, p. 100.

² Anonymous pamphlet, The Trial of Mrs. Branch, and her Daughter, For the Murder of Jane Buttersworth, before the Hon. Mr. Justice Chapple, at Somerset, Assizes, March 31, 1740... (London: Printed for James Leak, Bookseller at Bath; and Sold by J. Roberte in Warwick-Lane, and A. Dodd without Temple Bar, 1740).

³ His periodical in 1732-33 was called, The Ordinary of Newgate, His Account of the Behaviour, Confessions, and Dying Words, of the Malefactors, Who were Executed at Tyburn. There were minor changes in the title throughout the period.

respectable publishers. The J. Roberts who published the sessions papers, for instance, was perhaps the J. Roberts of Warwick Lane who published Samuel Johnson's life of Richard Savage. One J. Roberts also was printing the Daily Post, an early London newspaper, at the end of 1719.⁴ He might well have been the crime chronicler. It is even possible that the crime publisher was the James Roberts of Warwick Lane who was Master of the Stationers' Company from 1729 through 1731 and was called "a printer of great eminence."⁵ Another dabbler in crime, Charles Elliot of Edinburgh and London, who in 1788 brought out a trial of a colorful Edinburgh robber, was publisher of a 10-volume Encyclopedia Britannica and was so well established that he offered William Smellie 1,000 guineas for the copyright of his Philosophy of Natural History. These instances are by no means isolated.

Nor were all the crime writers mere Grubstreet hacks. Henry Fielding wrote crime pamphlets, including one about the Canning affair, and Daniel Defoe reported the activities of real-life criminals for the pamphlet press. In Dublin, Jonathan Swift turned his pen to crime when one Ebenezer Eliston was executed there for street robbery in 1722. In a "Last Speech and Dying Confession" purporting to have been written by Eliston,

⁴ Stanley Morison, The English Newspaper 1632-1932 (Cambridge University Press, 1932), p. 88.

⁵ Henry R. Plomer and others, A Dictionary of the Printers and Booksellers Who were at Work in England, Scotland and Ireland From 1668 to 1725 (Printed for the Bibliographical Society at Oxford University Press, 1922), p. 255.

Swift tried "to frighten wrongdoers into virtue."⁶

Good writers and bad easily found blood in which to dip their pens, for crime was widespread in the 18th Century. The looseness with which the law defined crime contributed to its abundance. Under the barbarous criminal code, slight transgressions carried sentences of transportation or the death penalty. Minor offenders were treated as criminals. There were of course men and women whose crimes would shock the people of any age: Cathering Hayes, who helped behead her husband, for instance; Mary Blandy, who poisoned her father for love of Captain Cranstoun; Elizabeth Browarigg, who ill-treated her apprentices to death; Robert Hallam, who killed his pregnant wife by toppling her out a window. Whenever the law discovered the bad works of such criminals (and they were numerous), multi-paged pamphlets reporting all angles of the cases blossomed in pamphlet shops and book stalls. Verbatim reports of trials were favorite subject matter for the booklets.

Although the 18th Century was an age of pamphlets, the broadside remained exceedingly popular. Pamphlets and books about crimes and trials sold for six-pence and up, prices quite high for the masses. The broadside still had a potentially large number of buyers. There is every sign that it reached them. The Canning affair saw no lack of broadsides, and Cathering Hayes' crime was "enshrined in ballads."⁷

⁶ Frank Wadleigh Chandler, The Literature of Reguery (New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1907), vol. I, p. 157.

⁷ The Dictionary of National Biography (Oxford, reprinted 1921-22), vol. IX, p. 288.

But there are indications that the 18th Century was a time of transition for the crime broadside. The changes were subtle, and one cannot be positive about them. The broadsides that have survived are certainly only a part of the total output. The author has examined only a representative sample of the survivors, but he has noted indications of two major differences between the 18th Century broadside and those of the earlier periods.

The first change appeared to be a dropping off in the number of broadside ballads dealing with crime and a growing emphasis on prose reporting. Ballads there were, to be sure, but apparently not in the quantity of earlier times. This raises the question: did the number of broadside ballads actually decline in the 18th Century or is the drop in the number that has been preserved? Lillian de la Torre has suggested that the thinking of the times may have been responsible for the 18th Century gap in information about the crime ballad. By the 18th Century, the British were getting self-conscious about the ballad. The hunt was on for the antiquarian kind; there was no Pepys to collect contemporary examples.⁸ All of which would explain a decline in the number of 18th Century crime ballads preserved.

But the number of crime ballads published on broadsides in the 18th Century also was perhaps fewer, at least comparatively so, than in times past. Prose appears to have been gaining on verse as a means of telling tales of crime, and by the 19th Century most crime broadsides were prose affairs. The crime ballad

⁸ Letter to author, January 22, 1948.

in the 18th Century seems to have been degenerating into the reportorial doggerel which in the 19th Century was appended to prose sheets as the "copy of verses." The quality of crime ballads had seldom been high, and what little artistry they had was all but gone by the 19th Century. But the ballads never did die.⁹ Rather they seemed to change gradually in the 18th Century from a major means of reporting crime to a subordinate one. In the late 17th Century, publishers had repeatedly used verse alone to tell of wrongdoing--had used it with perhaps greater frequency than prose. In the 18th and 19th Centuries, they more often used prose alone. However, a large number of the prose accounts carried ballad appendages. Known as the "copy of verses," the accompanying ballad rehashed the story already told in prose or purported to be the criminal's lamentation. This subordination of verse to prose seems to have come about in the 18th Century. It became even more pronounced a century later.

A second trend in the crime broadsheet in the 18th Century seems to have been the rise of sheets covering dozens of crimes and multiple executions in a single report. The early broadsides had a narrow focus. They dealt usually with one individual or on occasion with two or three criminals involved in a single felony. In the 18th Century appeared a number of sheets of broader scope. They reviewed the trial and sentences of all prisoners at Old

⁹ See story on front page of St. Louis Post-Dispatch, January 9, 1948, for a ballad telling about the killing of Carl Shelton in southern Illinois in 1947. The ballad was recorded for the juke box trade.

Bailey on a given day, perhaps, or reported the executions of a half-dozen malefactors instead of one star performer.

These 18th Century round-up crime budgets called for concise reporting. Consequently they presented their material with little emotion and with absence of sanguinary detail. The fate of 118 criminals was dusted off in a single paragraph in a late-century sheet¹⁰ reporting the gaol delivery at Old Bailey:

The April sessions ended at the Old Bailey on the 25th, when 13 convicts received judgment of death; 60 were sentenced to be transported, two of whom, for stripping children, are to be sent to Africa, the other women to New South Wales; 8 to be imprisoned in Newgate; 1 to hard labour in the house of correction; 5 to be whipped; and 31 discharged by proclamation.

In a long non-stop sentence, the same sheet reported the execution of 15 criminals and gave synopses of their offenses:

The following 15 convicts were brought out of Newgate on the platform erected before the Debtor's-door, and executed pursuant to their sentence, viz., ... Joseph Mullagan, James Coleman, and John Williamson Halfey, for breaking and entering the dwelling house of Joseph Stokes, in the parish of St. Catherine, and stealing a sheet, a blanket, and other things; Charles Baker, for breaking and entering the dwelling house of William Watson, in the parish of St. Matthew, Bethnal-green, and stealing several small casks, containing a quantity of spirituous liquors; William Dwyre, for feloniously and traitorously counterfeiting the current coin of the kingdom, called six-pences, by coloring certain pieces of brass with a certain liquid composition producing the color of silver....

Sheets of this sort also appeared in the early 19th Century. They later seem to have died out. At all times, they were certainly overshadowed in popularity and numbers by the broadsides

¹⁰ Charles Hindley, Curiosities of Street Literature (London: Reeves and Turner, 1871), p. 178.

that gave their attention to a single notorious law-breaker.

The two changes are difficult to explain. Quite possibly the growth of the newspaper helped bring about the decadence of the ballad. The newspaper was doffing its swaddling clothes in the 18th Century, and newswriting techniques could well have influenced broadside presentation of crime. They did in the following century, when broadside publishers often cribbed their copy without change from newspapers. The brief summaries of gaol deliveries and mass executions probably came about because by the 18th Century the broadsheet was so common a medium that it reported all manner of crime news. It is not impossible that the sheets served as a sort of program at executions. The hangman was busy in the 18th Century, and crowds watched him work. Spectators had no inexpensive means of identifying the creatures he strung up in groups save the broadside. The summary broadsheets often gave as much information about individual criminals as did Roberts' longer and more expensive trial reports, which disposed of many a prisoner with some such notation as this: "John Pavior was indicted for secretly stealing George Savage's Wig, in John Grainge's Shop, May 9. Guilty 10d."¹¹ Pavior's name appeared again at the end of the pamphlet, where disposition of prisoners was summarized. He was one of 45 sentenced to transportation.

While the two modifications of the broadside were taking place in the 18th Century, the familiar types thrived. Buyers

¹¹ Proceedings at the Sessions of the Peace (May, 1732), no. V, p. 142.

aplenty handed over their pennies to street salesmen for news of murders, trials, executions and for dying speeches. Three examples will illustrate how the old broadside subjects fared in these times of transition.

Interest ran high in 1752 in a fell creature named Elizabeth Jeffryes or Jeffries who was executed with John Swan for the murder of her uncle in Walthamstow, Essex. The uncle had taken Elizabeth into his home and had willed her almost his entire estate. As time passed, her conduct displeased the old man, and he threatened to alter his will. With Elizabeth as accomplice, Swan one night murdered the old man in his bed. They clumsily faked a robbery to divert suspicion from themselves.¹²

A good review of the whole transaction was carried by a contemporary broadside, which appeared after the execution in July.¹³ The account of the crime was based largely on a confession that Elizabeth made the day after her conviction. Elizabeth said they had agreed she was to feign sleep while Swan murdered her uncle; then on a signal she was to open her window and cry, "Fire and thieves."

She farther says, she accidentally fell asleep as soon almost as in bed; but on a sudden was waked by some noise in a fright, when she laid and listen'd, and heard a violent breathing or gasping, as if somebody was under a difficulty in drawing their breath; then she concluded her uncle was murder'd; and then open'd her window, and made the agreed alarm; directly after which she came down stairs, and Swan let her out of the street

¹² Anonymous, The New Newgate Calendar (London: J. Robins and Co., 1826), vol. I, pp. 447-56.

¹³ Hindley, op. cit., p. 171.

door in her shift, when she ran to Mrs. Diaper's door, in the same court-yard; Swan then shut the street-door, and as soon as he heard the neighbours were coming, and thought a sufficient alarm was made, he opened the street-door again in his shirt, and run out as if he was just come out of bed in a fright.

But for all their plans, the two were convicted. The broadside continued:

While the judge was making a moving and pathetic speech before the sentence, Miss Jeffryes fainted away several times, and at last recovered herself, pray'd for as long a time as possible to prepare herself for a future state.

The murderers were executed "near the six milestone" in Walthamstow parish, according to the broadsheet.

Swan was drawn on a sledge, and Miss Jeffryes in a cart, in the midst of the greatest concourse of people of all ranks and conditions, in coaches, &c., on horse-back and a-foot, that ever had been seen in the memory of man.

When Elizabeth and Swan had been put into the same cart, they acknowledged the justice of their sentence, after the custom of the time.

It was observed that these criminals did not so much as speak, touch, or look at one another during the whole time they were in the cart. Miss Jeffryes fainted when the halter was tied up; and again when placed on a chair (she being short) for the better conveniency of drawing away the cart.

Thus they died. Elizabeth's body was taken away in a hearse, and Swan's was strung up in chains. The broadside man presumably scurried off to the printer with his copy. A different sort of broadsheet but another old familiar type reported the exe-

cution of Lieutenant Patrick Ogilvy in Edinburgh in 1765.¹⁴ The sheet contained only a statement signed by Ogilvy on the day before his hanging, a more plausible dying speech than most of its kind. Ogilvy and Katharine Nairn were principals in a murder that stirred Edinburgh. Katharine, a vivacious damsel of 19, was wife of Patrick's ailing, middle-aged brother Thomas, laird of Eastmilm. The married couple lived with Thomas' mother, Lady Eastmilm, in a remote country house. Katharine must have been bored with her husband, twice her age, and her venerable mother-in-law, her only companions. She must have been delighted when her romantic brother-in-law came home. The friendship between Katharine and Patrick waxed. At length Thomas took ill and died--of arsenic administered by his wife at the behest of his brother, a jury decided.¹⁵

None of this appeared in the broadside, which was published immediately after Patrick was hanged. In his speech Patrick was so concerned with asserting his innocence that he scarcely referred to the murder itself:

I Lieutenant Patrick Ogilvy, Brother-German to the deceased Thomas Ogilvy of Eastmilm, considering myself upon the Brink of this Mortal Life into Eternity; and, as I have but few Hours to live, would chuse to employ them in the Way that would most conduce to my Eternal Happiness... As to the Crimes I am accused of, the Trial

¹⁴ Broadside, An Authentic Copy of the Dying Speech of Lieutenant Patrick Ogilvy of the eighty ninth Regiment of Foot, tried in the High Court of Justiciary at Edinburgh, upon the 5th, 12th, 13th, 14th, 15th, and 16th of August 1765, for the alleged Crimes of Incest and Murder. (No publisher, no date.)

¹⁵ For excellent study of case, see William Roughshead, ed., Trial of Katharine Nairn, Notable British Trials Series (Edinburgh: Wm. Hodge and Co. Ltd., n.d.).

itself will show the Propensity of Witnesses, where Civility, and possibly Folly, are explained into Actual Guilt; and which possibly had the greater Effect in making them believed; and of both Crimes, for which I am now doomed to suffer, I declare my Innocence; and that no Persuasion could ever have made me condescend to them.

Ogilvy forgave "every Person concerned in this melancholy Affair," thanked the ministers of Edinburgh for their "Goodness and Attendance" towards him and expressed his gratitude to the prison keepers for their kindness. In a postscript he spiked a rumor that John Fenton was guilty of keeping him from "making a Confession to the World" before he died.

Criminals were probably grateful when the broadside gave them a chance to broadcast their innocence after death. Sheets such as the one about Ogilvy no doubt had a good sale, especially when a cause celebre made the public eager for every scrap of information about the criminal. However, 18th-Century readers generally seem to have preferred bargain packages of sensation that gave them the criminal's biography in all its wicked detail, a shocking account of his crime, a word or two about his trial and an eye-witness account of his execution. All of these things were in a broadside preserved in the Harvard Library collection and bearing the comprehensive title, A true and authentick Narrative of the Birth, Parentage, Education, and dying Behaviour of Robert Hitchcock, A very wealthy Farmer, at Cocombe, in Oxfordshire, Executed at Oxford, on Monday the 9th Day of March, 1778, For the cruel and inhuman MURDER of his Own FATHER. The sheet, illustrated with a one-column cut of a man suspended from the gibbet, differed from the run of broadsides mainly in that it was printed

on both sides. It reported that Hitchcock was the son of a mason who in his old age had come upon hard times, and his poverty rankled his son.

The poor old man being reduced to necessity, was under the sad predicament of receiving relief from his parish, begging his bread, or of becoming chargeable to his son.--The last resource was the alternative decreed by the laws of the country, which obliged the child to support the parent as well as the parent to afford a maintenance to his offspring.

The broadside writer despised the murderer so heartily that he must have shuddered and his pen must have spluttered at mention of him:

The criminal of this day was a most shameful instance of the depravity of human nature;--so brutally lost to the common feelings of humanity; so devoid of affection and duty to an aged parent; so malevolently cruel, and obdurate to the cries of a fellow creature, as well as to the tears and entreaties of a father dying under his murderous hands; that words must be wanting to express a proper detestation of the crime.

Perhaps the writer had just cause for loathing Hitchcock.

Even before the murder, the son seems to have ill-treated the old man.

For we find the offender had long exercised his tyrannical cruelties over his poor aged father, gradually sinking to the grave through age and infirmities. He is said to have long forced him to undergo labour beyond his strength; and after cruelly beating and whipping the old man, whilst fainting under the fatigue, frequently to have tied him to the harness of his horses, and let the team drag him along.

One day in July in front of 13 witnesses, Hitchcock abused his father for the last time. The old man, "blood issuing from one of his ears, and his whole body being bruised to instant mortification," was taken to Coombe, where he died the following forenoon. The son was convicted and executed.

Such was the broadside reading of the 18th Century. In most respects, it differed little from that of an earlier age. It managed to survive increasing competition from pamphlets and books just as in the following century it would be able to withstand for several decades the additional pressure of the flowering newspaper. But it was changing. Ballads were losing what little quality they had and were slowly giving way to prose. By the following century, their degeneration would be complete. From time to time, they would be used to tell a tale of crime. Far more often, however, they would be doggerel appendages to prose accounts, superfluous in so far as they contributed anything in the way of information. Publishers would continue to print them because the public wanted them as embellishments to solid prose reporting. Before tracing the evolution of the broadside into the 19th Century, it will be well to take a look at its publishers and authors. A glimpse at their little world and their methods will help explain what happened to the broadside in the first half of the 19th Century, its years of tawdry splendor.

PUBLISHERS AND STREET VENDERS

The parish of St. Giles in London contributed more than its fair share of native sons to the gallows at Tyburn. Possibly because the parish folk took a friendly interest in neighborhood boys who made bad, it also contributed more than its share of gallows literature to 19th-Century London.

Crime and squalor have long been associated with St. Giles. The Great Plague of 1665 was suspected of having had its origin in the parish. Beggars gathered there, and so did thieves, cut-throats and pick-pockets. The place had a floating population estimated at a thousand--homeless men and women who drifted from flophouse to flophouse, where they paid sixpence for a bed of sorts, fourpence for a half one or three pence for floor space in a straw-littered crib out behind. The dens were crowded. As many as 17 men, women and children, married and single, slept in a single room. The neighborhood was one of low public-houses, chandlers' shops, cook-shops and cellar flophouses.¹

Beside its sordidness and vice, St. Giles in the 18th and 19th Centuries was known for its broadside publishers. Several ran shops at Seven Dials, which had a reputation little better than the criminals whose exploits the broadsheets recorded. Dickens, in his Sketches by Boz, saw Seven Dials as having

¹ Frederick W. Hackwood, The Good Old Times (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1910), pp. 399-401.

"streets of dirty, straggling houses, with now and then an unexpected court composed of buildings as ill-proportioned and deformed as the half-naked children that wallow in their kennels." Late in the 19th Century, when even by day the streets were doubly patrolled by the police, the King of Pickpockets held his nightly levee at a tavern in the neighborhood. The tavern was headquarters for a corps of sirens who went forth to woo and cajole strangers into the district. If a man were fool enough to listen to them, his watch stood a good chance of disappearing into the melting-pot that simmered day and night in the neighborhood. Certain it was that he would return without his valuables if he entered by the Dials after dusk.²

In this garden of sin, the crime broadside bloomed, and one of its assiduous cultivators was John Pitts of the Toy and Marble Warehouse, No. 6, Great St. Andrew Street. Pitts began publishing crime items in the late 18th Century. He was the acknowledged street literature printer for the Seven Dials district in 1813, when a young man named James Catnach set up a modest shop in the neighborhood and challenged his reputation.

The son of a printer, Catnach had few possessions when he began his fight with his well-established rival. In his shabby shop and parlor at No. 2, Monmouth Court, Seven Dials, he had an old wooden press that he had inherited from his father and a small assortment of type and woodcuts that his father had sal-

² Leopold Wagner, Saunterings in London (London: George Allen and Unwin, Ltd., 1923), pp. 162-64.

vaged before bankruptcy. With these, his youth and a shrewd business sense, Catnach in a few years fought his way to the leadership of London street literature publishers. His name has since been almost synonymous with the 19th Century broadside.

Catnach's biggest battle was with Pitts, who resented the upstart's encroachment on his territory. "Catblock" and "Cut-throat" were among the kinder variations Pitts found for his competitor's name. The two publishers sneered at one another on printed sheets, and their attacks were as personal as they were vicious. One sheet from the Pitts shop told readers that:

All the boys and girls around,
 Who go out priggging rags and phials,
 Know Jemmy Catsnatch ! ! ! well,
 Who lives in a back slum in the Dials.
 He hangs out in Mommouth Court,
 And wears a pair of blue-black breeches,
 Where all the "Polly Cox's crew" do resort
 To chop their swag for badly printed Dying Speeches.³

The feud was profitable, in a small way, to a close band of broadside scribblers known as the "Seven Bards of Seven Dials." The versifiers sold their productions to the publishers at a flat rate--usually a shilling with occasionally an over-sum of one or two pennies if the printer were especially pleased with a verse or if it proved more remunerative than had been anticipated.⁴ When Catnach started in business, Pitts warned his bards to have no dealings with the "new cove in the Court." For a time they obeyed. But before long the scribblers found it profitable to

³ Charles Hindley, The Life and Times of James Catnach (London: Reeves and Turner, 1878), p. 50.

⁴ Ibid., p. 382.

sell their output to both Catnach and Pitts. It did not occur to the publishers to accuse the writers of duplicity. Instead Catnach accused Pitts of pirating copy from his early sold sheets, and his rival swore that Catnach stole material from the Pitts broadsides. This mutual theft was in fact, common. Both Catnach and Pitts had spies on the streets to buy up the other's best productions for re-publication.

In addition to stealing copy from his rivals, Catnach got news for his broadsides from a staff of correspondents scattered throughout the kingdom. From time to time, he himself took a turn at scribbling out a broadside verse. The "dying verses" that appeared on an execution broadside in 1828 under the by-line of the murderer William Corder, for instance, were said to have been the work of Catnach.⁵ Catnach and other publishers, however, relied heavily for copy on the authors and poets of London who eked out slender incomes writing for the broadside press.

The success of a broadside writer in the 19th Century depended a great deal on his popularity with the street-patterers or salesmen, with whom he usually had some affiliation. The writer had to please the men who sold the broadsides. His work had to be such as the ballad-singers could sing. Above all, of course, it had to be what the public would buy.⁶

If the writer's work were a ballad, he perhaps considered the various elements in the order of their importance in selling

⁵ Ibid., p. 186.

⁶ Charles Hindley, Curiosities of Street Literature (London: Reeves and Turner, 1871), p. II.

broadside: tune, chorus, subject and words. Most important was the tune to which he would set his words, and choosing it was a matter for considerable deliberation. If the writer chose a tune that was too common or too popular, anyone could sing it. If he chose a lesser known tune, some street-singers might regard it as beyond their vocal accomplishments. In either case, the writer lost. Undoubtedly the writer toiled over the chorus, which, if good, could sell the ballad.⁷

The publisher usually took no great risk in bringing out a broadside. Venders, with a keen sense of what the public would buy, helped him decide what crime or calamity was worth a broadside. In the 19th Century, leaders among the broadside hawkers regularly scanned the evening papers for news that would lend itself to broadside treatment. When they came across an item with possibilities, they hastened to a publisher and decided on a style in which it would sell as a broadside. Sometimes the salesman promised to buy a specified number of copies in order to insure publication. Their standard payment in the latter half of the 19th Century seems to have been a glass of rum, a slice of cake and five dozen copies of the broadside. If their subject were especially timely, the publisher struck off their five dozen copies while they waited. Freelance authors and poets, taking a chance on a publisher's wanting a copy of verses on a subject, often scribbled them off without waiting for his order. "I did

⁷ Ibid., p. 117.

⁸ Ibid., p. 118.

the helegy on Rush," one of the bards told Hindley, with reference to a broadside about James Bloomfield Rush, hanged for murder in 1849.⁹ "I didn't writer it to horder; I knew that they would want a copy of verses from the wretched culprit. And when the publisher read it, 'that's the thing for the streets,' he says. But I only got a shilling for it."

Crime was not the only topic of 19th-Century versifiers. They wrote ballads about battles, love affairs, deaths of famous persons, politics, accidents---about the same things that had furnished material for the ballad writers of the 17th Century. Nor were crime broadsides the only productions of Catnach and his colleagues. Catnach's output included children's books, political ballads, street songs, collections of nursery rhymes and legends, small histories and similar miscellaneous reading matter. His imprint on one crime broadside advertised, "Travellers and Country Shops supplied with Sheet Hymns, ornamented with Engravings, not to be equalled in England for Beauty and Cheapness. Also Sheet Songs, Slips, &c." The wide range of printed material that the Seven Dials shops trafficked in was indicated by the trade announcement of W. S. Fortey, a Catnach employee who in mid-century succeeded to the firm:

The cheapest and greatest variety in the trade of large coloured penny books; halfpenny coloured books; farthing books; penny and halfpenny panoramas; school books; memorandum books; poetry cards; lotteries; ballads (4,000 sorts) and hymns; valentines; scripture sheets; Christmas pieces; Twelfthnight characters; carols; book and sheet almanacks; envelopes, note paper &c., &c.

⁹ Ibid., p. 159.

No less ambitious than Catnach in the scope of offerings were his contemporaries in London and in the provinces. George Walker, Catnach's counterpart in Durham, advertised a list of publications that included The Bijou; or, Flowers of Literature, "being a Selection from the most admired Authors"; Markham's Spelling Book; The Election Addresses, Songs &c., published during the Durham city elections of 1802; and an edition of Encyclopaedia Britannica, published in monthly parts.¹⁰ He also published numerous crime items. Other street literature publishers were just as catholic as Catnach and Walker in choosing material to print. And those contemporaries were numerous. In London broadside publishers besides Pitts included F. Birt, 29, Great St. Andrew St.; T. Evans, 79, Long Lane; Roccliff, Old Gravel Lane; Batchelor, Long Alley; and Marks, Brick Lane, Spitalfields. Producing for the provinces were Walker in Durham; Cadman, Bebbington and Jacques in Manchester; W. Pratt and Russell in Birmingham; McCall and Jones in Liverpool; John Harkness in Preston; Ford and Swindells in Sheffield; and J. Phillips in Brighton. Nor does that by any means complete the directory.

Catnach seemed to have printed his children's books when trade was quiet for sensational items. His Christmas song sheets, for which there was a great demand during a few weeks in December, flipped from his presses in dull seasons throughout the year. But when a crime called for a broadside, speed was paramount; and

¹⁰ Advertisement, rear cover, pamphlet, Introductory and Concluding Remarks, upon the Trial and Execution of Thomas Clark... (Durham: George Walker, 1831).

author, printers and salesmen hurried to get the sheet into the hands of the public before interest waned or before their competitors beat them to it.

Possessed of a good sense of journalism, publishers developed elaborate schemes for getting their broadsides onto the streets while they were still newsworthy. When trade was slack, Catnach and his sister Anne sat down with old pewter music plates and on the backs engraved pictures that would be handy for embellishing future crime sheets. A safe subject might be a masked highwayman shooting his victim on a lonely road.¹¹ Catnach maintained an extensive collection of woodblocks illustrating execution scenes. No matter how many criminals the hangman sent from the world at one time, Catnach had a woodcut illustration in stock.

Whether or not illustrations were related to the text was a matter of little concern to most broadside publishers. They bought a large share of their out-of-date woodcuts in lots at auctions of printers' equipment. The drawings ranged in date from the 16th to early 19th Centuries, and for the most part they represented art at its nadir.¹² Typography was of little better quality than the illustrations. Haste in getting sheets into the hands of the venders was generally more important than fancy presswork. Too, many of the printers were close-fisted with money for type and equipment as long as their help could get away with

¹¹ Hindley, The Life and Times of James Catnach, p. 393.

¹² John Ashton, Modern Street Ballads (London: Chatto and Winders, 1888), pp. vii-viii.

substituting the lowercase "p," "b," "d" or "q" for one another or rounding out a sentence in italics if the supply of roman letters failed.

In order to be first with the news, some publishers printed their broadsides reporting an execution a day or two before the criminal actually was hanged. Advance publication meant that the sheets could be in the provinces almost as soon as the hangman had finished his task. It also meant that the vendors could sell the dying speech of the criminal about to be hanged to the crowd that turned out for the execution. Catnach is said to have developed a network of informants who tipped him off to news from the condemned cell in order to have an advantage over his rivals.¹³

Since a soft-hearted monarch might reprieve a condemned criminal in the last minute, publishing advance reports of executions was not without its dangers. On one occasion Catnach had struck off several sheets about the hanging of three criminals before he luckily learned that the sentence of one of the men had been respited. Not so fortunate was the publisher of a broadside reporting the execution of James Rutterford in Bury St. Edmunds in about 1869.¹⁴ "This morning, at the county prison, Bury St. Edmunds," the broadsheet began, "James Rutterford underwent the last dread sentence of the law, for the wilful and deliberate murder of John Hight, a gamekeeper...." After a comment on the prisoner's behavior in prison were details of the execution

¹³ Hindley, The Life and Times of James Catnach, p. 391.

¹⁴ Hindley, Curiosities of Street Literature, p. 257.

itself:

The time had now arrived for the prisoner to be pinioned, the operation of which was quickly performed, and the wretched man thanked the parson, the governor, and other officials for their kindness toward him. The procession was formed, and slowly took its way to the scene of execution. The cap and rope having been adjusted, the bolt was drawn, and the wretched man soon ceased to exist. Simultaneously with the drop falling, a black flag was hoisted at one corner of the prison, announcing that the last dread sentence of the law had been carried into effect.

But in reality no bolt was drawn, no black flag was hoisted over the prison, no James Rutterford was hanged. His death sentence was commuted to transportation for life after surgeons pointed out that a malformation of his neck would cause him undue suffering if he were hanged. The printer evidently was left with a quantity of the worthless broadsides on his hands. In what must have been bitterness, he scribbled a marginal note on the sheet that later fell into Hindley's possession: "This man was to have been hung, but they let him off because they thought it would hurt him, good Christians."

The times that unwanted broadsides lay mouldering on printers' shelves were few, however. Far more often publishers had a hard time meeting the demand for their crime sheets. As early as 1723, greedy hawkers swarmed the office of Thomas Gent, printer in York, and clawed for copies of a popular dying speech he had printed. When the street venders became so unruly that they were ready to pull down his press in their eagerness to get broadsides, Gent prodently took to his apartments.¹⁵ Ragged, dirty

¹⁵ William Connor Sydney, England and the English in the Eighteenth Century (New York: Macmillan and Co., 1892), vol. II, p. 292.

and mysterious news-criers streamed into Catnach's dingy shop for a quarter of a century after 1813 and left hurriedly with their ink-wet bundles of goods.

In October, 1823, when Thurtell and Hunt murdered William Weare in Gill's Hill Lane Hertfordshire, Catnach produced a quarter of a million sheets informing the public of the crime. The task was not easy. If his printers were lucky, they could turn out but 200 to 300 copies an hour. Catnach worked then day and night for a week on his four presses, which printed two forms at a time. Both Catnach and his crew were surprised at their output, but they were not complacent. They doubled their circulation with a broadside reporting the trial. Catnach let out a part of the job to two other publishers, each of whom kept two presses working at top speed. In eight days, with their help, Catnach had produced a half-million sheets about the trial.¹⁶

When Catnach's productions added to those of other London publishers, crime sheet circulations reached unbelievable figures. The Edgware Road Murder, committed by James Greenacre, who dismembered the body of his female victim, gave London broadside publishers a chance to sell 1,650,000 copies of broadsheets. At that, the sales were not looked upon as particularly successful. Remarked one oldtime broadside vender, "Greenacre didn't sell so well as might have been expected, for such a diabolical out-and-out crime as he committed; but you see he came close after Pegs-worth, and that took the beauty off him. Two murderers together

¹⁶ Hindley, The Life and Times of James Catnach, pp. 142-44.

is no good to nobody."¹⁷ When a Swiss valet named Francois Courvoisier murdered Lord William Russell in 1840, printers sold 1,666,000 copies of their broadsides. The peak of sales seems to have been the 2,500,000 copies sold in 1849 in two murder cases.¹⁸

Each ream of broadsides that the venders carried away added to the publisher's profits; but the revenue was likely to be inconveniently cumbersome, since most of the customers paid in coppers. Catnach seems to have lived in a world of pennies. Neighboring shop-keepers were reluctant to convert his small change into silver. They believed stories that filthy money he had taken from cadgers and hawkers had spread fever. Catnach himself must have put some stock in the tale, for he boiled all his coppers in a strong solution of potash and vinegar before sacking them in large bage and hauling them off to the Bank of England by hackney coach.¹⁹ He paid his boys and journeymen their wages in pennies, and carrying home their pay on Saturday night was such a problem that they got their wives or mothers to help them. Although Catnach had a wary eye for bad coins, he still managed to accumulate so many bad pennies that he paved his back kitchen with them. Despite bad coins, Catnach's business grew sheet by sheet, penny by penny. So did his profits. By the time of his retirement in 1838, he was believed to have scraped together anywhere from

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 281.

¹⁸ Hindley, Curiosities of Street Literature, p. 159.

¹⁹ Hindley, The Life and Times of James Catnach, p. 383.

5,000 to 10,000 pounds.²⁰

W. S. Fortey, who took over the Catnach establishment after Catnach's sister had tried her hand at it, seems to have made substantial profits from his productions even in the latter half of the 19th Century when the crime broadside was moribund. Fortey's sheets about the execution of the five pirates of the bad ship Flowery Land in 1864 sold at the rate of 3,000 copies an hour. When he counted his take for the job, Fortey found he had money enough for a new press, which was referred to around the shop as the "pirates" or the "Flowery Land."²¹

The publishers would have had a hard time of it had it not been for the broadside hawkers, the chanters, the street-patters, the ballad-singers, the ragged men, women and children who sold the sheets in the streets, often at the foot of the scaffold itself. Most of the 19th Century venders called their wares as they drifted about town. A few picked some likely spot, pinned samples of their sheets to a wall or gaudily-painted backpiece and shouted their sales-patter at passers-by.

To sell their four or five quires of broadsides a day, the venders developed a sales patter with which they harangued prospective buyers. The patter of a vender known in the Seven Dials district as Tragedy Bill has been preserved by Hindley.²² It went in part as follows:

²⁰ Ibid., p. 412.

²¹ Hindley, Curiosities of Street Literature, p. 159.

²² Hindley, The Life and Times of James Catnach, pp. 369-71.

Now, my kind friends and relations, here you have, just printed and published, a full, true and pertickler account of the life, trial, character, confession, behaviour, condemnation, and hexecution of that unfortunat malefactor, Richard Wilbyforce, who was hexecuted on Monday last, For the small charge of one ha'penny! and for the most horrible, dreadful, and wicked murder of Samuel--I mean Sarah Spriggens, a lady's maid, young, tender, and handsome....Here, my customere, you may read his hexecution on the fatal scaffold. You may also read how he met his victim in a dark and lonesome wood, and what he did to her--For the small charge of a ha'penny! and further, you read how he brought her to London--after that comes the murder, which is worth all the money. And you read how the ghost appeared to him and then to her parents...Yes, my friends, I sold twenty thousand copies of them this here morning, and could a' sold twenty thousand more than that if I could of but kept from crying--only a ha'penny!--but I'll read the verses....

The descendante of Autolyous who hawked 19th-Century broadsides, the ill-paid scrivener who penned them and the men who printed them all were members of trades that stretched back for centuriee. The trades had changed little over the years. In the 19th Century a large proportion of the newscriers came from the unsavory neighborhood of St. Giles. The men who took the broadside into the streets often were men of the streets--coarse-living drifters, fond of drink and wary of labor, slow to distinguish between honesty and dishonesty. They seem to have differed little from their early counterparts. Autolyous, that "snapper-up of unconsidered trifles," that pilferer of sheets bleaching on hedges, was a likeable rogue but a rogue nonetheless. With his pack of ballads, he was fairly typical of the early itinerant cadgers who peddled broadsides.

Ballad-singers got only disapproval from Chettle in 1592 in his Kinde-Hart's Dreame, in which he complained that "a company of idle youths, loathing honest labour, and despising lawful

trades, betake themselves to a vagrant and vicious life, in every corner of cities and market towns of the realm, singing and selling ballads...." He mentioned two young men, "the one with a squeaking treble, the other with an ale-blown bass," whose vocal talents earned them 20 shillings a day. By their time, the wages of minstrelsy had evidently increased over those of a generation or two previously, when the ballad-man led a hard and impoverished existence.²³ How young idlers could go into business as ballad-mongers was described by Chettle:

There is many a tradesman, of a worshipful trade yet no stationer, who after bringing up apprentices to singing brokery, takes into his shop some fresh men, and trusts his servants of two months standing with a dozen gross of ballads. In which if they prove thrifty he makes them petty chapmen.

Their tribe increased. By the 18th Century, the number of ragged creatures bawling broadsides on the streets of London was so great that "there was neither cessation nor interval when the ear was relieved from the sound of their voices."²⁴ The din seems to have quieted by the 19th Century, but broadsides went from seller to buyer more frequently than ever.

Although the 19th Century broadside scribbler had the advantage of finding inspiration for his pen in the columns of newspapers, the early ballad writer had no great trouble finding things to write about. An incident, an event, furnished stuff for his imagination. Fawcett quotes Middleton's World Tost at

²³ G. H. Firth, "Ballade and Broadsides," Shakespeare's England (Oxford: Clarendon Press), vol. II, pp. 513-14.

²⁴ Sydney, op. cit., vol. II, pp. 292-93.

Tennis of 1620 to show the plentitude of topics at the Ballad writer's disposal:

One hangs himself to-day, another drowns himself tomorrow, a sergeant stabbed next day; here a petti-fogger in the pillory, a bawd in the cart's nose, and a pander in the tail; hic mulier haec vir, fashions, fictions, felonies, fooleries:—a hundred havens has ballad-monger to traffic at, and new ones still daily discovered.²⁵

From the 16th Century through the 19th Century, the ballad and broadside writers were for the most part as anonymous as present day police beat reporters. There were exceptions. Early in Elizabeth's reign, some authors signed their ballads: Leonard Gybson, William Fulwood, T. Ryder, Bernard Garter, Stephen Peele and others.²⁶ Thomas Deloney, who wrote broadside verse before turning to prose narratives, is known to have found material for two ballads in the murder of a Mr. Page in Plymouth in 1591. They were lamentations of Eulalia Page and of George Strangwidge, for whose sake the woman consented to her husband's death.²⁷ In the 19th Century, John Morgan, a prolific broadside versifier, was given a rare by-line over one of his works.²⁸ In general, the writers seem to have been unknown hacks, some of them the grubbiest of the Grub Street crew, who cared more for a few shillings pay than for any glory the broadside could give

²⁵ F. Burlington Fawcett, ed., Broadside Ballads of the Restoration Period (London: John Lane the Bodley Head, 1930), p. ix.

²⁶ Firth, op. cit., vol. II, p. 512.

²⁷ Ibid., vol. II, p. 530.

²⁸ Hindley, Curiosities of Street Literature, p. 160.

them.

Broadside printers and publishers were exceedingly numerous in London from the 17th Century onward, if one judges from the variety of imprints on the sheets themselves. Their shops were likely small, grimy, dimly-lit affairs, birthplaces of pamphlets and miscellaneous publications as well as broadsides. Year after year, decade after decade, broadsides issuing from the shops were the same wretchedly printed sheets with crude illustrations, broken and blotched letters. The trade changed little until James Catnach substituted real printer's ink and white paper for the lamp-black and oil and tea-paper that had satisfied his precursors.²⁹ While his competitors scrambled to keep up with him, Catnach set the pace for broadside publishers during the quarter century in which the broadside was in its shabby glory.

²⁹ Hackwood, op. cit., p. 231.

MURDER BROADSIDERS IN THE 19TH CENTURY

In the first third of the 19th Century, selling human corpses was profitable--both for the body-merchants themselves and for the broadside publishers who reported their transgressions. Surgeons needed bodies for anatomical studies, and they paid well for them. Dealers in corpses--known variously as sack-'em-up men, resurrectionists, grave robbers and body-snatchers--had a bagful of tricks for getting their wares. If an indigent wayfarer toppled dead on the streets, a money-minded stranger might pretend to be a relative in order to claim the body, which had a market value of several pounds, the amount depending on its condition. Forays on graveyards, often involving encounters with relatives guarding graves of their late deceased, netted material for the dissection tables of the surgeons.

The case of two body-salesmen who improved on the usual methods of acquiring their wares provided a good study of the 19th-Century broadside as a news-disseminating medium. When William Burke and William Hare, sometime laborers, discovered that human bodies meant ready money, they saw a way to easy wealth. Operating in Edinburgh, they quietly disposed of some 15 chance acquaintances, generally by luring them to Hare's place, plying them with liquor, then clapping a hand over their mouths until death came. They sold their victims to Dr. Robert Knox, lecturer on anatomy, who showed small curiosity as to their source of supply.

For almost a year the crimes of Burke and Hare were known only to Helen M'Dougal and Margaret Laird, who passed as their wives. Eventually the law overtook them; and in November, 1828, the people of Edinburgh were shocked to learn of the murder partnership that had flourished in their city for the better part of a year. Hare turned Crown's evidence and went free as did his doxie Laird, since he could not testify against her. Burke and M'Dougal were tried. Only Burke was convicted, and he was hanged on January 28, 1829.

When the four were apprehended and the horrible story began to unfold, newspapers gave generous space to the affair. Details overflowed newspaper columns and filled broadsides, pamphlets and books.¹ As the story came out, broadsides helped tell it to the public. The day after Burke and Hare were arrested, a penny sheet shouted news of the "most Extraordinary circumstance that took place on Friday night...in a House in the West Port...where an old Woman of the name of Campbell is supposed to have been murdered, and her Body Sold to a Medical Doctor." After the December day on which Burke stood in the crowded courtroom and heard the Lord Justice-Clerk sentence him to be hanged, broadsheet printers were especially busy. They printed sheets about the trial, with and without "likenesses of the murderers." They printed sheets about the execution of "that Horrible Monster William Burke." They printed his confessions. They ground out mis-

¹ For excellent bibliography and account of the case, see William Roughhead, ed., *Burke and Hare*, Limited Edition, Notable British Trials Series (Edinburgh: Wm. Hodge and Co., Ltd., 1921).

cellaneous items--"Subscriptions For the Benefit of James Gray And His Wife," the penniless couple who had given police their first tip about the murders; an "Atrocious Attempt to Murder... by Bernard Docherty and John Broggan, the associates of the Notorious Murderers Burke and Hare."

What eventually happened to Hare after his release from custody is a matter of conjecture to this day. When he fled Edinburgh, broadside publishers kept an eye on him until he gave them the slip. A sheet headed "Riot at Dumfries!" gave an account of his reception at Dumfries "on his way to Ireland." That seems to have been the last sheet giving a true account of Hare's flight. However, there were others purporting to report his fate--one with an account of his execution "at New York in June, from an American paper", another with a story of his hanging by a mob, "copied from a Dublin paper."

In all, more than 40 prose broadsides dealing with Burke and Hare were listed by William Roughead in his definitive volume about the case.² Another 18 broadsides carried ballads inspired by the affair. It is not surprising that broadsheets gave the case such complete coverage. The variety and number of sheets were no doubt greater than for most 19th-Century crimes; the doings of Burke and Hare excited tremendous popular interest and made the criminals' names household words. (Burke is the only murderer in history to enrich the English language by giving it his name as a verb.) Yet the coverage was not entirely atypical.

² Ibid., pp. 402-07.

Most crimes in the first half of the 19th Century brought forth a spate of broadsides.

The three important steps in a 19th-Century murder case were the discovery of the body, the trial of the murderer and his execution if he were convicted. His apprehension, if it were the result of prolonged police work, might rate a sheet of its own; but nearly always it could be recorded along with the discovery of his bloody handiwork. Each of these three steps was a signal for the broadside presses to go into action. Since the single sheets could be composed and printed fairly rapidly, especially if a large woodcut illustration helped fill space, they were a convenient way of getting news to the public while it was still fresh. When a prostitute named Margaret Murphy was murdered in Dublin in about 1864, one publisher rushed out the news in a small handbill marked "Special Edition" and headed, "Horrible Murder in Bull Lane. Apprehension of the Murderer [sic]." The entire account ran only some 130 words, and its errors in typography, grammar and spelling bespoke haste:

It becomes our painful duty to record one of the most brutal murders ever committed in this City.
Another Unfortunate.

On last night between the hours of ten and eleven o'clock in a house of ill fame in Bull Lane, an unfortunate named Margaret Murphy, was brutally assassinated by a pesioner, he cut cut her throat from ear to ear, and mutilated her person in a shocking manner. On entering the room this morning a sickeningsight presented itself to my veiw--huddled up in the miserable room lay the unfortunate creature, in a pool of blood, wearing her hat and feather, a warning and lesson to all. There will be

a coroner's inquest held to day at twelve o'clock, when the prisoner will be brought before the police magistratethis day.³

Such sketchiness was the exception rather than the rule; but the timeliness of the sheet, its ugly typography, its appearance of having been composed as it was set into type, its indignant tone, all of these were characteristic of a large percentage of the broadsides of the period. So was the concentration on one angle of the crime. As might be expected, the street paper reporting the death of Margaret Murphy signaled the start of her life in the broadsides. A later sheet gave readers a highly abridged version of the trial of Andrew Carr for her murder.⁴ The bill drew mainly on the statement of the prosecution for a short summary of the crime and on Justice Lawson's charge to the jury for an evaluation of the evidence. Readers learned that:

On the night of Thursday, the 16th of this month [Carr and Murphy] came together [sic] to the wretched house, and both of them were seen to go up to the room together which they jointly occupied. She at that time was in a state of intoxication and he was at least sober. That was some time about half-past Ten o'clock. There were several persons in the adjoining room--othere [sic] like her--and during the time after the prisoner and she went into the room no noise no struggle or contention of any kind was heard, nothing, as counsel understood, that could give the least reason to believe that there was any struggle or fight of any kind between the deceased and the prisoner.

The inference, of course, was that Carr had slit the woman's throat in cold blood after stupefying her with drink. This view

³ Errors in spelling and typography not corrected. From an undated broadside, without publisher's imprint, in author's collection.

⁴ Broadside, The Late Horrible Murder, In Dublin. Dreadful Sentence of Death (no publisher, n.d.). In author's collection.

of the prosecution was apparently shared by the broadside publisher, for he topped his sheet with a crude woodcut in accord with the spirit if not with the facts of the accusation. Carr, with staring eyes and hideous countenance, was shown hacking off the left leg of a prone, bare-bosomed female while an all-seeing eye in the upper right-hand corner of the cut shed a gleam on the scene.

Carr was hanged for the murder. A broadside man was on hand to record his exit from the world. The reporter's story was printed on a three-column broadside which presumably was issued the day of the execution.⁵ No gruesome detail was omitted:

When the bolt had been drawn, the body fell to the ground, which it struck heavily, and with the force of the recoil, the head was completely severed from the trunk. A volume of blood gushed out, and bespattered the ground. The scene was dreadful to behold. The body and head was shortly afterwards taken up separately and placed in coffin to wait an inquest, which will be held at twelve o'clock.⁶

Since the reporter's account was too short for the space, the printer picked up several inches of type he had used in the sheet about the trial, added it to the description of the execution and plugged a small hole that still remained in the lower right-hand corner with a black and gruesome cut of a coffin. Another small broadside, preserved in the Harvard collection, carried Carr's lamentation in verse.

In reporting the aspects of murder cases in three stages, the broadside strengthened its old habit of talking in clichés.

⁵ Broadside, The Execution of Andrew Carr, at Richmond Bridewell, This Morning (no publisher, n.d.). In author's collection.

⁶ Errors in spelling and typography not corrected.

Broadsheet writers in the 19th Century used expressions that had served for scores of years, and their pens scarcely sputtered about a murder that was not "of the deepest dye," "revolting" or "the most remarkable in the annals of crime"; about a criminal who was not "wretched" or "unfortunate"; about a hanging that was not "the last dread sentence of the law" or the "extreme penalty." Sheets about executions in particular had a boring sameness, a characteristic discussed more fully three chapters hence. The stereotyped reporting is easy to explain. Broadside writers, for the most part, were not a highly literate crew; and they undoubtedly patterned their stories after older ones they had read. Once established, the style perpetuated itself. Execution accounts were probably alike because, as has been pointed out, they were often prepared in advance; and to protect themselves against the unforeseen, writers had to stick to the events characteristic of all hangings. Furthermore, hangings had developed so standardized a procedure that they were hard to report with originality. The writers' situation was pretty much the same as that of a present-day society writer who finds that the five-hundredth wedding she reports differs little from the first.

Whatever other problems the crime writers may have had, however, finding evil folks to write about was not one of them. The 19th Century seems to have produced a bumper crop of murderers. Anyone whose taste runs to crime should have no trouble at all in ticking off a score of murderers whose crimes were big news at one time or another in the first three-quarters of the century. Among them certainly would be William Corder, who

murdered Maria Marten, the molecatcher's daughter, and hid her corpse in the red barn. John Thurtell earned his right to an effigy in the Chamber of Horrors of Madame Tussaud's Wax Museum in London by eliminating William Weare from the mortal scene with assistance from John Hunt one night in 1823. In a ballad fairly dripping with blood, a broadside by Catnach told of the murder:

'Twas on a bright October night,
The moon was shining clear,
When Thurtell, he set off from town,
Accompanied by Weare.
When they had reached Gill's Hill Lane,
That dark and dismal place,
Thurtell drew a pistol forth,
And fir'd it in Weare's face.

The helpless man sprung from his gig,
And strove the road to gain,
But Thurtell pounc'd on him, and dash'd
His pistol through his brains.
Then pulling out his murderous knife,
As over him he stood,
He cut his throat, and tiger-like,
Did drink his reeking blood.

Methinks the moon withdrew her light,
Affrighted to behold,
And through the curtains of the night,
Pity cry'd, "Hold! hold!"
But no remorse did Thurtell feel,
Revenge and thirst of gain,
He sear'd his heart as hard as steel,
And Pity wept in vain.⁷

Bishop and Williams, whose crime was a sensation in London in 1831, achieved a shabby immortality as disciples of Burke and Hare. A broadside of their day predicted:

The month of November, 1831, will be recorded in the annals of crimes and cruelties as particularly pre-

⁷ Eric R. Watson, ed., Trial of Thurtell and Hunt, Notable British Trials Series (Edinburgh: Wm. Hodge and Co., Ltd., 1920), pp. 211-16.

eminent, for it will prove to posterity that other wretches could be found base enough to follow the horrid example of Burke and his accomplice Hare, to entice the unprotected and friendless to the den of death for sordid gain.⁸

The two men were convicted of the murder of a little Italian boy by chucking him head-first down a well. They called some colleagues in to help them dispose of the body. The broadside continued:

From the evidence adduced, it appeared that May, alias Jack Stirabout, a known resurrection-man, and Bishop, a body-snatcher, offered at King's College a subject for sale, Shields and Williams having charge of the body in a hamper, for which they demanded twelve guineas. Mr. Partridge, demonstrator of anatomy, who, although not in absolute want of a subject, offered nine guineas, but being struck with its freshness sent a messenger to the police station....

Henry Wainwright is remembered for the brutal murder in 1874 of his mistress of euphonious name, Harriet Lane. He also should be remembered for the nonchalance with which he set out to dispose of the dismembered body. While he went to fetch a cab, he left two parcels containing parts of the body with an innocent man named Stokes. A contemporary sheet in the Harvard collection reported that:

...while he was gone Stokes was curious to know what was inside so opened the largest and discovered, to his horror, a human head, a hand, and an arm, which made his hair stand up.

Wainwright died on the scaffold "on a cold bleak December morning," the sheet said, and his parting with his wife "was very affecting."

⁸ Charles Hindley, The Life and Times of James Catnach (London: Reeves and Turner, 1876), p. 253.

Dr. Thomas Smethurst, whose name and deeds are familiar to crime fanciers, also stooped to murder because he found himself with a woman too many on his hands. A broadside of the day summarized the whole case in two stanzas of its "copy of verses":

A life interest of five thousand pounds,
 And more besides, by her father's will;
 To Doctor Smethurst she got married,
 Yet his first wife was living still.

The marriage day was scarcely over,
 When Elizabeth Banks was taken ill.
 With treacherous he waited on her,
 And begged her to make her will.

As the sheet pointed out, the "All-seeing eye was fast upon them," and Smethurst landed in the dock. "If he escapes his earthly judges," the verse noted darkly, "the day must come when he must die." Since Smethurst had scarcely been committed to trial, the ballad writer formed his judgments of the case early.

The roll of dishonor could continue: Franz Muller, who murdered for gold in a railway carriage; Constance Kent, who kept her killing in the family by doing away with her little brother; the Mannings, husband and wife; James Greenacre, who shared Wainwright's taste for dismembered bodies; and Dr. Edward William Pritchard, who made pious entries in his diary as he slowly killed his wife and mother-in-law with poison. All of these 19th-Century criminals have had monuments erected to them in the form of likenesses at Madame Tussaud's, chapters in books about crime or whole volumes in the Notable British Trials Series. This handful of erring folk by no means comprises the lot.

In reality, the 19th Century bred a population no more vicious than had the past. Its murderers are well remembered for

good reason. The broadside, with its tremendous circulations, certainly did much to build them into figures of national interest. Newspapers helped. They gave column after column to men and women distinguished only by their finesse in depriving fellow creatures of life. The nation found it more difficult to forget these murderers than it would have been if the press had not thrown a strong and incessant light upon their dark ways.

The steadily-growing newspaper, which helped the broadside to immortalize murderers, seems to have influenced the styles of broadsheet reporting. Parasitic almost from birth, the broadside drew food from the press of the 19th Century. Often when publishers were not inclined to write their own stories, they unashamedly lifted entire columns of crime copy from newspapers. Ballad writers kept an eye on newspapers for crime subjects they could set to rhyme. Those things had perhaps been going on for years, but in the 19th Century when newspapers were more readily available than in the past they seem to have been on the increase.

A more pronounced effect of the growing newspaper was that it created a large public accustomed to getting its news in prose with the result that the ballad steadily lost ground. Once a popular news vehicle, the ballad in the 19th Century hung on because of habit rather than of necessity. In newspaper fashion, the broadsheets told their stories in a prose style that gradually lost much of its verbiage although it never was clear, terse reporting. Many of the sheets still carried ballads beneath their prose stories or alongside their crude woodcut illustrations, usually under the heading, "Copy of Verses." But the poesy simply

restated what the prose had already said; and perhaps because the journalistic influence of the newspaper had extended even to the verse form, it had become exceedingly journalistic. In the 17th Century, a good share of the ballads neglected to mention names of the localities of crimes. In the 19th Century, the ballad stanzas were crammed with names, dates, addresses and other pertinent data, often with strange results to rhyme and metre. The verses went into detail, for instance, about the murder on a train "on that fatal Saturday evening...July the 9th...eighteen hundred and sixty-four," noting that the victim rode in "a first-class carriage" and that the murderer left a hat "made in Crawford-street, St. Maryleborne." They told what happened "upon the fatal eighth of May at No. 11, Artillery Passage" and "in Leveston Street in Liverpool."

In acquiring a tone even more journalistic than it had had in the past, the ballad lost none of its moralizing. The bards who scribbled 19th-Century ballads looked on crime with all the distaste of their 17th-Century forebears. They expounded fully on the awfulness of murder. If the verse was allegedly that of the murderer, he invariably admitted the enormity of his crime and the justice of his sentence in terms of abject repentance. "With aching heart, and tears fast streaming," sobbed Wainwright in a broadside lamentation, "I would I could recall the past." Mourned John Stuart and Catherine Wright, awaiting execution for poisoning in 1829:

But, ah! these days are past and gone,
 In fetters here we lie,
 Confined in a dungeon strong,
 By men condemned to die.
 Because God's law we did transgress
 And would not walk therein,
 But fled the paths of righteousness
 And trod the paths of sin.

* * *

Our sentence, therefore, must be just,
 For God's commandment says:
 "He that doth shed another's blood,
 His blood must it appease."⁹

Besides the moralizing, a survival from the glorious days of the crime ballad was the opening stanza, which had become as stereotyped as reports of executions. In the early days of the crime ballad, the singer had a story to tell, and he often began his song with a statement to that effect:

Assist me some mournful Muse,
 while I a sad Story relate;
 Let all that these Lines peruse,
 lament a poor maids hard fate.

In the 19th Century, when the story-telling function of the ballad amounted to little, this beginning remained in the form of a trite appeal for the reader's attention. Pick any dozen crime ballads of the period, and perhaps half of them will have the same opening. The first lines of murderer John Healey's lamentations in 1863 were:

Come all you wild and wicked youth,
 Listen to me, I will tell the truth
 For that sad and dreadful deed
 Has caused my very heart to bleed...

⁹ William Roughhead, In Queer Street (Edinburgh: W. Green and Son, Ltd., 1932), pp. 224-26.

With few changes it would have done for similar ballads, which had such beginnings as:

Come all good people and pay attention
 Unto these lines that I indite:
 A case of poisoning I will mention---
 This cruel deed has brought to light.

And this one:

Good people all I pray draw near,
 And my sad history you soon shall hear,
 And when the same I do relate,
 I trust you will a warning take.

The 19th-Century ballad, then, had lost all freshness and originality and had hardened in a stereotyped mold that had been forming for centuries. While becoming somewhat more journalistic, it had paradoxically lost its main excuse for existence, the telling of a story. It lived on only because the habit for it was strong.

From time to time, however, the crime ballad fought its way out of the corner of the broadside into which prose had crowded it and alone, as in times past, told of some current murder. Londoners, for instance, learned of the murder of Thomas Briggs in a railway carriage in 1864 from a broadside devoid of prose.¹⁰ A second broadside in verse reported the apprehension of Franz Muller and speculated on his guilt.¹¹ In both are typified the awkward metre, the clumsy rhymes, the essentially reportorial nature of ballads of the period. Mentioning clues to the murder-

¹⁰ Charles Hindley, Curiosities of Street Literature (London: Reeves and Turner, 1871), p. 209.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 210.

er, the first ballad said:

They have traced his watch-chain in the city,
 The very key, as we are told,
 Stole from poor Briggs that fatal evening,
 Albert curb, with swivel seal in gold.
 Robbed of nearly all that he possessed,
 He was, upon that fatal night,
 Between Old Ford and Hackney Wick,
 In the Railway Carriage in daylight.

The second weighed the possibility of Muller's guilt, in stanzas even cruder than those of the first:

Would a murderer have forgot, to have destroyed the
 jeweller's box,
 Or burnt up the sleeve of his coat,
 Would he the chain ticket have sold, and himself
 exposed so bold,
 And to all his friends a letter wrote,
 Before Muller went away, why did not the cabman say,
 And not give him so much start on the main
 If the cabman knew--it's very wrong--to keep the
 secret up so long,
 About the murder in the railway train.

The occasions on which the ballad showed these sparks of its former importance appear to have been infrequent. Prose had conquered it.

Mention of these trends does not tell the whole story of the crime broadside in the 19th Century. An important development was the widespread sale of catchpenny sheets reporting fictitious crimes. They deserve a chapter of their own.

COCKS AND CATCHPENNIES

One December morning in 1818, two broadside hawkers were picked up by the police in Chelsea. With shouts and a blowing of horns, the venders had advertised, "The full, true, and particular account of the most cruel and barbarous murder of Mr. Ellis, of Sloane Street."

Police in the neighborhood became suspicious, for they had heard of no such murder as the one advertised. They took the broadside peddlers before a Bow Street magistrate. Nothing in the broadsides, they discovered, dealt with the murder of Ellis. Under the head "A HORRID MURDER!" the sheets reported the murder of a Thomas Lane, his wife, three children and his mother in South Green, near Dartford. But the broadsides were fakes. No Lane family had been murdered.

The magistrate irritably sent for the printer of the sheets, James Catnach of Seven Dials. As Catnach was then in jail serving a six-month sentence for publishing a libelous broadside, his mother represented him in court. The magistrate reprimanded Mrs. Catnach and the venders before turning them loose.¹

Such hawking of faked crime accounts was not at all unusual in the 19th Century. The only unusual aspect of the affair was that the venders were apprehended. Perhaps the law caught up

¹ Charles Hindley, The Life and Times of James Catnach (London: Reeves and Turner, 1878), p. 88.

with them because they advertised their wares in too great detail. Customarily, street vendors kept their sales patter about the fake sheets incoherent. They emphasized certain words-- "horrible," "dreadful," "murder," "mysterious," "former crimes," "coal cellar," "pool of blood"--but they did not about details of the crime. They walked along the street as they shouted in order to keep moving away from deluded customers. Unlike most street vendors, they were glad for wet and gloomy evenings; then purchasers were not likely to learn immediately that they had been duped.²

The faked sheets were so common that the trade had a name for them--"cocks." The definition included all fictitious narratives, verse and prose, of murders, fires and terrible accidents. The sheets usually contained ambiguously worded accounts that promised much but revealed nothing. Selling them, in the provinces or in London, was an art. The hawker frequently changed the scene of the crime to the neighborhood he was selling in. Vendors often worked in crews. The crew distributed itself on both sides of the street. Going from one block to the next, the hawkers shouted noisily to give the impression that their news was important. The louder they shouted, the more broadsides they sold. Evening, when darkness made the sheets hard to read, was the favorite selling time of cock-peddlers.³

Crime cocks seem to have been of two main sorts--those based

² Ibid., p. 356.

³ Ibid., pp. 355-56.

on fancy and those based on fact. The first type gave an account of an entirely imaginary crime in terms of sober truth. The account gave the name of the victim and described the circumstances of the fictitious murder in sufficient detail for verisimilitude. Some cocks in this category were purposely vague, however, so they could be adapted for sale in any locality.

In cocks of the second sort, those based on fact, old crimes were passed off as events of the moment. In some instances, dates of the old crime appeared nowhere in the account; in others, the date was tampered with to suit the whims of the publisher. Also in this category might come broadside hoaxes with a shaky factual basis. Somewhere between the two categories might fall the broadsides based on old wives' tales and legends dealing with crime. The old tales were reported as events that had actually happened. Usually they were vouched for by "a respectable citizen." Because dates were a liability on most cocks, it is difficult to determine when individual items were published. As a class, cocks seem to have flourished in the first half of the 19th Century.

Presses of J. Lucksway, a London publisher of broadsides in the 19th Century, ground out copies of a fancy-inspired murder cock that vendors said "fought well." Its title was Full Particulars of this Dreadful Murder. The sheet was ingeniously composed without names, without mention of specific locality. Hawkers were able to sell it as the real article in dull intervals between actual murders.

The ponderous prose of the beginning of the account promised

the reader a good story:

A scene of bloodshed of the deepest dye has been committed in this neighborhood, which has caused a painful and alarming sensation among all classes in this place, in consequence of its being committed by an individual that is well known to most of the inhabitants, who are going in great numbers to the fatal spot where the unfortunate and ill-fated victim has met with this melancholy and dreadful end.

An astute reader would have noted that neither the victim nor the murderer was named and that the location of "the fatal spot" was extremely vague. The broadside next mentioned that its publisher had dispatched a reporter to cover the crime.

The reporter states that on the police authorities arriving at the place, they had some difficulty in preserving order; but after a short lapse of time, this was accomplished. They then proceeded to the house where the lifeless corpse laid, and took possession of the same, and which presented one of the most awful spectacles that has been witnessed for many years.

How the supposed murder was committed--whether by pistol or knife--the account did not state. It did venture a guess as to motive; perhaps the crime "was in consequence of some disagreement having taken place between the unfortunate victims and their assailants." (Within four paragraphs, the word "victim" had changed from singular to plural.) The broadside next went on record against murder and in favor of capital punishment.

According to the Scriptures, "He that sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed," which we entirely agree with in these instances, and fully acknowledge the just sentence that is often obliged to be carried into effect; and certainly must say that, were it not for the rigidity of those laws, many of us would not be able to proceed on our journey at heart. So, therefore, we are in duty bound to call upon those laws being fully acted up to, for it is our opinion that those crimes are very seldom committed without there is some disregard or ill-feeling towards their unfortunate victims, and thereby end their days in a dreadful manner.

In the following paragraph, the victims were still referred to in the plural form. The sheet expressed sympathy for their family. By the next paragraph, however, the word again had changed back to "victim"; and although he remained unnamed, he was lavishly eulogized.

As a member of society, there will be no one that we know of who will be more missed; one who was often known to relieve the wants of his fellow-creatures as far as his circumstances would permit, and whose society was courted by all.

In the very next sentence, the victim again became plural: "As a member of the family to which they belonged, none will be more deeply regretted." The report concluded with what was pretended to be the latest news about the crime:

Just as we are going to press, we have received information from our reporter, that something has been elicited from a party that has thrown a light on the subject, and which has led to the apprehension of one of the principal offenders, and who, if proved guilty, will, we hope, meet with that punishment due to his fearful crime.

A gullible purchaser reading the sheet might well have believed the report genuine, especially if hawkers had shouted local names in their sales patter. The narrative had the effect of being dashed off before details were available. The impression it gave was that it wanted to inform the populace of the horrid event as soon as possible. Even the absence of names might not have aroused the reader's suspicions. The reader could have believed that the publisher was sparing the feelings of the victim's family as long as he could. But the sheet was a fake. No doubt the majority of readers realized that only after the vendors had scurried away with their pennies.

Another 19th Century cock that must have coaxed thousands of pennies into hawkers' pockets bore the arresting title, The Life, Trial, Character, and Confession of the Man That was Hanged in front of Newgate, and who is Now Alive! With Full Particulars of the Resuscitated.⁴ The headline promised more than the account fulfilled. Actually, the sheet had nothing about the man's life, trial or confession and the "particulars of the resuscitated" were meager rather than full.

Sensational enough was the beginning, "There are but two classes of persons in the world--those who are hanged, and those who are not hanged; and it has been my lot to belong to the former." But by the time the purchaser had read the first sentence, the broadside vender was presumably beyond reach; and the writer was no longer obliged to hold the reader's interest. For perhaps 400 words, the writer mused that most men have wondered what dying is like, that some have gone so far as to attempt finding out.

"Now I am in a situation to speak from experience, upon that very interesting question--the sensations attendant upon a passage from life to death," he wrote. "I have been HANGED."

What those sensations were, alas, he never got around to telling. For after several assurances that the story was true--"I can gain nothing now by misrepresentation"--the statement ended abruptly. The writer did not even reveal his name. "There are individuals of respectability whom my conduct already has

⁴ Charles Hindley, Curiosities of Street Literature (London: Reeves and Turner, 1879), p. 4.

disgraced," he explained, "and I will not revive their shame and grief by publishing my name." As if to leave the reader convinced, he ended, "But it stands in the list of capital convictions in the Old Bailey Calendar for the Winter Sessions of 18--"

Now, condemned prisoners have been revived after hanging. Therefore, the broadside might have been true. The odds are overwhelmingly against it, however. The sheet--identified as a cook by Hindley--had all the vague generalities, the evasiveness of a fake. The writer has been unable to find any case of resurrection after hanging later than 1767.

Not all cooks were about anonymous persons. Some, like the one that landed the Chelsea peddlers before the magistrate, named persons. They mentioned specific localities. They gave the precise hour of the crime. They gave bloody details in abundance. They ran the confession of the criminal. They appended the customary "copy of verses." In short, they differed from the real crime sheet in just one respect--they simply were not true. Their advantage over the generality-laden cooks was that readers might never be aware of having been duped.

One broadside that Hindley has classified as a cook resembled the true crime sheet in every detail. The work of a London printer, it was entitled, The Committal of W. Thompson. To the County Gaol at Oxford for the Murder of His Wife and Three Children on the 12th instant.⁵ Its tale was a sordid one. Thompson spent the day drinking with Sarah Potts, who asked him to leave his family and live with her. Although Thompson could not make up his mind to do so at the time, he had resolved on his

⁵ Ibid., p. 2.

course of action by the time he reached home. After his wife had let him into the house, he felled her with an iron bar. Then he systematically beat to death his three children.

The crime seems to have been a fictitious one, and the names undoubtedly were just as fictitious. Nothing in the broadside, however, indicated that the publisher had not done a complete, swift job of reporting. The reader certainly could not complain that the beginning was wanting in detail. The time of the murder, the address of the murder-house and names of the individuals concerned all were there:

This morning, the 12th inst., the neighbourhood of Queen-st., Banbury, was thrown into a state of excitement at hearing the cries of murder between the hours of 12 and 1, at the house of Wm. Thompson. Several of the neighbours arose from their beds and knocked at, and tried the door, but all was silent, when Sarah Cope said, some efforts must be made to enter.

In convincing detail, the broadside described "a most awful sight" which two policemen found on forcing open the door of the house:

The wife lay weltering in her blood and with her head literally knocked to pieces, and the prisoner, who was drunk, was quickly apprehended. Up stairs the two youngest were found lying in a pool of blood on the chamber floor, and the eldest boy, Thomas, four years old, was found a lifeless corpse on the bed, and the clothes covered with blood.

After two surgeons had "pronounced life extinct" and after hearing the "whole of the Evidence," a coroner's jury at the Blue Bear returned a verdict of wilful murder against Thompson, the broadside reported. It dutifully followed through with a confession, which Thompson allegedly made in prison. The confession had nothing about it to suggest that it was not the

genuine statement of a real-life criminal. In all respects, it resembled the broadside confession of the time:

On the 12th ultimo, I left my wife and family and went to the house of Sarah Potte, and during the day when we were drinking, she asked me to leave my family and live with her; I gave no decisive answer at that time. At midnight I returned home and found my wife and children were gone to bed, but she got up and let me in without speaking an angry word; but I got hold of an iron bar and struck here a fatal blow on the head... I then proceeded to the bed-room, where the children were. My eldest son, Thomas, four years of age, begged for mercy, but I was deaf to his cries and tears; I then raised the bar of iron and struck him three times on the head; the two youngest are twine, I beat their heads against the chamber floor, and I hope the Lord will forgive me.

The broadside concluded with "a copy of verses" reviewing the crime. It ended with Thompson in prison,

Where till the Assizes he must lie, his trial for to stand,
When blood for blood will be required, by the laws of God
and man.

Strangely similar to the Thompson case was a supposed murder reported in verse by an undated broadside without printer's imprint. Title of the sheet was, An Affecting Copy of Verses on the Horrid Murder, Committed by William Johnson, Near Oxford on the bodies of his Wife and Two Children, October 4th. A copy of the broadside is in the Harvard Library collection. Johnson, like Thompeon, was lured away from his family by a designing female.

It happened on the fatal night, drinking with her he'd
been
And at the hour of 12 o'clock home to his wife he came,
Dear husband she to him did say, as on her bed she lay,
I fear that you disgrace will bring upon your family.

Johnson too beat his wife to death, but he used a gun barrel instead of an iron bar. His son, like Thompeon's, begged for

mercy: "Oh! my cruel father, my tender mother spare." Both sheets probably appeared on the streets at approximately the same time. The first gave the date of the crime as October 12, the second as October 4. The two broadsides may have resulted from a garbled account of an actual crime, but just as likely the second was a verse commentary designed to capitalize on the successful prose cock.

Several other broadsides of the period recounted the imaginary crimes, trials and executions of imaginary criminals. For their pennies, Londoners could buy a cock-account of The Life, Trial, Execution, Lamentation, and Letter written by the unfortunate man James Ward, Aged 25, who was hung in front of the Gaol, For the Wilful Murder he committed on the body of his Wife, near Edminton.⁶ The sheet was a happy blend of detail and evasiveness. The supposed murderer was named, and his crime was reported as having taken place "near Edminton." But the judge who passed the death sentence was unidentified, as were the places of the trial and the prisoner's incarceration. No date appeared on the sheet, not even on Ward's "Letter written after his condemnation," which was simply headed "Condemned Cell." The sheet could be safely hawked at any time or place.

Readers who liked a fillip of sex with their murders could buy a crudely-illustrated 19th Century cock called, Shocking Rape and Murder of Two Lovers. Showing how John Hodges, a farmer's son, committed a rape upon Jane Williams, and afterwards Murdered her

⁶ Ibid., p. c.

and her lover, William Edwards, in a field near Paxton.⁷ It was from the press of James Catnach.

"This is a most revolting Murder," the broadside observed; and if it had actually happened, it indeed would have been. Searching for his sweetheart, Edwards found her crying in a field while Hodges, her attacker stood "over her with a billhook, saying he would kill her if she ever told." The outraged Edwards manfully attacked Hodges. He was no match for his intended victim, for Hodges "with the hook, cut the legs clean from his body, and with it killed the poor girl." Since the broadside writer had provided no witness to the double murder, he was obliged to keep Edwards alive until "after giving his testimony to the magistrates." The reporter concluded his account by sentimentally remarking that "thousands of persons followed the unfortunate lovers to the grave, where they were buried together."

A Seven Dials bard next took a hand at reporting the murder in the all-necessary "copy of verses," but he added nothing to the prose account. As neither the prose-scribbler nor poet mentioned dates or specific localities, the broadside--especially with its touch of sex--could find a ready sale in town or country.

Uncritical readers could get murder in quantity in a faked broadside published in the 19th Century by Wilton, Mary Street, Limchouse. A copy is in the Harvard collection. "The Massacre of the Whole of the Passengers and Part of the Crew of the Sea Horse," the headline proclaimed, "On her Homeward Passage from

⁷ Ibid., p. d.

Sydney, and the Plunder of 18,000 ounces of Gold by the Murderers." Since the fictitious massacre took place at sea, the broadside writer could not kill everyone aboard the vessel. He spared "a man who had stowed in the hold to escape the slaughter." On that survivor's statements and on the tales told by crew members of the Sarah Ann, who boarded the death-ship, the broadside pretended to be based.

The crew of the Sarah Ann got no answer when they hailed the Sea Horse, which they spied plowing through the fog off the coast of England. From the time the sailors boarded the deserted ship until the search for the murderers began, the broadside reporter splashed his account with blood. "With one exception," he wrote, "the whole of the passengers and the remainder of the crew were in their berths stiff and cold, with their throats cut, and otherwise dreadfully disfigured." He saved the most gory touch for the discovery of the captain's body. "He was laying completely hacked to pieces," the reporter noted, "His tongue was completely cut out at the root, and his entrails strewed on the cabin floor, showing that there had been a terrible struggle." For their pennies, purchasers of the broadside got murder in quantity and at its most horrible, if they did not get the truth.

A gruesome cut of a fierce-faced father chucking one of his children into a well, decorated a James Catnach broadside bearing all the earmarks of a cock. The item, entitled A Horrid, and Dreadful Account of John Marlew, is in the Harvard Library collection. A subhead summarized the crime, which appears to have existed only in Catnach's imagination:

Who with his Three starving Children, went to seek assistance from a rich Brother,--Relating, how his Brother's Wife turned them out of doors, when the miserable Man, in a fit of Deepair, went home, and Drowned Himself & Three Children in a Well in his Garden.

The story began, "The following most horrible catastrophe has just occurred in the neighborhood of Boloo," but apart from the reference to John Marlew in the headline, the sheet mentioned no names, dates or readily-identified places.

Child murder seemed to have been a favorite topic of broadside writers who spun tales of fictitious crimes. Crime-fanciers in 1824 could read a broadsheet reviewing the life of Mary Hardcastle,

Who was executed at the new Drop, London, on Monday, Aug. 23, 1824, for the Murder of her male Bastard Child, by cutting its Throat and concealing it in her bed room, and afterwards throwing its mangled body upon the fire--it was nearly burnt to ashes when discovered by her fellow servant.⁸

The reader learned that Mary Hardcastle, aged 17 years, was a native of Carlisle, where she came of decent parents. She had become pregnant by a young gentleman to whose family she was servant. The broadside reported her misdeeds in prose and poesy and included a copy of a letter Mary was said to have written her mother from the condemned cell.

If the reader had sufficiently good memory, he perhaps would have been struck by the similarity between that broadside and one issued some three years earlier in the case of Margaret Harvey.⁹

⁸ Broadside, An Account of the Execution of Mary Hardcastle (Reprinted for J. Cooper by W. Stephenson, n.p., n.d.). In Harvard collection.

⁹ Broadside, An Account of the Execution of Margaret Harvey (no publisher, n.d.). In Harvard collection.

Although Margaret Harvey was reported as being 18 years old and a native of Durham, she too came of decent parents, became pregnant by a young gentleman to whose family she was servant and died on the New-Drop in London. Date of her execution was given as January 8, 1821. The verses dealing with her undoing were the same as those on the sheet about Mary Hardcastle; even her letter to her mother was identical with Mary's. The broadside of 1824 evidently was modelled after the successful item of about three years earlier, with just sufficient changes in text to give it the appearance of reporting a new and different crime.

Broadside writers frequently spared their imaginations by rehashing old crimes instead of concocting fictitious ones. James Catnach brushed the dust off an old sex-triangle murder and served it up to his 19th-Century readers as if it were a current one. The murder took place perhaps a century before Catnach reported it, but he deliberately neglected to inform his readers of the fact. He headlined his broadside, "Horrid Murder Committed by a young Man on a young Woman."¹⁰ The murderer was George Caddell, an apothecary's assistant, and his victim Elizabeth Price, an intimate acquaintance. "Pregnancy was shortly the result of their intimacy," the broadside reported, "but he resisted her importunities for a considerable time." When Miss Price threatened to ruin his chances of marriage to another young woman, Caddell lured her into the fields. "After a little conversation," the broadside continued, "Caddell suddenly pulled out a knife and cut

¹⁰ Broadside in Harvard collection.

her throat, and made his escape, but not before he had waited till she was dead."

For his broadside, Catnach may have drawn upon the account of the murder in The Newgate Calendar by Knapp and Baldwin, an immensely popular work of his day that went through many editions. Passages in the broadsides were worded almost identically with some in The Newgate Calendar.¹¹

Said The Newgate Calendar:

On the following morning, Miss Price being found murdered in the field, great numbers of people went to take a view of the body, among whom was the woman of the house where she lodged, who recollected that she had said she was going to walk with Mr. Caddell; on which the instruments were examined, and known to have belonged to him. He was accordingly taken into custody; and committed to the gaol at Stafford on the 21st of July, 1700.¹²

The same words appeared in the broadside--except that Catnach did some skillful editing. The passage about the execution dated the account too much for Catnach's taste. In the broadside, he cut short the story with the sentence, "He was accordingly taken into custody." Thus he created the impression that the trial was yet to come.

A cock based on an even older crime appeared in the 19th Century under the headline, "Apparition of a Ghost to a Miller to Discover a Hidden Murder."¹³ The sheet bore neither date nor

¹¹ Reprint of The Newgate Calendar, intro. by Henry Savage (Hartford: Edwin Valentine Mitchell, 1926), pp. 26-30.

¹² The date is given as 1701 by Camden Pelham, The Chronicles of Crime (London: T. Miles and Co., 1891), vol. I, pp. 7-8.

¹³ Hindley, Curiosities of Street Literature, p. 26.

name of printer. It recounted the story of a murder that other sources say was committed in the early 1600s. The broadside publisher brashly brought the events up to date by saying that they occurred "about the year of our Lord 18--."

Late one winter night, according to the broadside, James Graham--"or Grime, (for so in that country they called him)"-- was alone grinding corn in his mill. Suddenly he realized that he was no longer alone.

There stood a woman upon the midst of the floor with her hair about her head hanging down all bloody, with five large wounds on her head. He being much affrighted and amazed, began to bless himself, and at last asked her who she was, and what she wanted? To which she said, "I am the spirit of such a woman, who lived with Walker; and being got with child by him, he promised to send me to a private place, where I should be well looked to, until I was brought to bed, and well again, and then I should come again and keep his house."

The young woman had trustingly set out one night with Mark Sharp, the broadside continued. Instead of taking her to the promised haven, he had killed her with a pick-axe and thrown her body into a coal pit. The apparition told the miller he must reveal the murder or she would haunt him. Reluctantly, goaded by the spirit, Graham revealed the crime.

Diligent search being made the body was found in a coal pit, with five wounds in the head, and the pick and stockings yet bloody, in every circumstance as the apparition had related unto the miller: whereupon Walker and Mark Sharpe [sic] were both apprehended, but would confess nothing. At the assizes following they were arraigned, found guilty, condemned, and executed, but we could never hear that they confessed the fact.

Duplicating the broadside account virtually word-for-word was a story of the case in a 32-page pamphlet, Criminal Records,

published in Durham in 1835 by George Walker, Jr. The pamphlet seemed to have been based on a narrative of the case by John Webster. Not pretending to deal with a recent event, the pamphlet gave the date of the murder as 1631 or 1632. The broadside may have taken its version from the story by Webster or from the pamphlet itself.

Although the story of the miller and the ghost has been included in accounts of true crimes and seems to have some basis in fact, there is a quality of legend about it. Some broadsides were founded on outright legends and old wives' tales. Localities and names were changed at the publishers' convenience, and dates were adjusted to give the tales timeliness. Often the publisher said that he had received his account from "a very worthy man, known and respected by all," thereby seeking to lend credence to the story. Even with those changes, the broadside accounts sometimes followed closely the original sources.

The Liverpool Tragedy, a Catnach production "Showing how a Father and Mother barbarously Murdered their own Son," was based on an old, persistent legend. As with most of his fake sheets, Catnach gave it a timely slant.

A few days ago a sea-faring man, who had just returned to England after an absence of thirty years in the East Indies, called at a lodging-house, in Liverpool, for sailors, and asked for supper and a bed; the landlord and landlady were elderly people and apparently poor.

When the landlady showed the sailor to his room, he gave her a large purse of gold to keep for him until morning. In the night the couple decided to murder the stranger for his wealth. They crept silently into his room.

The landlady approached the bedside, and then cut his throat, severed his head from his body; the old man, upwards of seventy years of age, holding the candle. They put a washing-tub under the bed to catch his blood. And then ransacking the boxes of the murdered man they found more gold...together with what proved afterwards, to be a marriage certificate.

In the morning "a handsome and elegantly dressed lady" asked for the traveler. When the old man and woman were reluctant to show her to his room, the lady told her story. The traveler was the old couple's long lost son who had returned to surprise them, she said, and she was his wife.

The old couple went up stairs to examine the corpse, and they found the strawberry mark on its arm, and they then knew that they had murdered their own son, they were seized with horror, and each taking a loaded pistol blew out each other's brains.

The writer has heard several oral versions of the tale the broadsheet reported as news. The setting was described as an inn in Czechoslovakia and the murderers variously as the traveler's mother and sister and mother and brother.

A variation of the old tale turned up in another broadside, undoubtedly a cock, published for Thomas Hanaway in 1823. Headed "Horrid Murder," the broadside is in the Harvard collection. A young woman in service en route home, said the handbill, lodged September 25, 1823, in "a Cottage near Griff" with the John Hanson family. Knowing the woman had money, Hanson and his wife determined to murder her. The woman overheard their plans. Cunningly she "changed her place, and murderers' cut the throat of their own daughter, which they discovered when they were putting the body in a hole in the garden." When the murderers discovered their error, the "mother fell on the body senseless." The man

was soon taken into custody. The tenuous details strongly suggest that the sheet was a cock.

Another old story, that of Sawney Beane and his clan of man-eating ruffians, furnished the stuff of a broadside published by J. Edwards at Exeter in May, 1828.¹⁴

Legend is that around 1600 Sawney Beane, his wife and his ever-growing circle of children and grandchildren lived for 25 years in a rock by the seaside in Scotland. They robbed travelers. Worse, they killed their victims, cut up their bodies and pickled them for food. Several honest travelers and innkeepers were hanged on circumstantial evidence before authorities realized that the Beane family was responsible for the inroads on the Scottish population. Before the family was finally captured and executed, it had killed an estimated thousand persons.¹⁵

In his broadside, Edwards changed Beane's name to George Bruce and moved him and cave to Devonshire. He omitted entirely any reference to the probable dates that the hungry robber band flourished. He conservatively lowered the number of victims to 800. In most other respects his account corresponded to the legend of Sawney Beane. A subhead neatly summarized the story of George Bruce and his robbers,

Who were some time ago, all taken in a Cave near
the sea side, in Devonshire where they haunted for 25
years, without being found out, their being so many

¹⁴ Broadside, The Life and Dreadful Transactions of George of George Bruce, And his Crew of Robbers [sic] and Murderers (Exeter: J. Edwards, 1828). In Harvard collection.

¹⁵ Richard Barker, ed., "Murder for Meat," The Fatal Carass (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1947), pp. 29-33.

different inlets [sic] to the cave, and where they robbed and murdered about 800 people. Also an account of the manner in which they were taken, condemned and executed, and their hardened behaviour [sic] at the place of execution.

The carnivorous habits of the Beane family also appeared in the Bruce band, according to Edwards. "As soon as they had robbed and murdered any man, woman, or child," his story said, "they used to carry off their carcasses to their dens, where cutting them in pieces, they would pickle the mangled limbs and afterwards eat them, being their principal subsistence [sic]."

Credulous readers of Edwards' handbill had small way of knowing that he was not recounting the fairly recent depredations of their neighbors. They doubtless paid him well for the horror he served them.

Close cousins to these cocks were outright hoaxes or broadsides standing on a shaky factual leg. Such sheets are hard to classify. In some instances, the publishers used names of actual persons of some notoriety but deliberately fabricated stories about them. In other cases, publishers may have accepted the stories they printed as true but prudently neglected to verify them lest they prove false.

James Catnach published perhaps more than his share of cocks and hoaxes. When interest in the execution of murderer John Thurtell ebbed but the name of his victim Weare was still in public memory, Catnach brought out a sheet startlingly headed, "WE ARE ALIVE AGAIN!" Space between the first two words was so slight that the public read them "WEARE." Duped purchasers--and there were thousands of them--called the trick a "catch penny", a term

thereafter applied to Catnach productions.¹⁶

In 1818 Catnach's sensation-mongering brought him a six-month sentence in Clerkenwell, the term he was serving when the two Chelsea street-peddlers were picked up by the police. With a fine disregard for truth, Catnach devised a shocking expose which saw print in the following language:

Another dreadful discovery! Being an account of a number of Human Bodies found in the Shop of a Pork Butcher. We have just been informed of a most dreadful and horrible discovery revolting to every feeling of humanity and calculated to inspire sentiments of horror and disgust in the minds of every Individual. On Saturday night last the Wife of a Journeyman Taylor went into the Shop of a Butcher in the Neighbourhood of D----- L----- to buy a piece of pork. At the time the Master was serving a man came into the shop carrying a Sack. The woman thought by the appearance of the man that he was a Body Snatcher and when she left the Shop she communicated her suspicions to an acquaintance she met with: the news of this soon spread abroad and two Officers went and searched the house and to their inexpressible horror found two dead bodies wrapped up in a sack great flocks of people were assembled from all parts of the Town at Marlborough Street in expectation of the offender having a hearing.¹⁷

After the sheet had appeared on the streets, about 200 persons gathered in front of the shop of Thomas Pizzey, a butcher in Drury Lane. The crowd broke into Pizzey's shop, knocked out ten windows and noisily swarmed about for 12 hours, interfering with the servants and ruining the butcher's business. Pizzey took the matter to court. With three other butchers, he charged Catnach with publishing a scandalous, malicious and defamatory libel. While Catnach served his term, his mother and sisters aided by a

¹⁶ Hindley, The Life and Times of James Catnach, p. 149.

¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 84-87.

Seven Dials broadside writer carried on his business. The incident may have temporarily slowed down Catnach, but it did not stop him from cook-publishing.

Dead bodies also were the theme of a catchpenny published in Edinburgh in 1824, a few years before Burke and Hare began trafficking in corpses on a wholesale basis. Grave robbers-- "resurrectionists," they were called--at the time were a matter of grave public concern. Their business was digging up newly-buried bodies for sale to medical men who needed corpses for study. Strong iron fixtures, or "mortsafes," were placed over freshly-dug graves and bodies were buried in iron coffins in attempts to protect the dead from the resurrectionists.¹⁸

Into a corpse-conscious neighborhood came the catchpenny patently designed to trick and amuse the reader. Its head was a shocker: "More DEAD BODIES Discovered! !" The subhead was calculated to arouse the reader's curiosity and abhorrence:

Being an account of the apprehension of a Carter with three cart-loads of Dead Bodies on their road to Edinr. by the inhabitants of PEBBLES, on Monday last, and such a dreadful scene of bodies, limbs, and heads displayed before the eyes of the astonished multitude, as is beyond description: with the singular manner in which the Carter made his escape from the fury of the villagers.

The dispatch itself was datelined "Peebles, Feb 2d, 1824." In matter-of-fact manner, it reported, "On monday [sic] 7th current, three carts loaded with dead bodies were intercepted at the New toll-bar, near the village of PEBBLES." Word of the discovery soon spread.

¹⁸ James Moores Ball, The Sack-'Em-Up Men (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1923), p. 146.

Nothing could exceed their consternation and resentment of the inhabitants upon the receipt of this intelligence....With that good sense and decision for which they are remarkable, instead of wasting their time in minute investigation and useless vituperation, they instantly proceeded in one grand promiscuous body, with the constables at their head, to the toll-bar, blocked up in the gateway, seized the horses, and had the carter and his goods in safe custody long before a people less wise and energetic could have concerted the measure.

Although the constables had neglected to obtain a search warrant, the carter agreed to show his goods in return for a drink of whisky. When the crowd gaped into the cart, they saw "whole carcasses, limbs, heads, &c. were promiscuously huddled into bags and boxes. Some of the bodies appeared to be dreadfully mangled about the throat with knives, and others to have been strangled."

Then, fairly sniggering, the broadside concluded, "The dead bodies, O Reader, were not the dead bodies of men and women, but of plucked geese, and hens, and of lawfully murdered swine" on their way to Edinburgh market.

Such fraudulent crime sheets appear to have been a major output of broadside publishers in the 19th Century. Their family tree extended back at least two centuries. They bear strong family likenesses to the broadside ballads about prodigies, monstrosities, apparitions, lovers' suicides and similar topics in the Pepys collection edited by Rollins. Ballads about death-bent lovers of the 17th Century, with their combinations of sex and violence, illustrate the link with 19th Century productions. Names of victims and their neighborhoods appeared in the ballads to give them a ring of authenticity, but the stories appear to rest on doubtful factual foundations. Time, names and date all

were mentioned in a broadside reporting that on August 16, 1698, a man named Johnny "Shot himself with a Pistol in the Fields near Hackney" because his fair Elizabeth Spencer treated him cruelly.¹⁹ Like the crimes of the 19th Century cocks, his suicide was an event that could have happened and the publisher was not concerned with whether it did or not. The early ballads, as did the later catchpennies, included assurances of their truth, as in the "true Account of Joan Day, who shot herself with a Pistol, near Thame in Oxfordshire" in 1693 because she suspected that her lover was false:

The Story's true which I do tell
As many Folks can witness well.²⁰

When Catnach and other publishers printed cocks, then, they introduced nothing new. They do seem to have given the cock its years of glory. But the 19th Century, which saw the catchpenny in its prime, also saw the catchpenny die. It died before the broadside. In Brighton one day in 1879, when Charles Hindley was walking through a maze of outlying streets, he heard the familiar patter of the cock-vender.²¹ But the street-salesman had no catchpenny to offer. He was just selling the current edition of the local newspaper, which carried a story about a suicide.

"It ain't a cock, it's a genuine thing," the hawker told

¹⁹ Hyder Edward Rollins, ed., The Pepye Ballads (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1929-32), vol. VII, pp. 287-89.

²⁰ Ibid., vol. VII, pp. 281-83.

²¹ Hindley, Curiosities of Street Literature, p. 49.

Hindley. "The day of cocks is gone bye--cheap newspapers 'as done 'em up." The hawker explained that he was using the old cock-patter because he was accustomed to it and could "sell 'em better in that style than as a newspaper."

Cheap newspapers, the vender believed, were responsible for the death of the cock. He was right. As the cheap newspaper printed more and more crime news, as it crowded sensation upon sensation, horror-hungry readers had less occasion to include crime broadsides in their reading diet. Newspapers satisfied their crime appetites. As demand for their sheets slackened, publishers cut down the press run of their broadsides. Circumstances made the existence of catchponnies vulnerable. As Samuel Milne, an old street vender told Hindley, cocks were good selling for just a day, "then they are no use at all."²² Customers did not like to be fooled more than once. As newspaper circulations rose, the number of broadside venders dropped. Those remaining turned to items that had a steady sale, to songs and ballads on a subject. The cock died. The crime broadside itself was on its deathbed.

²² Ibid., p. 11.

SATAN, ANGELS AND SPIRITS

Satan seems to have been exceedingly active in the British Isles from early in the 17th Century to the last half of the 19th. He frequently popped up to entice weak-willed persons to crime or, irrationally, to punish those whose misdeeds offended him. Sometimes he appeared in person, openly or in one of his disguises. Other times he worked his judgments without bothering to put in an appearance---that is, if one believes broadsides about him.

Busy as Satan was--and he was so ubiquitous that one wonders how he found time for his traditional duties--he did not have the islands to himself. Angels occasionally turned up to ruin the bad work he had wrought. A Higher Being, impatient with mundane justice, inflicted dramatic punishments on the erring. Ghosts bobbed up about the island to confess crimes they had committed as mortals, to ask friends or strangers to bury their bones, to harrass their murderers or just to be sociable.

All of these phenomena were recorded by broadsides, often with a seriousness amounting to awe. The broadsides were little better than catchpennies, yet they do not seem to be in the same class. Many balladmongers who sang of the eerie doings, many of the prose writers who chronicled them, wrote so convincingly that they themselves appear to have been taken in by the stories. They seemed to write what they thought was the truth, not always a characteristic of catchpenny scribblers.

Satan of course was credited with being behind many crimes in which he did not take an active part. Ballad writers of the 17th Century observed that murderers were "in Satan's service," that robbers were "inspired by the Devil." George Gibbs, a sawyer who committed the crime of suicide in about 1663, blamed his impulse on the devil. The broadside ballad reporting his end accepted his excuse and added editorially:

The Divill hath very busie been,
 now in these latter dayes,
 For to entrap, and to draw in,
 poor soules by several wayes.¹

Satan was not always a worker behind scenes. Forswearing--lying under oath--could bring him in person. It did in 1665 in the case of Margery Perry, who by lying cheated her mistress of a few shillings.² The cheating Margery started home in the company of two friends. As they crossed Horksey-down, the devil irritably flung Margery to the ground and snatched her up again. Too hardened to take warning from such treatment, the woman went home. At midnight someone called her name, and she went to him. She went to her death. The voice was Satan's. Her friends

...stript her naked being dead,
 and found her body black as pitch,
 The hellish fiend her prepared,
 according to her cursed wish.

Gambling, blasphemy and sabbath-breaking were serious enough offenses to bring Satan on the run in Ireland even as late as the last century. One Sunday evening in about 1865, several young

¹ Hyder Edward Rollins, ed., The Pack of Autolykus (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1927), pp. 122-25.

² Ibid., pp. 146-50.

men were roistering in a gambling den, according to a contemporary broadside.³ Suddenly Satan burst into the room. In a frenzy, he hurled the young gamblers about, leaving them mute and paralyzed. To one he spared speech--"not," the broadside said, "because he was less guilty than the others--no, but it is really this--to tell the awful tale which we now relate...." Michael Dolan, the spared sinner, as a warning to others described Satan's entry into the room:

We had not time to look round us when the door was dashed open, with great force. My heart shook in my body with fear, for here I seen the Dreadful Vision standing in the room, in a cloud of fire, and smoke, and stench, the head was like that of a lion; the eyes were like unto two large balls of fire, and out of its mouth I could see plainly serpents coming.

Thereafter the devil went into action. Michael was able to recall how Satan had served him:

Here I was taken hold of, raised up, and dashed from one end of the room to the other several times ! I lay for some time, when I heard the others served in the same manner. All that I could hear was their heavy dismal moans. I was taken hold of a second time, when my legs and arms were twisted, which is the cause of me now not having the use of my limbs, as the prints of satan's hands are on them.

That was not all of the tale ascribed to Michael, but it is enough to give the flavor of his narration. His offence, sabbath-breaking, was in itself to be frowned upon. But it was especially wicked, broadsides inferred, because it inevitably led to murder. Instead of worshiping God, sabbath-breakers fell pawns of Satan. And this affiliation was risky. Satan did not

³ Broadside, Just Published, A Correct Account of the Awful Appearance [sic] of the Devil ! (no publisher, n.d.). In author's collection.

always appreciate the loyalty of his followers. He seems to have been at odds with one of his promising disciples, Gabriel Harding of Westmoreland, whose crime was reported in a broadside of about 1670.⁴ In Harding's case, Satan turned up as executioner to help out an angel who appointed himself judge and jury.

Harding, as was his custom, returned home drunk. His weeping wife took him by the hand. "Dear Husband," quoth she, "lye down and sleep."

She lovingly took him by the arms,
Thinking in safety him to guide,
A blow he struck her on the breast,
The woman straight sunk down and dy'd.

Alarmed by the murder, the Harding children ran into the street, where "they wept, they wail'd, they wrung their hands to all good Christians they did meet." Thus were neighbors notified of the crime. But when they accused Harding of the murder, he stoutly denied it. Before the coroner could be summoned, a stranger came into the house.

His eyes like to the Stars did shine,
He was clothed in a bright Grass green,
His cheeks was of a Crimson red,
For such a man was seldom seen.

Vnto the people then he spoke,
Mark well these words which I shall say,
For no Coroner you shall send,
I'm Iudge and Iury here this day.

Harding was thrust before the self-appointed judge. After enumerating the prisoner's sins, the stranger told the assemblage not to fear the spectacle they would soon witness.

⁴ Rollins, op. cit., pp. 162-67.

Then in the Room the Devil appar'd !
 Like a brave Gentleman did stand:
 Satan (quoth he that was the Iudge)
 Do no more than thou hast command.

The Devil then he straight did hold
 On him that had murdered his Wife,
 His neck in sunder then he broke,
 And thus did end his wretched life.

Immediately Satan vanished. The green-clad stranger, obviously an angel, lingered long enough to advise the neighbors to love one another. Then he too disappeared. The strange visit of the justice-dealing duet was almost unbelievable, and the broadside publisher realized it. Accordingly he affixed a list of "Names of some of the chiefest men that live in the Parish," presumably witnesses to the affair.

Teamwork between Satan and angels was sometimes lacking, however. The devil and an angel worked at cross purposes with John Johnson of near Lincoln, according to an undated broadside in the Harvard Library.⁵ Johnson lived happily with his wife and three children, a comfort to them both.

...but the devil who is daily going about, roaring like a lion, watching all opportunities to destroy poor sinful men, by one means or other, raised up such a spirit of jealousy in this man, that soon turned the love he bore to his wife and children to cruel hatred, so that he often abused his good and virtuous wife, using the most wicked expressions to her that he could imagine...

Pondering means of getting rid of his family, Johnson one day was accosted by the devil, who had feigned the likeness of a nobleman. Said Satan:

⁵ Broadside, God's Dreadful Judgments on Murderers, Wicked and Profane Swearers, Sabbath Breakers, and Jealous Persons (no publisher, n.d.) Probably 18th Century.

Sir, I perceive that you are discontented in mind which is the cause of my approach to you at this time, I being the only one that can give you full content, and ease you of all your trouble, if you will freely discover your mind to me, and be ruled by me. Not that I am unacquainted with your trouble, for I have been a very great sufferer myself by the like occasion for many years, but now I have eased my mind. I know that you think your wife has defiled your marriage bed; which I believe to be very true, because I know her to be a loose person, and mine was the same; but I soon eased myself of her, for I cut her throat, with two of her bastards to get rid of that trouble; and having a good estate over-sea, and a ship of my own that lies ready for to take me on board, so if you have a mind to lead a happy life, now is the time to ease you of all your trouble. If you will go home your wife is abroad, therefore send your servant maid to look for her, in the mean time kill the three bastards, and then the whore, as soon as she comes in; and when done come to me at this place, where I will receive you and take you on board my ship, where you may live happily, and enjoy all the pleasures the world can afford; let nothing daunt thee, for I will keep thee from all harm.

Johnson promptly returned home to follow out this advice.

He killed the two youngest children by cutting their throats with his penknife, "whilst the eldest stood trembling and crying, 'Dear Father, why do you kill my poor brother and sister!'" With paternal kindness, Johnson allowed the girl to kneel in prayer before he cut her throat. While she was still on her knees, her mother returned. Johnson flew at his wife with his knife.

...when immediately there stood one in his way, all cloathed in white, who cried out, "Thou wicked and perfidious wretch, hold thy bloody hand, and proceed no further in thy cruelty; thou hast already taken the lives of thy two innocent babes, whose blood the Lord will require at thy hand, and seekest thou to destroy thy innocent wife, whom thou falsly [sic] accuseth. The cries of thy innocent babes came up before the Almighty who sent me to deliver thy wife out of thy wicked hands, and the devil that deceived thee can do thee no service but torment thee forever."

The angel then vanished, but neighbors showed up to seize the murderer. Having confessed his crime and pleaded guilty at his trial, Johnson was "executed opposite his own door."

A Higher Being sometimes imposed his judgments without recourse to angelic messengers. So it was in the case of Dorothy Mattley, "late of Ashover in the County of Darby." Her fatal experience was recounted in a broadside that appeared in about 1600.⁶ Dorothy was a small-time thief who stole two pennies from a boy, the sheet reported, then denied that she had taken them.

If I this money stole, or it be found
With me, then let me sink into the ground,
Ith place whereas I stand and let me be
Example to you all that do me see.

Suddenly she began to sink into the ground. Although she "screched and cryed for help," no one moved to save her. "Straight down she went," the ballad said, "with a most hidious cry."

When she was sunk the ground forthwith did close
And did return unto the first repose.
Which made all for to muse that did it see
And much admire that such a thing should be.

Her neighbors, doubting what they had seen, dug for the "woful wretch, to satisfie their mind." They found her buried "in the ground so deep which would have made the hardest heart to weep."

Punishment meted out by an unseen being also befell a young man who "plaid the Thief" in Staffordshire, according to a broadside of about 1677.⁷ The unnamed thief made off with a

⁶ Rollins, *op. cit.*, pp. 62-67.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 200-205.

Bible. Taxed with the theft, the young man said he "wisht if he the Book did take...that he alive might rot." Before long, the hand with which he stole the Bible rotted off.

His other hand shrunk up and dry'd
Like a Beasts Hoof, lyes by his side;
His knees do rot, and legs decay,
And from his body fall away.

Apparently not satisfied with leaving punishment in the hands of divine beings or in the hands of man, ghosts of murdered persons occasionally turned up to annoy their murderers. Sometimes, impatient with the lack of detective work shown in their cases, they brought the murderers to justice. The case of the murdered young woman who haunted a miller until Mary Sharp was tried for the killing has already been mentioned in the chapter on Cocks and Catchpennies. A similar tale of ghostly vengeance appeared in an undated Catnach broadside in the Harvard Library collection.⁸

A ne'er-do-well named Edward Wood lived with his parents near Chester, according to the broadside, which told its story in prose and verse. Edward's vices cost him so much money that he was forever short of cash. One day as his mother went to market, he waylaid her and demanded money.

She answer'd son, stay till I home return,
I have but just enough she did reply,
To go to market victuals for to buy.

But Edward cursed her and threatened her so angrily that she finally gave him a crown.

⁸ Broadside, Barbarous and Awful Murder (London: James Catnach, n.d.).

He said I must have more, this won't do,
Then from his pocket out a knife he drew,
She on her aged knees to him did fall,
Saying dear child I have no more at all.

* * *

O wicked wretch quit of shame and grace,
Immediately he stept upon his mother's face,
Then he her throat did cut from ear to ear,
And in the road he left her bleeding there.⁹

When Edward returned home, he nonchalantly asked his father where Mother had gone. They talked awhile, but their chat was interrupted by neighbors bearing the woman's mangled body. No one suspected Edward of the murder; he managed a fine show of grief. Indeed, the father was optimistic enough in his sorrow to imagine that the death would draw the disobedient son closer to him.

Then a vision before them did appear.
The apparition of his mother dear,
Crying, repent thou wicked child of mine,
Seek for a Saviour, you'll a Saviour find.

Thus spoke she vanish'd, and said no more,
But plainly did appear upon the floor,
The purple seem'd to flow fresh from the wound,
And never can be wash'd from the ground.

Edward was so upset by the apparition that he cried out his confession. He was hanged in chains, the broadside said. For illustration, it had a grisly woodcut showing a hollow-eyed corpse in chains on a lonely gibbet.

Ghosts revealed not only the crimes of others; sometimes they confessed crimes they had committed as mortals. London broadside readers in about 1680, for instance, read of the trou-

⁹ Errors in punctuation and typography have been corrected.

bled apparition that haunted a house in Rotten-Row, Holborn, until it spilled its confession to a servant maid.¹⁰ The ghost was that of one Mistress Atkins, who had plied her earthly trade of midwife in the house. When parents had been anxious to get rid of illegitimate children, Mistress Atkins had murdered the babies and buried their bodies under the tiles near the fireplace. Such doings did her no credit after her death, and she felt obliged to unburden herself to someone. One March night, the ghost cornered the maid.

pray Virgin stay, then quoth the ghost,
 for I to you will do no harm;
 And tell Mary whom I love most,
 that I hereby, her now do charm,
 Two Tiles by 'th fire up to take,
 A Board also, and then to make

A Burial of what she finds,
 in decent and most handsome sort;
 And let the World to know my Crime,
 and that I am most sorry for't;
 Desiring Midwives to take heed,
 How they dispose their Bastard-breed.

A search turned up the children's bones. Since most people were likely to condemn all strange tales as lies, the broadside concluded, unbelievers could go to the Cheshire Cheese to see the bones on display.

Patrick Kilkenny, murderer, also had a nasty experience with a ghost. Kilkenny was hanged in July, 1865, at Kilmainham Gaol in Ireland for the murder of his sweetheart, Margaret Farquhar. On the eve of his execution Margaret's ghost visited Kilkenny in

¹⁰ Hyder Edward Rollins, ed., *The Pepys Ballads* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1929-32), vol. III, pp. 30-36.

his cell, according to a contemporary broadsheet.¹¹ The deputy governor of the prison and a number of turnkeys, aroused by cries for help, rushed to Kilkenny's cell. The guard in charge of the murderer had fainted.

...the prisoner himself kept looking the personification of horror, crouched in a corner, had his eyes fixed on some object close to him. On the entrance of the deputy and his assistants, he rushed to them crying, "there she is--see her--see her!" by this time the turnkey had recovered sufficiently to tell that he had been awakened...by an exclamation from Kilkenny and...beheld a female, with long flowing yellow hair, kneeling imploringly before the prisoner, who seemed too terror-stricken to do anything.

The turnkey (a most sensible man and truly religious,) had only time to notice that the apparition had a most ghastly appearance and a cut on her left eyebrow, before he fainted. Kilkenny refused to tell more than that she had spoken to him, and forgave him for what he had done, promising at the same time to wait for him under the drop the following morning.

Despite the kind message the ghost brought him, Kilkenny was upset. He raved throughout the night, the broadside reported.

It is easy to explain away broadsides about devils and ghosts as sensational items cooked up by circulation-minded publishers. Some of them undoubtedly were. Yet many of the publishers certainly believed what they printed. The publishers lived, and their sheets appeared, in times of superstition. The early sheets appeared in an age that saw such contributions to crime detection as the one recorded by James VI of Scotland in his Daemonologie: "In a secret Murther, if the dead carkasse be at any time thereafter handled by the Murtherer, it will gush out

¹¹ Broadside, Last Will and Dying Confession of Patrick Kilkenny... (no publisher, n.d.). In author's collection.

out blood; as if the blood were crying to Heaven for revenge of the Murderer." This ordeal by touch was used on Philip Stanfield, who stood trial in Scotland in 1683 for the murder of his father. As late as the 18th Century, all of London could be excited by tales of the "Cock Lane Ghost." As late as the mid-18th Century, testimony repeating conversations with a ghost was allowed in Scotland when two men were tried for the murder of Sergeant Arthur Davies.¹² As late as the 19th Century, spectators at executions occasionally climbed the scaffold for an application of the dead man's hand, a reputed cure for marks, wens and disfigurements. The ghosts and spirits that popped up in broadsides were not necessarily creatures of some reporter's fancy. They were creatures bred by the times. Wise publishers accepted the strange tales at their face value; they were too good copy for any other treatment.

¹² The case interested Sir Walter Scott, who edited and published a report of the trial for presentation to members of the Banatyne Club in 1831.

END OF THE CRIME BROADSIDE

When Frederick George Manning and his wife Maria were hanged at Horsemonger Lane in November, 1849, for killing Patrick O'Connor, Londoners still felt strongly about murderers. The howls and cries of the crowd at the execution were so awful that Charles Dickens penned an indignant letter to the Times. Black satin dresses went out of fashion for nearly 30 years because Mrs. Manning wore one at her execution.¹

Although Mrs. Manning caused a slump in the black satin market, she brought a boom to broadside publishers. Publishers turned out 2,500,000 copies of broadsheets dealing with the execution of the Mannings.² A few months earlier, they had printed an equal number about the execution and last speech of James Bloomfield Rush, who did his murdering single-handed.

Yet in August, 1865, when Stephen Forward gave publishers a murder to write about, they were able to sell only a paltry 30,000 sheets. Forward was no less a criminal than the Mannings. In quantity he exceeded them five to one; he killed his wife and four children. The trouble was that during the 16 intervening years, street-hawkers had been finding it increasingly harder to sell crime broadsides. The reasons are not hard to imagine. The

¹ Arthur Griffiths, The Chronicles of Newgate (London: Chapman and Hall, 1834), p. 499.

² Broadside circulation figures in this chapter are from Charles Hindley, Curiosities of Street Literature (London: Reeves and Turner, 1871), p. 159.

growth of inexpensive newspapers equipped to cover crime extensively meant overwhelming competition for the crime broadside. Too, the public attitude towards crime was changing in the last half of the 19th Century, and people were less and less inclined to spend their pennies for sheets morbidly sympathetic toward criminals. Finally, the abolishing of public executions in 1868 stripped hangings of their carnival aspects. Private hangings were sure death to the "dying speech" sheets, if not to the entire field of crime handbills.

The expanding British press was itself a serious blow to the broadside publishers. With the emergence of low-priced newspapers capable of treating crime the way their readers wanted it, the main function of the broadside ended. The early British printer who struck off the first crime broadsheet brought it into a world without newspapers. The sheet was a form of newspaper. Even in the first two centuries of newspaper journalism, the broadside was able to hold its own. Papers were few, and they were small. Their prices were out of reach of the masses. The broadside offered the mass of people material that the newspaper could not.

Newspapers in the 18th Century were edited to appeal to the comparatively small audience that could afford them. Much of the news in the four-page sheets was of a political nature. At least one of the four folio pages was devoted to advertisements. The rest of the paper was given over to serious and comic articles, poetry, theatrical and social gossip, official reports, letters

from correspondents and snippets of information.³ There was crime news to be sure, but the space that could be devoted to it was necessarily limited.

Even if the crime budget of a newspaper were large enough for the common man, he probably could not have afforded the paper. Late in the 18th Century and on into the 19th, prices of dailies and thrice-weeklies were high. Many persons--undoubtedly most--could not afford the Times at four pence in 1792 or at four and a half pence in 1796.⁴ By 1806 the price of the Times had risen to sixpence a copy. Prices of most broadsheets throughout the period were a penny or a half-penny.

Newspapers for the masses came with the introduction of weeklies that gave more than a day's reading. One of these, Bell's Weekly Messenger, appeared in 1796.⁵ The real growth of the popular press, however, came at the start of the French war, when people besieged newspaper offices for developments and when every town of any importance began to feel the absolute need of a newspaper it could call its own.⁶ The remainder of the century was one of phenomenal growth of the press. In 1800 the total number of newspapers in the United Kingdom was 250. By 1901 that

³ G. M. Trevelyan, English Social History (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1942), p. 412.

⁴ Stanley Morison, The English Newspaper 1632-1932 (Cambridge University Press, 1932), p. 235.

⁵ Loc. cit.

⁶ James Routledge, Chapters in the History of Popular Progress (London: Macmillan and Co., 1876), p. 498.

number had increased nearly tenfold. At the start of the 19th Century, a paper with a circulation of 2,000 or 3,000 copies was regarded as remarkably successful. By the end of the century, penny papers sold 250,000 or more copies daily. The half-penny papers ran up even larger circulations.⁷

Crime became important news. Typical of the newspapers that prospered during the French wars was Bell's Weekly Dispatch, which soon after 1815 introduced copious reports of murders, seductions, rapes and other sorts of horrors.⁸ A later bargain package of sensation worth mentioning was News of the World, which began publication in 1843.⁹ A novelty for Sunday in size and in its price of threepence, it gave a great deal of space to murder and crime of all kinds. Its appeal was to lower income groups who had neither time nor money for the daily press but looked forward to their weekend paper.¹⁰ The News of the World at present gives an advertised 4,000,000 readers their weekly review of murders, rapes, robberies and scandals.

How a newspaper could treat a good crime story was demonstrated by the London Times in 1806. The sensation of the hour was the murder of Isaac Blight by Richard Patch. The Times pioneered in newspaper illustration by splashing two woodcut en-

⁷ The Cambridge History of English Literature (G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1907-17), vol. XIV, p. 191.

⁸ Morison, op. cit., p. 242.

⁹ Ibid., p. 251.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 255.

gravings dealing with the murder across its front page for April 7. One was a ground floor diagram, the other an elevation of the house in which the murder took place.¹¹ The rest of the front page was given over to a verbatim account of Patch's trial. More extensive and more sensational was the Weekly Dispatch's handling of the William Corder execution in 1828. The Weekly Dispatch for August 17 ran more than 10 columns about the case. Coverage included a column editorial, a column and a half of remarks on Corder's motives and eight columns describing his execution. Further, the same issue used two separate sheets, printed by lithography, to furnish readers with a representation of the execution, a portrait of Corder's head on the dissection board and a drawing of the Red Barn in which he murdered Maria Marten.¹²

Such competition eventually cut into the sales of crime broadsides. As the century grew older, as newspapers grew in number and circulation, the demand for broadsheets dropped. The lush days, when the execution of the Mannings meant sales of a quarter of a million copies, were over. The trial of Constance Kent for the murder of her brother in 1860 resulted in only 150,000 sheets, although it must be admitted that Miss Kent cheated the broadside press by escaping the gallows. The execution papers about the five pirates of the Flowery Land in 1864 sold 290,000 copies. The case gave W. S. Fortey, Catnach's

¹¹ Ibid., p. 209.

¹² Ibid., p. 279.

successor, his largest press run, 90,000 copies. Yet 40 years earlier, old Jammy Gatnach had produced 500,000 copies of the sheet on just the trial of the murderer Thurtell.

Even the execution of Franz Muller in 1864 was worth broadside sales of only 280,000 copies, despite Hindley's observation that no murder of the period surpassed Muller's crime in atrocity or public interest.¹³ The circulation of execution broadsides of London printers sank to 60,000 copies in the case of J. R. Jeffery, who murdered his young son in 1866. The slump was caused by the daily penny newspapers. By giving comprehensive accounts of crime, they forestalled demand for broadside "dying speeches and confessions."¹⁴

Nor was the newspaper the only enemy of the broadside. Their decline was undoubtedly sped by a changing attitude toward crime and criminals. For centuries crime as a sensation had been exceedingly close to the common man. Much as they might go to the zoo, large numbers of persons visited Newgate prison for the cheap thrill of seeing criminals. The public at times had been allowed to attend the prison chapel services for condemned prisoners, a morbid ceremony during which a black coffin faced the criminals about to die. Executions had been frequent, and multitudes had watched them. Crowds had streamed past dissection tables on which lay exposed the bodies of executed criminals.

The 19th Century with its slowly growing enlightenment in

¹³ Hindley, op. cit., p. 159.

¹⁴ Loc. cit.

the treatment of criminals brought an end to those practices. After legislation of 1832, no person was executed for forgery. In 1832 and the few years that followed it, the death penalty was abolished for a long list of crimes: coining, sheep stealing, horse stealing, stealing in a dwelling house, house breaking, burglary, returning from transportation, cutting and maiming, stealing postoffice letters, rick-burning, sacrilege and arson. By 1837 murder and attempted murder were practically the only crimes punishable by death.¹⁵ The change was reflected in the number of executions. The number of persons sentenced to death in England dropped from 438 in 1837 to 56 in 1839.¹⁶ Spectators still thronged to executions, but their occasions for doing so were materially lessened.

Dissection of the bodies of all executed murderers was discontinued in 1832. Improving prison conditions throughout the remainder of the century stripped the public of its chances to gape at prisoners in confinement. The public, which once had been able to hobnob vicariously with criminals, was thrust farther and farther away from the source of its thrills.

The last major blow to the crime broadside was the abolishing of public executions in 1868. The final public hanging in front of Newgate was that of Michael Barrett, a Fenian convicted of complicity in an explosion in Clerkenwell prison which result-

¹⁵ Griffiths, *op. cit.*, p. 436.

¹⁶ *Loc. cit.*

ed in several deaths. Police took unusual precautions to prevent any outbreak at the scene of execution. Troops were in readiness. Detectives mingled with the crowd, which was not as large as usual. These precautions escaped at least one broadside reporter, who probably wrote his story well in advance of the execution. His account made no reference to the fact that Barrett's was the last public hanging. Scarcely deviating from similar accounts he had no doubt scribbled scores of times before, the reporter wrote:

The time having arrived, Calcraft, the executioner, was introduced to the prisoner, who immediately commenced pinioning him, which operation having been gone through, the prisoner thanked the governor and other officials of the prison for their kindness towards him. The procession was then formed, and slowly took its way towards the scene of execution. The prisoner ascended the scaffold with a firm step. Everything having been prepared, the cap was drawn over his eyes and the rope adjusted, the bolt was drawn, and he appeared to struggle but slightly before life was extinct.¹⁷

The broadside was distinguished only by a misplaced pronoun which gave the impression that the prisoner pinioned the executioner instead of vice versa. The writer might have done a better job had he known his story was an epitaph not only for Barrett but for a whole glorious era of broadside history; for after Barrett's dangling body ceased struggling, the broadside lost forever its chance to give detailed reports of criminals' last moments and agonies.

When a railway porter was hanged for murder in 1868 within the precincts of Maidstone Gaol, out of sight of the multitude,

¹⁷ Hindley, *op. cit.*, p. 228.

the carnival atmosphere that had long accompanied executions was gone. A black flag that crawled to the top of a staff over the prison told the solemn crowd outside that the sentence had been carried out. The same changed atmosphere also was apparent at the second private execution--the first at Newgate--on September 8, 1868, when Alexander Mackay was hanged for murdering his mistress with a rolling-pin and furnace-rake. Officials spoke in whispers. Only the deep, monotonous tolling of the death bell broke the monotonous stillness.¹⁸

Broadsides reporting Mackay's execution did not have all the difficulties of those of the future. Instead of emphasizing the hanging itself, they were able to play up the fact that his was the second private execution, as did a sheet published by Taylor.¹⁹ It said:

This is the second execution that has been carried out in private under the provisions of the recent statute, and it, of course, necessitated the making of a great many alterations with regard to details. It was at first proposed that the scaffold should be erected in one of the yards adjoining the scaffold, upon the level; but although the original plan was adhered to, it was decided that the scaffold should not be on a level, and the culprit, as was the case before, had to reach the drop by ascending a ladder.

Beginning with the death of Mackay, broadside accounts of executions were burdened with dullness and sameness. Writers remembered the ritual of hangings, and they were able to do a fair job of reporting current executions from the memory of past ones. They knew that the executioner pinioned the prisoner. They knew

¹⁸ Griffiths, *op. cit.*, p. 523.

¹⁹ Hindley, *op. cit.*, p. 233.

that the condemned man invariably pardoned the executioner and thanked prison officials for their kindness. They knew that the little procession of doomed men and attendants moved slowly towards the scaffold. They were reasonably sure that the prisoner would mount the scaffold "with a firm step," and they knew that the bolt would be drawn. These points they could incorporate into their stories. But no more could they linger over the gruesome details that had once given broadside readers delicious shudders. Take, for instance, the paragraphs describing the end of Mackay:

The sheriffs of the prison having arrived, immediately proceeded to the condemned cell. The executioner was shortly afterwards introduced to the prisoner, who immediately commenced pinioning him. During this trying operation, the wretched criminal only once he [sic] exclaimed, "May the Lord have mercy on my soul!" Everything having been completed, the prisoner thanked the chaplain and officers of the prison for their kindness towards him. The procession was formed, and slowly took its way towards the scaffold, which the prisoner ascended with a firm step; the rope was then speedily adjusted, the bolt was drawn, and the wretched man after a few struggles ceased to exist.

To appreciate how inadequate such reporting must have seemed to readers--who could not see the execution themselves---one needs only compare it with J. Pitts' sheet about the hanging of John Thurtell in 1824.²⁰ The entire two-column paper was a moment-by-moment report of Thurtell's progress from condemned cell to death. In the second paragraph, Thurtell, "mounted the stairs with a slow but steady step." In the third:

²⁰ Charles Hindley, The Life and Times of James Catnach (London: Reeves and Turner, 1878), p. 150.

Thurtell immediately placed himself under the fatal beam, and at that moment the chimes of a neighbouring clock began to strike twelve. The executioner then came forward with the rope, which he threw across it. Thurtell first lifted his eyes up to the drop, gazed at it for a few moments, and then took a calm but hurried survey of the multitude around him. He next fixed his eye on a young gentleman in the crowd, whom he had frequently seen as a spectator at the commencement of the proceedings against him. Seeing that the individual was affected by the circumstances, he removed them to another quarter, and in so doing recognized an individual well known in the sporting circles, to whom he made a slight bow.

No particular of Thurtell's dress escaped the reporter.

"The prisoner was attired," he noted, "in a dark brown great coat, with a black velvet collar, white corduroy breeches, drab gaiters and shoes." He wore handcuffs instead of cord bonds, black gloves "and the wrists of his shirt were visible below the cuffs of his coat." His cravat was white. His leg chains were held up in the middle "by a white Belcher handkerchief tied round his waist."

Conscientiously the reporter observed that Thurtell "looked careworn; his countenance had assumed a cadaverous hue, and there was a lankness about his cheeks and mouth, which could not fail to attract the notice of every spectator." The writer painstakingly set down the exchange of remarks between Thurtell and the governor of the jail. The prisoner's last words, he recorded, were, "I admit that justice has been done me--I am perfectly satisfied."

A few seconds then elapsed, during which every person seemed to be engaged in examining narrowly Thurtell's deportment. His features, as well they could be discerned, appeared to remain unmoved, and his hands, which were extremely prominent, continued perfectly steady, and were not affected by the slightest tremulous motion.

Exactly at two minutes past twelve the Under-sheriff, with his wand, gave the dreadful signal--the drop suddenly and silently fell--and

JOHN THURTELL WAS LAUNCHED
INTO ETERNITY.

Not all broadsides had been as detailed as that one. They had not needed to be. By virtue of their speed of production, their low selling price, they had been able to compete with newspapers without such conscientious reporting. But when the press seriously challenged their function, their opportunity was gone forever. Dying speeches belonged to the heyday of the Mannings, and long execution reports to the days before Michael Barrett. After Mackay plunged through the trap, execution reports were flat and stereotyped. The newspapers could do a better job.

The crime broadside did not die overnight. But as dwindling numbers were willing to pay for its raucous voice, the crime sheet became increasingly uncommon. When Charles Hindley was gathering material for his collection of street literature which he published in 1871, he one day met the street ballad singer of his youth near the Strand in London. Hindley and the hawker stopped to chat.²¹

"Want some old 'dying speeches' and 'cocks' you do indeed," said the vender. "Well, I a'nt got any."

Certainly no broadside peddler of old Jemmy Catnach's day would ever have had to confess that to a would-be customer.

²¹ Hindley, Curiosities of Street Literature, p. 11.

CONCLUSIONS

In the summer of 1946, Chicago police arrested a 17-year-old University of Chicago student named William Heirens for the murder of Suzanne Degnan. While his case moved towards trial, a sleek Air Force bomber dropped experimental atomic bombs at Bikini, and in Washington congressmen debated the British Loan and OPA issues. When stories datelined Bikini and Washington reached Chicago, editors played them down to give their readers latest developments in the Heirens case. In 85 newspaper issues, editors gave the murder case front-page banner headlines 62 times---73 percent of the total. Stories about OPA got top prominence 11 times, those about Bikini 4 times and those about the British Loan twice.¹

This preoccupation with crime on the part of United States editors has worried many critics of the press. It even has worried some editors. One Wisconsin editor has written:

Another recent violent example of obscenity run wild was the handling of the facts concerning the murder of a University of Wisconsin student and the attack made upon his companion. Details of the case were described in language totally unfit for young people or any other people. Every rule of propriety was disregarded....

We are fed up with this nationwide palming off of smut as news and entertainment. We need legislation to put men who conceive and distribute and pander in such filth behind the bars.²

¹ Lillian Gottlieb, "Radio and Newspaper Reports of the Heirens Case," Journalism Quarterly, June, 1947, p. 100.

² Ashland (Wisconsin) Daily Press, November 25, 1947.

The life story of the crime broadside should forcibly impress upon critics of the press that 20th-Century editors did not discover crime news, nor did their predecessors of the last century. In printed form, crime news antedated the newspaper. Indeed, on at least one side of its family tree, the newspaper can trace its ancestry back to the first printed ballads about crime. Blood and printer's ink have been mixed since the infancy of printing in England. And they have long been mixed in America. British broadsheets about crime and violence had their counterparts in America from the 17th Century until at least the latter half of the 19th, although in the long run the pamphlet was perhaps the more popular media in this country. Many classic American crimes--the Webster case in 1849, for instance--were covered extensively by pamphlets as well as newspapers.³

This is not to say that present-day handling of crime news is desirable or that it cannot be improved. It is simply to restate one obstacle to improvement: the reader's deep and abiding interest in gruesome news. One may easily underestimate the part of the early press in catering to this morbid curiosity if he refers only to old papers themselves. Some early newspapers carried a high proportion of what might be considered significant news--stories of international affairs and politics--and a low percentage of crime items. But the masses did not read those newspapers. The masses read broadsides, and crime was among the

³ Floyd K. Baskette, "Reporting the Webster Case, America's Classic Murder," Journalism Quarterly, September, 1947, pp. 250-57, gives an interesting account of American crime coverage in the last century.

first songs that the broadside sang.

There is scarcely a technique of modern crime presentation that cannot be traced back to the broadside. Today editors of tabloids and magazines specializing in true crime stories splash large headlines over first-person confessions of criminals, who sob their stories beneath such titles as "I Was a Gun Moll" and "I Killed for Love." Broadside publishers ran criminals' confessions as early as the 17th Century, perhaps earlier, in the form of versified laments and dying speeches. They anticipated by centuries the tabloid device of having hacks ghost-write these sensational revelations; most of the broadside confessions were the work of hired scribblers. Broadside men used illustrations of an "x-marks-the-spot" nature as early as the Canning case in the 18th Century, and likenesses of criminals decorated crime sheets as early as the 16th Century. Modern editors are fond of bestowing names on crimes, and during its life in the news a nasty bit of homicide might be identified as "The Black Dahlia Slaying" or "The Broadway Butterfly Murder." From the 17th Century on, broadside men did much the same sort of christening as they told their readers about "The Bloody-Minded Midwife," "The Whipster of Woodstreet" and "The Red Barn Murder."

Tricks of sensationalism that the yellow press has capitalized on were routine for broadside men. Villainy spiced up with sex was recognized as a tasty dish by even 17th-Century broadsheet men. They turned out many a story of murder involving an unwed mother and her uncomfortable lover, of unwanted husbands and wives who were converted into corpses by illicit lovers.

To sell sheets, publishers from time to time printed stories they knew to be false, used distortion, overplayed insignificant crimes. They could create a first-rate sensation from even a minor trial; they did in the case of Mary Doheny, for instance.

Mary Doheny stood trial in 1864 for obtaining food and other items under false pretences from gullible acquaintances in Carrick-on-Suir. She had convinced some of her neighbors, two policemen among them, that she could conjure up the spirits of their dead relatives for them. She was levying tributes of food and clothing on the living for the comfort of their ethereal kinfolk when the law caught up with her. Three contemporary broadsides in the author's possession refer to the woman as "The Modern Witch of Endor" and "The Carrick-on-Suir Witch."⁴ The headlines were designed to catch attention. "The Witch Again!" screamed one. "She revisits the scenes of her former fame each night? Notwithstanding the Bolts, Bars, and Padlocks of Clonmel Jail! !" Nowhere in the trial, as the broadsides reported it, was witchcraft mentioned. Yet the broadside confidently asserted:

It would appear from recent revelations in Carrick-on-Suir that witchery has been exercised there. A remarkable case of its power has been brought under judicial cognizance of the local magistracy, through the energy of Mr. Heard, S.I., and the police.

The current charge that prisoners often have a hard time getting a fair trial because their cases are tried beforehand in newspapers would have been valid against the broadside at almost

⁴ Lockhart in his life of Scott mentions a ballad, founded on Ayrshire tradition, that recounts the deeds of a "Witch of Carrick," whose skill in black art helped destroy one of the scattered vessels of the Spanish Armada.

any time from its birth to death. Before William Corder was even apprehended for the murder of Maria Marten, for instance, James Catnach in a broadside remarked:

There can be but little doubt left but that this unfortunate young woman fell a victim to her unhalloved passion, and was inhumanly butchered by the monster upon whom she relied for her future protection as a husband.⁵

Context of the sheet identified Corder as the "monster." When Corder was taken into custody, another Catnach sheet spoke in its headline of the "apprehension of the murderer," referred to Maria Marten as the young man's "victim" and said that he was charged with "perpetration of as dark and foul a murder as perhaps ever stained the annals of crime."⁶

Certain New York tabloids devoted to sex and sin at present pre-date by several days their Sunday editions, which are distributed to out-of-town news stands early in the week. That practice was used by 19th-Century broadside publishers. They printed reports of executions and dying speeches of criminals a day or two ahead of time so the broadsides could be sold in the provinces almost as soon as the malefactor made his fatal descent from the scaffold.

Even from the point of view of circulation, the broadsides compared favorably with American tabloids specializing in crime. When one New York tabloid editor was using sensation to build circulation, he had difficulty in getting more than 700,000

⁵ Charles Hindley, The Life and Times of James Catnach (London: Reeves and Turner, 1878), p. 182.

⁶ Ibid., pp. 183-84.

readers daily.⁷ Catnach, as has been pointed out several times, sold 500,000 broadsheets about a crime with strong public interest. Although Catnach's sheets were sold over a period of weeks, their showing is still impressive.

In almost every aspect of crime presentation, the broadside pioneered, for good or ill. But that information is one of the minor conclusions from this history of the crime broadside. The greatest value of this study of the crime sheet is in the field of social history. The mere fact that the crime broadside survived for more than three centuries is in itself a curious commentary on the times, and this study has repeatedly attempted to show why it survived.

Although many of the broadsides are of small use for trustworthy details about specific criminal cases, they are exceedingly valuable for the light they shed on the seamy side of their day. They teach a great deal about the extent of crime, types of crimes, barbarity of punishments, spirit of the London mob, living conditions, superstitions, sacredness of property--a list of things.

The value of the broadside as a source for social historians is in no way diminished by the fact that the sheets were not always accurate and at times were outright fakes. The broadsides were read by the masses; and true or false, they gave a picture that their readers accepted as true. Even the faked sheets, the

⁷ Emile Gauvreau, My Last Million Readers (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., 1941), passim.

cocks and catchpennies, had to carry information that would strike the reader as credible, although they might stretch his credulity. They had to have the ring of truth. If they got by with stories of ghosts and spirits, it was because a good share of their readers believed in ghosts and spirits. The broadside reflected the thinking of its times.

The changing attitude towards criminals, for instance, was recorded by the broadside in its lifetime. Early in the history of the broadsheet, the populace admired breakers-of-the law to the point of making them heroes; and if this admiration had not wholly vanished by the time the broadside died, it certainly had diminished. In the life span of the broadside, the criminal ceased to be viewed as a freak to be peeked at and poked at by sensation hunters and began to be recognized as what he was, an aberrant member of society in need of correction for his own sake as well as society's.

The law, too, changed, and the broadside reflected the changes. For centuries the government held that brutal punishments were the answer to an increasing criminal population. Scores of offences carried the death penalty, which was inflicted with monotonous regularity. But severity was not enough, and barbarous punishments did not diminish crime although they may have increased it. A man who could be executed for robbing a dwelling house might just as well murder anyone who tried to stop him, since he could be hanged only once. Furthermore, juries often refused to convict prisoners accused of minor crimes carrying the death penalty, and the offenders went entirely unpunished. In the

early 19th Century, the criminal code was alleviated. Public executions, which had long since lost their effect as warnings to the populace, were abolished.

These were the changes reflected by the broadside over a long period. As a day to day record, the broadside is fully as valuable for the glimpses it gives of the life and manners of the times. A few random examples will illustrate the point.

In 1783 the procession of criminals from prison to Tyburn gallows was abolished for humane reasons, and Samuel Johnson lamented its passing. A few years later this measure was followed by another, the introduction of a gallows with trap door to replace the cart on which condemned criminals previously had stood until horses jerked it from under them. The new device for speeding felons into eternity was described by a contemporary broadsheet:

We imagine that an accurate representation of the new mode of executing criminals in the Old Bailey, which does so much honour to the present worthy Sheriffs, will hardly fail of giving satisfaction to such, at least, as do not reside near the metropolis.

The whole of this temporary erection is hung in black. The criminals are attended...from their cells to the centre part of the scaffold, which is a platform raised about two or three inches above the general floor, and directly under the gallows: here, after the usual prayers and solemnities, the rope is tied up, and, at the Sheriff's signal, the executioner pulls away a staple, which loosens a bar that supports the platform, and the platform then falls in: and this, being much more sudden and regular than that of a cart being drawn away, has the effect of immediate death.⁸

Even after this device of humane intent had been in use for

⁸ Charles Hindley, Curiosities of Street Literature (London: Reeves and Turner, 1871), p. 179.

more than threescore years, the hangman sometimes had to give it manual assistance, if one believes a sheet published in Bideford in 1849:

The bolt was drawn, the hands gave a convulsive twitch upwards, there was a slight motion in the legs, and then a horrible tugging of the hangman at his heels.⁹

These spectacles were intended to serve as a warning to the populace, and so was the custom of hanging the corpses of criminals in chains. Ralph Smith, who died in 1792 for murder, was one of a host of felons who went without a grave that his fellow creatures might profit from his example.

His body was hung in chains near the village of Frampton, to perpetuate the inhuman transactions that both young and old may endeavour to shun so abominable an example.¹⁰

How behaved the crowds at these executions performed for their edification? Not always as soberly as the occasion warranted. Consider the attitude of spectators toward Robert Blakesly, who was hanged for murder in about 1840:

The moment the culprit appeared on the scaffold, there was a yell from the multitude, but he took no notice of it, but muttering a few words in prayer he was launched into eternity. For the first couple of minutes, the wretched man struggled very much, to the great gratification of the crowd, at the pain he was supposed to be suffering.¹¹

Whether the spectators came for enlightenment or out of morbid curiosity, they came in vast numbers. "Upwards of 100,000

⁹ Broadside, An Account of the Execution and Confession & of James Landick... (Bideford: Wilson, 1849). In Harvard collection.

¹⁰ Broadside, The Life, Trial, and Behaviour of Ralph Smith... (no publisher, 1792). In Harvard collection.

¹¹ Hindley, Curiosities of Street Literature, p. 194.

persons were present, said a sheet about the fatal descent of John Gleeson Wilson in 1849, "the railway company running cheap trains from all available parts."¹²

The broadsides shed curious light on juvenile delinquency of their time. Anticipating Oliver Twist by about 14 years, one broadsheet described the robbery of a dwelling house near Wakefield; the methods of entry were strikingly similar to those used in a house-breaking attempt to which Dickens' young hero was an unwilling party:

The entrance into the premises was effected by breaking a square of glass, through which a boy was passed into the kitchen, and opened the door for the rest.¹³

The routing of the robbers also smacked of the episode of Oliver Twist. The master of the house, roused by his servant, arrived in time to shoot at the intruders.

About half past four some colliers going to their work, found the man who had been shot, within one hundred yards of Mr. Boyle's house, so desperately wounded, that he shortly expired....It is supposed that his companions had intended to have thrown him into a well near at hand, to prevent his making any disclosure, but that they were too much concerned for their own safety, to be able to effect their object.

A man and a boy of 14 were apprehended on suspicion of the robbery, the broadside continued, and they were believe "to form part of a most extensive gang of house breakers."

In reporting crime, the broadside could scarcely avoid revealing the human misery that often caused it. James Duggin

¹² Ibid., p. 197.

¹³ Broadside, A Particular Account of a Daring Robbery And Shooting One of the Robbers.... (Leeds: Samuel Brookes, 1824). In Harvard collection.

murdered his wife and six children, then committed suicide, one June day in 1879. There was no real viciousness in the man, if the broadside writer had his story right.

On Saturday evening Duggin returned from his work, and he then looked rather sad, his wife told a female neighbour that her husband had been dismissed from his employment, and they had also received notice to leave their lodgings at 12 o'clock on Monday.¹⁴

These examples could be multiplied to show that in telling about crime the broadside told also of the everyday life of the people. The shilling hacks who turned their small talents to crime reporting of necessity revealed a murky part of their times in all its brutality, squalor, misery and life-like detail.

¹⁴ Hindley, Curiosities of Street Literature, p. 235.

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In preparing this thesis, the author has studied hundreds of broadsides in their original form and in collections of reprints. In this list of references, he has included neither the broadsides nor the contemporary crime tracts that furnished background material, since the titles of those items would be more tedious than helpful. The reader whose interest in broadsides is stimulated as a result of this study will find several excellent collections of the sheets in the United States. The Harvard Library has a large collection of crime broadsides, most of them from the late 18th Century and the 19th Century, according to Miss Carolyn Jakeman, librarian, who assisted the author in selecting source material for this study. The New York Public Library has a collection of at least 4,000 broadsides of all types, American and British. However, as the sheets are arranged chronologically without regard to subject or country, working with them might present certain difficulties. The Library of the American Antiquarian Society in Worcester, Massachusetts, has an extensive collection of American crime broadsides and pamphlets, according to Clifford K. Shipton, librarian. Broadsides and pamphlets about the Canning case are in the Yale and Harvard Libraries. An excellent microfilm collection of this source material, arranged by Lillian de la Torre, is in the Connecticut State Library at Hartford. The reader's attention also is directed to the excellent collections of broadside reprints edited by Pro-

fessor Rollins. Hindley's Curiosities of Street Literature contains a number of interesting broadside reprints. Hindley arranged his reprints in chronological order, but he was inaccurate in the dates that he ascribed to some of the items.

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