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HISTORICAL MYSTERIES

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Содержание

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PREFACE

These Essays, which appeared, with two exceptions, in *The Cornhill Magazine*, 1904, have been revised, and some alterations, corrections, and additions have been made in them. 'Queen Oglethorpe,' in which Miss Alice Shield collaborated, doing most of the research, is reprinted by the courteous permission of the editor, from *Blackwood's Magazine*. A note on 'The End of Jeanne de la Motte,' has been added as a sequel to 'The Cardinal's Necklace:' it appeared in *The Morning Post*, the Editor kindly granting leave to republish.

The author wishes to acknowledge the able assistance of Miss E.M. Thompson, who made researches for him in the British Museum and at the Record Office.

I
THE CASE OF ELIZABETH CANNING

Don't let your poor little
Lizzie be blamed!

Thackeray.

'Everyone has heard of the case of Elizabeth Canning,' writes Mr. John Paget; and till recently I agreed with him. But five or six years ago the case of Elizabeth Canning repeated itself in a marvellous way, and then but few persons of my acquaintance had ever heard of that mysterious girl.

The recent case, so strange a parallel to that of 1753, was this: In Cheshire lived a young woman whose business in life was that of a daily governess. One Sunday her family went to church in the morning, but she set off to skate, by herself, on a lonely pond. She was never seen of or heard of again till, in the dusk of the following Thursday, her hat was found outside of the door of her father's farmyard. Her friend discovered her further off in a most miserable condition, weak, emaciated, and with her skull fractured. Her explanation was that a man had seized her on the ice, or as she left it, had dragged her across the fields, and had shut her up in a house, from which she escaped, crawled to her father's home, and, when she found herself unable

to go further, tossed her hat towards the farm door. Neither such a man as she described, nor the house in which she had been imprisoned, was ever found. The girl's character was excellent, nothing pointed to her condition being the result *d'une orgie échevelée*; but the neighbours, of course, made insinuations, and a lady of my acquaintance, who visited the girl's mother, found herself almost alone in placing a charitable construction on the adventure.

My theory was that the girl had fractured her skull by a fall on the ice, had crawled to and lain in an unvisited outhouse of the farm, and on that Thursday night was wandering out, in a distraught state, not wandering in. Her story would be the result of her cerebral condition – concussion of the brain.

It was while people were discussing this affair, a second edition of Elizabeth Canning's, that one found out how forgotten was Elizabeth.

On January 1, 1753, Elizabeth was in her eighteenth year. She was the daughter of a carpenter in Aldermanbury; her mother, who had four younger children, was a widow, very poor, and of the best character. Elizabeth was short of stature, ruddy of complexion, and, owing to an accident in childhood – the falling of a garret ceiling on her head – was subject to fits of unconsciousness on any alarm. On learning this, the mind flies to hysteria, with its accompaniment of diabolical falseness, for an explanation of her adventure. But hysteria does not serve the turn. The girl had been for years in service with a Mr.

Wintlebury, a publican. He gave her the highest character for honesty and reserve; she did not attend to the customers at the bar, she kept to herself, she had no young man, and she only left Wintlebury's for a better place – at a Mr. Lyon's, a near neighbour of her mother. Lyon, a carpenter, corroborated, as did all the neighbours, on the points of modesty and honesty.

On New Year's Day, 1753, Elizabeth wore her holiday best – 'a purple masquerade stuff gown, a white handkerchief and apron, a black quilted petticoat, a green undercoat, black shoes, blue stockings, a white shaving hat with green ribbons,' and 'a very ruddy colour.' She had her wages, or Christmas-box, in her pocket – a golden half guinea in a little box, with three shillings and a few coppers, including a farthing. The pence she gave to three of her little brothers and sisters. One boy, however, 'had huffed her,' and got no penny. But she relented, and, when she went out, bought for him a mince-pie. Her visit of New Year's Day was to her maternal aunt, Mrs. Colley, living at Saltpetre Bank (Dock Street, behind the London Dock). She meant to return in time to buy, with her mother, a cloak, but the Colleys had a cold early dinner, and kept her till about 9 p. m. for a hot supper.

Already, at 9 p. m., Mr. Lyon had sent to Mrs. Canning's to make inquiries; the girl was not wont to stay out so late on a holiday. About 9 p. m., in fact, the two Colleys were escorting Elizabeth as far as Houndsditch.

The rest is mystery!

On Elizabeth's non-arrival Mrs. Canning sent her lad, a little after ten, to the Colleys, who were in bed. The night was passed in anxious search, to no avail; by six in the morning inquiries were vainly renewed. Weeks went by. Mrs. Canning, aided by the neighbours, advertised in the papers, mentioning a report of shrieks heard from a coach in Bishopsgate Street in the small morning hours of January 2. The mother, a Churchwoman, had prayers put up at several churches, and at Mr. Wesley's chapel. She also consulted a cheap 'wise man,' whose aspect alarmed her, but whose wisdom took the form of advising her to go on advertising. It was later rumoured that he said the girl was in the hands of 'an old black woman,' and would return; but Mrs. Canning admitted nothing of all this. Sceptics, with their usual acuteness, maintained that the disappearance was meant to stimulate charity, and that the mother knew where the daughter was; or, on the other hand, the daughter had fled to give birth to a child in secret, or for another reason incident to 'the young and gay,' as one of the counsel employed euphemistically put the case. The medical evidence did not confirm these suggestions. Details are needless, but these theories were certainly improbable. The character of La Pucelle was not more stainless than Elizabeth's.

About 10.15 p. m. on January 29, on the Eve of the Martyrdom of King Charles – as the poor women dated it – Mrs. Canning was on her knees, praying – so said her apprentice – that she might behold even if it were but an apparition of her

daughter; such was her daily prayer. It was as in Wordsworth's *Affliction of Margaret*:

> I look for ghosts, but none will force
> Their way to me; 'tis falsely said
> That ever there was intercourse
> Between the living and the dead!

At that moment there was a sound at the door. The 'prentice opened it, and was aghast; the mother's prayer seemed to be answered, for there, bleeding, bowed double, livid, ragged, with a cloth about her head, and clad in a dirty dressing-jacket and a filthy draggled petticoat, was Elizabeth Canning. She had neglected her little brother that 'huffed her' on New Year's Day, but she had been thinking of him, and now she gave her mother for him all that she had – the farthing!

You see that I am on Elizabeth's side: that farthing touch, and another, with the piety, honesty, loyalty, and even the superstition of her people, have made me her partisan, as was Mr. Henry Fielding, the well-known magistrate.

Some friends were sent for, Mrs. Myers, Miss Polly Lyon, daughter of her master, and others; while busybodies flocked in, among them one Robert Scarrat, a toiler, who had no personal knowledge of Elizabeth. A little wine was mulled; the girl could not swallow it, emaciated as she was. Her condition need not be described in detail, but she was very near her death, as the medical evidence, and that of a midwife (who consoled Mrs.

Canning on one point), proves beyond possibility of cavil.

The girl told her story; but what did she tell? Mr. Austin Dobson, in *The Dictionary of National Biography*, says that her tale 'gradually took shape under the questions of sympathising neighbours,' and certainly, on some points, she gave affirmative answers to leading questions asked by Robert Scarrat. The difficulty is that the neighbours' accounts of what Elizabeth said in her woful condition were given when the girl was tried for perjury in April-May 1754. We must therefore make allowance for friendly bias and mythopœic memory. On January 31, 1753, Elizabeth made her statement before Alderman Chitty, and the chief count against her is that what she told Chitty did not tally with what the neighbours, in May 1754, swore that she told them when she came home on January 29, 1753. This point is overlooked by Mr. Paget in his essay on the subject.[1]

On the other hand, by 1754 the town was divided into two factions, believers and disbelievers in Elizabeth; and Chitty was then a disbeliever. Chitty took but a few notes on January 31, 1753. 'I did not make it so distinct as I could wish, not thinking it could be the subject of so much inquiry,' he admitted in 1754. Moreover, the notes which he then produced were *not* the notes which he made at the time, 'but what I took since from that paper I took then' (January 31, 1753) 'of hers and other persons that were brought before me.' This is not intelligible, and is not satisfactory. If Elizabeth handed in a paper, Chitty should have

[1] *Puzzles and Paradoxes*, pp. 317-336, Blackwoods, 1874.

produced it in 1754. If he took notes of the evidence, why did he not produce the original notes?

These notes, made when, and from what source, is vague, bear that Elizabeth's tale was this: At a dead wall by Bedlam, in Moorfields, about ten p. m., on January 1, 1753, two men stripped her of gown, apron, and hat, robbed her of thirteen shillings and sixpence, 'struck her, stunned her, and pushed her along Bishopsgate Street.' She lost consciousness – one of her 'fits' – and recovered herself (near Enfield Wash). Here she was taken to a house, later said to be 'Mother Wells's,' where 'several persons' were. Chitty, unluckily, does not say what sort of persons, and on that point all turns. She was asked 'to do as they did,' 'a woman forced her upstairs into a room, and cut the lace of her stays,' told her there were bread and water in the room, and that her throat would be cut if she came out. The door was locked on her. (There was no lock; the door was merely bolted.) She lived on fragments of a quartern loaf and water '*in a pitcher*,' with the mince-pie bought for her naughty little brother. She escaped about four in the afternoon of January 29. In the room were 'an old stool or two, *an old picture* over the chimney,' two windows, an old table, and so on. She forced a pane in a window, 'and got out on a small shed of boards or penthouse,' and so slid to the ground. She did not say, the alderman added, that there was any hay in the room. Of bread there were 'four or five' or 'five or six pieces.' '*She never mentioned the name of Wells.*' Some one else did that at a venture. 'She said she could tell

nothing of the woman's name.' The alderman issued a warrant against this Mrs. Wells, apparently on newspaper suggestion.

The chief points against Elizabeth were that, when Wells's place was examined, there was no penthouse to aid an escape, and no old picture. But, under a wretched kind of bed, supporting the thing, was a picture, on wood, of a Crown. Madam Wells had at one time used this loyal emblem as a sign, she keeping a very ill-famed house of call. But, in December 1745, when certain Highland and Lowland gentlemen were accompanying bonny Prince Charlie towards the metropolis, Mrs. Wells removed into a room the picture of the Crown, as being apt to cause political emotions. This sign may have been 'the old picture.' As to hay, there *was* hay in the room later searched; but penthouse there was none.

That is the worst point in the alderman's notes, of whatever value these enigmatic documents may be held.

One Nash, butler to the Goldsmiths' Company, was present at the examination before Chitty on January 31, 1753. He averred, in May 1754, what Chitty did not, that Elizabeth spoke of the place of her imprisonment as 'a little, square, darkish room,' with 'a few old pictures.' Here the *one* old picture of the notes is better evidence, if the notes are evidence, than Nash's memory. But I find that he was harping on 'a few old pictures' as early as March 1753. Elizabeth said she hurt her ear in getting out of the window, and, in fact, it was freshly cut and bleeding when she arrived at home.

All this of Nash is, so far, the better evidence, as next day, February 1, 1753, when a most tumultuous popular investigation of the supposed house of captivity was made, he says that he and others, finding the dungeon not to be square, small, and darkish, but a long, narrow slit of a loft, half full of hay, expressed disbelief. Yet it was proved that he went on suggesting to Lyon, Elizabeth's master, that people should give money to Elizabeth, and 'wished him success.' The proof was a letter of his, dated February 10, 1753. Also, Nash, and two like-minded friends, hearing Elizabeth perjure herself, as they thought, at the trial of Mrs. Wells (whom Elizabeth never mentioned to Chitty), did not give evidence against her – on the most absurdly flimsy excuses. One man was so horrified that, in place of denouncing the perjury, he fled incontinent! Another went to a dinner, and Nash to Goldsmiths' Hall, to his duties as butler. Such was then the vigour of their scepticism.

On the other hand, at the trial in 1754 the neighbours reported Elizabeth's tale as told on the night when she came home, more dead than alive. Mrs. Myers had known Elizabeth for eleven years, 'a very sober, honest girl as any in England.' Mrs. Myers found her livid, her fingers 'stood crooked;' Mrs. Canning, Mrs. Woodward, and Polly Lyon were then present, and Mrs. Myers knelt beside Elizabeth to hear her story. It was as Chitty gave it, till the point where she was carried into a house. The 'several persons' there, she said, were 'an elderly woman and two young ones.' Her stays were cut by the old woman. She was then thrust

upstairs into a room, wherein was *hay*, *a pitcher of water*, and bread in pieces. Bread may have been brought in, water too, while she slept, a point never noted in the trials. She 'heard the name of Mother Wills, or Wells, mentioned.'

Now Scarrat, in 1754, said that he, being present on January 29, 1753, and hearing of the house, 'offered to bet a guinea to a farthing that it was Mother Wells's.' But Mrs. Myers believed that Elizabeth had mentioned hearing that name earlier; and Mrs. Myers must have heard Scarrat, if he suggested it, before Elizabeth named it. The point is uncertain.

Mrs. Woodward was in Mrs. Canning's room a quarter of an hour after Elizabeth's arrival. The girl said she was almost starved to death in a house on the Hertfordshire road, which she knew by seeing the Hertford coach, with which she was familiar, go by. The woman who cut her stays was 'a tall, black, swarthy woman.' Scarrat said 'that was not Mrs. Wells,' which was fair on Scarrat's part. Elizabeth described the two young women as being one fair, the other dark; so Scarrat swore. Wintlebury, her old master, and several others corroborated.

If these accounts by Mrs. Myers, Mrs. Woodward, Scarrat, Wintlebury, and others are trustworthy, then Elizabeth Canning's narrative is true, for she found the two girls, the tall, swarthy woman, the hay, and the broken water-pitcher, and almost everything else that she had mentioned on January 29, at Mother Wells's house when it was visited on February 1. But we must remember that most accounts of what Elizabeth said on January

29 and on January 31 are fifteen months after date, and are biassed on both sides.

To Mother Wells's the girl was taken on February 1, in what a company! The coach, or cab, was crammed full, some friends walked, several curious citizens rode, and, when Elizabeth arrived at the house, Nash, the butler, and other busybodies had made a descent on it. The officer with the warrant was already there. Lyon, Aldridge, and Hague were with Nash in a cab, and were met by others 'riding hard,' who had seized the people found at Mrs. Wells's. There was a rabble of persons on foot and on horse about the door.

On entering the doorway the parlour was to your left, the house staircase in front of you, on your right the kitchen, at the further end thereof was a door, and, when that was opened, a flight of stairs led to a long slit of a loft which, Nash later declared, did not answer to Elizabeth's description, especially as there was hay, and, before Chitty, Elizabeth had mentioned none. There was a filthy kind of bed, on which now slept a labourer and his wife, Fortune and Judith Natus. Nash kept talking about the hay, and one Adamson rode to meet Elizabeth, and came back saying that she said there *was* hay. By Adamson's account he only asked her, 'What kind of place was it?' and she said, 'A wild kind of place with hay in it,' as in the neighbours' version of her first narrative. Mrs. Myers, who was in the coach, corroborated Adamson.

The point of the sceptics was that till Adamson rode back to

her on her way to Wells's house she had never mentioned hay. They argued that Adamson had asked her, 'Was there hay in the room?' and that she, taking the hint, had said 'Yes!' By May 1754 Adamson and Mrs. Myers, who was in the cab with Elizabeth, would believe that Adamson had asked 'What kind of place is it?' and that Elizabeth then spoke, without suggestion, of the hay. The point would be crucial, but nobody in 1754 appears to have remembered that on February 21, three weeks after the event, at the trial of Mother Wells, Adamson had given exactly the same evidence as in May 1754. 'I returned to meet her, and asked her about the room. She described the room with some hay in it … an odd sort of an empty room.'

Arriving at Mother Wells's, Elizabeth, very faint, was borne in and set on a dresser in the kitchen. Why did she not at once say, 'My room was up the stairs, beyond the door at the further end of the room'? I know not, unless she was dazed, as she well might be. Next she, with a mob of the curious, was carried into the parlour, where were all the inmates of the house. She paid no attention to Mrs. Wells, but at once picked out a tall old woman huddled over the fire smoking a pipe. She did this, by the sceptical Nash's evidence, instantly and without hesitation. The old woman rose. She was 'tall and swarthy,' a gipsy, and according to all witnesses inconceivably hideous, her underlip was 'the size of a small child's arm,' and she was marked with some disease. 'Pray look at this face,' she said; 'I think God never made such another.' She was named Mary Squires. She added

that on January 1 she was in Dorset – 'at Abbotsbury,' said her son George, who was present.

In 1754 thirty-six people testified to Mary Squires's presence in Dorset, or to meeting her on her way to London, while twenty-seven, at Enfield alone, swore as positively that they had seen her and her daughter at or near Mrs. Wells's, and had conversed with her, between December 18, 1752, and the middle of January. Some of the Enfield witnesses were of a more prosperous and educated class than the witnesses for the gipsy. Many, on both sides, had been eager to swear, indeed, many had made affidavits as early as March 1753.

This business of the cross-swearing is absolutely inexplicable; on both sides the same entire certainty was exhibited, as a rule, yet the woman was unmistakable, as she justly remarked. The gipsy, at all events, had her *alibi* ready at once; her denial was as prompt and unhesitating as Elizabeth's accusation. But, if guilty, she had enjoyed plenty of time since the girl's escape to think out her line of defence. If guilty, it was wiser to allege an *alibi* than to decamp when Elizabeth made off, for she could not hope to escape pursuit. George Squires, her son, so prompt with his 'at Abbotsbury on January 1,' could not tell, in May 1754, where he had passed the Christmas Day before that New Year's Day, and Christmas is a notable day. Elizabeth also recognised in Lucy Squires, the gipsy's daughter, and in Virtue Hall, the two girls, dark and fair, who were present when her stays were cut.

After the recognition, Elizabeth was carried through the

house, and, according to Nash, in the loft up the stairs from the kitchen she said, in answer to his question, 'This is the room, for here is the hay I lay upon, but I think there is more of it.' She also identified the pitcher with the broken mouth, which she certainly mentioned to Chitty, as that which held her allowance of water. A chest, or nest, of drawers she declared that she did not remember. An attempt was made to suggest that one of her party brought the pitcher in with him to confirm her account. This attempt failed; but that she had mentioned the pitcher was admitted. Mrs. Myers, in May 1754, quoted Elizabeth's words as to there being more hay exactly in the terms of Nash. Mrs. Myers was present in the loft, and added that Elizabeth 'took her foot, and put the hay away, and showed the gentlemen two holes, and said they were in the room when she was in it before.'

On February 7, Elizabeth swore to her narrative, formally made out by her solicitor, before the author of *Tom Jones*, and Mr. Fielding, by threats of prosecution if she kept on shuffling, induced Virtue Hall to corroborate, after she had vexed his kind heart by endless prevarications. But as Virtue Hall was later 'got at' by the other side and recanted, we leave her evidence on one side.

On February 21-26 Mary Squires was tried at the Old Bailey and condemned to death, Virtue Hall corroborating Elizabeth. Mrs. Wells was branded on the hand. Three Dorset witnesses to the gipsy's *alibi* were not credited, and Fortune and Judith Natus did not appear in court, though subpœnaed. In 1754 they

accounted for this by their fear of the mob. The three sceptics, Nash, Hague, and Aldridge, held their peace. The Lord Mayor, Sir Crispin Gascoyne, who was on the bench at the trial of Squires and Wells, was dissatisfied. He secured many affidavits which seem unimpeachable, for the gipsy's *alibi*, and so did the other side for her presence at Enfield. He also got at Virtue Hall, or rather a sceptical Dr. Hill got at her and handed her over to Gascoyne. She, as we saw, recanted. George Squires, the gipsy's son, with an attorney, worked up the evidence for the gipsy's *alibi*; she received a free pardon, and on April 29, 1754, there began the trial of Elizabeth Canning for 'wilful and corrupt perjury.'

Mr. Davy, opening for the Crown, charitably suggested that Elizabeth had absconded 'to preserve her character,' and had told a romantic story to raise money! 'And, having by this time subdued all remains of virtue, she preferred the offer of money, though she must wade through innocent blood' – that of the gipsy – 'to attain it.'

These hypotheses are absurd; her character certainly needed no saving.

Mr. Davy then remarked on the gross improbabilities of the story of Elizabeth. They are glaring, but, as Fielding said, so are the improbabilities of the facts. Somebody had stripped and starved and imprisoned the girl; that is absolutely certain. She was brought 'within an inch of her life.' She did not suffer all these things to excite compassion; that is out of the question. Had

she plunged into 'gaiety' on New Year's night, the consequences would be other than instant starvation. They might have been 'guilty splendour.' She had been most abominably misused, and it was to the last degree improbable that any mortal should so misuse an honest quiet lass. But the grossly improbable had certainly occurred. It was next to impossible that, in 1856, a respectable-looking man should offer to take a little boy for a drive, and that, six weeks later, the naked body of the boy, who had been starved to death, should be found in a ditch near Acton. But the facts occurred.[2] To Squires and Wells a rosy girl might prove more valuable than a little boy to anybody.

That Elizabeth could live for a month on a loaf did not surprise Mrs. Canning. 'When things were very hard with her,' said Mrs. Canning, 'the child had lived on half a roll a day.' This is that other touch which, with the story of the farthing, helps to make me a partisan of Elizabeth.

Mr. Davy said that on January 31, before Chitty, Elizabeth 'did not pretend to certainty' about Mrs. Wells. She never did at any time; she neither knew, nor affected to know, anything about Mrs. Wells. She had only seen a tall, swarthy woman, a dark girl, and a fair girl, whom she recognised in the gipsy, her daughter, and Virtue Hall. Mr. Davy preferred Nash's evidence to that of all the neighbours, and even to Chitty's notes, when Nash and Chitty varied. Mr. Davy said that Nash 'withdrew his assistance' after the visit to the house. It was proved, we saw, by his letter of

[2] Paget, p. 332.

February 10, that he did not withdraw his assistance, which, like that of Mr. Tracy Tupman, took the form of hoping that other people would subscribe money.

Certain varieties of statement as to the time when Elizabeth finished the water proved fatal, and the penthouse of Chitty's notes was played for all that it was worth. It was alleged, as matter of fact, that Adamson brought the broken pitcher into the house – this by Mr. Willes, later Solicitor-General. Now, for three months before February 1, Adamson had not seen Elizabeth Canning, nor had he heard her description of the room. He was riding, and could not carry a gallon pitcher in his coat pocket. He could not carry it in John Gilpin's fashion; and, whatever else was denied, it was admitted that from the first Elizabeth mentioned the pitcher. The statement of Mr. Willes, that Adamson brought in the pitcher, was one that no barrister should have made.

The Natus pair were now brought in to say that they slept in the loft during the time that Elizabeth said she was there. As a reason for not giving evidence at the gipsy's trial, they alleged fear of the mob, as we saw.

The witnesses for the gipsy's *alibi* were called. Mrs. Hopkins, of South Parrot, Dorset, was not very confident that she had seen the gipsy at her inn on December 29, 1752. She, if Mary Squires she was, told Mrs. Hopkins that they 'sold hardware'; in fact they sold soft ware, smuggled nankin and other stuffs. Alice Farnham recognised the gipsies, whom she had seen after New Christmas (new style). 'They said they would come to see me after the Old

Christmas holidays' – which is unlikely!

Lucy Squires, the daughter, was clean, well dressed, and, *teste* Mr. Davy, she was pretty. She was not called.

George Squires was next examined. He had been well tutored as to what he did *after* December 29, but could not tell where he was on Christmas Day, four days earlier! His memory only existed from the hour when he arrived at Mrs. Hopkins's inn, at South Parrot (December 29, 1752). His own counsel must have been amazed; but in cross-examination Mr. Morton showed that, for all time up to December 29, 1752, George's memory was an utter blank. On January 1, George dined, he said, at Abbotsbury, with one Clarke, a sweetheart of his sister. They had two boiled fowls. But Clarke said they had only 'a part of a fowl between them.' There was such a discrepancy of evidence here as to time on the part of one of the gipsy's witnesses that Mr. Davy told him he was drunk. Yet he persisted that he kissed Lucy Squires, at an hour when Lucy, to suit the case, could not have been present.

There was documentary evidence – a letter of Lucy to Clarke, from Basingstoke. It was dated January 18, 1753, but the figure after 175 was torn off the postmark; that was the only injury to the letter. Had there not been a battalion of as hard swearers to the presence of the gipsies at Enfield in December-January 1752-1753 as there was to their absence from Enfield and to their presence in Dorset, the gipsy party would have proved their case. As matters stand, we must remember that the Dorset evidence had been organised by a solicitor, that the route was one which

the Squires party habitually used; that by the confession of Mr. Davy, the prosecuting counsel, the Squires family 'stood in' with the smuggling interest, compact and unscrupulous. They were 'gipsies dealing in smuggled goods,' said Mr. Davy. Again, while George Squires had been taught his lesson like a parrot, the prosecution dared not call his sister, pretty Lucy, as a witness. They said that George was 'stupid,' but that Lucy was much more dull. The more stupid was George, the less unlikely was he to kidnap Elizabeth Canning as prize of war after robbing her. But she did not swear to him.

As to the presence of the gipsies at Mrs. Wells's, at Enfield, as early as January 19, Mrs. Howard swore. Her husband lived on his own property, and her house, with a well, which she allowed the villagers to use, was opposite Mrs. Wells's. Mrs. Howard had seen the gipsy girl at the well, and been curtsied to by her, at a distance of three or four yards. She had heard earlier from her servants of the arrival of the gipsies, and had 'looked wishfully,' or earnestly, at them. She was not so positive as to Mary Squires, whom she had seen at a greater distance.

William Headland swore to seeing Mary Squires on January 9; he fixed the date by a market-day. Also, on the 12th, he saw her in Mrs. Wells's house. He picked up a blood-stained piece of thin lead under the window from which Elizabeth escaped, and took it to his mother, who corroborated. Samuel Story, who knew Mary Squires from of old, saw her on December 22 in White Webs Lane, so called from the old house noted as a

meeting-place of the Gunpowder Plot conspirators. Story was a retired clockmaker. Mr. Smith, a tenant of the Duke of Portland, saw Mary Squires in his cowhouse on December 15, 1752. She wanted leave to camp there, as she had done in other years. The gipsies then lost a pony. Several witnesses swore to this, and one swore to conversations with Mary Squires about the pony. She gave her name, and said that it was on the clog by which the beast was tethered.

Loomworth Dane swore to Mary Squires, whom he had observed so closely as to note a great hole in the heel of her stocking. The date was Old Christmas Day, 1752. Dane was landlord of the Bell, at Enfield, and a maker of horse-collars. Sarah Star, whose house was next to Mrs. Wells's, saw Mary Squires in her own house on January 18 or 19; Mary wanted to buy pork, and hung about for three-quarters of an hour, offering to tell fortunes. Mrs. Star got rid of her by a present of some pig's flesh. She fixed the date by a document which she had given to Miles, a solicitor; it was not in court. James Pratt swore to talk with Mary Squires before Christmas as to her lost pony; she had then a man with her. He was asked to look round the court to see if the man was present, whereon George Squires ducked his head, and was rebuked by the prosecuting counsel, Mr. Davy, who said 'It does not look well.' It was hardly the demeanour of conscious innocence. But Pratt would not swear to him. Mary Squires told Pratt that she would consult 'a cunning-man about the lost pony,' and Mr. Nares foolishly asked why a

cunning woman should consult a cunning man? 'One black fellow will often tell you that he can and does something magical, whilst all the time he is perfectly aware that he cannot, and yet firmly believes that some other man can really do it.' So write Messrs. Spencer and Gillen in their excellent book on *The Native Tribes of Central Australia* (p. 130); and so it was with the gipsy, who, though a 'wise woman,' believed in a 'wise man.'

This witness (Pratt) said, with great emphasis: 'Upon my oath, that is the woman… I am positive in my conscience, and I am sure that it was no other woman; this is the woman I saw at that blessed time.' Moreover, she gave him her name as the name on the clog of the lost pony. The affair of the pony was just what would impress a man like Pratt, and, on the gipsies' own version, they had no pony with them in their march from Dorset.

All this occurred *before* Pratt left his house, which was on December 22, 'three days before New Christmas.' He then left Enfield for Cheshunt, and his evidence carries conviction.

In some other cases witnesses were very stupid – could not tell in what month Christmas fell. One witness, an old woman, made an error, confusing January 16 with January 23. A document on which she relied gave the later date.

If witnesses on either side were a year out in their reckoning, the discrepancies would be accountable; but Pratt, for example, could not forget when he left Enfield for Cheshunt, and Farmer Smith and Mrs. Howard could be under no such confusion of memory. It may be prejudice, but I rather prefer the Enfield

evidence in some ways, as did Mr. Paget. In others, the Dorset evidence seems better.

Elizabeth had sworn to having asked a man to point out the way to London after she escaped into the lane beside Mrs. Wells's house. A man, Thomas Bennet, swore that on January 29, 1753, he met 'a miserable, poor wretch, about half-past four,' 'near the ten-mile stone,' in a lane. She asked her way to London; 'she said she was affrighted by the tanner's dog.' The tanner's house was about two hundred yards nearer London, and the prosecution made much of this, as if a dog, with plenty of leisure and a feud against tramps, could not move two hundred yards, or much more, if he were taking a walk abroad, to combat the object of his dislike. Bennet knew that the dog was the tanner's; probably he saw the dog when he met the wayfarer, and it does not follow that the wayfarer herself called it 'the tanner's dog.' Bennet fixed the date with precision. Four days later, hearing of the trouble at Mrs. Wells's, Bennet said, 'I will be hanged if I did not meet the young woman near this place and told her the way to London.' Mr. Davy could only combat Bennet by laying stress on the wayfarer's talking of 'the tanner's dog.' But the dog, at the moment of the meeting, was probably well in view. Bennet knew him, and Bennet was not asked, 'Did the woman call the dog "the tanner's dog," or do you say this of your own knowledge?' Moreover, the tannery was well in view, and the hound may have conspicuously started from that base of operations. Mr. Davy's reply was a quibble.

His closing speech merely took up the old line: Elizabeth was absent to conceal 'a misfortune'; her cunning mother was her accomplice. There was no proof of Elizabeth's unchastity; nay, she had an excellent character, 'but there is a time, gentlemen, when people begin to be wicked.' If engaged for the other side Mr. Davy would have placed his '*Nemo repente fuit turpissimus*' – no person of unblemished character wades straight into 'innocent blood,' to use his own phrase.

The Recorder summed up against Elizabeth. He steadily assumed that Nash was always right, and the neighbours always wrong, as to the girl's original story. He said nothing of Bennet; the tanner's dog had done for Bennet. He said that, if the Enfield witnesses were right, the Dorset witnesses were wilfully perjured. He did not add that, if the Dorset witnesses were right, the Enfield testifiers were perjured.

The jury brought in a verdict of 'Guilty of perjury, but not wilful and corrupt.' This was an acquittal, but, the Recorder refusing the verdict, they did what they were desired to do, and sentence was passed. Two jurors made affidavit that they never intended a conviction. The whole point had turned, in the minds of the jury, on a discrepancy as to when Elizabeth finished the water in the broken pitcher – on Wednesday, January 27, or on Friday, January 29. Both accounts could not be true. Here, then, was 'perjury,' thought the jury, but not 'wilful and corrupt,' not purposeful. But the jury had learned that 'the court was impatient;' they had already brought Elizabeth in guilty of

perjury, by which they meant guilty of a casual discrepancy not unnatural in a person hovering between life and death. They thought that they could not go back on their 'Guilty,' and so they went all the way to 'corrupt and wilful perjury' – murder by false oath – and consistently added 'an earnest recommendation to mercy'!

By a majority of one out of seventeen judges, Elizabeth was banished for seven years to New England. She was accused in the Press of being an 'enthusiast,' but the Rev. William Reyner, who attended her in prison, publicly proclaimed her a good Churchwoman and a good girl (June 7, 1754). Elizabeth (June 24) stuck to her guns in a manifesto – she had not once 'knowingly deviated from the truth.'

Mr. Davy had promised the jury that when Elizabeth was once condemned all would come out – the whole secret. But though the most careful attempts were made to discover her whereabouts from January 1 to January 29, 1753, nothing was ever found out – a fact most easily explained by the hypothesis that she was where she said she was, at Mother Wells's.

As to Elizabeth's later fortunes, accounts differ, but she quite certainly married, in Connecticut, a Mr. Treat, a respectable yeoman, said to have been opulent. She died in Connecticut in June 1773, leaving a family.

In my opinion Elizabeth Canning was a victim of the common sense of the eighteenth century. She told a very strange tale, and common-sense holds that what is strange cannot be true.

Yet something strange had undeniably occurred. It was very strange if Elizabeth on the night of January 1, retired to become a mother, of which there was no appearance, while of an amour even gossip could not furnish a hint. It was very strange if, having thus retired, she was robbed, starved, stripped and brought to death's door, bleeding and broken down. It was very strange that no vestige of evidence as to her real place of concealment could ever be discovered. It was amazingly strange that a girl, previously and afterwards of golden character, should in a moment aim by perjury at 'innocent blood.' But the eighteenth century, as represented by Mr. Davy, Mr. Willes, the barrister who fabled in court, and the Recorder, found none of these things one half so strange as Elizabeth Canning's story. Mr. Henry Fielding, who had some knowledge of human nature, was of the same opinion as the present candid inquirer. 'In this case,' writes the author of *Tom Jones*, 'one of the most simple girls I ever saw, if she be a wicked one, hath been too hard for me. I am firmly persuaded that Elizabeth Canning is a poor, honest, simple, innocent girl.'

Moi aussi, but – I would not have condemned the gipsy!

In this case the most perplexing thing of all is to be found in the conflicting unpublished affidavits sworn in March 1753, when memories as to the whereabouts of the gipsies were fresh. They form a great mass of papers in State Papers Domestic, at the Record Office. I owe to Mr. Courtney Kenny my knowledge of the two unpublished letters of Fielding to the Duke of Newcastle

which follow:

'My Lord Duke, – I received an order from my Lord Chancellor immediately after the breaking up of the Council to lay before your Grace all the Affidavits I had taken since the Gipsy Trial which related to that Affair. I then told the Messenger that I had taken none, as indeed the fact is the Affidavits of which I gave my Lord Chancellor an Abstract having been all sworn before Justices of the Peace in the Neighbourhood of Endfield, and remain I believe in the Possession of an Attorney in the City.

'However in Consequence of the Commands with which your Grace was pleased to honour me yesterday, I sent my Clerk immediately to the Attorney to acquaint him with the Commands, which I doubt not he will instantly obey. This I did from my great Duty to your Grace, for I have long had no Concern in this Affair, nor have I seen any of the Parties lately unless once when I was desired to send for the Girl (Canning) to my House that a great number of Noblemen and Gentlemen might see her and ask her what Questions they pleased. I am, with the highest Duty,

'My Lord,
'Your Grace's most obedient
and most humble Servant,
'Henry Fielding.

'Ealing; April 14, 1753.

'His Grace the Duke of Newcastle.'

'*Endorsed*: Ealing, April 14th, 1753

Mr. Fielding.
R. 16th.'

'My Lord Duke, – I am extremely concerned to see by a Letter which I have just received from Mr. Jones by Command of your Grace that the Persons concerned for the Prosecution have not yet attended your Grace with the Affidavits in Canning's Affair. I do assure you upon my Honour that I sent to them the moment I first received your Grace's Commands, and having after three Messages prevailed with them to come to me I desired them to fetch the Affidavits that I might send them to your Grace, being not able to wait on you in Person. This they said they could not do, but would go to Mr. Hume Campbell their Council, and prevail with him to attend your Grace with all their Affidavits, many of which I found were sworn after the Day mentioned in the Order of Council. I told them I apprehended the latter could not be admitted but insisted in the strongest Terms on their laying the others immediately before your Grace, and they at last promised me they would, nor have I ever seen them since.

'I have now again ordered my Clerk to go to them to inform them of the last Commands I have received, but as I have no Compulsory Power over them I cannot answer for their Behaviour, which *indeed I have long disliked*, and have therefore long ago declined giving them any advice, nor would I *unless in Obedience to your Grace have anything to say to a set of the most obstinate fools I ever saw, and who seem to me rather to act from a Spleen against my Lord Mayor, than from any motive of*

Protecting Innocence, tho' that was certainly their motive at first.[3] In Truth, if I am not deceived, I suspect that they desire that the Gipsey should be pardoned, and then to convince the World that she was guilty in order to cast the greater Reflection on him who was principally instrumental in obtaining such Pardon. I conclude with assuring your Grace that I have acted in this Affair, as I shall on all Occasions, with the most dutiful Regard to your Commands, and that if my Life had been at Stake, as many know, I could have done no more. I am, with the highest Respect,

'My Lord Duke,
'Yr. Grace's most obedient
and most humble Servant,
'Henry Fielding.

'Ealing; April 27, 1753.
'His Grace the Duke of Newcastle.'
Endorsed: 'Ealing: April 27th, 1753.
Mr. Fielding.'

[3] My italics. Did Fielding abandon his belief in Elizabeth?

II
THE MURDER OF ESCOVEDO

'Many a man,' says De Quincey, 'can trace his ruin to a murder, of which, perhaps, he thought little enough at the time.' This remark applies with peculiar force to Philip II. of Spain, to his secretary, Antonio Perez, to the steward of Perez, to his page, and to a number of professional ruffians. All of these, from the King to his own scullion, were concerned in the slaying of Juan de Escovedo, secretary of Philip's famous natural brother, Don John of Austria. All of them, in different degrees, had bitter reason to regret a deed which, at the moment, seemed a commonplace political incident.

The puzzle in the case of Escovedo does not concern the manner of his taking off, or the identity of his murderers. These things are perfectly well known; the names of the guilty, from the King to the bravo, are ascertained. The mystery clouds the motives for the deed. *Why* was Escovedo done to death? Did the King have him assassinated for purely political reasons, really inadequate, but magnified by the suspicious royal fancy? Or were the secretary of Philip II. and the monarch of Spain rivals in the affections of a one-eyed widow of rank? and did the secretary, Perez, induce Philip to give orders for Escovedo's death, because Escovedo threatened to reveal to the King their guilty intrigue?

Sir William Stirling-Maxwell and Monsieur Mignet accepted, with shades of difference, this explanation. Mr. Froude, on the other hand, held that Philip acted for political reasons, and with the full approval of his very ill-informed conscience. There was no lady as a motive in the case, in Mr. Froude's opinion. A third solution is possible: Philip, perhaps, wished to murder Escovedo for political reasons, and without reference to the tender passion; but Philip was slow and irresolute, while Perez, who dreaded Escovedo's interference with his love affair, urged his royal master on to the crime which he was shirking. We may never know the exact truth, but at least we can study a state of morals and manners at Madrid, compared with which the blundering tragedies of Holyrood, in Queen Mary's time, seem mere child's play. The 'lambs' of Bothwell are lambs playful and gentle when set beside the instruments of Philip II.

The murdered man, Escovedo, and the 'first murderer,' as Shakespeare says, Antonio Perez, had both been trained in the service of Ruy Gomez, Philip's famous minister. Gomez had a wife, Aña de Mendoza, who, being born in 1546, was aged thirty-two, not thirty-eight (as M. Mignet says), in 1578, when Escovedo was killed. But 1546 may be a misprint for 1540. She was blind in one eye in 1578, but probably both her eyes were brilliant in 1567, when she really seems to have been Philip's mistress, or was generally believed so to be. Eleven years later, at the date of the murder, there is no obvious reason to suppose that Philip was constant to her charms. Her husband, created Prince

d'Eboli, had died in 1573 (or as Mr. Froude says in 1567); the Princess was now a widow, and really, if she chose to distinguish her husband's old secretary, at this date the King's secretary, Antonio Perez, there seems no reason to suppose that Philip would have troubled himself about the matter. That he still loved Aña with a constancy far from royal, that she loved Perez, that Perez and she feared that Escovedo would denounce them to the King, is M. Mignet's theory of the efficient cause of Escovedo's murder. Yet M. Mignet holds, and rightly, that Philip had made up his mind, as far as he ever did make up his mind, to kill Escovedo, long before that diplomatist became an inconvenient spy on the supposed lovers.

To raise matters to the tragic height of the *Phædra* of Euripides, Perez was said to be the natural son of his late employer, Gomez, the husband of his alleged mistress. Probably Perez was nothing of the sort; he was the bastard of a man of his own name, and his alleged mistress, the widow of Gomez, may even have circulated the other story to prove that her relations with Perez, though intimate, were innocent. They are a pretty set of people!

As for Escovedo, he and Perez had been friends from their youth upwards. While Perez passed from the service of Gomez to that of Philip, in 1572 Escovedo was appointed secretary to the nobly adventurous Don John of Austria. The Court believed that he was intended to play the part of spy on Don John, but he fell under the charm of that gallant heart, and readily accepted, if he

did not inspire, the most daring projects of the victor of Lepanto, the Sword of Christendom. This was very inconvenient for the leaden-footed Philip, who never took time by the forelock, but always brooded over schemes and let opportunity pass. Don John, on the other hand, was all for forcing the game, and, when he was sent to temporise and conciliate in the Low Countries, and withdraw the Spanish army of occupation, his idea was to send the Spanish forces out of the Netherlands by sea. When once they were on blue water he would make a descent on England; rescue the captive Mary Stuart; marry her (he was incapable of fear!); restore the Catholic religion, and wear the English crown. A good plot, approved of by the Pope, but a plot which did not suit the genius of Philip. He placed his leaden foot upon the scheme and on various other gallant projects, conceived in the best manner of Alexandre Dumas. Now Escovedo, to whom Don John was devotedly attached, was the soul of all these chivalrous designs, and for that reason Philip regarded him as a highly dangerous person. Escovedo was at Madrid when Don John first went to the Low Countries (1576). He kept urging Philip to accept Don John's fiery proposals, though Antonio Perez entreated him to be cautious. At this date, 1576, Perez was really the friend of Escovedo. But Escovedo would not be advised; he wrote an impatient memorial to the King, denouncing his stitchless policy (*descosido*), his dilatory, shambling, idealess proceedings. So, at least, Sir William Stirling-Maxwell asserts in his *Don John of Austria*: 'the word used by Escovedo was *descosido*, "unstitched."'

But Mr. Froude says that *Philip* used the expression, later, in reference to *another* letter of Escovedo's which he also called 'a bloody letter' (January 1578). Here Mr. Froude can hardly be right, for Philip's letter containing that vulgar expression is of July 1577.

In any case, in 1576 Philip was induced, by the intercession of Perez, to overlook the fault, and Escovedo, whose presence Don John demanded, was actually sent to him in December 1576. From this date both Don John and Escovedo wrote familiarly to their friend Perez, while Perez lured them on, and showed their letters to the King. Just as Charles I. commissioned the Duke of Hamilton to spy on the Covenanted nobles, and pretend to sympathise with them, and talk in their godly style, so Philip gave Perez orders to entrap Don John and Escovedo. Perez said: 'I want no theology but my own to justify me,' and Philip wrote in reply, 'My theology takes the same view of the matter as your own.'

At this time, 1577, Perez, though a gambler and a profligate, who took presents from all hands, must have meant nothing worse, on M. Mignet's theory, than to serve Philip as he loved to be served, and keep him well informed of Don John's designs. Escovedo was not yet, according to M. Mignet, an obstacle to the amours of Perez and the King's mistress, the Princess d'Eboli. Sir William Stirling-Maxwell, on the other hand, holds that the object of Perez already was to ruin Don John; for what reason Sir William owns that he cannot discover. Indeed Perez had no such

object, unless Don John confided to him projects treasonous or dangerous to the Government of his own master, the King.

Now did Don John, or Escovedo, entrust Perez with designs not merely chivalrous and impracticable, but actually traitorous? Certainly Don John did nothing of the kind. Escovedo left him and went, without being called for, to Spain, arriving in July 1577. During his absence Don John defeated the Dutch Protestants in the battle of Gemblours, on January 31, 1578. He then wrote a letter full of chivalrous loyalty to Escovedo and Perez at Madrid. He would make Philip master indeed of the Low Countries; he asked Escovedo and Perez to inspire the King with resolution. To do that was impossible, but Philip could never have desired to murder Escovedo merely because he asked help for Don John. Yet, no sooner did Escovedo announce his return to Spain, in July 1577, than Philip, in a letter to Perez, said, 'we must hasten to despatch him before he kills us.' There seems to be no doubt that the letter in which this phrase occurs is authentic, though we have it only in a copy. But is the phrase correctly translated? The words '*priesa á despacherle antes que nos mate*' certainly may be rendered, 'we must be quick and despatch *him*' (Escovedo) 'before he kills *us*.' But Mr. Froude, much more lenient to Philip than to Mary Stuart, proposes to render the phrase, 'we must despatch Escovedo quickly' (*i. e.* send him about his business) 'before he worries us to death.' Mr. Froude thus denies that, in 1577, Philip already meant to kill Escovedo. It is unlucky for Mr. Froude's theory, and for Philip's

character, if the King used the phrase *twice*. In March 1578 he wrote to Perez, about Escovedo, 'act quickly *antes que nos mate*, – before he kills us.' So Perez averred, at least, but is his date correct? This time Perez did act, and Escovedo was butchered! If Perez tells truth, in 1577, Philip meant what he said, 'Despatch him before he kills us.'

Why did Philip thus dread Escovedo? We have merely the published statements of Perez, in his account of the affair. After giving the general causes of Philip's distrust of Don John, and the ideas which a deeply suspicious monarch may very well have entertained, considering the adventurous character of his brother, Perez adds a special charge against Escovedo. He vowed, says Perez, that, after conquering England, he and Don John would attack Spain. Escovedo asked for the captaincy of a castle on a rock commanding the harbour of Santander; he was *alcalde* of that town. He and Don John would use this fortress, as Aramis and Fouquet, in the novel of Dumas, meant to use Belle Isle, against their sovereign. As a matter of fact, Escovedo had asked for the command of Mogro, the fortress commanding Santander, in the spring of 1577, and Perez told Philip that the place should be strengthened, for the protection of the harbour, but not entrusted to Escovedo. Don John's loyalty could never have contemplated the use of the place as a keep to be held in an attack on his King. But, if Perez had, in 1577, no grudge against Escovedo as being perilous to his alleged amour with the Princess d'Eboli, then the murderous plan of Philip must have sprung

from the intense suspiciousness of his own nature, not from the promptings of Perez.

Escovedo reached Spain in July 1577. He was not killed till March 31, 1578, though attempts on his life were made some weeks earlier. M. Mignet argues that, till the early spring of 1578, Philip held his hand because Perez lulled his fears; that Escovedo then began to threaten to disclose the love affair of Perez to his royal rival, and that Perez, in his own private interest, now changed his tune, and, in place of mollifying Philip, urged him to the crime. But Philip was so dilatory that he could not even commit a murder with decent promptitude. Escovedo was not dangerous, even to his mind, while he was apart from Don John. But as weeks passed, Don John kept insisting, by letter, on the return of Escovedo, and for *that* reason, possibly, Philip screwed his courage to the (literally) 'sticking' point, and Escovedo was 'stuck.' Major Martin Hume, however, argues that, by this time, circumstances had changed, and Philip had now no motive for murder.

The impression of M. Mignet, and of Sir William Stirling-Maxwell, the biographer of Don John, is quite different. They hold that the Princess d'Eboli, in 1578, was Philip's mistress; that she deceived him with Perez; that Escovedo threatened to tell all, and that Perez therefore hurried on his murder. Had this been the state of affairs, would Escovedo have constantly accepted the invitations of Perez to dinner? The men would necessarily have been on the worst of terms, if Escovedo was threatening

Perez, but Escovedo, in fact, kept on dining with Perez. Again, the policy of Perez would have been to send Escovedo where he wanted to go, to Flanders, well out of the way, back to Don John. It seems probable enough, though not certain, that, in 1567, the Princess and Philip were lovers. But it is, most unlikely, and it is not proved, that Philip was still devoted to the lady in 1578. Some of the Princess's family, the Mendozas, now wanted to kill Perez, as a dishonour to their blood. At the trial of Perez later, much evidence was given to show that he loved the Princess, or was suspected of doing so, but it is not shown that this was a matter about which Philip had any reason to concern himself. Thus it is not inconceivable that Escovedo disliked the relations between Perez and the Princess, but nothing tends to show that he could have made himself dangerous by revealing them to the King. Moreover, if he spoke his mind to Perez on the matter, the two would not have remained, as apparently they did, on terms of the most friendly intercourse. A squire of Perez described a scene in which Escovedo threatened to denounce the Princess, but how did the squire become a witness of the scene, in which the Princess defied Escovedo in terms of singular coarseness?

At all events, when Philip consulted the Marquis of Los Velez on the propriety of killing Escovedo rather than sending him back to Don John, the reasons, which convinced the Marquis, were mere political suspicions.

It was at that time a question of conscience whether a king might have a subject assassinated, if the royal motives, though

sufficient, were not such as could be revealed with safety in a court of justice. On these principles Queen Mary had a right to take Darnley off, for excellent political causes which could not safely be made public; for international reasons. Mary, however, unlike Philip, did not consult her confessor, who believed her to be innocent of her husband's death. The confessor of Philip told him that the King had a perfect right to despatch Escovedo, and Philip gave his orders to Perez. He repeated, says Perez, in 1578, his words used in 1577: 'Make haste before he kills us.'

As to this point of conscience, the right of a king to commit murder on a subject for reasons of State, Protestant opinion seems to have been lenient. When the Ruthvens were killed at Perth, on August 5, 1600, in an affair the most mysterious of all mysteries, the Rev. Robert Bruce, a stern Presbyterian, refused to believe that James VI. had not planned their slaughter. 'But your Majesty might have secret reasons,' said Bruce to the King, who, naturally and truly, maintained his own innocence. This looks as if Mr. Bruce, like the confessor of Philip, held that a king had a right to murder a subject for secret reasons of State. The Inquisition vigorously repudiated the doctrine, when maintained by a Spanish preacher, but Knox approved of King Henry's (Darnley's) murder of Riccio. My sympathies, on this point, are with the Inquisition.

Perez, having been commissioned to organise the crime, handed on the job to Martinez, his steward. Martinez asked a ruffianly page, Enriquez, 'if I knew anybody in my

country' (Murcia) 'who would stick a knife into a person.' Enriquez said, 'I will speak about it to a muleteer of my acquaintance, as, in fact, I did, and the muleteer undertook the business.' But later, hearing that a man of importance was to be knifed, Enriquez told Perez that a muleteer was not noble enough: the job 'must be entrusted to persons of more consideration.'

Enriquez, in 1585, confessed for a good reason; Perez had absurdly mismanaged the business. All sorts of people were employed, and, after the murder, they fled, and began to die punctually in an alarming manner. Naturally Enriquez thought that Perez was acting like the Mures of Auchendrane, who despatched a series of witnesses and accomplices in their murder of Kennedy. As they always needed a new accomplice to kill the previous accomplice, then another to slay the slayer, and so on, the Mures if unchecked would have depopulated Scotland. Enriquez surmised that *his* turn to die would soon come; so he confessed, and was corroborated by Diego Martinez. Thus the facts came out, and this ought to be a lesson to murderers.

As the muleteer hung fire, Perez determined to poison Escovedo. But he did not in the least know how to set about it. Science was hardly in her infancy. If you wanted to poison a man in Scotland, you had to rely on a vulgar witch, or send a man to France, at great expense, to buy the stuff, and the messenger was detected and tortured. The Court of Spain was not more scientific.

Martinez sent Enriquez to Murcia, to gather certain poisonous

herbs, and these were distilled by a venal apothecary. The poison was then tried on a barndoor fowl, which was not one penny the worse. But Martinez somehow procured 'a certain water that was good to be given as a drink.' Perez asked Escovedo to dinner, Enriquez waited at table, and in each cup of wine that Escovedo drank, he, rather homœopathically, put 'a nutshellful of the water.' Escovedo was no more poisoned than the cock of the earlier experiment. 'It was ascertained that the beverage produced no effect whatever.'

A few days later, Escovedo again dined with the hospitable Perez. On this occasion they gave him some white powder in a dish of cream, and also gave him the poisoned water in his wine, thinking it a pity to waste that beverage. This time Escovedo was unwell, and again, when Enriquez induced a scullion in the royal kitchen to put more of the powder in a basin of broth in Escovedo's own house. For this the poor kitchenmaid who cooked the broth was hanged in the public square of Madrid, *sin culpa*.

Pious Philip was demoralising his subjects at a terrible rate! But you cannot make an omelet without breaking eggs. Philip slew that girl of his kitchen as surely as if he had taken a gun and shot her, but probably the royal confessor said that all was as it should be.

In spite of the resources of Spanish science, Escovedo persisted in living, and Perez determined that he must be shot or stabbed. Enriquez went off to his own country to find a friend

who was an assassin, and to get 'a stiletto with a very fine blade, much better than a pistol to kill a man with.' Enriquez, keeping a good thing in the family, enlisted his brother: and Martinez, from Aragon, brought 'two proper kind of men,' Juan de Nera and Insausti, who, with the King's scullion, undertook the job. Perez went to Alcala for Holy Week, just as the good Regent Murray left Edinburgh on the morning of Darnley's murder, after sermon. 'Have a halibi' was the motto of both gentlemen.

The underlings dogged Escovedo in the evening of Easter Monday. Enriquez did not come across him, but Insausti did his business with one thrust, in a workmanlike way. The scullion hurried to Alcala, and told the news to Perez, who 'was highly delighted.'

We leave this good and faithful servant, and turn to Don John. When he, far away, heard the news he was under no delusions about love affairs as the cause of the crime. He wrote to his wretched brother the King 'in grief greater than I can describe.' The King, he said, had lost the best of servants, 'a man without the aims and craft which are now in vogue.' 'I may with just reason consider *myself* to have been the cause of his death,' the blow was really dealt at Don John. He expressed the most touching anxiety for the wife and children of Escovedo, who died poor, because (unlike Perez) 'he had clean hands.' He besought Philip, by the love of our Lord, 'to use every possible diligence to know whence the blow came and to punish it with the rigour which it deserves.' He himself will pay the most pressing debts

of the dead. (From Beaumont, April 20, 1578.)

Probably the royal caitiff was astonished by this letter. On September 20 Don John wrote his last letter to his brother 'desiring more than life some decision on your Majesty's part. Give me orders for the conduct of affairs!' Philip scrawled in the margin, 'I will not answer.' But Don John had ended his letter 'Our lives are at stake, and all we ask is to lose them with honour.' These are like the last words of the last letter of the great Montrose to Charles II., 'with the more alacrity and vigour I go to search my death.' Like Montrose Don John 'carried with him fidelity and honour to the grave.' He died, after a cruel illness, on October 1. Brantôme says that he was poisoned by order of the King, at the instigation of Perez. 'The side of his breast was yellow and black, as if burned, and crumbled at the touch.' These things were always said when a great personage died in his bed. They are probably untrue, but a king who could conscientiously murder his brother's friend could as conscientiously, and for the same reasons, murder his brother.

The Princess d'Eboli rewarded and sheltered one of the murderers of Escovedo. They were all gratified with chains of gold, silver cups, abundance of golden *écus*, and commissions in the army; all were sent out of the country, and some began to die strangely, which, as we saw, frightened Enriquez into his confession (1585).

At once Perez was suspected. He paid a visit of condolence to young Escovedo: he spoke of a love affair of Escovedo's

in Flanders; an injured husband must be the guilty man! But suspicion darkened. Perez complained to the King that he was dogged, watched, cross-examined by the *alcalde* and his son. The Escovedo family had a friend in Vasquez, another royal secretary. Knowing nothing of the King's guilt, and jealous of Perez, he kept assuring the King that Perez was guilty: that there was an amour, detected by Escovedo: that Escovedo perished for a woman's sake: that Philip must investigate the case, and end the scandal. The woman, of course, was the Princess d'Eboli. Philip cared nothing for her, now at least. Mr. Froude says that Don Gaspar Moro, in his work on the Princess, 'has disproved conclusively the imagined *liaison* between the Princess and Philip II.' On the other hand, Philip was darkly concerned in litigations about property, *against* the Princess; these affairs Vasquez conducted, while Perez naturally was on the side of the widow of his benefactor. On these points, more than a hundred letters of Vasquez exist. Meanwhile he left, and the Escovedo family left, no stone unturned to prove that Perez murdered Escovedo because Escovedo thwarted his amour with the Princess.

Philip had promised, again and again, to stand by Perez. But the affair was coming to light, and if it must come out, it suited Philip that Vasquez should track Perez on the wrong trail, the trail of the amour, not follow the right scent which led straight to the throne, and the wretch who sat on it. But neither course could be quite pleasant to the King.

Perez offered to stand his trial, knowing that evidence against him could not be found. His accomplices were far away; he would be acquitted, as Bothwell was acquitted of Darnley's death. Philip could not face the situation. He bade Perez consult the President of the Council, De Pazos, a Bishop, and tell him all, while De Pazos should mollify young Escovedo. The Bishop, a casuist, actually assured young Escovedo that Perez and the Princess 'are as innocent as myself.' The Bishop did not agree with the Inquisition: he could say that Perez was innocent, because he only obeyed the King's murderous orders. Young Escovedo retreated: Vasquez persevered, and the Princess d'Eboli, writing to the King, called Vasquez 'a Moorish dog.' Philip had both Perez and the Princess arrested, for Vasquez was not to be put down; *his* business in connection with the litigations was to pursue the Princess, and Philip could not tell Vasquez that he was on the wrong trail. The lady was sent to her estates; this satisfied Vasquez, and Perez and he were bound over to keep the peace. But suspicion hung about Perez, and Philip preferred that it should be so. The secretary was accused of peculation, he had taken bribes on all hands, and he was sentenced to heavy fines and imprisonment (January 1585). Now Enriquez confessed, and a kind of secret inquiry, of which the records survive, dragged its slow course along. Perez was under arrest, in a house near a church. He dropped out of a window and rushed into the church, the civil power burst open the gates, violated sanctuary, and found our friend crouching, all draped

with festoons of cobwebs, in the timber work under the roof. The Church censured the magistrates, but they had got Perez, and Philip defied the ecclesiastical courts. Perez, a prisoner, tried to escape by the aid of one of Escovedo's murderers, who was staunch, but failed, while his wife was ill treated to make him give up all the compromising letters of the King. He did give up two sealed trunks full of papers. But his ally and steward, Martinez, had first (it is said) selected and secreted the royal notes which proved the guilt of Philip.

Apparently the King thought himself safe now, and actually did not take the trouble to see whether his compromising letters were in the sealed trunks or not! At least, if he did know that they were absent, and that Perez could produce proof of his guilt, it is hard to see why, with endless doubts and hesitations, he allowed the secret process for murder against Perez to drag on, after a long interruption, into 1590. Vasquez examined and re-examined Perez, but there was still only one witness against him, the scoundrel Enriquez. One was not enough.

A new step was taken. The royal confessor assured Perez that he would be safe if he told the whole truth and declared openly that he had acted by the royal orders! Perez refused, Philip commanded again (Jan. 4, 1590). Perez must now reveal the King's motive for decreeing the murder. If Philip was setting a trap for Perez that trap only caught him if he could not produce the King's compromising letters, which, in fact, he still possessed. Mr. Froude asserts that Philip had heard from his

confessor, and *he* from the wife of Perez, that the letters were still secreted and could be produced. If so, Perez would be safe, and the King's character would be lost. What was Philip's aim and motive? Would he declare the letters to be forgeries? No other mortal (of that day) wrote such an unmistakable hand as his, it was the worst in the world. He must have had some loophole, or he would never have pressed Perez to bear witness to his own crime. A loophole he had, and Perez knew it, for otherwise he would have obeyed orders, told the whole story, and been set free. He did not. Mr. Froude supposes that he did not think the royal authority would satisfy the judges. But they could not condemn Perez, a mere accessory to Philip, without condemning the King, and how could the judges do that? Perez, I think, would have taken his chance of the judges' severity, as against their King, rather than disobey the King's command to confess all, and so have to face torture. He did face the torture, which proves, perhaps, that he knew Philip could, somehow, escape from the damning evidence of his own letters. Philip's loophole, Major Martin Hume thinks, was this: if Perez revealed the King's reasons for ordering the murder, they would appear as obsolete, at the date of the deed. Pedro alone would be culpable. In any case he faced torture.

Like most people in his circumstances, he miscalculated his own power of bearing agony. He had not the endurance of the younger Auchendrane murderer: of Mitchell, the choice Covenanting assassin: of the gallant Jacobite Nevile Payne,

tortured nearly to death by the minions of the Dutch usurper, William of Orange. All of these bore the torment and kept their secrets. But 'eight turns of the rope' opened the mouth of Perez, whose obstinacy had merely put him to great inconvenience. Yet he did not produce Philip's letters in corroboration; he said that they had been taken from him. However, next day, Diego Martinez, who had hitherto denied all, saw that the game was up, and admitted the truth of all that Enriquez had confessed in 1585.

About a month after the torture Perez escaped. His wife was allowed to visit him in prison. She had been the best, the bravest, the most devoted of women. If she had reason for jealousy of the Princess, which is by no means certain, she had forgiven all. She had moved heaven and earth to save her husband. In the Dominican church, at high mass, she had thrown herself upon the King's confessor, demanding before that awful Presence on the altar that the priest should refuse to absolve the King unless he set Perez free.

Admitted to her husband's prison, she played the trick that saved Lord Ogilvy from the dungeon of the Covenanters, that saved Argyle, Nithsdale, and James Mòr Macgregor. Perez walked out of gaol in the dress of his wife. We may suppose that the guards were bribed: there is *always* collusion in these cases. One of the murderers had horses round the corner, and Perez, who cannot have been badly injured by the rack, rode thirty leagues, and crossed the frontier of Aragon.

We have not to follow his later adventures. The refusal of the Aragonese to give him up to Castile, their rescue of him from the Inquisition, cost them their constitution, and about seventy of them were burned as heretics. But Perez got clear away. He visited France, where Henry IV. befriended him; he visited England, where Bacon was his host. In 1594 (?) he published his *Relaciones* and told the world the story of Philip's conscience. That story must not be relied on, of course, and the autograph letters of Philip as to the murder of Escovedo are lost. But the copies of them at the Hague are regarded as authentic, and the convincing passages are underlined in red ink.

Supposing it possible that Philip after all secured the whole of the autograph correspondence, and that Perez only succeeded in preserving the copies now at the Hague, we should understand why Perez would not confess the King's crime: he had only copies of his proofs to show; and copies were valueless as evidence. But it is certain that Perez really had the letters.

'Bloody Perez,' as Bacon's mother called him, died at Paris in November 1611, outliving the wretched master whom he had served so faithfully. Queen Elizabeth tried to induce Amyas Paulet to murder Mary Stuart. Paulet, as a man of honour, refused; he knew, too, that Elizabeth would abandon him to the vengeance of the Scots. Perez ought to have known that Philip would desert him: his folly was rewarded by prison, torture, and confiscation, which were not more than the man deserved, who betrayed and murdered the servant of Don John of Austria.

Note. – This essay was written when I was unaware that Major Martin Hume had treated the problem in *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 1894, pp. 71-107, and in *Españoles é Ingleses* (1903). The latter work doubtless represents Major Hume's final views. He has found among the Additional MSS. of the British Museum (28,269) a quantity of the contemporary letters of Perez, which supplement the copies, at the Hague, of other letters destroyed after the death of Perez. From these MSS. and other original sources unknown to Mr. Froude, and to Monsieur Mignet (see the second edition of his *Antonio Perez*; Paris, 1846), Major Hume's theory is that, for *political* reasons, Philip gave orders that Escovedo should be assassinated. This was in late October or early November, 1577. The order was not then carried out; the reason of the delay I do not clearly understand. The months passed, and Escovedo's death ceased, in altered circumstances, to be politically desirable, but he became a serious nuisance to Perez and his mistress, the Princess d'Eboli. Philip had never countermanded the murder, but Perez, according to Major Hume, falsely alleges that the King was still bent on the murder, and that other statesmen were consulted and approved of it, *shortly before the actual deed*.[4] Perez gives this impression by a crafty manipulation of dates in his narrative. When he had Escovedo slain, he was fighting for his own hand; but Philip, who had never countermanded the murder, was indifferent, till, in 1582, when he was

[4] See p. 38, *supra*.

with Alva in Portugal. The King now learned that Perez had behaved abominably, had poisoned his mind against his brother Don Juan, had communicated State secrets to the Princess d'Eboli, and had killed Escovedo, not in obedience to the royal order, but using that order as the shield of his private vengeance. Hence Philip's severities to Perez; hence his final command that Perez should disclose the royal motives for the destruction of Escovedo. They would be found to have become obsolete at the date when the crime was committed, and on Perez would fall the blame.

Such is Major Hume's theory, if I correctly apprehend it. The hypothesis leaves the moral character of Philip as black as ever: he ordered an assassination which he never even countermanded. His confessor might applaud him, but he knew that the doctors of the Inquisition, like the common sentiment of mankind, rejected the theory that kings had the right to condemn and execute, by the dagger, men who had been put to no public trial.

III
THE CAMPDEN MYSTERY

I

The ordinary historical mystery is at least so far clear that one or other of two solutions must be right, if we only knew which. Perkin Warbeck was the rightful King, or he was an impostor. Giacopo Stuardo at Naples (1669) was the eldest son of Charles II., or he was a humbug. The Man in the Iron Mask was *certainly* either Mattioli or Eustache Dauger. James VI. conspired against Gowrie, or Gowrie conspired against James VI., and so on. There is reason and human nature at the back of these puzzles. But at the back of the Campden mystery there is not a glimmer of reason or of sane human nature, except on one hypothesis, which I shall offer. The occurrences are, to all appearance, motiveless as the events in a feverish dream. 'The whole Matter is dark and mysterious; which we must therefore leave unto Him who alone knoweth all Things, in His due Time, to reveal and to bring to Light.'

So says the author of 'A True and Perfect Account of the Examination, Confession, Trial, and Execution of *Joan Perry*, and her two Sons, *John* and *Richard Perry*, for the Supposed

Murder of *Will Harrison*, Gent., Being One of the most remarkable Occurrences which hath happened in the Memory of Man. Sent in a Letter (by *Sir Thomas Overbury*, of *Burton*, in the County of *Gloucester*, Knt., and one of his Majesty's Justices of the Peace) to *Thomas Shirly*, Doctor of Physick, in London. Also Mr. *Harrison's* Own account,' &c. (London. Printed for John Atkinson, near the Chapter House, in *St. Paul's Church-Yard*. No date, but apparently of 1676.)

Such is the vast and breathless title of a pamphlet which, by undeserved good luck, I have just purchased. The writer, Sir Thomas Overbury, 'the nephew and heir,' says Mr. John Paget, 'of the unhappy victim of the infamous Countess of Somerset' (who had the elder Overbury poisoned in the Tower), was the Justice of the Peace who acted as *Juge d'Instruction* in the case of Harrison's disappearance.[5]

To come to the story. In 1660, William Harrison, Gent., was steward or 'factor' to the Viscountess Campden, in Chipping Campden, Gloucestershire, a single-streeted town among the Cotswold hills. The lady did not live in Campden House, whose owner burned it in the Great Rebellion, to spite the rebels; as Castle Tirrim was burned by its Jacobite lord in the '15. Harrison inhabited a portion of the building which had escaped destruction. He had been for fifty years a servant of the Hickeses and Campdens, his age was seventy (which deepens the mystery), he was married, and had offspring, including Edward, his eldest

[5] Paget, *Paradoxes and Puzzles*, p. 342. Blackwoods, 1874.

son.

On a market day, in 1659, Mr. Harrison's house was broken into, at high noon, while he and his whole family were 'at the Lecture,' in church, a Puritan form of edification. A ladder had been placed against the wall, the bars of a window on the second story had been wrenched away with a ploughshare (which was left in the room), and 140*l.* of Lady Campden's money were stolen. The robber was never discovered – a curious fact in a small and lonely village. The times, however, were disturbed, and a wandering Cavalier or Roundhead soldier may have 'cracked the crib.' Not many weeks later, Harrison's servant, Perry, was heard crying for help in the garden. He showed a 'sheep-pick,' with a hacked handle, and declared that he had been set upon by two men in white, with naked swords, and had defended himself with his rustic tool. It is curious that Mr. John Paget, a writer of great acuteness, and for many years police magistrate at Hammersmith, says nothing of the robbery of 1659, and of Perry's crazy conduct in the garden.[6] Perry's behaviour there, and his hysterical invention of the two armed men in white, give the key to his character. The two men in white were never traced of course, but, later, we meet three men not less flagitious, and even more mysterious. They appear to have been three 'men in buckram.'

At all events, in quiet Campden, adventures obviously

[6] See his *Paradoxes and Puzzles*, pp. 337-370, and, for good reading, see the book *passim*.

occurred to the unadventurous. They culminated in the following year, on August 16, 1660. Harrison left his house in the morning (?) and walked the two miles to Charringworth to collect his lady's rents. The autumn day closed in, and between eight and nine o'clock old Mrs. Harrison sent the servant, John Perry, to meet his master on the way home. Lights were also left burning in Harrison's window. That night neither master nor man returned, and it is odd that the younger Harrison, Edward, did not seek for his father till very early next morning: he had the convenience, for nocturnal search, of a moon which rose late. In the morning, Edward went out and met Perry, returning alone: he had not found his master. The pair walked to Ebrington, a village half way between Campden and Charringworth, and learned that Harrison had called, on the previous evening, as he moved home through Ebrington, at the house of one Daniel. The hour is not given, but Harrison certainly disappeared when just beyond Ebrington, within less than a mile from Campden. Edward and Perry next heard that a poor woman had picked up on the highway, beyond Ebrington, near some whins or furze, a hat, band, and comb, which were Harrison's; they were found within about half a mile of his own house. The band was bloody, the hat and comb were hacked and cut. Please observe the precise words of Sir Thomas Overbury, the justice who took the preliminary examinations: 'The Hat and Comb being hacked and cut, and the Band bloody, but nothing more could there be found.' Therefore the hat and comb were not on Harrison's head when they were

hacked and cut: otherwise they must have been blood-stained; the band worn about the throat was bloody, but there was no trace of blood on the road. This passage contains the key to the puzzle.

On hearing of the discovery of these objects all the people rushed to hunt for Harrison's corpse, which they did not find.

An old man like Harrison was not likely to stay at Charringworth very late, but it seems that whatever occurred on the highway happened after twilight.

Suspicion fell on John Perry, who was haled before the narrator, Sir Thomas Overbury, J.P. Perry said that after starting for Charringworth to seek his master on the previous evening, about 8.45 p. m., he met by the way William Reed of Campden, and explained to him that as he was timid in the dark he would go back and take Edward Harrison's horse and return. Perry did as he had said, and Reed left him 'at Mr. Harrison's Court gate.' Perry dallied there till one Pierce came past, and with Pierce (he did not say why) 'he went a bow's shot into the fields,' and so back once more to Harrison's gate. He now lay for an hour in a hen house, he rose at midnight, and again – the moon having now risen and dispelled his fears – he started for Charringworth. He lost his way in a mist, slept by the road-side, proceeded in the dawn to Charringworth, and found that Harrison had been there on the previous day. Then he came back and met Edward Harrison on his way to seek his father at Charringworth.

Perry's story is like a tale told by an idiot, but Reed, Pierce, and two men at Charringworth corroborated as far as their

knowledge went. Certainly Perry had been in company with Reed and Pierce, say between nine and ten on the previous night. Now, if evil had befallen Harrison it must have been before ten at night; he would not stay so late, if sober, at Charringworth. Was he usually sober? The cool way in which his wife and son took his absence suggests that he was a late-wandering old boy. They may have expected Perry to find him in his cups and tuck him up comfortably at Charringworth or at Ebrington.

Till August 24 Perry was detained in prison, or, odd to say, at the inn! He told various tales; a tinker or a servant had murdered his master and hidden him in a bean-rick, where, on search being made, *non est inventus*. Harrison, and the rents he had collected, were vanished in the azure. Perry now declared that he would tell all to Overbury, and to no other man. To him Perry averred that his mother and brother, Joan and Richard Perry, had murdered Harrison! It was his brother who, by John Perry's advice and connivance, had robbed the house in the previous year, while John 'had a Halibi,' being at church. The brother, said John, buried the money in the garden. It was sought for, but was not found. His story of the 'two men in white,' who had previously attacked him in the garden, was a lie, he said. I may add that it was not the lie of a sane man. Perry was conspicuously crazy.

He went on with his fables. His mother and brother, he declared, had often asked him to tell them when his master went to collect rents. He had done so after Harrison started for Charringworth on the morning of August 16. John Perry

next gave an account of his expedition with his brother in the evening of the fatal day, an account which was incompatible with his previous tale of his doings and with the authentic evidence of Reed and Pierce. Their honest version destroyed Perry's new falsehood. He declared that Richard Perry and he had dogged Harrison, as he came home at night, into Lady Campden's grounds; Harrison had used a key to the private gate. Richard followed him into the grounds; John Perry, after a brief stroll, joined him there and found his mother (how did she come thither?) and Richard standing over the prostrate Harrison, whom Richard incontinently strangled. They seized Harrison's money and meant to put his body 'in the great sink by Wallington's Mill.' John Perry left them, and knew not whether the body was actually thrown into the sink. In fact, *non est inventus* in the sink, any more than in the bean-rick. John next introduced his meeting with Pierce, but quite forgot that he had also met Reed, and did not account for that part of his first story, which Reed and Pierce had both corroborated. The hat, comb, and band John said that he himself had carried away from Harrison's body, had cut them with his knife, and thrown them into the highway. Whence the blood on the band came he neglected to say.

On the strength of this impossible farrago of insane falsehoods, Joan and Richard Perry were arrested and brought before Overbury. Not only the 'sink' but the Campden fish-pools and the ruinous parts of the house were vainly searched in

quest of Harrison's body. On August 25 the three Perrys were examined by Overbury, and Richard and the mother denied all that John laid to their charge. John persisted in his story, and Richard admitted that he and John had spoken together on the morning of the day when Harrison vanished, 'but nothing passed between them to that purpose.'

As the three were being brought back from Overbury's house to Campden an unfortunate thing happened. John was going foremost when Richard, a good way behind, dropped 'a ball of inkle from his pocket.' One of his guards picked it up, and Richard said that it 'was only his wife's hair-lace.' At one end, however, was a slip-knot. The finder took it to John, who, being a good way in front, had not seen his brother drop it. On being shown the string John shook his head, and said that 'to his sorrow he knew it, for that was the string his brother strangled his master with.' To this circumstance John swore at the ensuing trial.

The Assizes were held in September, and the Perrys were indicted both for the robbery in 1659 and the murder in 1660. They pleaded 'Guilty' to the first charge, as some one in court whispered to them to do, for the crime was covered by the Act of Pardon and Oblivion passed by Charles II. at his happy Restoration. If they were innocent of the robbery, as probably they were, they acted foolishly in pleading guilty. We hear of no evidence against them for the robbery, except John's confession, which was evidence perhaps against John, but was none against *them*. They thus damaged their case, for if they were really

guilty of the robbery from Harrison's house, they were the most likely people in the neighbourhood to have robbed him again and murdered him. Very probably they tied the rope round their own necks by taking advantage of the good King's indemnity. They later withdrew their confession, and probably were innocent of the theft in 1659.

On the charge of murder they were not tried in September. Sir Christopher Turner would not proceed 'because the body of Harrison was not found.' There was no *corpus delicti*, no evidence that Harrison was really dead. Meanwhile John Perry, as if to demonstrate his lunacy, declared that his mother and brother had tried to poison him in prison! At the Spring Assizes in 1661, Sir B. Hyde, less legal than Sir Christopher Turner, did try the Perrys on the charge of murder. How he could do this does not appear, for the account of the trial is not in the Record House, and I am unable at present to trace it. In the *Arminian Magazine*, John Wesley publishes a story of a man who was hanged for murdering another man, whom he afterwards met in one of the Spanish colonies of South America. I shall not here interrupt the tale of the Perrys by explaining how a hanged man met a murdered man, but the anecdote proves that to inflict capital punishment for murder without proof that murder has been committed is not only an illegal but an injudicious proceeding. Probably it was assumed that Harrison, if alive, would have given signs of life in the course of nine or ten months.

At the trial in spring all three Perrys pleaded 'not guilty.'

John's confession being proved against him, 'he told them he was then mad and knew not what he said.' There must have been *some* evidence against Richard. He declared that his brother had accused others besides him. Being asked to prove this, he answered 'that most of those that had given evidence against him knew it,' but named none. So evidence had been given (perhaps to the effect that Richard had been flush of money), but by whom, and to what effect, we do not know.

The Perrys were probably not of the best repute. The mother, Joan, was supposed to be a witch. This charge was seldom brought against popular well-living people. How intense was the fear of witches, at that date, we know from the stories and accounts of trials in Glanvil's *Sadducismus Triumphatus*. The neighbours probably held that Joan Perry would, as a witch, be 'nane the waur o' a hanging.' She was put to death first, under the belief that any hypnotic or other unholy influence of hers, which prevented her sons from confessing, would be destroyed by her death. We are not aware that post-hypnotic suggestion is removed by the death of the suggester; the experiment has not been tried. The experiment failed in Joan's case. Poor Richard, who was hanged next, could not induce the 'dogged and surly' John to clear his character by a dying declaration. Such declarations were then held irrefragable evidence, at least in Scotland, except when (as in the case of George Sprot, hanged for the Gowrie conspiracy) it did not suit the Presbyterians to believe the dying man. When John was being turned off, he said that 'he knew nothing of his

master's death, nor what was become of him, but they might hereafter (possibly) hear.' Did John know something? It would not surprise me if he had an inkling of the real state of the case.

II

They *did* hear; but what they heard, and what I have now to tell, was perfectly incredible. When 'some' years (two apparently) had passed, Will Harrison, Gent., like the three silly ewes in the folk-rhyme, 'came hirpling hame.' Where had the old man been? He explained in a letter to Sir Thomas Overbury, but his tale is as hard to believe as that of John Perry.

He states that he left his house in the afternoon (not the morning) of Thursday, August 16, 1660. He went to Charringworth to collect rents, but Lady Campden's tenants were all out harvesting. August seems an odd month for rent-collecting when one thinks of it. They came home late, which delayed Harrison 'till the close of the evening.' He only received 23 *l.*, which John Perry said, at his first examination in 1660, had been paid by one Edward Plaisterer, and Plaisterer corroborated. Harrison then walked homeward, in the dusk probably, and, near Ebrington, where the road was narrow, and bordered by whins, 'there met me one horseman who said "*Art thou there?*"' Afraid of being ridden over, Harrison struck the horse on the nose, and the rider, with a sword, struck at him and stabbed him in the side. (It was at this point of the road, where the whins grew, that

the cut hat and bloody band were found, but a thrust in the side would not make a neck-band bloody.) Two other horsemen here came up, one of them wounded Harrison in the thigh. They did not now take his 23*l.*, but placed him behind one of them on horseback, handcuffed him, and threw a great cloak over him.

Now, is it likely that highwaymen would carry handcuffs which closed, says Harrison, with a spring and a snap? The story is pure fiction, and bad at that. Suppose that kidnapping, not robbery, was the motive (which would account for the handcuffs), what had any mortal to gain by kidnapping, for the purpose of selling him into slavery, a 'gent.' of seventy years of age?

In the night they took Harrison's money and 'tumbled me down a stone-pit.' In an hour they dragged him out again, and he naturally asked what they wanted with him, as they had his money already. One of these miscreants wounded Harrison again, and – stuffed his pockets full of 'a great quantity of money.' If they had a great quantity of money, what did they want with 23*l.*? We hear of no other robberies in the neighbourhood, of which misdeeds the money might have been the profits. And why must Harrison carry the money? (It has been suggested that, to win popular favour, they represented themselves as smugglers, and Harrison, with the money, as their gallant purser, wounded in some heroic adventure.)

They next rode till late on August 17, and then put Harrison down, bleeding and 'sorely bruised with the carriage of the

money,' at a lonely house. Here they gave their victim broth and brandy. On Saturday they rode all day to a house, where they slept, and on Sunday they brought Harrison to Deal, and laid him down on the ground. This was about three in the afternoon. Had they wanted to make for the sea, they would naturally have gone to the *west* coast. While one fellow watched Harrison, two met a man, and 'I heard them mention seven pounds.' The man to whom seven pounds were mentioned (Wrenshaw was his name, as Harrison afterwards heard – where?) said that he thought Harrison would die before he could be put on board a ship. *Que diable allait-il faire dans cette galère?* Harrison was, however, put on board a casual vessel, and remained in the ship for six weeks.

> Where was the land to which the ship would go?
> Far, far ahead is all the sailors know!

Harrison does not say into what 'foam of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn' the ship went wandering for six mortal weeks. Like Lord Bateman:

> He sailéd East, and he sailéd West,
> Until he came to famed Turkee,
> Where he was taken and put in prison,
> Till of his life he was wear – ee!

'Then the Master of the ship came and told me, and *the rest who were in the same condition*, that he discovered three Turkish

ships.' 'The rest who were in the same condition'! We are to understand that a whole cargo of Harrisons was kidnapped and consigned captive to a vessel launched on ocean, on the off chance that the captain might meet three Turkish rovers who would snap them up. At this rate of carrying on, there must have been disappearances as strange as Harrison's, from dozens of English parishes, in August 1660. Had a crew of kidnappers been taking captives for purposes of private fiscal policy, they would have shipped them to the Virginian plantations, where Turkish galleys did not venture, and they would not have kidnapped men of seventy. Moreover, kidnappers would not damage their captives by stabbing them in the side and thigh, when no resistance was made, as was done to Harrison.

'The rest who were in the same condition' were 'dumped down' near Smyrna, where the valuable Harrison was sold to 'a grave physician.' 'This Turk he' was eighty-seven years of age, and 'preferred Crowland in Lincolnshire before all other places in England.' No inquiries are known to have been made about a Turkish medical man who once practised at Crowland in Lincolnshire, though, if he ever did, he was likely to be remembered in the district. This Turk he employed Harrison in the still room, and as a hand in the cotton fields, where he once knocked his slave down with his fist – pretty well for a Turk of eighty-seven! He also gave Harrison (whom he usually employed in the chemical department of his business) 'a silver bowl, double gilt, to drink in, and named him Boll' – his way of pronouncing

bowl – no doubt he had acquired a Lincolnshire accent.

This Turk fell ill on a Thursday, and died on Saturday, when Harrison tramped to the nearest port, bowl and all. Two men in a Hamburg ship refused to give him a passage, but a third, for the price of his silver-gilt bowl, let him come aboard. Harrison was landed, without even his bowl, at Lisbon, where he instantly met a man from Wisbech, in Lincolnshire. This good Samaritan gave Harrison wine, strong waters, eight stivers, and his passage to Dover, whence he came back to Campden, much to the amazement of mankind. We do not hear the names of the ship and skipper that brought Harrison from Lisbon to Dover. Wrenshaw (the man to whom seven pounds 'were mentioned') is the only person named in this delirious tissue of nonsense.

The editor of our pamphlet says, 'Many question the truth of this account Mr. Harrison gives of himself, and his transportation, believing he was never out of England.' I do not wonder at their scepticism. Harrison had 'all his days been a man of sober life and conversation,' we are told, and the odd thing is that he 'left behind him a considerable sum of his Lady's money in his house.' He did not see any of the Perrys on the night of his disappearance. The editor admits that Harrison, as an article of merchandise, was not worth his freight to Deal, still less to Smyrna. His son, in his absence, became Lady Campden's steward, and behaved but ill in that situation. Some suspected that this son arranged the kidnapping of Harrison, but, if so, why did he secure the hanging of John Perry, in chains, on Broadway

hill, 'where he might daily see him'?

That might be a blind. But young Harrison could not expect John Perry to assist him by accusing himself and his brother and mother, which was the most unlooked-for event in the world. Nor could he know that his father would come home from Charringworth on August 16, 1660, in the dark, and so arrange for three horsemen, in possession of a heavy weight of specie, to stab and carry off the aged sire. Young Harrison had not a great fardel of money to give them, and if they were already so rich, what had they to gain by taking Harrison to Deal, and putting him, with 'others in the same condition,' on board a casual ship? They could have left him in the 'stone-pit:' he knew not who they were, and the longer they rode by daylight, with a hatless, handcuffed, and sorely wounded prisoner, his pockets overburdened with gold, the more risk of detection they ran. A company of three men ride, in broad daylight, through England from Gloucestershire to Deal. Behind one of them sits a wounded, *and hatless*, and handcuffed captive, his pockets bulging with money. Nobody suspects anything, no one calls the attention of a magistrate to this extraordinary *démarche*! It is too absurd!

The story told by Harrison is conspicuously and childishly false. At every baiting place, at every inn, these weird riders must have been challenged. If Harrison told truth, he must have named the ship and skipper that brought him to Dover.

Dismissing Harrison's myth, we ask, what could account

for his disappearance? He certainly walked, on the evening of August 16, to within about half a mile of his house. He would not have done that had he been bent on a senile amour involving his absence from home, and had that scheme of pleasure been in his mind, he would have provided himself with money. Again, a fit of 'ambulatory somnambulism,' and the emergence of a split or secondary personality with forgetfulness of his real name and address, is not likely to have seized on him at that very moment and place. If it did, as there were no railways, he could not rush off in a crowd and pass unnoticed through the country.

Once more, the theory of ambulatory somnambulism does not account for his hacked hat and bloody band found near the whins on the road beyond Ebrington. Nor does his own story account for them. He was stabbed in the side and thigh, he says. This would not cut his hat or ensanguine his band. On the other hand, he would leave pools and tracks of blood on the road – 'the high way.' 'But nothing more could there be found,' no pools or traces of blood on the road. It follows that the hacked hat and bloody band were a designed false trail, *not* left there by John Perry, as he falsely swore, but by some other persons.

The inference is that for some reason Harrison's presence at Campden was inconvenient to somebody. He had lived through most troubled times, and had come into a changed state of affairs with new masters. He knew some secret of the troubled times: he was a witness better out of the way. He may conceivably have held a secret that bore on the case of one of the Regicides; or

that affected private interests, for he was the trusted servant of a great family. He was therefore spirited away: a trail certainly false – the cut hat and bloody band – was laid. By an amazing coincidence his servant, John Perry, went more or less mad – he was not sane on the evening of Thursday, August 16, and accused himself, his brother, and mother. Harrison was probably never very far from Campden during the two or three years of his disappearance. It was obviously made worth his while to tell his absurd story on his return, and to accept the situation. No other hypothesis 'colligates the facts.' What Harrison knew, why his absence was essential, we cannot hope to discover. But he never was a captive in 'famed Turkee.' Mr. Paget writes: 'It is impossible to assign a sufficient motive for kidnapping the old man … much profit was not likely to arise from the sale of the old man as a slave.' Obviously there was no profit, especially as the old man was delivered in a wounded and imperfect condition. But a motive for keeping Harrison out of the way is only hard to seek because we do not know the private history of his neighbours. Roundheads among them may have had excellent reasons, under the Restoration, for sequestering Harrison till the revenges of the Restoration were accomplished. On this view the mystery almost ceases to be mysterious, for such mad self-accusations as that of John Perry are not uncommon.[7]

[7] Not only have I failed to trace the records of the Assize at which the Perrys were tried, but the newspapers of 1660 seem to contain no account of the trial (as they do in the case of the Drummer of Tedworth, 1663), and Miss E.M. Thompson, who kindly undertook the search, has not even found a ballad or broadside on 'The

Campden Wonder' in the British Museum. The pamphlet of 1676 has frequently been republished, in whole or in part, as in *State Trials*, vol. xiv., in appendix to the case of Captain Green; which see, *infra*, p. 193, *et seq.*

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.