







CURIOSITIES
OF
STREET LITERATURE:



LONG-SONG SELLER.

(From a Daguerreotype by BEARD.)

"Three yards a penny! Three yards a penny! Beautiful songs!
Newest songs! Popular songs! Three yards a penny!
Songs, songs, songs!"

CURIOSITIES
OF
STREET LITERATURE:

COMPRISING

"COCKS," OR "CATCHPENNIES,"

A LARGE AND CURIOUS ASSORTMENT OF

STREET-DROLLERIES, SQUIBS, HISTORIES, COMIC TALES IN PROSE AND VERSE,

BROADSIDES ON THE ROYAL FAMILY,

POLITICAL LITANIES, DIALOGUES, CATECHISMS, ACTS OF PARLIAMENT,

STREET POLITICAL PAPERS,

A VARIETY OF "BALLADS ON A SUBJECT,"

DYING SPEECHES AND CONFESSIONS.

TO WHICH IS ATTACHED THE ALL-IMPORTANT AND NECESSARY

AFFECTIONATE COPY OF VERSES,

AS

"Come, all you feeling-hearted Christians, wherever you may be,
Attention give to these few lines, and listen unto me;
It's of this cruel murder, to you I will unfold,
The bare recital of the same will make your blood run cold."

"What hast here? ballads? I love a ballad in print, or a life; for then we are sure they are true."—SHAKESPEARE.

"There's nothing beats a stunning good murder, after all."—EXPERIENCE OF A RUNNING PATERER.

LONDON:
REEVES AND TURNER,
196, STRAND.
1871.

CURIOSITIES
OF
STREET LITERATURE.



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6	on Yellow Demy 4to paper	"	2	2 0

456

❧ EACH COPY OF EACH EDITION NUMBERED.

INTRODUCTION.

In selecting and arranging this collection of "Street Papers" for publication, every care has been taken to print them *verbatim et literatim*. They all bear the printer's name and address were such is used, and, in many cases, the wood-cuts have either been borrowed or purchased for the purpose of presenting them in their original style. The real object being to show, in the most genuine state, the character and quality of the productions written expressly for the amusement of the lower orders by street-authors. The general instruction given to our printer has been to "set up word for word from copy, with the exception of turned letters (*sic*) and those of a *WRONG FONT (?)*"—it being thought quite unnecessary to repeat these *convenient* and at that time *compulsory* "Errors of the Press," and which were very common in former days with the printers and publishers of street and public-house literature; arising alike from a want of skill in the art, a deficiency of capital, and the hurried manner in which they were prepared and worked off to meet the momentary demand.

Old "Jemmy" Catnach—whose name is ever associated with the literature of our streets—was a man who hated "innovations," as he used to call improvements, and had a great horror of buying type, because, as he used to observe, he kept no standing formes, and when certain sorts run short, he was not particular, and would tell the boys to use anything which would make a good shift. For instance, he never considered a compositor could be aground for a lowercase l while he had a figure of 1 or a cap. I to fall back upon; by the same rule, the cap. O and figure 0 were synonymous with "Jemmy;" the lower-case p, b, d, and q, would all do duty for each other in *turn*, and if they could not always find roman letters to finish a word with, why the compositor knew very well that the "reader" would not mark out *italic*.

At the time Catnach commenced business, "Johnny" Pitts,* of the Toy and Marble Warehouse, No. 6, Great St. Andrew Street, was the acknowledged and established Printer of Street-Literature for the "Dials" district; therefore, as may be easily imagined, a powerful rivalry and vindictive jealousy soon arose between these "two of a trade"—most especially on the part of "Old Mother" Pitts, who is described as being a coarse and vulgar-minded personage, and as having originally followed the trade of a bumboat woman at Portsmouth: she "vowed vengeance against the young fellow in the court for daring to set up in their business, and also spoke of him as young "Catsnatch," "Catblock," "Cut-throat," and many other opprobrious terms being freely given to the new comer. Pitts' staff of "bards" were duly cautioned of the consequences which would inevitably follow should they dare to write a line for Catnach—the new *cove* in the court. The injunction was for a time obeyed, but the "Seven Bards of the Dials" soon found it not only convenient, but also more profitable to sell copies of their effusions to both sides at the same time, and by keeping their own council they avoided detection, as each printer accused the other of buying an early sold copy, and then reprinting it off with the utmost speed, and which was in reality often the case, as "Both Houses" had an emissary on the constant look-out for any new production suitable for street-sale. Now, although this style of "Double dealing" and competition tended much to lessen the cost price to the "middle-man," or vendor, the public in this case did not get any of the reduction, as a penny broadside was still a penny, and a quarter sheet still a halfpenny to them, the "street-patterer" obtaining the whole of the reduction as extra profit.

The feud existing between these rival publishers, who have been somewhat aptly designated as the Colburn and Bentley of the "paper" trade, never abated, but, on the contrary, increased in acrimony of temper until at last not being content to vilify each other by words alone, they resorted to printing off virulent lampoons, in which Catnach never failed to let the world know that "Old Mother Pitts" had been formerly a bumboat woman, while the Pitts announced that—

"All the boys and girls around,
Who go out priggish rags and phials,
Know Jemmy *Catsnatch*!!! well,
Who lives in a back slum in the Dials.

He hangs out in Monmouth Court,
And wears a pair of blue-black breeches,
Where all the "Polly Cox's crew" do resort
To chop their swag for badly printed Dying Speeches.

At length Catnach, from the possession of greater capital and business acumen, became—to use the words of our informant—"the Cock of the Walk," and continued so until his retirement in 1839. In his Will—or LAST DYING SPEECH—which was proved April, 1842, "James Catnach, of Dancer's Hill, South Mimms, in the county of Middlesex, gentleman, formerly of Monmouth Court, Monmouth Street, printer, bequeathed the whole of his estate to his sister Anne, the widow of Joseph Ryle, in trust, nevertheless, for her daughter, Marion Martha Ryle, until she obtain the age of twenty-one years. Witnesses—William Kinsey, 13, Suffolk St., Pall Mall, Solr. Wm. Tookey his clerk."

The present street literature printers and publishers are Mr. W. S. Fortey (Catnach's successor), of 2 and 3, Monmouth Court, Seven Dials. Mr. Henry Disley (formerly with Catnach), 57, High Street, St. Giles's. Mr. Taylor, Brick Lane, Spitalfields. Mr. H. Such, 177, Union Street, Borough; and Mr. J. Harkness, 121, Church Street, Preston. From whose "establishments" upwards of two thousand street "papers" and "ballads" have been obtained, and from which—together with a private collection—we have made our selection to form "THE CURIOSITIES OF STREET LITERATURE."

With such a vast amount of "material" to hand, it is somewhat difficult to know which to retain and which to reject. It being utterly impossible to reproduce the whole, the only thing to be done is to make the attempt to divide them into something like classes. We have, therefore, arranged our collection into four divisions, which may be briefly alluded to as—I. "COCKS," OR "CATCHPENNIES." II. ROYALTY AND POLITICAL. III. BALLADS ON A SUBJECT. IV. DYING SPEECH AND CONFESSIONAL PAPERS.

During the progress of our "Collection" through the press, we had, by a special appointment, an interview with Mr. John Morgan, a street author, and who may be said to be the oldest of his peculiar class. "I'm the last one left of our old crew, Sir," he observed during our conversation. He is now upwards of 70 years of age, and formerly wrote for "Old Jemmy" Catnach,

* Pitts, a modern publisher of love garlands, merriments, penny ballads,—

"Who, ere he went to heaven,
Domiciled in Dials Seven"—G. DANIEL'S "Democritus in London."

with whose personal history he is well acquainted, and still continues to write for the "Seven Dials Press." A street ballad from his pen will be found at page 103 of our work. In allusion to Mr. John Morgan, the writer of an article on "Street Ballads" in the *National Review* for October, 1861, makes the following remarks:—

"This ballad—'Little Lord John out of Service'—is one of the few which bear a signature. It is signed 'John Morgan' in the copy which we possess. For a long time we believed this name to be a mere *nom-de-plume*; but the other day, when making a small purchase in Monmouth Court, we were informed, in answer to a casual question, that this is the real name of the author of some of the best comic ballads. Our informant added, that he is an elderly, we may say old, gentleman, living somewhere in Westminster; but the exact whereabouts we could not discover. Mr. Morgan followed no particular visible calling so far as our informant knew, except writing ballads, by which he could not earn much of a livelihood, as the price of an original ballad, in these buying-cheap days, has been screwed down by publishers to somewhere about a shilling sterling. Something more like bread-and-butter might be made perhaps by poets who were in the habit of singing their own ballads, as some of them do, but not Mr. Morgan. Should this ever meet the eye of that gentleman (a not very probable event, we fear), we beg to apologise for the liberty we have taken in using the verses and name, and hope he will excuse us, having regard to the subject in which we are his humble fellow-labourers. We could scarcely avoid naming him, the fact being that he is the only living author of street ballads whose name we know. That self-denying mind, indifferent to worldly fame, which characterised the architects of our cathedrals and abbeys, would seem to have descended on our ballad-writers; and we must be thankful, therefore, to be able to embalm and hand down to posterity a name here and there, such as William of Wykeham, and John Morgan. In answer to our inquiries in this matter, generally we have been told, 'Oh, any body writes them' and with that answer we have had to rest satisfied. But in presence of that answer, we walk about the streets with a new sense of wonder, peering into the faces of those of our fellow-lieges who do not carry about with them the external evidence of overflowing exchequers, and saying to ourselves, 'That man may be a writer of ballads.'"

With regard to illustrations, a ballad-printer is in the habit of buying up old wood-cuts which have been engraved for any other works, and of applying them to his own purposes; disregarding alike their age, rudeness, and condition. Most of those adopted are repeatedly employed over and over again. The printers of "broadsides" seldom care whether an ornament of the kind used is, or not, appropriate to the subject of the ballad, so long as it is likely to attract attention. Many examples will be found in this collection, and we are indebted to Mr. H. Disley and others for the use of the same.

"The authors and poets who give this peculiar literature, alike in prose or rhyme to the streets, are all in some capacity or another connected with street-patter or song; and the way in which a narrative or a 'copy of verses' is prepared for the press is usually this:—The leading members of the 'schools'—some of whom refer regularly to the evening papers—when they hear of any out-of-the-way occurrence, resort to the printer and desire its publication in a style proper for the streets. This is usually done very speedily, the school—or a majority of them—and the printer agreeing with the author. Sometimes an author will voluntarily prepare a piece of street-literature and submit it to a publisher, who, as in case of other publishers, accepts or declines, as he believes the production will or will not prove remunerative. Sometimes the school carry the manuscript with them to the printer, and undertake to buy a certain quantity to insure publication. The payment to the author is the same in all cases—a shilling; but sometimes if the printer and publisher like the verses he 'throws a penny or two over.' And sometimes also, in case of a great sale there is the same 'over-sum.' The 'Dials' and its immediate neighbourhood is the chief residence of these parties, as being nearest to the long-established printer they have made it the 'head meet' of the fraternity.

"It must be borne in mind that the street-author is closely restricted in the quality of his effusions. It must be such as the patterers approve, as the chanters can chant, the ballad singers sing, and—above all, such as the street buyers will buy."

We have recently met, near the Strand, the street ballad singer of our youth, and, from whom we procured, "Wait for the Turn of the Tide," and "Call her back and Kiss Her," and the following information—"Oh, yes, I remember you, remember you well; particularly when I see you down at Brighton; when you treated me to that hot rum and water; when I was so wet and cold, at a little snug public-house in one of the streets that leads off the main street. I don't remember the name on it now, but I remember the rum and water well enough; it was good. You said it would be, and so it was, and no mistake. How old am I now? Why, 59. How long have I been at it? Why, hard on fifty years. I was about nine or ten year old—no, perhaps I might have been 12 year old, when I come to think on it. Yes, about 12 year old; my mother was a widow with five children, and there was a boy in our street as used to go out singing ballads, and his mother said to my mother, 'Why don't you let your boy (that's me) go out and sing ballads like my boy.' And I said I didn't mind, and I did go out, and I've been at it ever since, so you see it ain't far short of 50 year. How many do I sell in a day? Well, not so many as I used to do, by a long way. I've sold me four and five quires a-day, but I don't sell above two and three dozen a-day now. That's all the difference you see, sir—dozens against quires. How do I live then? Why, you see I am now so well-known in different parts of London, that lots and lots of people comes up to me—like you always do—and says—'How do you do, old fellow? I remember you when I was a boy, if its a man, and when I was a girl, if its a woman.' And says, 'So you are still selling songs, eh?' Then they give me a few coppers; some more and some less than others, and says they don't want the songs. Some days—very often—I've had more money giving me than I've took for the ballads. Yes, I have travelled all over England—all over it I think—but the North's the best—Manchester, Liverpool, and them towns; but down Bath and Cheltenham way I was nearly starved. I was coming back from that way, I now remember, when I met you, sir, at Brighton that time. I buy my ballads at various places—but now mostly over the water, because I live there now and it's handiest. Mr. Such, the printer, in Union-street in the Borough. Oh! yes, some at Catnach's—leastways, it ain't Catnach's now, it's Fortey's. Yes, I remember 'old Jemmy Catnach' very well; he wa'n't a bad sort, as you say; leastways, I've heard so, but I never had anything of him. I always paid for what I had, and did not say much to him, or he to me—writing his life of him, are you indeed? No, I can't give you no more information about him than that, because, as I said before, I bought my goods as I wanted them, and paid for them, then away on my own account and business. Well, he was a man something like you—a little wider across the shoulders, perhaps, but about such a man as you are. I did know a man as could have told you a lot about 'old Jemmy,' but he's dead now; he was one of his authors, that is, he wrote some of the street-ballads for him, and very good ones they used to be, that is, for selling. Want some old 'Dying Speeches' and 'Cocks,' do you indeed? well, I a'n't got any—I don't often 'work' them things, although I have done so sometimes, but I mostly keep to the old game—'Ballads on a Subject.' You see them other things are no use only just for the day, then they are no use at all, so we don't keep them—I've often given them away. You'd give sixpence a piece for them, would you, indeed, sir; then I wish I had some of them. Now I come to think of it I know a man that did have a lot of them bye him, and I know he'd be glad to sell them. I don't know where he lives, but I sometimes see him. Oh! yes, a letter would find me. My name is Samuel Milnes, and I live at No. 81, Mint-street, that's in the Borough; you know, Guager is the name at the house. Thank you, sir, I'm much obliged. Good day, sir."

It will be seen that our street-ballads and "papers" come down to the latest period, several being issued during the printing of this collection; in fact, any public affair seems of sufficient importance to write a ballad about. We have, therefore, placed some blank leaves between each division, for the purpose of mounting other examples that may be from time to time published by the printers of Street Literature.

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