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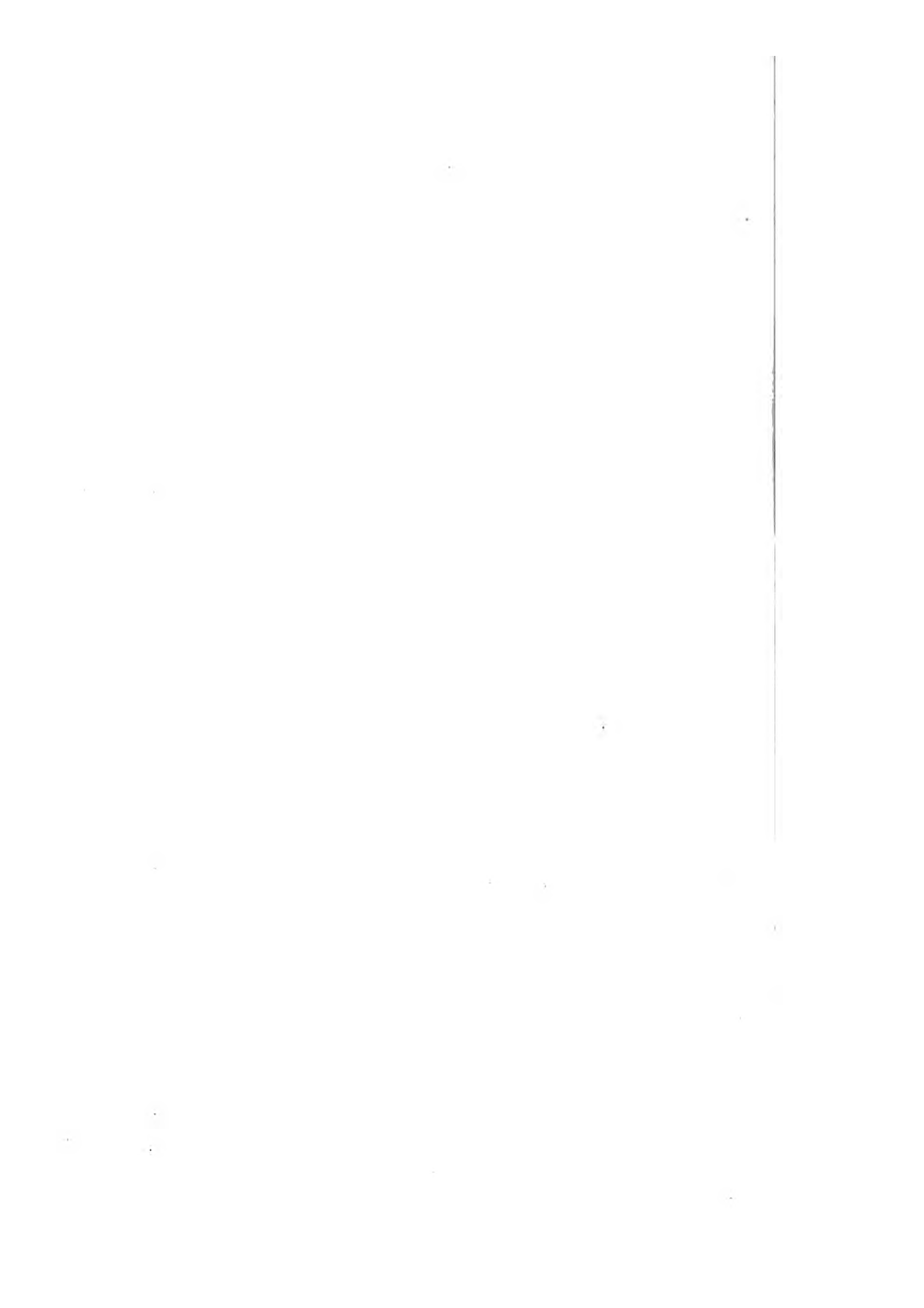
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930 e. 233. The Merry Tales of the Wise Men of Gotham. 1840.





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H. D. Cooper

THE MERRY TALES
OF THE
WISE MEN OF GOTHAM.

EDITED BY
JAMES ORCHARD HALLIWELL, ESQ. F.S.A.

" Rejoice, ye happy Gothamites, rejoice!"—CHURCHILL.

LONDON:
JOHN RUSSELL SMITH,
4, OLD COMPTON STREET, SOHO SQUARE.

M. DCCC. XL.

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INTRODUCTION.

It is a work of the utmost difficulty to trace, with any certainty, the origin of those traditions, often as positive as they are fanciful, which assign general properties to the inhabitants of certain localities, and which often last for ages, continually deriving additional strength from increasing antiquity. Such traditions are sometimes the result of near observation and experience, obtained after the lapse of a long period, and generally elicited by foes; and they are frequently merely the offspring of chance and uncertain fancy.

The general characters which nations have obtained in various ages are examples of the former.*

The attribute of folly and stupidity to the men of Gotham, a humble village in Nottinghamshire, is one of the most remarkable instances of the other. The following well-known nursery rhyme has rendered the subject familiar to every one:—

“ Three wise men of Gotham
Went to sea in a bowl;
And if the bowl had been stronger,
My song would have been longer.”

* For instance, see *Reliquiæ Antiquæ*, p. 5. and 127, and Wright's *Essay on Anglo-Saxon Literature*, p. 43.

Hence also the proverb*—"As wise as the men of Gotham." The tale of its origin, handed down by tradition, is the following :†—King John, intending to pass through this place towards Nottingham, was prevented by the inhabitants, they apprehending that the ground over which a king passed was for ever after to become a public road. The King, incensed at their proceedings, sent from his court, soon afterwards, some of his servants to inquire of them the reason of their incivility and ill treatment, that he might punish them. The villagers, hearing of the approach of the King's servants, thought of an expedient to turn away his majesty's displeasure from them. When the messengers arrived at Gotham, they found some of the inhabitants engaged in endeavouring to drown an eel in a pool of water; some were employed in dragging carts upon a large barn to shade the wood from the sun; and others were engaged in hedging a cuckoo, which had perched itself upon an old bush. In short, they were all employed some foolish way or other, which convinced the King's servants that it was a village of fools.

It is somewhat curious, that the earliest collection of such tales as those which in later times were told of the men of Gotham, laid them to the charge of the men of Norfolk.‡ It may also be remarked, that one of the stories in that collection, is identical with

* Fuller's Worthies, Edit. 1662. p. 315-6.

† Thoroton's Nottinghamshire, i. 42-3.

‡ This singular collection, under the title of *Descriptio Norfolkensium*, was first pointed out and printed by Mr. Wright, in his "Early Mysteries, and other Latin Poems," 8vo. Nichols, 1838. See, also, the Introduction to that work, pp. xxi, xxii.

the second tale in the following tract. It is thus briefly told in the Latin *Descriptio Norfolciensium*,

Ad forum ambulant diebus singulis ;
Saccum de lolio portant in humeris,
Jumentis ne noceant : bene fatuis,
Ut prolocutus sum, æquantur bestiis.

Many stories of the Gothamites are preserved orally, which are not found in the printed collection. The following may be given as examples.

One day some of the men of Gotham were walking by the river-side ; and came to a place where the contrary currents caused the water to boil as in a whirlpool. " See how the water boils !" says one. " If we had plenty of oatmeal," says another, " we might make enough hasty-porridge to serve all the village for a month." It was accordingly resolved that part of them should go to the village and fetch their oatmeal. The oatmeal was soon brought, and thrown into the water, but there soon arose a question how they were to know when the porridge was ready. This difficulty was overcome by the offer of one of the company to jump in, and it was agreed that if he found it was ready for use, he should signify the same to his companions. The man jumped in, and found the water deeper than he expected; thrice he rose to the surface, but said nothing. The others, impatient at his remaining so long silent, and seeing him smack his lips, took this for an avowal that the porridge was good, and they all leaped in after him, and were drowned.

Other stories of a similar kind may still be collected. On one occasion, the villagers are stated to have found a hedgehog in the fields, and the schoolmaster (for the schoolmaster seems even to have reached the village of Gotham) not knowing what

animal it was, declared it to be one of those which Adam had never named. On another occasion, a villager happening to be abroad at a late hour on a moon-shiny night, saw the reflection of the moon in the horse-pond, and, believing the moon was made of green cheese, he raised all his neighbours to help him to draw it out. According to another story, the Gothamites are said to have had but one knife amongst them, which was stuck in a tree in the middle of the village for their common use: many amusing incidents arose out of the disputes for the use of this knife.

William de Gotham was Master of Michael House at Cambridge, in 1336, and twice Chancellor of the University. This is one of the earliest notices of the town that I know of; very ancient, however, is the myth of the stupidity of its inhabitants, for in the *Widkirk Plays** we have—

“ Foles al sam ;
Sagh I never none so fare,
Bote the foles of Gotham.”

And Tom Hearne,† in a fit of stupidity, strongly contended that the tales and the proverb arose from certain tenures held by the observance of customs similar to them.

The tales of the *Wise Men of Gotham* were formed into a chap-book as early as the commencement of

* Collier's History of Dramatic Poetry, ii. 179. See also, ii. 472, iii. 33.

† Benedictus Abbas, i. 2. and liv. Not. et Spicileg. ad Gul. Neubrig, iii. p. 744.

the sixteenth century, and some have attributed them to Dr. Andrew Borde,* the well-known progenitor of Merry-Andrews. The collection continued to be reprinted until lately, but now, like other books of a similar character, has become exceedingly scarce; a copy in the possession of the Rev. J. Hunter being the only one I have seen in London, either in private or public libraries. An edition of 1650 (12mo. Lond.) has been pirated from Wood's collection in the Ashmolean Museum at Oxford, but there are *two* editions in the Bodleian Library.†

* Wood's *Ath. Oxon.* i. 74. We may here make the following references for allusions:—Eliot's *Fruits from the French*, p. 69; Warton's *History of English Poetry*, iii. 356; Ritson's *Edition of Robin Hood*, i. xci.; More's *Philosophical Works*, pp. 47, 159; Leigh's *Accidence of Armory*, Edit. 1597, fol. 134, v^o.

† Douce, pp. 179. In MS. Douce, 357, written in the year 1642, is a satirical address to his Majesty "of the inhabitants of the antient corporation of Gotham," commencing thus,— "Wee have with great satisfaction observed the admirable influence of your Majesties late proclamacion, the very reading of which having made some persons in most of the counties and townes of this kingdome as wise men as ourselves," fol. 91, v^o. A short political squib (ff. 4) appeared in 1643, called "The Foole's Complaint to Gotham Colledge," Lond. 4to.; and in 1798, we have "Libellus, or a Brief Sketch of the Kingdom of Gotham," 12mo. Lond. pp. 101, neither of which appear to have particular reference to the village of fools.

Kemp wrote "applauded merriments of the men of Gotham," consisting only of a single scene of ignorant blundering and contention, whether a smith or a cobbler should deliver a mock-petition to the king regarding the consumption of ale; this was printed in *A knack to know a knave* in 1594, and Mr. Collier has given the whole of it in his history of English Dramatic Poetry. In the play of *Misogonus* (A. D. 1560) we find Cacurgus saying

"Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha! I must neds laughe in my slefe:
The wise men of Gotum are risen againe."—*Collier*, ii. 472.

In order to put the present inhabitants of the town of Gotham into good humour, we subjoin the following song composed by a rustic Gothamite at the close of the last century:—

“ Tell me no more of Gotham Fools,
Or of their eels in little pools,
Which they were told were drowning ;
Nor of their carts drawn up on high
When King John’s men were standing by,
To keep a wood from browning.

“ Nor of their cheese shov’d down the hill,
Nor of their cuckoo sitting still,
While it they hedged round ;
Such tales of them have long been told,
By prating boobies young and old ;
In drunken circles crown’d.

“ The fools are those who thither go,
To see the cuckoo-bush I trow,
The wood, the barn, the pools ;
For such are seen both here and there,
And passed by without a sneer,
By all but errant fools.”

THE MERRY TALES
OF THE
MAD MEN OF GOTHAM.

REPRINTED FROM A COPY PRINTED AT HULL IN THE
PRESENT CENTURY, IN THE POSSESSION OF THE REV.
JOSEPH HUNTER, F.S.A.

FIRST TALE.

THERE were two men of Gotham, and one of them was going to the market at Nottingham to buy sheep, and the other was coming from the market, and both met together on Nottingham bridge. Well met, said the one to the other; whither are you a-going, said he that came from Nottingham? Marry, said he that was going thither, I am going to the market to buy sheep. Buy sheep, said the other, and which way will you bring them home? Marry, said the other, I will bring them over this bridge. By Robin Hood, said he that came from Nottingham, but thou shalt not. By maid Marjoram, said he, that was going thither, but I will. Thou shalt not, said the one. I will said the other. Tut here, said the one, and shute there, said

the other. Then they beat their staves against the ground one against the other, as if there had been an hundred sheep betwixt them. Hold them there, said one. Beware of the leaping over the bridge of my sheep, said the other. I care not, said the other. They shall all come this way, said one. But they shall not, said the other. Then said the one, and if thou make much ado, I will put my finger in thy mouth. A turd thou wilt, said the other. And as they were in contention, another wise man that belonged to Gotham, came from the market with a sack of meal upon his horse; and seeing and hearing his neighbours at strife about sheep and none betwixt them, said he, Ah ! fools, will you never learn wit ? Then help me, said he that had the meal; and lay this sack upon my shoulder. They did so, and he went to the one side of the bridge, and unloosed the mouth of the sack, and did shake out the meal into the river. Then said he, how much meal is there in the sack, neighbours ? Marry, answer'd they, none. Now by my faith, replied this wise man, even so much wit is there in your two heads, to strive for that thing which you have not. Now which was the wisest of all these three persons I leave you to judge.

SECOND TALE.

There was a man of Gotham that rode to the market with two bushels of wheat, and because his horse should not be damaged by carrying too great a burthen, he was determined to carry the corn himself upon his own neck, and still kept riding upon his horse till he arrived at the end of his journey. Now I will leave you to judge which was the wisest, his horse or himself.

THIRD TALE.

On a time the men of Gotham fain would have pinn'd in the cuckow, whereby she should sing all the year ; and in the midst of the town they had a hedge made round in compass, and they had got a cuckow, and put her into it, and said, Sing here, and you shall lack neither meat nor drink all the year. The cuckow, when she perceived herself encompassed within the hedge, she flew away : A vengeance on her, said the wise men, we made not our hedge high enough.

FOURTH TALE.

There was a man of Gotham, who went to the market of Nottingham, to sell cheese, and as he was going down the hill to Nottingham bridge, one of his cheeses fell out of his wallet, and run down the hill. A whoreson, said the fellow, what can you run to the market alone ? I will now send one after the other ; then laying down the wallet, and taking out the cheeses, he tumbled 'em down the hill one after the other, and some ran into one bush, and some into another, so at last he said, I do charge you to meet me in the market-place. And when the man came into the market to meet the cheeses, he staid until the market was almost done, then went and enquired of his neighbours, and other men, if they did see his cheeses come to market ? Why who should bring them, said one of his neighbours ? Marry, themselves, said the fellow ; they knew the way well enough, said he ; a vengeance on them, for I was

afraid to see my cheeses run so fast, that they would run beyond the market. I am persuaded that they are at this time almost as far as York. So he immediately takes a horse, and rides after them to York, but was very much disappointed. But to this day no man has ever heard of the cheeses.

This was the end of

FIFTH TALE.

There was a man of Gotham, who bought at the market of Nottingham, a trevit or a barn iron, and as he was going home, his shoulders grew weary with the carriage, he set it down, and seeing it had three feet, said, Whoreson, thou hast three feet, and I but two : thou shalt bear me home, if thou wilt, and so set it down upon the ground, and set himself down thereon : and said to the trevit, Bear me along as I have done thee ; for if thou dost not thou shalt stand still for me. The man of Gotham saw that his trevit would not go any further. Stand still, said he, in the Mayor's name, and follow me, if thou wilt, and I can shew you the right way. But when he came home his wife said, Where is my trevit ? The man said, it had three legs, and I but two, and I did teach him the ready way to my house, therefore let him come if he can himself. Where did you leave the trevit ? said the woman. At Gotham bridge, said the man. So the woman immediately run to fetch home the trevit herself, or otherwise she must certainly have lost it, thro' her husband's want of wit.

SIXTH TALE.

There dwelt a certain smith in Gotham, who had a wasp's nest in the straw at the end of his forge, and there coming one of his neighbours to have his horse shod, and the wasps being exceeding busy, the man was stung by one of them. The man being grievously affronted, said, Art thou worthy to keep a forge, or no? To have men stung with these wasps! Oh neighbour, said the smith, be but content, and I shall put them from their nest by and by: immediately he takes up a coultter, and so heats it in the fire, till it was red hot, and then he thrust it into the straw at the end of the forge, and set it on fire and burnt it up: there, said the smith, I told thee I would fire them out of their nests.

SEVENTH TALE.

When that Good Friday was come the men of Gotham did cast their heads together, what to do with their white herrings, red herrings, their sprats, and salt fish. Then one consulted with the other, and agreed that all such fish should be cast into the pond or pool, which was in the middle of the town, that the number of them might increase against the next year. Therefore every one that had got any fish left, did cast them into the pond. Then one said, I have as yet gotten left so many red herrings. Well, said the other, and I have yet left so many whittings. Another immediately cry'd out, I have as yet gotten so many sprats left. And said the last, I have got so many salt fishes. Let them all

go together into the great pond without any distinction, and we may be sure to fare like lords the next year. At the beginning of the next Lent, they immediately went about drawing the pond, imagining that they should have the fish, but were much surprised to find nothing but a great eel. Ah! said they, a mischief on this eel, for he hath eaten up our fish. What must we do with him? said one to the other. Kill him, said one to the other: Chop him into pieces, said another: Nay, not so, said the other, but let us drown him: Be it accordingly so, replied they all. So they immediately went to another pond, and did cast the eel into the water. Lie there, said these wise men, and shift for thyself, since you can expect no help from us. So they left the eel to be drowned.

This was the mode of executing criminals at Perkins. See Sup: and coll. vol 4 for ceremonial.

EIGHTH TALE.

On a time the men of Gotham had forgotten to pay their rent to their landlords. So the one said to the other, To-morrow must be pay day, and what remedy can we take to send our money to our landlords? The one said to them, This day I have taken a hare, and he shall carry it, for he is very quick-footed. Be it so, replied the rest; he shall have a letter, and a purse to put our money in; and we can direct the ready way. When the letter was written, and the money put in a purse they immediately ty'd'em about the hare's neck; saying, You must first go to Loughborough, and then to Leicester, and at Newark is our landlord; then commend us unto him, and there is his due. The hare, as soon as she got out of their hands, run a clean contrary way. Some

said, Thou must go to Loughborough first. Some made answer and said, Let the hare alone, for he can tell a nearer way than the best of us ; let him go.

NINTH TALE.

On a time, there was a man of Gotham, that went a mowing in the meads, and found a great grasshopper. He immediately threw down his scythe, and run home to his neighbours, and said, that the Devil was there in the field, and was hopping amongst the grass. Then there were every man ready with clubs and staves, halberts, and other weapons to kill the grasshopper. When they came almost to the place where the grasshopper should be, said one to the other, Let every man cross himself from the Devil, for we'll not meddle with him; and so they returned again, and said, We were blest this day that we went no further. O cowards, said he that had got the scythe in the mead, help me to fetch my scythe. No! answered they, it is good to sleep in a whole skin ; it is much better for thee to lose thy scythe, than to mar us all.

TENTH TALE.

On a certain time there were twelve men of Gotham that went a fishing ; and some did wade in the water, and some did stand upon dry land. And when they went homeward, one said to the other, We have ventured wonderful hard this day in wading, I pray God that none of us may come from home

to be drowned. Nay marry, said one to the other, let us see that, for there did twelve of us come out. Then they told themselves, and every man told eleven, and the twelfth man did never tell himself. Alas! said the one to the other, there is some one of us drowned. They went back to the brook where they had been fishing, and sought up and down for him that was drowned, and did all make a great lamentation. A courtier did come riding by, and did ask what it was they sought for, and why they were so sorrowful? Oh! said they, this day we went to fish in the brook, and here did come out twelve of us; and one of us is drowned. Why, said the courtier, tell how many there be of you; and the one said eleven, and he did not tell himself. Well, said the courtier, what will you give me, and I will find out twelve men? Sir, said they, all the money we have got. Give me the money, said the courtier; and began with the first, and gave a recommendibus over the shoulders, which made him to groan; saying, Here is one; and so he served them all, that they groaned at the matter. When he came to the last, he paid him well, saying, Here is the twelfth man. God's blessing on thy heart, for finding out our dear brother.

ELEVENTH TALE.

There was a man of Gotham that rode upon the highway; and there he found a cheese, and he pulled out his sword, and gored and pricked the cheese with the point, in order to take it up: there came another man by and alighted, and so takes up the cheese, and rides away with it. The man of

Gotham rides back to Nottingham, to buy a longer sword to take up the cheese ; and having purchased a sword, returned back, and coming to the place where the cheese did lie, he pulled out his sword and pricked the ground, saying, A murrain take it; if I had had but this sword, I should have had the cheese myself, but now another has got it.

TWELFTH TALE.

There was a man of Gotham that did not love his wife, and she having fair hair, her husband said divers times that he would cut it off, but durst not do it when she was waking, and so resolved to do it when she was asleep. Therefore, on a night, he takes up a pair of shears, and lays them under his bed's head, which his wife perceived, and so called to one of her maids, and said, Go to bed to my husband, for that he is minded to cut off my hair to-night, let him cut off thy hair, and I will give thee as good a kirtle as ever thou didst see. The maid did so, and feigned herself asleep, which the man perceiving, cut off the maid's hair, and wrapt it about the shears, and laid it under his pillow, and so fell asleep again. The wife made her maid arise, and takes the hair and shears, and went into the hall and there burnt the hair; the man had a horse that he loved above all things, as she very well knew : the good wife went into the stable, and cut off the horse's tail, and wrapped the shears up in it, and then laid them under the pillow again. In the morning she arose betimes, and sat by the fire combing her hair. At last came the man to the fire, and seeing his wife combing her head, marvelled very much thereat. The girl, seeing her master standing in a deep study, said, What the

devil ails the horse in the stable, for he bleeds sore. The man ran into the stable, and found that his horse's tail was cut off; then going to his wife's bed, he found the shears wrapt up in the horse's tail, and came to his wife, saying, I crythee mercy, for I imagined to cut off thy hair, but have cut off my horse's tail. Yea, said she, self do, self have; many a man thinketh on a bad turn, but it turneth oft-times on himself.

THIRTEENTH TALE.

A man of Gotham laid his wife a wager that she could not make him a cuckold. No, said she, but I can. Spare me not, said he, but do what you can. So upon a time, she hid all the spigots and faucets in the house, and went into the buttery, and sets a barrel a broach, and cryed out to her spouse, I pray you bring me hither a spigot and faucet, or else all the ale will run out. The good man sought up and down, but could find none: Come hither then, said she, and hold your finger in the tap-hole; so she pulled out her finger, and the good man put in his. So then she called her taylor, who lived at the next door, with whom she made a blind bargain. And within a while after, she came to her husband, and brought a spigot and faucet, saying, Pull thy finger out of the tap-hole, gentle cuckold. Aye, beshrew your heart for your labour, said the good man. Make no such bargain with me again, said she.

FOURTEENTH TALE.

A man of Gotham had taken a very young buzzard, and to the eating of it he invited four or five gentlemen's servants; but the old wife killed an old

brood goose, and she and two of her gossips had eaten up the buzzard; and the old goose was laid to the fire for the gentlemen's servants. So when they came, and the goose was set before 'em; What is this, said one of them? The good man said, A curious buzzard. A buzzard, said they! Why it is an old goose, and thou art a knave to mock us; and in great anger they departed home. The fellow was very sorry that he had affronted the gentlemen's servants, and took a bag, and put in the buzzard's feathers, and then he intended to go to them, and shew them the buzzard's feathers, and so please them. But the wife prayed him e'er he went, to fetch her in a block of wood for the fire, and in the interim she pulled out the buzzard's feathers, and put in the goose's feathers. Then the man taking the bag went to the gentlemen's servants, and said, Pray be not angry with me, for you shall see that I had a buzzard, for here be the feathers; then he opened his bag and shook out all the goose's feathers. The gentlemen's servants seeing the goose's feathers, said, Why, thou knave, could'st thou not be contented to mock us at thine own house, but art come here to mock us? Then one took a waster in his hand, and gave him a dozen stripes, saying at every blow, Here sirrah, take this for a reward, and hereafter mock us no more.

FIFTEENTH TALE.

There was a young man of Gotham, who went a wooing to a fair maid; his mother warned him before hand, saying, Whenever thou dost look at her, cast a sheep's eye at her, and say to her, How dost thou do, my sweet pig's-nic! The fellow went to the butchers, and bought him seven or eight sheep's eyes. And when this lusty wooer was at dinner, he would

look upon this fair wench, and immediately cast in her face a sheep's eye, saying, How dost thou do, my dear sweet pig's-nic? How do I do! said the wench, swine's face? What dost thou mean by casting a sheep's eye at me? Oh! sweet pig's-nic, have at thee here another. But I defy thee, old swine's face, said the wench. What my old sweet pig's-nic, be content, for if thou livest till the next year, thou wilt be a foul sow. Walk knave, walk, said she, for if thou livest until the next year, thou wilt be a rank knave, besides a lubber and a fool. Whereby a man may see, that for his goodwill he shall often have as much displeasure.

SIXTEENTH TALE.

A man's wife of Gotham was brought to bed of a male child, and the father bid the gossips, which were children of eight or ten years of age. The eldest child's name who was to be god-father, was called Gilbert, the second child's name was Humphrey, and the god-mother's name was Christibel. The friends of all them did admonish them, saying, that divers of times they must say after the Priest. When they all were come to the church door, the priest said, Be you all agreed of the name? Be you all, said Gilbert, agreed of the name? The priest then said, Wherefore do you come hither? Gilbert said, Wherefore do you come hither? Humphrey said, Wherefore do you come hither? and Christibel said, Wherefore do you come hither? The priest being amazed, he could not tell what to say, but whistled and said whew. Gilbert whistled and said whew; Humphrey whistled and said whew, and so did Christibel. The priest being angry, said, Go home, fools, go home. Then said Gilbert, and Humphrey, and Christibel, the same.

The priest then himself provided for god-fathers and god-mothers. Here a man may see, that children can do nothing without good instruction, and that they are not wise who regard them.

SEVENTEENTH TALE.

There was a man of Gotham, who would be married, and when the day of marriage was come, they went to church. The Priest said, Do you say after me. The man said, Do you say after me. The Priest said, Say not after me such words, but say what I shall tell thee. Thou dost play the fool to mock with the holy Scripture concerning matrimony. Then the fellow said, Thou dost play the fool to mock with the holy Scripture concerning matrimony. The Priest could not tell what to say, but answered, What shall I do with this fool? and the man answered the same. So the Priest took his leave and would not marry him. But the fellow was instructed by others how to do, and was afterwards married.

EIGHTEENTH TALE.

There was a Scotchman, who dwelt at Gotham, and he took a house a little distance from London, and of it he would make an inn, and for his sign he would have the Boar's head, so he went to get one made. So when he came to the carver he said in his own tongue, Can'st thou make me a Bare-head? Yes, said the carver. Then, said he, make me a Bare-head, and thou have twenty-pence for thy hire. I will do it, said the carver. So on St. Andrew's day, before Christmas, the which is called Youl in Scotland, the Scotchman came to London, for the Boar's head to

set up at his door. I say, said the Scotchman, hast thou made me a Bare-head? Yes, said the carver. Aye, then, thouse a good fellow. He then went and brought a man's head of wood, that was bare, and said, Sir, here is your Bare-head. Aye, said the Scot, the mickle de'il, is this a Bare-head! Yes, said the carver. I will have a Bare-head, like a head that does follow the sow that has gryces. Sir, said the carver, I don't know a sow and gryces. What, horson, know not a sow that will grit and groan, and her gryces will run after and cry, a-week, a-week. O said the carver, it is a pig. Yea, said the Scotchman, let me have her head made in timber; and make me a bird, and set on her scalp, and let her sing, whip, wire. The carver said he could not. You horson, said he, gang her as should sing, whip, wire. This shows that all men delight in their fancy.

NINETEENTH TALE.

In old times, during the said jests, the wives of Gotham were all got into an ale-house, and said they were all profitable to their husbands. Why which way, good gossips. The first said, I will tell you all, for I can neither brew nor bake, wherefore I make every day alike; and go to the ale-house, because I cannot go to church. And in the ale-house I pray to God to speed my husband, and I am sure my prayers will do him more good than my labour. Then said the second, I am profitable to my husband in saving of candle in winter; for I cause my husband and all my people, to go to bed by day-light, and rise by day-light. The third said, I am profitable in sparing bread, for drinking a gallon of ale, I care not for much meat. The fourth said, I am loath for to spend meat and drink at home, so I go to a tavern at

Nottingham, and take wine, and such other good things as God sends me there. The fifth said, A man will for ever have more company in another's house than his own, and most commonly in an ale-house is the best cellar in the town : and so to spare meat and drink I go to an ale-house. The sixth said, My husband has flax and wood enough to spare, if I go to other folk's house to do their work. The seventh said, I spare both my wood and coal, and sit talking all the day at other folk's fires. The eighth said, Beef, mutton and pork is dear, wherefore I take pigs, hens, chickens, coneys, and capons, which be of a lower price. The ninth said, And I spare my husband's soap and lye ; for whereas I should wash once a week, I wash but once a quarter. Then said the ale-wife, And I keep my husband's ale, that I brew, from souring ; for as I was wont to drink it almost up, now I do leave never a drop.

TWENTIETH TALE.

On Ash Wednesday the minister of Gotham would have a collection of his parishioners, and said unto them, Friends, the time is come that you must use prayer and fasting, and alms, and come ye to shrift and I will tell you more of my mind. But as for prayer, I don't think two men in the parish can say half their Pater-noster. As for your fasting, you fast still, for you have not a good meal's meat in a year. As for alms-deeds, what should they do to give any thing away that have nothing to take ? But as you come to shrift, I will tell you more of my mind after mass. So the man that kept the ale-house came to shrift, and confessed himself to have been drunk divers times in the year, but especially in Lent. The priest said, In Lent you should refrain from drunkenness, and abstain from drink. No,

not so, said the fellow; for it is an old proverb, that fish should swim. Yes, said the priest, it must swim in the water. I cry your mercy, quoth the fellow, I thought it should have swam in fine ale, for I've been told so. Soon after the men of Gotham were come to shrift, and being seven, the priest knew not what penance to give. He said, If I enjoin you to pray, you cannot say your Pater-noster; and it is but a folly to make you fast, because you never eat a meal's meat. Labour hard, and get a dinner on Sunday, and I will partake of it, Another man he did enjoin to fare well on Monday, and another on Tuesday, and one after another; and one or more other should fare well one day in the week, that he might have a part of their meat. And as for alms-deeds, the priest said, you be but beggars all, except one or two, therefore bestow your alms on yourselves.

NOTE.

The composition of the foregoing tales may be easily gathered from certain allusions in them to be not more modern than the first half of the sixteenth century.

I ought to add, that William John Thoms, Esq. F.S.A. and Secretary of the Camden Society, had some time since an intention of printing these tales; but, on learning that I wished to publish them, with the greatest kindness and liberality he delivered the charge into my hands.

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‘Whoso buyeth anything,
Hit is hys ant his offsprung.’

i. e. ‘Whosoever buys anything, it belongs to him and his offspring.’ Christ contends that the apple with which Satan bought Adam was his (Christ’s) property, and tells the devil that he must submit, as ‘Ambes-ars’ has fallen to him; in other words, that Satan has cast the dice, and has only both aces. After much discussion the Saviour arrives at the gates of hell.

‘Helle gates y come now to,
And y wole that heo* un do
Wer ys now this gateward?
Me thuncketh he is a coward.’

The ‘gateward,’ or porter of hell, runs away, saying,

‘Ich have herd wordes stronge,
Ne dar y her no lengore stonde;
Kepe the gates whoso may
Y lete them stonde ant renne away.’

The Saviour binds Satan in hell ‘till that come domesday,’ and apparently without any resistance: he is then received by Adam, Eve, Abraham, David, St. John the Baptist, and Moses. Adam says,

‘Welcome louerd† god of londe
Godes sone ant godes sonde‡
Welcome louerd mote thou be
That thou wolt us come and se.’

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