

## A So-called "Quaker Highwayman."

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A quaint, old, eight-page pamphlet, printed a hundred and fifty years ago, has recently fallen into my hands. It is illustrated by half-a-dozen woodcuts, two of which show the grisly gibbeting of thieves and murderers who have come under the law.

The pamphlet bears this title:—*The Surprising Life and Dying Speech of Tobias Donkin, the Quaker and Famous Yorkshire Highwayman, who was Executed at Tyburn, near York, October 6th, 1754.* The foreword goes on to state that Donkin was of respectable family, that he had a valuable estate at Beverley, and that he married a Yorkshire lady of beauty and fortune, who loved him so well that, even when he had run through his money and had lived wildly, she refused to leave him.

After that introduction follows "An Account of Mr. Donkin's Robberies." We find him cheating a travelling grazier, absconding from a Leeds inn without paying, and afterwards robbing the landlord who comes after him, and finally plundering a coach on the North Road.

Captured and clapped in jail, he confesses to the murder of a man, called Boward, who had been in love with Mrs. Donkin some time before. The said Boward, believing the husband to be absent, comes to Donkin's house, whereupon "the Quaker Highwayman" knocks him on the head, despoils him of the money he has, carries the body off, and places it in an outhouse of Boward's dwelling. A friend of the dead man, who knew where he had been, takes the corpse back to Donkin's door, where, when Mrs. Donkin opens, the dead man comes tumbling in. The murderer thereupon coolly carries the body off to throw it into the river, but he is followed, and, to avoid recognition, slips into a limekiln.

Those who are following him are other midnight marauders in reality, and, as they have been stealing bacon, they leave it there to dispose of later. Donkin, then, when they have gone, takes the bacon and puts the dead man in its place, so that there is a fine upset when the

robbers have brought their bacon to a receiver to sell. They open the sack and out tumbles the late Mr. Boward. The compiler coolly adds, "they were all committed to York jail, tried, condemned, and executed."

It was only when put in prison for robbery (having confessed to fifty robberies) that Donkin tells of his guilt of blood.

"The reason of his execution not being made public, was his belonging to a creditable family at Beverley, and having many friends in that county, which, for fear of disgrace, prevailed on the sheriff, and he was executed by four o'clock in the morning."

Such is the bald narrative, "printed in Bow Church-Yard, London," apparently in 1754.

This pamphlet I believe to be but an underhand libel on Friends by some unknown enemy. And my reasons for this view are these:—(1) In the Yearly Meeting Library is no trace of any reference to "the Quaker Highwayman"; (2) There is no such place as "Tyburn, near York." Tyburn, the famous execution ground for criminals was near London; (3) The leading features of the story are so suspiciously like those of certain tales, common to more than one epoch and more than one language: *i.e.*, the courted wife, the body falling in when the door is opened, the substitution of meat for the corpse in the sack. This last point will be recalled in one of Grimm's Fairy Tales; (4) No Quaker, I fancy, whether renegade or no, would be likely to swear "By Yea and Nay." (5) No trace of the family of Donkin is to be found in connection with Beverley. Mr. Lockwood Huntley, the borough librarian, writes, "I rather suspect it to be the production of one of those pedlars, who infested the roads years ago. It is almost identical with one of the episodes in the career of the famous highwayman, Dick Turpin."

Who the anonymous romancer was, who turned out this document, I cannot tell. Only, it seems clear that it must have been either a man anxious to besmirch the reputation of Quakers through malice; or else an ingenious scribe, paid to pen a novel and attractive tract for street hawkers.

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