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THE LIFE AND SURPRISING EXPLOITS
OF
JACK SHEPPARD.



[*Jack Sheppard beating his Master.*]

JACK SHEPPARD was born in the parish of Stepney, near London, in the year 1702. His father was a Carpenter, and he died when Jack was so young, that he could not recollect ever seeing him. Hence the burthen of his maintenance, together with that of his brother and sister, lay upon his mother, who soon procured him admission into the workhouse, in Bishopsgate-street, where he continued for a year and a half; and during that time, received an education sufficient to qualify him for the trade his mother designed him, viz., a carpenter: accordingly, he was recommended to Mr. Wood, in Wych-street, Drury-lane, and bound to him for seven years. The lad proved an early proficient. Being an ingenious

hand, he soon became master of his business, and gave such satisfaction to his master's customers, that he had the character of a very sober, orderly boy; but, alas, unhappy youth! before he had completed six years of his apprenticeship, he formed a fatal acquaintance with one Elizabeth Lyon, (otherwise called Edgworth Bess, from a town of that name in Middlesex, where she was born,) the reputed wife of a soldier, and who lived in a debauched life. Our young hero became enamoured of her, and they cohabited as man and wife.

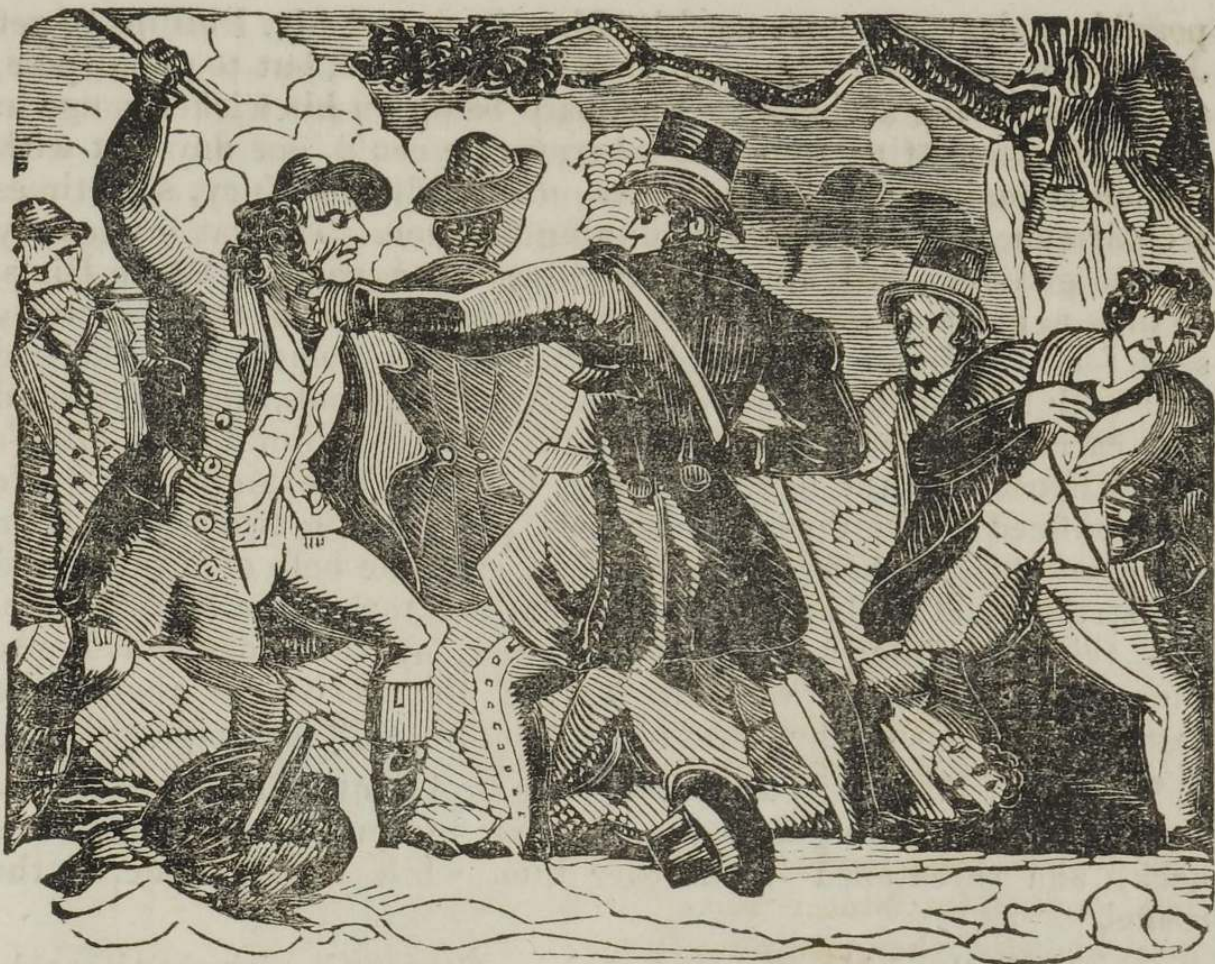
This was the foundation of his ruin. Sheppard grew weary of the yoke of servitude, and began to dispute with his master. Being one day at work at Mr. Britt's, the Sun alehouse, near Islington, he on a trivial occasion, fell upon his master, and beat and bruised him in a barbarous and shameful manner. Such a sudden and deplorable change was there in the behaviour of this promising young man. Next ensued a neglect of duty both to God and his master, lying out of nights, perpetual jarring and animosities. These were the consequences of his intimacy with this harlot, who, by the sequel, will appear to have been the main loadstone in bringing him to the fatal tree.

Edgworth Bess having stolen a gold ring from a gentleman, to whom she had introduced herself in the street, was sent to St. Giles's round-house. Sheppard went immediately to his consort; and, after a short discourse with Mr. Brown, the beadle, and his wife, who had the care of the place, he fell upon the poor old couple, took the keys from them, and let his lady out, in spite of all the outcries and opposition they were capable of making.

About July, 1723, he was, by his master, sent to perform a repair at the house of Mr. Braines, a piece-broker, in White-horse-yard—From thence he stole a roll of fustian, containing twenty-four yards, which was afterwards found in his trunk.

This is supposed to be the first robbery he ever committed; and it was not long before he repeated another upon the same Mr. Braines, by breaking into his house in the night time, and taking out of the till £7 in money, and goods from the shop to the value of £14 more. How he entered this house was a secret, until upon being committed to Newgate he confessed that he took up the iron bars at the cellar window, and after he had done his business nailed them down again: so that Mr. Braines never believed that his house had been broken open; and a woman, a lodger in the house, lay all the while under suspicion of having committed the robbery.

Sheppard and his master parted ten months before the expiration of his apprenticeship: a woeful parting to the former. He lost a good, careful patron, and lay exposed to the temptations of the most wicked wretches the town could afford, such as Joseph Blake, *alias*



[*Jack Sheppard and his Comrades encountering the Game-keepers.*]

Blueskin; — Dowling; James Sykes, *alias* Hell and Fury, by whom he was seduced into every kind of vice! After breaking into a house near Kennington, they were all nearly apprehended by some game-keepers, who happened to pass that way, and with whom they had a desperate battle. Soon after this, Sheppard being on horse-back, met his late master near Finchly, whom he first robbed, and then tying him on his horse, with his face towards his tail, flogged him unmercifully with a whip.

Sheppard had a brother named Thomas, a carpenter by profession, but a notorious thief and housebreaker by practice. Thomas being committed to Newgate for breaking open the house of Mrs. M. Cook, a linen draper in Clare-market, on the 5th of February, and stealing goods to the amount of £50 or £60, impeached his brother, John Sheppard, and Edgworth Bess, as being concerned with him in this fact; and these three were charged with being concerned together in breaking into the house of Mr. William Phillips, in Drury-lane, and stealing divers goods, the property of Mrs. Frederick, a lodger in the house, on the 14th of the said month of February. All

possible endeavours were used by Mrs. Cook and Mr. Phillips to get John Sheppard and Edgworth Bess apprehended, but to no purpose, till the following accident:—Sheppard being on his wicked range in London, committing robberies wherever he could, one day met with his old acquaintance, James Sykes, *alias* Hell and Fury, sometimes a chairman, and sometimes a running footman. He was invited by him to go to one Sedgate's, a victualling house, near the Seven Dials, to play a game at skittles, Sheppard complied, and Sykes secretly sent for Mr. Price, a constable in St. Giles's Parish, and charged him with his friend Sheppard for robbing Mrs. Cook, &c. Sheppard was carried before Justice Parry, who ordered him to St. Giles's round-house, till the next morning, for further examination. He was confined in the upper part of the place, being two stories from the ground; but, before two hours, by only the help of a razor and the stretcher of a chair, he broke open the top of the round-house, and, tying together a sheet and blanket, by them descended into the church-yard, and escaped, leaving the parish to repair the damage, and repent the affront put upon his skill and capacity.

The night after this, Jack and Bess broke into a house in Chancery-lane, and finding an old gentleman up, put a rope round his neck, and threatened to murder him, while Bees plundered the rooms.

On the 19th of May, in the evening, Sheppard, with another robber, named Benson, was passing through Leicester-fields, where a gentleman stood accusing a woman with an attempt to steal his watch. A mob was gathered about the disputants. Sheppard's companion got in among them, and picked the gentleman's pocket in earnest of his watch. The scene was now changed from an attempted robbery to a real one: and in a moment ensued an outcry of "Stop thief!" Sheppard and Bensen took to their heels; but Sheppard was seized by a sergeant of the guard at Leicester-house, crying out "Stop thief!" with much earnestness. He was conveyed to St. Ann's round-house, in Soho, and kept secure till the next morning, when Edgworth Bess came to visit him, who was seized also. They were carried before Justice Walker, when the people in Drury Lane and Clare-market appeared, and charged them with the robberies before-mentioned; but Sheppard pretending to impeach certain accomplices, the justices committed them to the New Prison, with an intent to have them removed to Newgate, unless there came from them some useful discoveries. Sheppard was now a second time in the hands of justice; but how long he intended to keep in them the reader will soon be able to judge.

He and his mate were now in a strong and well-guarded prison, himself loaded with a pair of double links, and bazils of about 14lb. weight, and confined together in the safest apartment, called New-

gate ward. Sheppard, conscious of his crime, and knowing the information he had made to be but a blind scheme, that would avail nothing, began to meditate an escape. They had been thus detained four days, when their friends, having the liberty of seeing them, furnished Jack with implements proper for his design; accordingly he went to work, and, on the 25th of May, being Whitsunday, at about two o'clock in the morning, completed a practicable breach, and sawed off his fetters; having, with unheard of diligence and dexterity, cut off an iron bar from the window, and took out a mutin or bar, of the most solid oak, about nine inches in thickness, by boring it through in many places, with great skill and labour.—They had still twenty-five feet to descend. Sheppard fastened a sheet and blankets to the bars, caused madam to take off her gown and petticoat, and sent her out first. She being more corpulent than himself, it was with great difficulty he got her through the opening; but, on observing his directions, she was instantly down, more frightened



[*Sheppard making his escape from the condemned hole.*]

than hurt. Our hero followed, and lighted with ease and pleasure. But where are they now?—Why, escaped out of one prison into another. The reader is to understand that the New Prison and

Clerkenwell Bridewell lie contiguous to each other, and that Sheppard and Bess got into the yard of the latter, where they had a wall of 22 feet high to scale before their liberty was perfected. Sheppard, far from being unprepared to surmount this difficulty, had his gimblets and piercers ready, and made a scaling-ladder. While the keepers and prisoners of both places were asleep in their beds, he mounts with his lady, and in less than ten minutes gets over the wall with her, completing his liberation. His escape from the condemned hole in Newgate made a far greater noise in the world than that from the New Prison ; and it has been allowed by all the gaol-keepers, in London, that one so extraordinary was never before performed in England. The broken chairs and bars are kept at the New Prison to testify the fact and preserve the memory of the villain.



[*The Law Stationer imploring Sheppard not to rob him.*]

The next evening, alone, he entered the house of a Law Stationer, in the same street, who went down upon his knees, and implored him not to rob him. Sheppard, however, laughed at him for a fool ; and, giving him a kick, which made him senseless, robbed the house of all he could lay his hands on. The next crime Sheppard and his

companions committed was to rob Mr. Kneebone, near the New Church, of property to the value of £300, for which he was a short time after taken, by a domestic of Jonathan Wild, tried, and sentenced to death. Being taken to the condemned hole, Sheppard once more contemplated escape; and, having got implements, by some means, for that purpose, he affected it on the very evening that the warrant for his execution came from Windsor.

He had not been many days at liberty, before he wrote the two following letters; and, dressing himself, at night, like a porter, went to Mr. Applebee's house, in Blackfriars, who at that time printed what are termed the dying speeches of the persons executed, and left them with his maid-servant:—

“*Mr. Applebee,—*

“This, with my kind love to you, and pray give my kind love to Mr. Wagstaff, hoping these few lines will find you in good health, as I am at present, but I must own you are the loser for want of my dying speech; but to make up your loss, if you think this sheet worth your while, pray make the best of it. Though they do say I am taken among the smugglers, and put into Dover Castle, yet I hope I am among the smugglers still. So no more, but your humble servant,

“*JOHN SHEPPARD.*”

“*P.S. I desire you will be the postman with this letter to Mr. Austin, the jail-keeper; so farewell; now I quit the English shore.*

“*NEWGATE, FAREWELL.*”

“*Mr. Austin,—*

“You was pleased to pass your jokes upon me, and did say, you should not have been angry with me, had I took my leave of you; but now pray keep your jokes to yourself; let them laugh that win; for now it is an equal chance, you to take me, or I to go away; but I own myself guilty of that ill manners; but excuse me, for my departure being private and necessary, spoiled the ceremony of bidding adieu. But I wish you all as well as I am at present. But pray be not angry for the loss of your irons; had you not given me them I had not taken them away; but really I had left them behind me had convenience served. So do not be angry. And what is amiss done, you right, for my scholarship is but small. This, from your fortunate prisoner,

“*JOHN SHEPPARD.*”

In a few nights after leaving these letters, he broke open a shop in Moumouth-street, and stole some wearing apparel. On the 29th of October he broke open the house of Mr. Robert Rawlins, a pawnbroker, in Drury-lane, from whence he took a sword, a suit of apparel, a snuff box, rings, watches, and goods to a considerable extent.

On the 31st of October he dined with his two women, Cook and Skeggs, at a public-house in Newgate-street, where they were very merry together. About four in the afternoon they took coach, and drawing up the windows, passed through Newgate, which then was similar to Temple-bar, and on to the Shears'-alehouse, in Maypole-street, by Clare-market; where, in the evening, he sent for his



[*Jack securely fettered in Newgate.*]

mother, and treated her with some brandy. As she knew the danger he was in, she advised him to take care of himself, and keep out of the way; but Jack had been drinking pretty hard, and was grown too wise to take counsel, and too valiant to fear anything; and, therefore, leaving his mother, he strolled about in the neighbourhood, from alehouse to gin-shop, till near 12 o'clock, when he was apprehended by means of an alehouse boy, who had accidentally seen him. Poor Jack was then drunk, unable to make any resistance, and was once more conveyed to Newgate.

The 10th of November he was carried to the King's Bench bar, at Westminster, where the record of his conviction being read, and an affidavit made that he was the same John Sheppard mentioned in that record, Mr. Justice Power awarded sentence of death against him, and a rule of court was made for his execution on the Monday following.

He was hanged at Tyburn, on Monday, November 16th, 1724, in the 23rd year of his age. He died with great difficulty, and much pitied by the mob. When he had hung about a quarter of an hour he was cut down by a soldier, and delivered to his friends, who carried him to the Barley-mow, in Long-acre. He was buried the same evening, in St. Martin's church-yard.

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