

cross, and that is the next neighbour to the gallows. Well, Gentlemen, thus have I bewrayed much and got little thanks, I mean of the dishonest sort, but I hope such as measure virtue by her honours will judge of me as I deserve. Marry! the goodmen cony-catchers, those base excrements of dishonesty, report they have got one . . . —I will not bewray his name,¹⁸ but a scholar they say he is—to make an invective against me, in that he is a favourer of those base reprobates. But let them, him, and all know, the proudest peasant of them all dare not lift his plumes in disparagement of my credit, for, if he do, I will for revenge only appoint the jakes-farmers of London, who shall case them in their filthy vessels, and carry them as dung to manure the barren places of Tyburn. And so for cony-catchers an end.

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A DISCOURSE, OR RATHER DISCOVERY, OF A NIP AND THE FOIST, LAYING OPEN THE NATURE OF THE CUTPURSE AND PICKPOCKET

Now Gentlemen, merchants, farmers, and termers, yea, whatsoever he be that useth to carry money about him, let him attentively hear what a piece of new-found philosophy I will lay open to you, whose opinions, principles, aphorisms, if you carefully note and retain in memory, [may] perhaps save some crowns in your purse ere the year pass; and therefore thus. The nip and the foist, although their subject is one which they work on, that is, a well-lined purse, yet their manner is different, for the nip useth his knife, and the foist his hand; the one cutting the purse, the other drawing the pocket. But of these two scurvy trades, the foist holdeth himself of the highest degree, and therefore they term themselves gentlemen foists, and so much disdain to be called cutpurses as the honest man that lives by his hand or occupation, insomuch that the foist refuseth even to wear a knife about him to cut his meat withal, lest he might be suspected to grow into the nature of the nip. Yet, as I said before, is their subject and haunt both alike, for their gains lies by all places of resort and assemblies, therefore their chief walks is Paul's, Westminster, the Exchange,¹⁹ plays, bear-garden,²⁰ running at tilt, the Lord Mayor's day, any festival meetings, frays, shootings, or great fairs. To be short, wheresoever is any extraordinary resort of people, there the nip and the foist have fittest opportunity to show their juggling agility.

Greene, Robert. The Second Part of Cony-Catching
 1591. The Elizabethan Underworld. Ed. A.V. Judges.
 1930. Rot. New York: Octagon, 1965: 149-78.
 (You have 162-69 only)

Commonly, when they spy a farmer or merchant whom they suspect to be well moneyed, they follow him hard until they see him draw his purse, then spying in what place he puts it up, the stall, or shadow, being with the foist or nip, meets the man at some strait turn, and jostles him so hard that the man, marvelling, and perhaps quarrelling with him, the whilst the foist hath his purse, and bids him farewell. In Paul's, especially in the term-time, between ten and eleven, then is their hours and there they walk, and, perhaps, if there be great press, strike a stroke in the middle walk, but that is upon some plain man that stands gazing about, having never seen the church before ; but their chiefeſt time is at divine service, when men devoutly given do go up to hear either a sermon, or else the harmony of the choir and the organs. There the nip and the foist, as devoutly as if he were some zealous person, standeth soberly, with his eyes elevated to Heaven, when his hand is either on the purse or in the pocket, surveying every corner of it for coin. Then, when the service is done, and the people press away, he thrusteth amidst the throng, and there worketh his villainy. So likewise in the markets, they note how every one putteth up his purse, and there, either in a great press, or while the party is cheapening of meat, the foist is in their pocket, and the nip hath the purse by the strings, or sometimes cuts out the bottom, for they have still their stalls following them, who thrusteth or jostleth him or her whom the foist is about to draw. So likewise at plays, the nip standeth there leaning like some mannerly gentleman against the door as men go in, and there finding talk with some of his companions, spyeth what every man hath in his purse, and where, in what place, and in which sleeve or pocket he puts the bung, and, according to that, so he worketh, either where the thrust is great within, or else as they come out at the doors. But suppose that the foist is smoked, and the man misseth his purse, and apprehendeth him for it, then straight, he either conveyeth it to his stall, or else droppeth the bung, and with a great brave he defyeth his accuser ; and though the purse be found at his feet, yet because he hath it not about him, he comes not within compass of life.²¹

Thus have they their shifts for the law, and yet at last so long the pitcher goeth to the brook that it cometh broken home ; and so long the foists put their villainy in practise that westward they go, and there solemnly make a rehearsal sermon at Tyburn.²² But again, to the places of resort, Westminster,²³ ay, marry, that is their chiefeſt place that brings in their profit ; the term-time is their harvest, and therefore, like provident husbandmen, they take time while time serves, and make

hay while the sun shines, following their clients, for they are at the Hall very early, and there work like bees, haunting every court, as the Exchequer Chamber, the Star Chamber, the King's Bench, Common Pleas, and every place where the poor client standeth to hear his lawyer handle his matter, for the poor man is so busied with his causes, and so careful to see his counsel, and to ply his attorney, that he thinketh least of his purse. But the foist or nip, he watcheth, and, seeing the client draw his purse to pay some charges or fees necessary for the court, marketh where he putteth it, and then when he thrusteth into the throng, either to answer for himself, or to stand by his counsellor to put him in mind of his cause, the foist draws his pocket and leaves the poor client penniless. This do they in all courts, and go disguised like serving-men, wringing the simple people by this juggling subtlety. Well might, therefore, the honourable and worshipful of those courts do, to take order for such vile and base-minded cutpurses, that as the law hath provided death for them, if they be taken, so they might be rooted out, especially from Westminster, where the poor clients are undone by such roguish catchers.

It boots not to tell their course at every remove of her Majesty, when the people flock together, nor at Bartholomew Fair,²⁴ on the Queen's day at the Tilt-yard,²⁵ and at all other places of assembly; for let this suffice, at any great press of people or meeting, there the foist and the nip is in his kingdom. Therefore let all men take this caveat, that when they walk abroad amid any of the forenamed places, or like assemblies, that they take great care for their purse, how they place it, and not leave it careless in their pockets or hose, for the foist is so nimble-handed, that he exceeds the juggler for agility, and hath his legerdemain as perfectly. Therefore an exquisite foist must have three properties that a good surgeon should have, and that is, an eagle's eye, a lady's hand, and a lion's heart; an eagle's eye, to spy out a purchase, to have a quick insight where the bung lies, and then a lion's heart, not to fear what the end will be, and then a lady's hand to be little and nimble, the better and the more easy to dive into any man's pocket.

These are the perfect properties of a foist. But you must note that there be diversities of this kind of people, for there be city nips, and country nips which haunt from fair to fair, and never come in London, unless it be at Bartholomew Fair, or some other great and extraordinary assemblies. Now there is a mortal hate between the country foist and the city foist: for if the city foist spy one of the country foists in London, straight he seeks by some means to smoke him; and so the country nip,

if he spy a city nip in any fair, then he smokes him straight, and brings him in danger, if he flee not away the more speedily. Beside, there be women foists and women nips, but the woman foist is the most dangerous, for commonly there is some old bawd or snout-fair strumpet, who inveigleth either some ignorant man, or some young youth to folly; she hath straight her hand in the pocket, and so foists him of all that he hath. But let all men take heed of such common harlots, who either sit in the streets in evenings, or else dwell in bawdy-houses, and are pliant to every man's lure. Such are always foists and pickpockets, and seek the spoil of all such as meddle with them, and, in cozening of such base-minded lechers as give themselves to such lewd company, are worthy of whatsoever befalls, and sometimes they catch such a Spanish pip, that they have no more hair on their heads than on their nails.

But, leaving such strumpets to their souls' confusion and bodies' correction in Bridewell, again to our nips and foists, who have a kind of fraternity or brotherhood amongst them,²⁶ having a hall or place of meeting, where they confer of weighty matters touching their workmanship, for they are provident in that every one of them hath some trusty friend whom he calleth his treasurer, and with him he lays up some rateable portion of every purse he draws, that when need requires, and he is brought in danger, he may have money to make composition with the party. But of late there hath been a great scourge fallen among them; for now if a purse be drawn of any great value, straight the party maketh friends to some one or other of the Council, or other inferior her Majesty's Justices, and then they send out warrants, if they cannot learn who the foist is, to the keepers of Newgate, that take up all the nips and foists about the City,²⁷ and let them lie there while the money be re-answered unto the party, so that some pay three pound, nay, five pound at a time, according as the same loss did amount unto, which doth greatly impoverish their trade, and is likewise an hindrance to their figging law.

Therefore about such causes grow their meetings, for they have a kind of corporation, as having wardens of their company, and a hall. I remember their hall was once about Bishopsgate, near unto Fisher's Folly,²⁸ but because it was a noted place, they have removed it to Kent Street,²⁹ and as far as I can learn, it is kept at one Laurence Pickering's house, one that hath been, if he be not still, a notable foist. A man of good calling he is, and well allied, brother-in-law to Bull the hangman.³⁰ There keep they their feasts and weekly meetings fit for their company.

Thus have I partly set down the nature of the foist, and the nip, with their special haunts, as a caveat to all estates to beware of such wicked persons, who are as prejudicial unto the commonwealth, as any other faculty whatsoever; and although they be by the great discretion of the Judges and Justices daily trussed up, yet still there springeth up young, that grow in time to bear fruit fit for the gallows. Let then every man be as careful as possibly he may, and by this caveat take heed of his purse, for the prey makes the thief, and there an end.

A merry tale, how a miller had his purse cut in Newgate Market.

It fortuned that a nip and his stall, drinking at the *Three Tuns* in Newgate Market,³¹ sitting in one of the rooms next to the street, they might perceive where a meal-man stood selling of meal, and had a large bag by his side, where by conjecture was some store of money. The old cole, the old cutpurse I mean, spying this, was delighted with the show of so glorious an object, for a full purse is as pleasing to a cutpurse eye, as the curious physiognomy of Venus was to the amorous god of war; and, entering to a merry vein, as one that counted that purchase his own, discovered it to the novice and bade him go and nip it. The young toward scholar, although perhaps he had stricken some few strokes before, yet seeing no great press of people, and the meal-man's hand often upon his bag, as if he had in times past smoked some of their faculty, was half afraid, and doubted of his own experience, and so refused to do it.

"Away, villain!" said the old nip. "Art thou faint-hearted? Belongs it to our trade to despair? If thou wilt only do common work, and not make experience of some hard matters to attempt, thou wilt never be master of thine occupation. Therefore try thy wits and do it."

At this the young stripling stalks me out of the tavern, and feeling if his cuttle-bung were glib and of a good edge, went to this meal-man to enter combat hand to hand with his purse. But, seeing the meal-man's eye was still abroad, and for want of other sport that he played with his purse, he was afraid to trust either to his wit or fortune, and therefore went back again without any act achieved.

"How now!" saith the old nip, "what hast thou done?"

"Nothing," quoth he. "The knave is so wary, that it is impossible to get any purchase there, for he stands playing with his purse, for want of other exercise."

At this his fellow looks out and smiles, making this reply: "And

dost thou count it impossible to have the meal-man's bung? Lend me thy knife, for mine is left at home, and thou shalt see me strike it straight, and I will show thee a method, how perhaps hereafter to do the like by my example, and to make thee a good scholar. And therefore go with me, and do as I shall instruct thee. Begin but a feigned quarrel, and when I give thee a watchword, then throw flour in my face, and, if I do miss his purse, let me be hanged for my labour."

With that he gave him certain principles to observe, and then paid for the wine, and out they went together. As soon as they were come unto the meal-man, the old nip began to jest with the other about the miller's sack, and the other replied as knavishly. At last the elder called the younger rogue.

"Rogue! thou swain," quoth he, "dost thou, or darest thou dishonour me with such a base title?" And with that, taking a whole handful of meal out of the sack, threw it full in the old nip's neck, and his breast, and then ran his way.

He, being thus dusted with meal, entreated the meal-man to wipe it out of his neck, and stooped down his head. The meal-man, laughing to see him so rayed and whited, was willing to shake off the meal, and the whilst he was busy about that, the nip had stricken the purse and done his feat, and both courteously thanked the meal-man, and closely went away with his purchase. The poor man, thinking little of this cheat, began again to play with his purse strings, and suspected nothing till he had sold a peck of meal, and offered for to change money, and then he found his purse bottomless, which struck such a quandary to his stomach as if in a frosty morning he had drunk a draught of small-beer next his heart. He began then to exclaim against such villains, and called to mind how in shaking the dust out of the gentleman's neck, he shook his money out of his purse, and so the poor meal-man fetched a great sigh, knit up his sack and went sorrowing home.

A kind conceit of a foist performed in Paul's.

While I was writing this discovery of foisting, and was desirous of any intelligence that might be given me, a gentleman, a friend of mine, reported unto me this pleasant tale of a foist, and as I well remember it grew to this effect:

There walked in the middle walk a plain country farmer, a man of good wealth, who had a well-lined purse, only barely thrust up in a round slop, which a crew of foists having perceived, their hearts were

set on fire to have it, and every one had a fling at him, but all in vain, for he kept his hand close in his pocket, and his purse fast in his fist like a subtle churl, that either had been forewarned of Paul's, or else had aforetime smoked some of that faculty. Well, howsoever it was impossible to do any good with him, he was so wary. The foists spying this, strained their wits to the highest string how to compass this bung, yet could not all their politic conceits fetch the farmer over, for jostle him, chat with him, offer to shake him by the hand, all would not serve to get his hand out of his pocket. At last one of the crew, that for his skill might have been doctorate in his mystery, amongst them all chose out a good foist, one of a nimble hand and great agility, and said to the rest thus :

“Masters, it shall not be said such a base peasant shall slip away from such a crew of gentlemen-foists as we are, and not have his purse drawn, and therefore this time I'll play the stall myself, and if I hit him not home, count me for a bungler for ever ” ; and so left them and went to the farmer and walked directly before him and next him three or four turns. At last, standing still, he cried, “Alas, honest man, help me. I am not well ” ; and with that sunk down suddenly in a swoon. The poor farmer, seeing a proper young gentleman, as he thought, fall dead afore him, stepped to him, held him in his arms, rubbed him and chafed him.

At this, there gathered a great multitude of people about him, and the whilst the foist drew the farmer's purse and away. By that the other thought the feat was done, he began to come something to himself again, and so half staggering, stumbled out of Paul's, and went after the crew where they had appointed to meet, and there boasted of his wit and experience.

The farmer, little suspecting this villainy, thrust his hand into his pocket and missed his purse, searched for it, but lining and shells and all was gone, which made the countryman in a great maze, that he stood still in a dump so long that a gentleman, perceiving it, asked what he ailed.

“What ail I, sir ? ” quoth he. “Truly I am thinking how men may long as well as women.”

“Why dost thou conjecture that, honest man ? ” quoth he.

“Marry ! sir,” answers the farmer. “The gentleman even now that swooned here, I warrant him breeds his wife's child, for the cause of his sudden qualm, that he fell down dead, grew of longing ! ”

The gentleman demanded how he knew that.

"Well enough, sir," quoth he, "and he hath his longing too, for the poor man longed for my purse, and thanks be to God he hath it with him."

At this all the hearers laughed, but not so merrily as the foist and his fellows, that then were sharing his money.

A quaint conceit of a cutler and a cutpurse.³²

A nip, having by fortune lost his cuttle-bung, or having not one fit for his purpose, went to a cunning cutler to have a new made, and prescribed the cutler such a method and form to make his knife, and the fashion to be strong, giving such a charge of the fineness of the temper and setting of the edge, that the cutler wondered what the gentleman would do with it. Yet, because he offered so largely for the making of it, the cutler was silent and made few questions, only he appointed [him] the time to come for it, and that was three days after. Well, the time being expired, the gentleman-nip came, and, seeing his knife, liked it passing well, and gave him his money with advantage. The cutler desirous to know to what use he would put it, said to the cutpurse thus :

"Sir," quoth he, "I have made many knives in my days, and yet I never saw any of this form, fashion, temper, or edge, and therefore, if without offence, I pray you tell me how or to what will you use it?"

While thus he stood talking with the nip, he, spying the purse in his apron, had cut it passing cunningly, and then, having his purchase close in his hand, made answer : "In faith, my friend, to dissemble is a folly. 'Tis to cut a purse withal, and I hope to have good handsel."

"You are a merry gentleman," quoth the cutler.

"I tell true," quoth the cutpurse, and away he goes.

No sooner was he gone from the stall, but there came another and bought a knife, and should have single money³³ again. The cutler, thinking to put his hand in his bag, thrust it quite through at the bottom. All his money was gone, and the purse cut. Perceiving this, and remembering how the man prayed he might have good handsel, he fetched a great sigh, and said :

"Now I see : he that makes a snare, first falls into it himself. I made a knife to cut other men's purses, and mine is the first handsel. Well, revenge is fallen upon me, but I hope the rope will fall upon him." And so he smoothed up the matter to himself, lest men should laugh at his strange fortune.