

d. 42

JUST ACCOUNT

Of the

Horrid Contrivance

OF

John Cupper, and Judith Brown his Servant,  
In Poysoning his Wife.

Who were Tryed at the Assizes held at Shrews-  
bury; Cupper to be Hang'd in Chains, and Judith Brown  
to be Burnt.

Together with their Dying Confessions.

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Published by me *William Smith*, Rector of *Bit-  
terley*, their Minister, to prevent false Reports.

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Juvenal. Sat. 6.

*Hippomanes carmenque loquar, coctumque venenum, uxorique  
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Printed for *Edw. Robinson*, Bookseller in *Ludlow*,  
MDCLXXXVI.

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A Just Account of the Horrid Contrivance of *John Cupper*, and *Judith Brown* his Servant, in Poysoning his Wife.

**J**OHAN CUPPER was born at *Snitton*, in the Parish of *Bitterley*, and a short time educated at the School of *Bitterley*; not making any proficiency in Learning, his Father *Thomas Cupper*, removed him from thence to *Ludlow*, to a Writing-School: Where after he had spent some time, his Father put him out to several Services; but not behaving himself well in some of them, he returned to his Fathers house; and afterwards Married *Hannah* the Daughter of *John Wheeler*, Rector of *Wafers Hopton*, about Three Miles distant from *Bitterley*, against the consent of her Father and all her Relations. Not long after they were Married, though her Fortune was beyond his Merit: continual Jars and Quarrels happened betwixt them, in so much that their Neighbours were in daily fear, lest some mischief should attend their ungodly way of Living.

At last, he with his Servant *Judith Brown*, a Notorious Strumpet, contriv'd the Death of this Miserable and Unfortunate Woman. They both long debated, how they should accomplish their wicked design, and after several Consults, they concluded the securest way to effect it, was by Poyson.

This they attempted for the space of a Month together: and what they thus basely and wickedly design'd, at last they brought to pass.

Her Death being sudden, her Neighbours came and told me that they were afraid, that *John Cupper* had made away with his Wife: I



told them, That if they did suspect it, (as indeed there was just cause, by the words they had given out) that they ought to go to the next Justice of Peace, for his Warrant to apprehend both *Cupper* and his Servant *Brown*; and after Apprehension, to send for the Coroner; who summoned a Jury at *Bitterley* upon *Ascension* day, and caus'd the Body of the Murthered Person to be taken up again, being buried the Lord's Day before. After the Body was viewed, and *Cupper* and his Servant brought to touch the Corps, the Coroner causeth them to be separated, and examined them asunder very strictly; and I must needs say, with much Prudence and Caution.

But they had so combin'd together, that for some hours they stiffly denied the Guilt charged against them, and their Tales were but little differing one from the other.

At last his Servant being removed, whilst *Cupper* was under a second or third Examination; A Farmer of the Parish, with the Maids Sister, goes to her, and told her if she would confess truly, she might be in some hopes of being sav'd; if not, they were both like to suffer together; the Witnesses that were examined, having Sworn so materially against them.

*Judith Brown* listening to this, confess'd presently that her Master and she had poyson'd her Mistress; the Farmer and some others acquainted the Coroner privately with it; upon that he was removed, and she brought under Examination again, and confessed the Fact before the Jury, and several other By-standers, and set her hand to the Confession. She being again removed, *Cupper* was called in, and when he perceived that his Servant had declared it, he likewise confessed it, and set his Hand to his Confession. Upon this they were both the same Night sent towards *Shrewsbury* Gaol, and the next day were secured there.

During the time of their Imprisonment, I went with two of his Neighbours to visit him, where we found him seemingly not much concern'd; and after some little time of Discourse with him, and lamenting the miserable state and condition, that he had brought himself into, I desired the Jaylor and my Neighbours to withdraw; and discours'd him an hour at least by myself. He then utterly denied what he had set his Hand unto before, and pleaded, with Tears in his Eyes, his own Innocency; and did not doubt, but at his Tryal he should clear himself, and  
that

that he was there in Chains by the malice of his next Neighbours. I told him that whatever he did propose to himself, he would certainly die for this offence, and that poysoning of his Wife was so horrid and dismal a Crime, that he could have no hopes of Pardon; and therefore perswaded him what I could to betake himself to his Prayers and Tears day and night, to secure, if possible, the Salvation of his Soul. When I had said what I could to him, I desired the Jaylor that his Servant might have the Liberty to come to me; he granted it presently, and when she came, she pleaded her own Innocency likewise, and though she had put her hand to her Confession before, yet vow'd she was not Guilty: But I assur'd her, as a little before I had her Master, that they would both die for that black and fearful Crime; and desired and intreated them both, that they would prepare for their latter End; that their times were but short in this World; and that in a wretched and shameful manner they would be cut off: And then I took my leave of them, commending them to the mercy of Almighty God, with my earnest Prayers and Supplications for them.

After I had left them both in tears, they having the conveniency it seems, through the favour of the Under-Jaylor, (as some of the People in the Town informed me) of coming frequently together, He perswaded his Servant to take the whole upon her, and that if he was acquitted, he would get a Pardon for her.

His Servant (as I was acquainted by some of my Parishioners that heard the Tryal) when she was brought to the Bar before the Honourable *Sir Thomas Street*, one of His Majesties Judges of Assize for the *Oxford* Circuit, being ask't whether she was Guilty or not, she then pleaded her own Guilt, and her Masters Innocency; her Master continu'd obstinately denying the Fact; and that he was not in the least Guilty; but the Jury going out upon him, brought him in equally guilty of that Crime, which his Servant had took upon her self, and after that, the day following, Sentence pass'd upon them both: *Cupper* to be Hang'd in Chains in the *Old Field* near *Ludlow*; and *Judith Brown* to be burnt for poysoning her Mistress.

When she saw her self under the Sentence of Condemnation, she pleaded her Belly; and was respited till her Delivery, and  
when



when she was delivered of a Man-Child, which she Father'd upon one *Nott*, her Execution was deferred for a Month, or longer. But *Cupper* was brought to be executed in the *Old Field* near *Ludlow*, the twenty fourth day of *July*. I met him on the way at *Roger Burton's* House in *Onybury*, where the Officers staid about two hours with him. And after Prayers with this poor condemned Malefactor, I then privately put him upon that which before he had denyed in Prison, viz. The Poysoning of his Wife; he then confessed it presently, and withal told me, That *Judith Brown* and he had attempted it several times after his Wife had lain in her Month, and finding that through the strength of her Body, she had workt off small Potions infused sometimes in Milk, and sometimes in Beer, at last they were resolved to give her a greater quantity, of *White Arsenick* in Milk. After she had eaten the Milk, a violent Vomiting and Purging seiz'd her, and being very thirsty, called for Water to drink; they thinking her then in a fair way to have their ends bring her Water with more *Arsenick* infused in it; and after the drinking of it, being violently torn in her Stomach, a Neighbour coming in accidentally to see her, *Cupper's* Wife told her they had given her her last, and she not long after dy'd.

After he had thus confest his Guilt towards his Wife, I ask't him about the death of his two Children; it being reported that he had murthured them: this he denyed, and told me he had never any thoughts of ill towards them; and that the Accident of scalding Pitch falling upon one of them, hastened its end which had troubled him very much; and that the other dyed of a Natural Death, which his Neighbours could not but be well satisfied about.

Then I enquired of him, Whether he had been Guilty of stealing Sheep upon the *Clee-hill*, or not, having been long suspected: He answered, That he was *Innocent*; and wisht he had been as Guiltless towards his Wife, that then he had never come to so shameful an end, as he was presently like to do, in the view of all his Neighbours and Acquaintance. I desir'd him to tell me truly, whether he knew of any about the Hill, that were Sheep-stealers, and advised him to have a care that he did not die with a Lie in his mouth, or any thing that then might burthen his Conscience. He

He told me he would have a care of that; and said he knew of none; only there was a common Report in the Neighbourhood, That there was a Person in the Township of *Snitton* given that way; but he knew nothing of it.

What relates to the *Scotchman* that was murthured some years since on the *Clee*, of which he was suspected, I know nothing of, I my self being but lately settled in the Parish; and no man in his Wits can think that I could charge him with that I never heard of, till the Execution of the Criminal; nor did he mention the least tittle of it to me.

All he further confest to me, was, That he had had Carnal knowledge of his Servant *Judith* twice the Month before his Wife was brought to Bed, and though she was with Child, yet she was not so by him, but by another that was conversant with her before.

And now in Contemplation of approaching Death and Judgment, with tears at the Gibbet he bewails this wicked Act of poysoning his Wife, and all other Sins that he was guilty of, and with a heart swell'd with the dreadful thoughts of his sad Condition, repeats that excellent Prayer for Condemned Malefactors, written by *Dr. Patrick* in his *Devout Christian*.

When he had ended that Prayer, after a Psalm, I joyned with him in another, and then rising up, the Chains were presently fastened to his Body; then in another short Prayer he desired that God would ease his disturbed mind, his wounded and dejected Soul, heartily praying that God would ease his broken heart, hoping in his Goodness, that now crying and bewailing his sins, God would hear him; and then going up the Ladder about the middle, he turn'd to the People, acknowledged his faults, for which he suffered, and begg'd of them to pray for him, that his Soul might be saved, and begg'd Young and Old to take warning by him, and was Turn'd off.

The one and twentieth of *August*, *Judith Brown* was Burnt at *Shrewsbury*, where she confest (as appears by Captain *Reignolds* Paper sent me) she consented with her Master to poyson her Mistress, and her Master was the cause of bringing her to that unhappy end; desiring that all would take Example by her just and shameful Death, and so was consum'd to Ashes in a dreadful Bed of Flames.

Thus both underwent the due punishment of their hainous Crimes.



Crimes, contriv'd and executed upon a poor and unhappy Wretch, a Wife to the one, and a Mistress to the other.

Let me desire every one to examine himself to the bottom, touching all crying sins, particularly touching Cruelty. God himself is rigorous in the scrutiny he makes in any Bloody Crimes: As if he would upon occasion take the Coroners Inquest into his own hand, he himself maketh Inquisition for Blood.

These two Wretches that were justly Executed, had time enough after the Fact to have fled from the rigour of the Law, having the opportunity of four or five days to make their Escape; but surpriz'd with the Villanousness of the Action, and their Consciences being harrast with the sense of Guilt, they could not flee, but Justice necessarily took hold upon them.

It hath past into a Proverb long since, That *Murder will out*, and the History of all Ages affords us wonderful Discoveries of it. Wherefore we ought to take warning, and not to suffer any revengeful Inclinations to harbour in our minds, no Cruelty to Neighbours, no Bloody Practises against Parents or Relations: If we give way to these things our hearts becoming hardened through the deceitfulness of sin, no wonder if the blackest Crimes do follow; and one wickedness slily draw on another. These despicable Wretches neglected Instruction, hated to be reform'd, lived in all manner of Licentiousness, prophaned the Sabbath, slighted Ordinances. The Master often engaged in Quarrels, both at home and abroad, would not be perswaded, but still persisted in Wickedness, and we have seen the End, a sad and a shameful End; a way of Dying abhorr'd by Good Men, and the Wicked may tremble at it, and learn to amend their Lives, to become better Christians than they have been formerly: which God of his Infinite Mercy grant, through *Jesus Christ*, our Lord.

**F I N I S.**