



XII.—Turnpike Riots, Foster Powell, and Mary Bateman.

One finds so much of interest among the episodes and incidents that belong to the history of Leeds of the 18th and early part of the 19th centuries, that one is tempted to record those that most vividly bring before us moderns the changes in social life and thought.

Many of us of the present day, for example, can remember the toll gates that stretched across the beginning of the main roads leading out of Leeds. The broad white gates and adjoining toll houses, at which every rider or driver was stopped for a toll payment, would to the younger of my readers be hardly conceivable, and yet such bars to progress were over the whole of England and Scotland forty or fifty years ago.

Can we fancy to-day every tram, motor-car, or bicycle being pulled up by the alert toll-keeper and made to hand over its twopence, fourpence, or sixpence in return for a ticket that purchased its freedom from road tariff for a certain distance? Less than fifty years ago there was a toll gate across Woodhouse Lane at what we now call College Road; another, a double one, at Sheepscar, blocked Roundhay as well as Chapeltown Road. The toll house was on the site of Sheepscar Police Station. Then there was a bar across Meanwood Road, near the bottom of Crimbles Street, and other roads to the southward were equally protected.

When turnpike roads were made and the cost of upkeep repaid by means of tolls, the English people resented the impost very bitterly, and Leeds was not backward in showing its displeasure. The first enactment regarding the making of turnpike roads at the expense of the users of the same appears to be of the date 1662; but the making of roads progressed but slowly in the North. The Scotch rebellion of 1745 caused some fine military roads to be made in Scotland, much to the disgust of the Highlanders. In Yorkshire goods traffic between the small cloth towns was chiefly done by trains of pack-horses, and in the hilly districts that separate Lancashire from our own county this method of carrying goods held quite into the 19th century.

In June, 1753, Leeds people showed their resentment at turnpike charges in a notable riot. At Halton Dial, at the junction of the York and Selby roads (where the tram now stops), there was a double bar, and another toll bar at Beeston. An organised attack on the turnpike houses and gates was determined on, and pretty generally known to the authorities, who had time to make some preparation for defending them.

An attack was first made by the country people on the toll-bar at Harewood Bridge. Mr. Edwin Lascelles, afterwards Earl of Harewood, assembled his tenants and workpeople to defend his gate, and after a pitched battle defeated the rioters.

A few days after this, a carter refused to pay toll at Beeston, and was arrested by the soldiers who were in readiness to guard the bar. He was rescued by an overwhelming force of the populace, and feeling was decidedly against both toll-bars and military, for the bar was wrecked, and the mob had it their own way—for a time at least; but three of the rioters were seized and conveyed to the King's Arms, in Briggate, where the magistrates were sitting.

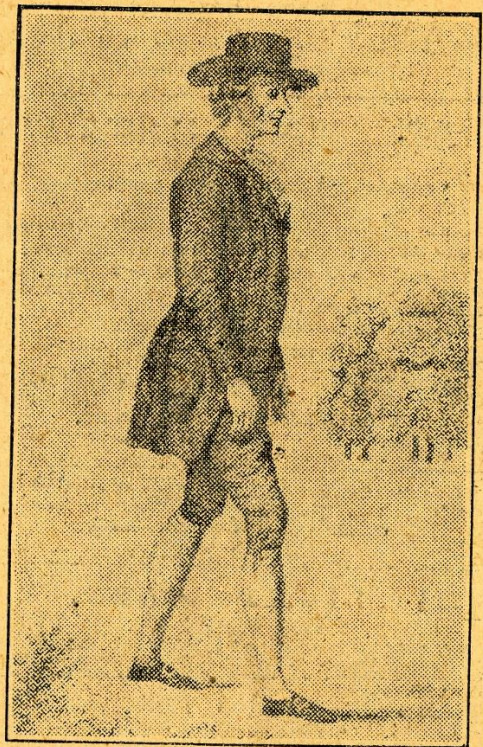
Meanwhile the bar at Halton Dial was demolished, and an angry crowd assembled before the King's Arms, demanding the release of the three men who had been seized. In the evening things got worse, and the inn was besieged. Windows and shutters were smashed, and paving stones taken up from the roadway and freely used against the dragoons that the Mayor had requested to be sent. Orders were given that each shop should be closed, and all peaceable townsmen should remain indoors. Then the soldiers were ordered to fire upon the mob, who had already knocked down a dragoon.

It being Saturday night, the streets were crowded

promising to make them into forty by certain spells, provided the twenty guineas were left undisturbed for eight days. The gipsy left the woman in full belief, but the spell cannot have been rightly cast, for after the expiration of the eight days the guineas had totally disappeared! This must have been a sad disappointment for everybody except the gipsy.

To return to Mary Bateman, we may be quite sure that not even the before-mentioned gipsy could have shown her any tricks she did not know. She stole, while in her High Court lodgings, a watch and two guineas from a fellow lodger; and in 1796, after a disastrous fire, went about collecting blankets and sheets for poor, burnt-out folk. We need not speculate very much as to the final disposal of the aforesaid sheets and blankets.

High Court Lane was evidently getting too hot for her, as she removed to Black Dog Yard, on the Bank. Here she made some capital out of an egg which some favoured hen had laid. The egg bore the legend "Crist is coming." The hen's education, so far as spelling goes, had evidently been neglected, but on the whole the omission of the "h" was of small import, and Mary netted a nice sum by showing the egg at a penny a time.



FOSTER POWELL, the Horsforth pedestrian.

Mary Bateman now soared to higher crimes. She was engaged to do housework for two maiden ladies. These ladies became suddenly ill, and their mother, who came from some distance to attend them, also developed mysterious symptoms. All three ladies died, and Mary, who had been in attendance, declared they had died of the plague. This left the house free to her for some time, and ultimately Mary Bateman was suspected of having poisoned the family of three, and ransacked their belongings.

Mrs. Judith Cryer and Mrs. Snowden, both having sons arrested for crimes which entailed a death sentence, gave sums of money (four guineas and twelve guineas respectively) to Mary Bateman to save them by her magic. Mary promised to work the required spell. Whether it was successful I cannot say.

with people, who were attracted merely by curiosity. As in the case of all riots, the curious suffered more than the actual rioters, and there was a roll of about thirty-seven dead and wounded.

Resentment against the Mayor and Recorder was very great, and their houses had to be guarded for several weeks.

Although active measures against the turnpike laws were lessened, the fact of having to pay when using a public road for horse or cart passage was never fairly stomachached.

In some cases the turnpike man had the astounding right to seize a horse for his own benefit if more than a certain number formed a team. This right was exercised once at the Sheepscar bar.

Another enactment, which was made in 1776, and which caused much grumbling prohibited wheels of vehicles being less than six inches wide, under pain of a double toll payment. A largely signed petition was sent from Leeds in 1778, pointing out the inconvenience of always using broad wheel waggons. What effect this had upon the minds of a stupid, pig-headed, and obstinate Government I am unable to say. The Act certainly did not make the payment of turnpike tolls more sweet.

A FAMOUS PEDESTRIAN.

Turnpike roads remind one of our famous pedestrian, Foster Powell, who was born at Horsforth in 1734, and astonished the world by feats of walking and endurance that were wonderful even in those days, when walking long distances was common to every man who couldn't afford coach hire.

For example, he walked 50 miles in seven hours, and he walked from London to York and back in five days, a distance of 400 miles.

He next walked from Canterbury to London Bridge and back in 24 hours, and when he was 53 years of age, in 1792, a year before his death, he repeated for the fourth or fifth time his York to London and back journey. He did this last walk in five days and fifteen hours.

A NOTORIOUS WRONGDOER.

We have had many "characters" in Leeds, for the age was conducive to "character," but perhaps the worst was Mary Bateman. Her villainies were so remarkable that one is forced to regard them as unique in our simple Yorkshire annals. She may be placed on the same pedestal as the Marchioness of Brinvilliers and other professional poisoners of historical fame.

Mary Bateman was originally a Mary Harker, and the daughter of a small farmer. She was born at Aisenby, a village not far from Topcliffe, in 1768. Her childhood was not free from blemish, for she seems to have been addicted to stealing and other crimes of minor magnitude.

After a three weeks' courtship she and John Bateman, a decent working man, were married and removed to Leeds. Mary set up in business as a witch and fortune teller; this was in 1792. Her cave of mystery was a lodging in High Court Lane, off The Calls.

She carried on her trade here with considerable success, for belief in witchcraft was very strong in the popular mind; so much so that a Leeds newspaper records that a gipsy woman induced another, with whom she lodged, to place twenty guineas in a chest,

THE UNCHANGING BUTCHER BOY.

Mary did not always adhere to the higher flights of crime; she was content with smaller game, and found much amusement and profit therein. For example, seeing a gentleman purchase a leg of mutton in the Shambles, and hearing its destination, she went on in front and awaited the butcher boy in Meadow Lane. Even in those strenuous days butcher boys were dilatory, and Mary, assuming the role of an indignant cook, demanded the mutton and reproached the youth for his laziness. The guileless butcher boy handed it over, and the purchaser's household went muttonless.

Another playful trick was delivering to her husband a false message, that sent him to Thirsk, presumably to his father's death-bed. On his return, after finding his father well and hearty, he found that his wife had stripped the house of all his belongings.

Yet another deception on her own people was the telling her mother that her son, Mary's brother, had deserted from the Militia. She said that the sum of £10 would "square" matters, and this was sent. Mrs. Harker did not know her own child so well as the reader now does.

In 1808 Mary Bateman played her highest and her last card. At Bramley lived a small clothmaker named Perigo. Mrs. Perigo was convinced that she had had the evil eye cast upon her by some person unknown. She applied to Mary Bateman, as skilled in such occult matters, for relief, and Mary gladly tackled the job. In the back ground was an imaginary "Mrs. 'Arris," whom Mary Bateman called "Miss Blythe."

Pound after pound was paid to Mary Bateman by William Perigo and his wife, until she had obtained £70, all the money they had in the world. Mary continued her extortions until she had induced them to sell everything they had in the house. She promised health and happiness in due course, but nothing came of her promises.

Perigo and his wife now became impatient, and as a final settlement Mary gave them some substance which was to be taken in honey and in a pudding; this charm was certain to bring all things right. They took the potion as instructed, with the result that Mrs. Perigo died and William Perigo was taken seriously ill.

THE GALLOWS HER END.

It at last dawned upon the obtuse William that Mary Bateman was a poisoner and an imposter, and he laid information before the Leeds magistrates. Mary was tried at York on the 17th day of March, 1809, for the murder of Rebecca Perigo and condemned to death. She attempted to delay her execution, but a jury of matrons did not support her in the attempt, and she was duly hanged, denying her guilt.

The senior William Hey dissected her body at the Leeds Infirmary during a public lecture on anatomy. A gruesome relic which formerly existed was a book bound in her skin.

The story of Mary Bateman forms an integral part of the history of Leeds, and there used to be on sale with many other delightful pamphlets her life, with a cover design of Mary holding the famous egg. These pamphlets, which comprised "Mary the Maid of the Inn," "The Life of Robin Hood," "Jemmy Hirst," and half a dozen others, were common in small stationers' and sweet shop windows. Alas, they have gone from us, for the youth of to-day demands a different class of literature.