



Courtesy of the Warwick Leadlay Gallery, Greenwich, England

A GENERAL HISTORY OF THE ROBBERIES & MURDERS OF THE MOST NOTORIOUS PIRATES

Captain
**CHARLES
JOHNSON**



with an
introduction
and commentary by
DAVID CORDINGLY



The Lyons Press

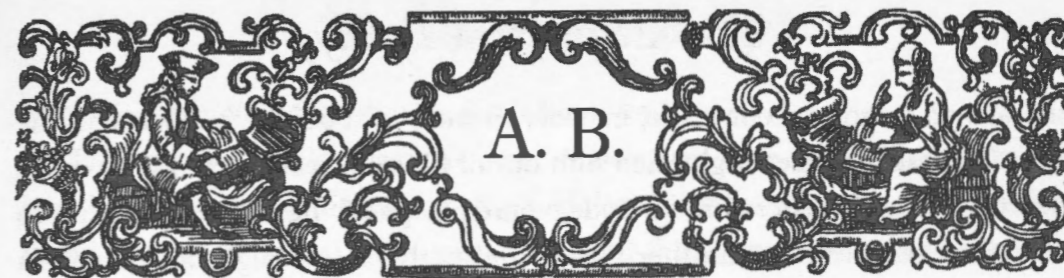
The life of *Mary Read*

there was no occasion for ties or obligations, his inclination towards her was sufficient; in fine, they applied their troth to each other, which Mary Read said she looked on to be a marriage in conscience, as if it had been done by a minister in church; and to this was owing her great belly, which she pleaded to save her life.

She declared she had never committed adultery or fornication with any man, she commended the justice of the court before which she was tried, for distinguishing the nature of their crimes; her husband, as she called him, with several others, being acquitted; and being asked who he was, she would not tell, but said he was an honest man and had no inclination to such practices, and they had both resolved to leave the pirates the first opportunity, and apply themselves to some honest livelihood.

It is no doubt but many had compassion for her, yet the court could not avoid finding her guilty; for among other things, one of the evidences against her deposed, that being taken by Rackam, and detained some time on board, he fell accidentally into discourse with Mary Read, whom he taking for a young man, asked her what pleasure she could have in being concerned in such enterprizes where her life was continually in danger, by fire or sword; and not only so, but she must be sure of dying an ignominious death, if she should be taken alive? She answered, that as to hanging, she thought it no great hardship, for, were it not for that every cowardly fellow would turn pirate, and so infest the seas, that men of courage, must starve: that if 'twas put to the choice of the pirates, they would not have the punishment less than death, the fear of which, kept some dastardly rogues honest; that many of those who are now cheating the widows and orphans, and oppressing their poor neighbours, who have no money to obtain justice, would then rob at sea, and the ocean would be crowded with rogues, like the land, and no merchant would venture out; so that in trade, in a little time, would not be worth following.

Being found quick with child, as has been observed, her execution was respited, and it is possible she would have found favour, but she was seized with a violent fever soon after her trial, of which she died in prison.¹



The life of *Anne Bonny*



As we have been more particular in the lives of these two women than those of other pirates, 'tis incumbent on us as a faithful historian, to begin with their birth. Anne Bonny was born at a town near Cork, in the kingdom of Ireland, her father an attorney at law; but Anne was not one of his legitimate issue, which seems to cross an old proverb, which says, 'that bastards have the best luck'. Her father was a married man, and his wife having been brought to bed, contracted an illness in her lying in, and in order to recover her health, she was advised to remove for change of air; the place she chose was a few miles distance from her dwelling, where her husband's mother lived. Here she sojourned some time, her husband staying at home, to follow his affairs. The servant-maid, whom she left to look after the house, and attend the family, being a handsome young woman, was courted by a young man of the same town, who was a tanner; this tanner used to take his opportunities, when the family was out of the way, of coming to pursue his courtship; and being with the maid one day as she was employed in the household business, not having the fear of God before his eyes, he takes his opportunity, when her back is turned, of whipping three silver spoons into his pocket. The maid soon missed the spoons, and knowing that nobody had been in the room, but herself and the young man, since she saw them last, she charged him with taking them; he very stiffly denied it, upon which she grew outrageous and

threatened to go to a constable, in order to carry him before the Justice of the Peace. These menaces frightened him out of his wits, well knowing he could not stand search; wherefore he endeavoured to pacify her, by desiring her to examine the drawers and other places, and perhaps she might find them. In this time he slips into another room, where the maid usually lay, and puts the spoons between the sheets, and then makes his escape by a back door, concluding she must find them, when she went to bed, and so next day he might pretend he did it only to frighten her, and the thing might be laughed off for a jest.

As soon as she missed him, she gave over her search, concluding he had carried them off, and went directly to the constable, in order to have him apprehended. The young man was informed, that a constable had been in search of him, but he regarded it but little, not doubting but that all would be well next day. Three or four days past, and still he was told, the constable was upon the hunt for him; this made him lie concealed, he could not comprehend the meaning of it, he imagined no less, than that the maid had a mind to convert the spoons to her own use and put the robbery upon him.



It happened, at this time, that the mistress being perfectly recovered of her late indisposition, was returned home, in company with her mother-in-law; the first news she heard, was of the loss of the spoons, with the manner how; the maid telling her, at the same time, that the young man was run away. The young fellow had intelligence of the mistress's arrival, and considering with himself, that he could never appear again in his business, unless this matter was got over, and she being a good natured woman, he took a resolution of going directly to her, and of telling her the whole story,

only with this difference that he did it for a jest.

The mistress could scarce believe it, however, she went directly to the maid's room, and turning down the bedclothes, there, to her great surprize, found the three spoons; upon this she desired the young man to go home and mind his business, for he should have no trouble about it.

The mistress could not imagine the meaning of this, she never found the maid guilty of any pilfering, and therefore it could not enter her head, that she designed to steal the spoons herself; upon the whole, she concluded, the maid had not been in her bed, for the time the spoons were missed, she grew immediately jealous upon it, and suspected, that the maid supplied her place with her husband, during her absence and this was the reason why the spoons were not sooner found.

She called to mind several actions of kindness, her husband had showed the maid, things that passed unheeded by, when they happened, but now she had got that tormentor, jealousy, in her head, amounted to proofs of their intimacy; another circumstance which strengthened the whole, was, that though her husband knew she was to come home that day, and had had no communication with her in four months, which was before her last lying in, yet he took an opportunity of going out of town that morning, upon some slight pretence: all these things put together, confirmed her in her jealousy.

As women seldom forgive injuries of this kind, she thought of discharging her revenge upon the maid. In order to this, she leaves the spoons where she found them, and orders the maid to put clean sheets on the bed, telling her, she intended to lie there herself that night, because her mother in law was to lie in her bed, and that she (the maid) must lie in another part of the house. The maid in making the bed, was surprized with the sight of the spoons, but there were very good reasons why it was not proper for her to tell where she found them, therefore she takes them up, puts them in her trunk, intending to leave them in some place where they might be found by chance.

The mistress, that everything might look to be done without design, lies that night in the maid's bed, little dreaming of what an adventure it would

produce. After she had been a-bed some time, thinking on what had passed, for jealousy kept her awake, she heard somebody enter the room. At first she apprehended it to be thieves, and was so frightened, she had not courage enough to call out; but when she heard these words, 'Mary, are you awake?' she knew it to be her husband's voice. Then her fright was over, yet she made no answer, lest he should find out, if she spoke, therefore she resolved to counterfeit sleep, and take what followed.

The husband came to bed, and that night played the vigorous lover; but one thing spoiled the diversion on the wife's side, which was, the reflection that it was not designed for her; however she was passive, and bore it like a Christian. Early before day, she stole out of bed, leaving him asleep, and went to her mother in law, telling her what had passed, not forgetting how he had used her, as taking her for the maid; the husband also stole out, not thinking it convenient to be caught in that room; in the mean time, the revenge of the mistress was strong against the maid, and without considering, that to her, she owed the diversion of the night before, and that one good turn should deserve another; she sent for a constable, and charged her with stealing the spoons. The maid's trunk was broke open, and the spoons found, upon which she was carried before a Justice of the Peace, and by him committed to gaol.

The husband loitered about till 12 o' clock at noon, then comes home pretended that he was just come to town; as soon as he heard what had passed, in relation to the maid, he fell into a great passion with his wife; this set the thing into a greater flame, the mother takes the wife's part against her son, insomuch that the quarrel increasing, the mother and wife took horse immediately, went back to the mother's house, and the husband and wife never bedded together after.

The maid lay a long time in the prison, it being near half a year to the assizes; but before it happened, 'twas discovered she was with child; when she was arraigned at the bar, she was discharged for want of evidence; the wife's conscience touched her, and as she did not believe the maid guilty of any

theft, except that of love, she did not appear against her; soon after her acquittal, she was delivered of a girl.

But what alarmed the husband most, was, that 'twas discovered the wife was with child also, he taking it for granted, he had had no intimacy with her, since her last laying in, grew jealous of her, in his turn, and made this a handle to justify himself, for his usage of her, pretending now he had suspected her long, but that here was proof; she was delivered of twins, a boy and a girl. The mother fell ill, and sent to her son to reconcile him to his wife, but he would not hearken to it; therefore she made a will, leaving all she had in the hands of certain trustees, for the use of the wife and two children lately born and died a few days later.

This was an ugly turn upon him, his greatest dependance being upon his mother; however, his wife was kinder to him than he deserved, for she made him a yearly allowance out of what was left, though they continued to live separate. It lasted near five years; at this time having a greater affection for the girl he had by his maid, he had a mind to take it home, to live with him; but as all the town knew it to be a girl, the better to disguise the matter from them, as well as from his wife, he had it put into breeches, as a boy, pretending it was a relation's child he was to breed up to be his clerk.

The wife heard he had a little boy at home he was very fond of, but as she did not know any relation of his that had such a child, she employed a friend to enquire further into it; this person by talking with the child, found it to be a girl, discovered that the servant-maid was its mother, and that the husband still kept up his correspondence with her.

Upon this intelligence, the wife being unwilling that her children's money should go towards maintenance of bastards, stopped the allowance. The husband enraged, in a kind of revenge, takes the maid home, and lives with



her publicly, to the great scandal of his neighbours; but he soon found the bad effect of it, for by degrees lost his practice, so that he saw plainly he could not live there, therefore he thought of removing, and turning what effects he had into ready money; he goes to Cork, and there with his maid and daughter embark for Carolina.

At first he followed the practice of the law in that province, but afterwards fell into merchandize, which proved more successful to him, for he gained by it sufficient to purchase a considerable plantation. His maid, who passed for his wife, happened to die, after which his daughter, our Anne Bonny, now grown up, kept his house.

She was of a fierce and courageous temper, wherefore, when she lay under condemnation, several stories were reported of her, much to her disadvantage, as that she had killed an English servant-maid once in her passion with a case-knife, while she looked after her father's house; but upon further enquiry, I found this story to be groundless. It was certain she was so robust, that once, when a young fellow would have lain with her, against her will, she beat him so, that he lay ill of it a considerable time.

While she lived with her father, she was looked upon as one that would be a good fortune, wherefore 'twas thought her father expected a good match for her; but she spoilt it all, for without his consent, she marries a young fellow, who belonged to the sea, and was not worth a groat; which provoked her father to such a degree, that he turned her out of doors, upon which the young fellow, who married her, finding himself disappointed in his expectation, shipped himself and wife, for the island of Providence, expecting employment there.



Here she became acquainted with Rackam the pirate, who making courtship to her, soon found means of withdrawing her affections from her husband, so that she consented to elope from him, and go to sea with Rackam in men's clothes. She was good as her word, and after she had been at sea some time, she proved with child, and beginning to grow big, Rackam landed her on the island of Cuba; and recommended her there to some friends of his, they took care of her, till she was brought to bed. When she was up and well again, he sent for her to bear him company.

The King's proclamation being out, for pardoning of pirates,¹ he took the benefit of it, and surrendered; afterwards being sent upon the privateering account, he returned to his old trade, as has already been hinted in the story of Mary Read. In all these expeditions, Anne Bonny kept him company, and when any business was to be done in their way, nobody was more forward or courageous than she, and particularly when they were taken; she and Mary Read, with one more, were all the persons that durst keep the deck, as has been before hinted.

Her father was known to a great many gentlemen, planters of Jamaica, who had dealt with him, and among whom he had a good reputation, and some of them who had been in Carolina, remembered to have seen her in his house; wherefore they were inclined to show her favour, but the action of leaving her husband was an ugly circumstance against her. The day that Rackam was executed, by special favour, he was admitted to see her; but all the comfort she gave him, was, that she was sorry to see him there, but if he had fought like a man, he need not have been hanged like a dog.

She was continued in prison, to the time of her laying in, and afterwards reprieved from time to time; but what became of her since, we cannot tell; only this we know, that she was not executed.

