THE ISAIAH THOMAS COLLECTION OF BALLADS

BY WORTHINGTON C. FORD

AFTER working for years on a check-list of Broadsides, Ballads, &c., printed in Massachusetts, 1639-1800, and finally getting it in print,[1] I was surprised to be informed that in the Antiquarian Society were three volumes of ballads which had escaped my notice. It was not strange that they had been overlooked; that is the usual experience of even the best investigators. I have now an opportunity to list these ballads and to say a little about the collection, quite unique in number and in character.

First, as to their history. Bound in three volumes they were presented to the Society by Isaiah Thomas in 1814. He lived at a time when to be recognized as a master printer a long apprenticeship was required and he began with a ballad—a broadside dated 1755, "The Lawyer's Pedigree, Tune, Our Polly is a sad Slut," printed and sold in Boston below the Mill-Bridge. The only known copy is in the Antiquarian Society and bears the interesting manuscript note: "Printed from type set by Isaiah Thomas, aetatis 6." Our colleague, Dr. Nichols, has treated so fully of Thomas as a printer that nothing need be said further in this place, but this early association with a broadside is not without suggestion.

Thomas was more than a printer and had a strong vein of the antiquary, which led him to accumulate things out of the ordinary. One of the odd things is

[1] Vol. LXXV of the *Collections* of the Massachusetts Historical Society.

this collection of ballads. He notes in the first volume:

> Songs, Ballads, &c. In Three Volumes. Purchased from a Ballad Printer and Seller in Boston, 1813.[1] Bound up for Preservation, to shew what articles of this kind are in vogue with the Vulgar at this time, 1814. N. B. Songs and common Ballads are not so well printed at this time as they [were] 70 years ago, in Boston.
>
> Presented to the Society by
>
> ISAIAH THOMAS.
>
> August 1814.

He has noted on the same sheet that the songs in the three volumes and binding cost six dollars—less than two cents apiece, a price calculated to make any collector of today envious. No one, however, will be willing to deny Thomas's good sense in buying these ballads or in placing them where they would be preserved. Eliminating duplicates there are three hundred and two distinct sheets containing three hundred and forty-nine distinct poems, with some additional pieces in prose. In size no other American library can offer anything like it for the period, and all other libraries combined would still hardly be able to match the contents of these three volumes.

Thomas's critical note on the printing of these leaves appeals to me. The form, paper and typographical appearance of a ballad printed before the War for Independence were distinctly better than the ballads of 1814. Yet when these latter are compared with the ballads of the seventies—our day—they are better in every respect, type, paper and cuts. I well remember some street sellers of ballads in New York in the early seventies, who had on twine wound in the iron fences of parks or churchyards or on a light bamboo frame, between strings stretched to keep them down in the wind, the ballads then in vogue. The wood-cuts were coarse, and bad as they were in black and white, a dab of raging blue, or green, or orange

[1] This is not a correct statement, for there are ballads bearing date 1814.

was considered an artistic touch, just as on vilely colored comic valentines, making the sheet of double value—five cents, as I remember. These vendors were to be found near the corner of Ann Street and Broadway, where the *New York Herald* later had its building (now the Havemeyer Building), the most frequented corner in the city. N. P. Willis writing some thirty years earlier said that the sidewalk in front of St. Paul's, immediately opposite, enjoyed that distinction; but in the thirty years Brooklyn had grown, and Fulton Street had become the principal path to the city of cemeteries. The change had made the corner of Ann Street the central point measured in business activity between the Battery and Fourteenth Street, then quite the limit except for sleeping purposes.

Now, as I think of it, the selection of Ann Street by the ballad sellers was a peculiar one, for these songs were supposed to be the favorites of sailors, and few sailors got above Franklin Square on the east, or beyond West Street on the west, those regions being particularly open and dripping with the vile poisons and worse that preyed upon the seamen. I cannot remember ever to have heard a landsman sing ballads, nor do I remember that the dealer ever crooned or chanted them, as was the practice of the English street seller. But then one need only have walked along the docks to hear them in all sorts of keys and manners, the depth of feeling depending upon the inebriety of the singer. Today I would not know where to go in Boston or New York to hear or to see such ballads, and one wonders what, if anything, has taken their place. One is tempted to say the "records," which are barked out of the shop door or window, or are given in homes as aids to digestion in the form of such exercise as the modern dances afford. The disappearance of these ballads can hardly be due to improved taste in the vulgar, for the best vaudeville rises no higher than the standard of the street ballad—Sir Harry Lauder excepted.

The ballad of the Thomas collection is specially designed for seamen. It is eloquent on the many delights of the sailor's life—the roaming in foreign parts, the return with his purse well stored, the meeting with his sweetheart—or others—the festive board and sparkling bowl, his return to the sea when his last shiner has been spent, the parting from his sweetheart—or others—the merits of his ship and commander—all this is shouted in brazen lines, redolent of grog, flip and brandy, and so loudly vaunted as to suggest that the sailors were really whistling to keep up their courage and to save their face, instead of being the "blithe and bland," "the carefree and happy," "the supremely blest" that the ballad would have us accept. Doubtless the subject of the ballad is of secondary importance to the singer. He sings of death and danger as he would of the girl he had left behind him, or of the girl he expected to chance upon in the next port. The world over the seaman is vocal when on land, and also at sea, and I have heard voices that entranced by their rich, untrained and deeply stirring tones, while turning off lines that were contemptible, disgusting or incoherent in their nonsense. In unison at work, or singly at night, the tonal qualities summon visions of tender romance which the mastersinger may fail to evoke.

It is safe to say that most of these issues, if not all, had been published between 1810 and 1814.[1] The paper, type, cuts and general appearance would indicate this. The subjects of the verses add their evidence. Buying in 1814, at the peak of the war of 1812, Mr. Thomas obtained much that is concerned with that war, together with not a little that was reprinted from other times—especially the Revolution. It is well known that New England remained cold to "Mr. Madison's war" and took a position which implied something more than passive opposition to the war policy. Presumably enlistments in the land

[1]There are a few of English origin, engravings, not printed from type.

forces were neither large in number nor enthusiastic in the making. The means of awakening a patriotic spirit were few and weak as compared to those employed in the Civil or in the Great War. Propaganda has become a science, of almost military precision, and when pressed becomes relentless to resistance, unjustly so. Not so in the war of 1812, when it was difficult to arouse the people over the somewhat scanty victories on land, and to assure a roaring crowd to greet the advances or give aid in the retreats of our hastily improvised army. It should be added, and a possible excuse for the indifference is offered, that the measures of government leading up to the war of 1812 had not found favor in New England. Both in impressments and embargo that section had endured much and suffered more than any other part of the country. All the same, it is strange and not creditable that when a war came intended to stop impressments and win greater freedom on the seas New England held back.

There are pieces in this collection on Washington—always a national hero—with sly digs at the Jeffersonian policy,[1] offered in deadly contrast. There are verses on impressment:[2]

> Can you bear such treatment *freemen!*
> Will you drain the cup of *woe?*
> Rouse, to save impressed seamen!
> Rouse, to conquer every foe!

And on the embargo:[3]

> Our ships all in motion,
> Once whiten'd the ocean,
> They sail'd and return'd with a cargo;
> Now doom'd to decay,
> They have fallen a prey,
> To Jefferson, worms and Embargo.

The removal of the embargo also called out a comment:[4]

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[1]60 (The numbers refer to the printed list). [2]7 [3]77 [4]59

They say that just at twelve o'clock,
It's soul and body parted,
They threw the carcase in the Dock,
The soul to the Devil started.

With the war reappeared some of the patriotic songs of the war for independence. Yankee Doodle, of course; also ballads on the battle of Bunker Hill, the death of Warren, surrender of Burgoyne, lines written by Major André, Lord Cornwallis's surrender and others of the same description. Thomas Paine's verses on General Wolfe, said to have been written in 1759, and a favorite long poem on American taxation were also reissued. Most of these have long since passed into a merited oblivion.

An early song was on Harrison's victory near Prophet's Town in 1811,[1] where among other artistic touches we read:

And garments roll'd in blood, stood full in view,
Caus'd by that base—that wicked Indian crew.

—Elsewhere dubbed the copper nos'd allies of Great Britain, as great an offence in American eyes as the employment of Hessians had been. This was followed in time by one on Hull's surrender of Detroit which gave that much maligned and truly unfortunate commander the benefit of the doubt:[2]

Is it true that our soldie'rs were wrongfully us'd?
Is it true that they've been by their *General* abus'd?
Is it true that an army so gallant were *sold?*
Is it true that *Columbians* were barter'd for gold?

The battle of Queenstown (October, 1812)[3] which ended against the forces of the United States, Dearborn's and Chauncey's taking of Little York (April, 1813)[4] and Harrison's victory on the Thames (October, 1813)[5] were duly celebrated by poet tasters, not lacking in braggadocio, inseparable from such writing. For instance:

[1]21 [2]116 [3]17 [4]37 [5]113

> But Yankees can always convince their proud foes,
> That they're ready the *Lion* to take by the nose,
> And if they don't conquer by giving a twist,
> They beat in his jaws with the weight of their fist.

If the encounters on land gave little opportunity to tune the harp, those by sea were greeted with unbounded applause and dropping into poetry. New England's interests were largely maritime, and from New England came the best sailors. The United States navy drew heavily on our seamen and privateer adventures went out from our ports. It was only natural that the public interest should turn to the sea, the more because of the past and present performance of American vessels. There are three sheets on Truxtun's victory in the *Constellation* against the *Insurgente* (February, 1799);[1] and one on the encounter between the *Boston* and the *Berceau* (October, 1800)[2]. The siege of Tripoli in 1803 is recalled in one,[3] and probably one of the earliest in time, as it called for men for the President, and dealt with naval recruiting.[4] In May, 1811, the first exploit occurred—the meeting of the *President* with the *Little Belt*—and is sung in three sheets,[5] one of them purporting to be by Mons. Tonson, Late Hair-Dresser to his Imperial and Royal Majesty the Emperor of the French. It is interesting only as being one of two attempts to write English as a foreigner supposedly might. A single couplet will suffice:

> Den Rogers was enrage for good,
> To see dem such a ninny;
> He knock dair mas all over board,
> And break de leg of many.

When the *Constitution* bested the *Guerriere* (August 20, 1812) there was an outburst of song. Isaac Hull on water was lauded to the skies, perhaps in contrast to William Hull on land of just twelve months before, and five sheets relate the story.[6] It would be difficult

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[1] 19,279,280 [2] 26 [3] 243 [4] 176 [5] 227,228,229; also 176. [6] 117,118,171,183.

to award a prize among such a display of doggerel, but the authorship of No. 183 is given—James Campbell, a boatswain's mate, and the last stanza reads:

Now to conclude my boys, and finish with my song,
I was a boatswain's mate, unto said ship I do belong.
I wrote these lines to let you know how yankees they can fight,
When their officers give command, and men of courage bright.

Among other encounters noted in these sheets are the *Wasp* and *Frolic* (October 18, 1812);[1] the *United States* and *Macedonian* (October 25, 1912);[2] the *Constitution* and *Java* (December 29, 1812);[3] the *Peacock* and *Hornet* (February, 1813);[4] the *Chesapeake* and *Shannon* (June 1, 1813);[5] Perry on Lake Erie (September 9, 1813);[6] the *Saratoga* and *Morgiana* (October, 1813);[7] and the arrival of the *President* at Providence,[8] and of the *President* and *Congress* at Boston (December 12, 1812).[9] An ambitious sheet attempts a summary of naval victories to April 27, 1813,[10] and another, not to be outdone gives a "Yankee Chronology"[11] which begins with the discovery of America and reaches the death of Lawrence with a delightful confession at the end:

The four last verses of this song, was written by a resident of Boston. We hope Mr. Dunlap, (the author) will not be offended at this; for he intimates in the advertisement to the Interlude from which the song is extracted, that he would be happy to add a verse to it for every brilliant achievement of the arms of his country, "till it should outdo Chevy Chase," in its number of verses. We therefore rest perfectly assured of obtaining his pardon for our presumption. For as he was not on the spot, we thought it would be doing him a wrong to omit the record of the capture of four of the enemy's vessels by our gallant tars, which events had not happened when he commenced his journal of "Yankee Chronology." Also, to alter its title, from "Huzza for the Constitution," to "Huzza for the American Navy."[12]

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[1]288 [2]27,126. [3]12,98,177. [4]205. [5]14,40,296. [6]29,75,173,209. [7]11. [8]120. [9]11. [10]80. [11]297.

[12]The full title of Dunlap's work is: Yankee Chronology; | or, | Huzza for the Constitution: | A musical Interlude, | in one Act. | To which are added, | the patriotic Songs of | The Freedom of the Seas, | and | Yankee Tars. | By W. Dunlap, Esq. |

Perhaps the two outstanding features of this series are the boastfulness and contempt for the enemy and the prevalence of grog, flip, brandy and other concoctions of the past not dissociated from the performances of muse and sybil.

If successes by sea and land could not fill the ranks there were other means—a general appeal like "The American Patriot's War Song,"[1] in which the Union was lauded, where

> All in bonds of love united,
> Safe beneath our eagle's wings
> Let the fowls of heaven, invited,
> Come and eat the flesh of kings,

a dinner of somewhat scant measure, even in that time.

Apart from the war and patriotic poems there is a large class of verses of sentiment, original or borrowed from England. An English writer on music, Ernest Newman of the *Manchester Guardian* recently wrote: "I thought our own British shop ballad had achieved the proud pre-eminence of being the world's worst welter of sentimental inanity; but the American product can evidently give it seventy-five yards' start in a hundred and beat it easily." I fear the charge may be true, and it was true in 1814, as our poets were still in the lisping stage and in simplicity of structure and liberty of rhyme, united with a shameless display of the sentimental, could hardly have been poorer. Occasionally a good thing was recognized, as Charles

New-York: | Published by D. Longworth, | At the Dramatic Repository, | Shakespeare-Gallery. | Dec.—1812. In the "Advertisement" the author says: "The song of Yankee Chronology was written for the fourth of July last, excepting the last verse. Upon the arrival of the news of the victory obtained by captain Isaac Hull of the *Constitution*, over the english frigate the *Guerriere*, mr. [Thomas Apthorpe] Cooper called upon the writer and requested an additional verse, and an introductory interlude. My wishes were too much in unison with his to allow of hesitation. On the anniversary of the evacuation of this place, another verse was requested and given; and the writer would be happy to evince his gratitude to every defender of his country's rights, by adding for each a tribute of applause, till his song out did chevy-chase in number of verses. New-York, November 28th, 1812." "The Freedom of the Seas" was sung at the New York Theatre July 4, 1810, and "Yankee Tars" was sung by Mr. Yates at the same place, December 10 1812. This would place the Boston issue of the "Chronology" early in 1813.

[1] 7.

Dibdin's "Tom Bowlin's Epitaph," of which three issues are in the Thomas collection. Such instances are rare and the leaning towards favorite though somewhat aged anonymous ballads was a better indication of the ballad market. The examples are such as had been printed in Boston in provincial times and some later appeared in our early readers, were repeated in our day, and still may be found in some form in children's books. The ballads of Chevy Chase, of Fair Rosamond, of the Children in the Wood, of a Frog who would a wooing go, have held on for centuries, tales still recognized as good material. Less known but no less persistent, were the London Apprentice, being an account of his matchless manhood, and brave adventures done in Turkey, and how he came to marry the King's daughter, which long shared popularity with Dick Whittington and his Cat, Love in a Tub, or the Merchant outwitted by a Vintner, the Golden Bull, the Dorsetshire Garland or the Miser outwitted, as inspiration to poor boys, lovers crossed by angry parents, or parents tricked by scheming children. The stories are old as humanity and in one form or another have been perpetuated through ages as folk stories, ballads and novels, from Homer, through other nameless composers and relators, to Boccaccio and the modern school, which poses as original, while vamping the rags and tatters of the past.

Most of these sentimental ballads are of English origin, as the references they contain indicate. The Dying Words of Captain Robert Kidd was certainly English. "Tippy Jack's Journey to Brighton" appears on the same sheet with the Death of General Wolfe, a strange combination, and on another issue of Wolfe is printed John Bull's description of a church, which is certainly free in expression:[1]

There were men folks and women folks penn'd up together
  Like so many weathers and ewes at a fair;

[1]58.

Besides, a long booby hutch built up for holding
  The whole corporation, justasses and mayor.
Then up got a little man into a tub,
  And he looked just tho' he'd been roll'd in the dirt.
For you could not suppose he could be very clean,
  When he'd got nothing on but a long black shirt,
Except a little white slabbering bib,
  Tuck'd under his chin and slit in two, etc.

The fickle lover and deceived maiden are described again and again in terms which would not pass the censorship set up by modern prudes, be they on or off the bench; and the jilt and her swift and ghostly punishment would be acceptable to those who dabble in spiritism.

This is the dark and fearful hour,
  When injur'd ghosts complain;
Now dreary graves give up their dead,
  To haunt the faithless swain.

Naturally remorse was awakened by such visitations and if frequent resulted in compensation:

And thrice he call'd on Marg'ret's name,
  And thrice he wept full sore;
Then laid his cheek to the cold earth,
  And word spake never more.[1]

In "Bateman's Tragedy, being a warning to all Maidens, by the Example of God's Judgments shewed on Jerman's Wife, of Clifton, in the County of Nottingham, who lying in child-bed, was borne away, and never heard of after."[2] a jilt was punished. In the Mournful Tragedy of Roxanna the seducer killed his mistress but was brought to judgment by the roses springing from her grave, which withered in his hand—a novel in miniature or tabloid.

Strangely familiar are the lines of Sally in our Alley, which we have heard warbled—no, yodled—from many a stage, whistled by many a youth prouder of that accomplishment than a peace-loving community justified, and finally ground out of the barrel-organ

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[1]163. [2]13.

until it became a musical nightmare. Nancy Dawson[1] sought to compete, starting out with the usual biographical sketch:

> Of all the girls of our town,
> The black, the fair, the red, the brown,
> That dance and prance it up and down,
> There's none like Nancy Dawson.

She lived 1730-1767 and danced into fame with a hornpipe. In one of the verses the names of her rivals or colleagues are given:

> Tho' Beard[2] and Brent charm every night,
> And female Peachum's justly right,
> And Filch and Rocket[3] please the sight
> 'Tis crown'd by Nancy Dawson.

The Irish had their say, expressed with their usual modesty—Green on the Cape,[4] Exiles from Erin, Sprig of Shillelah and Shamrock so Green, in which from Donnybrook he comes "His heart soft with whiskey, his head soft with blows." Erin go Brah and St. Patrick's Day in the Morning we have heard sung on the stage or shouted in the streets, and in New York even in my time the battle of the Boyne and the merits of St. Patrick still called for police intervention and encouraged the manly art and deep drinking. The Land of Sweet Erin,[5] in spite of its title, probably sprung from this side of the water—the ocean being no barrier to Irish sentiment on tap, for the refrain ran:

> Then let us be friskey, and tipple the whiskey,
> Long life to the land of dear liberty joys;
> No country whatever has power to sever
> The Shamrock, the Eagle and freedom my boys.

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[1]See D. N. B. under Nancy Dawson, where the authorship of the ballad is attributed to George Alexander Stevens. "This tune was for a long time the popular air of the day. It was set with variations for the harpsichord as Miss Dawson's hornpipe, was introduced in Carey's and Bickerstaff's opera 'Love in a Village,' is mentioned as 'Nancy Dawson' by Goldsmith in the epilogue to 'She stoops to conquer,' and in another unspoken epilogue to the same play, and is still sung in nurseries to the words 'Here we go round the Mulberry Bush.' "

[2]John Beard (1716?–1791), who appeared in the "Beggars' Opera" in 1759 as Macheath, with Miss Charlotte Brent (*d.* 1802) as Polly Peachum.

[3]Filch and Lucy Lockit—not Rocket—are characters in the "Beggars' Opera."

[4]30. [5]136.

Again a New Irish Song begins with a half warning against migrating to America, followed by an account of being shipwrecked and ends with a determination not to go back "Along with Wicks, so full of tricks in the cursed ship Alnomack."

The verses on criminals are here—what collection is without some examples of these forced expressions of supposedly repenting scoundrels, and the moral lessons they inculcated?[1] Livermore and Angier were sentenced to be executed for the brutal killing of two Indians:[2]

> Learn well to shun the steps of those,
> Who walk through sinful ways,
> Mark but the progress of such men
> Who live but half their days.

Another man, Tully, was executed for piracy,[3]

> But just as Dalton was about
> His exit to receive
> The marshal stopt, and then pronounc'd
> A thirty days reprieve.

—spoiling the show by half.

What might pass as religious tracts are few in number. It was easier to attract attention through some striking incident, like a murder, a shipwreck, or disease. Yet some there are, like Brother Sailor,[4] where the sailor is told to

> Renounce your old captain, the devil, straightway,
> The crew that you sail with will lead you astray,
> Desert their black colours—come under the red,
> Where Jesus was captain to conquest he lead.

So the Christian Pilgrim speaks for itself, as does the Christian's Song,[5] written by a young lady of vocal attainments, who begins:

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[1]The almost general resort to such expressions in verse is suggested in Irvin S. Cobb's "Stickfuls," where he describes a hanging of a negro for murder which he reported, and adds: "A group of reckless young negroes began singing the Devil song—one of those weird chants that guitar-picking minstrel bards among the Southern negroes write to commemorate a notable crime or a great tragedy." Page 48.

[2]25. [3]146. [4]31. [5]44.

My soul's full of glory which fires my tongue,
Could I meet with angels I'd sing them a song,

but in the absence of angels was forced to address her words to her brother and sister. A Dialogue between Death and a Lady was an old time favorite, and Wigglesworth's Dream, with its mention of a day of judgment and doom suggests a parentage in the real and fortunately the only Wigglesworth of Massachusetts of ancient vintage. The Last Words of Polly Goold, in three editions, opening fruitfully with

Give ear to me, ye Sons of Men,
Why stand ye gazing round my bed?

was to be sung to a very mournful tune, though none is specially named.

All the sheets on American politics or War successes are of local origin, and form a class by themselves, constituting the larger portion of the purely American ballads. When we read:[1]

I Nancy Welch was born and bred
In Essex County Marblehead

and run through a medley of pious reflections, there is no call to doubt where that was composed. Granny Wales, of Ireland,[2] written on the Tea Tax mentions Lexington, yet might have been an American, though the tone favors an English product. The Girl of my Heart[3] which opens

I have Parks and I have Grounds,
I have Deer, I have Hounds,

could not have been written anywhere in America. Did the Bottle of Rum[4] come from the West Indies where rum was native, or from Maryland or Virginia, with its patter:

If money you do owe and tobacco's selling low,
And the sheriff for his taxes doth come,
If your horses go astray, and your negroes run away,
Drown your sorrows in a bottle of rum, rum, rum.

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[1]82. [2]89. [3]96. [4]137.

A favorite ballad, for I have found no less than twelve editions, was the Major's Only Son, and his True Love's Overthrow, which were composed by himself on the melancholy occasion.[1] It has a more than passing interest to us topically, as the son was a resident of Massachusetts in 1793, "a scholar bright," who in learning took great delight, and so was able to argue with his stern parent over a low-born maid by citing Dives and Lazarus, but the precedent was not upheld. The young man entered the ministry at Rochester, the girl faded away and died after delivering an exhortation that would have deserved sainthood, however mingled with earthly concerns. Of course the young man went mad; she had put it up to him and he must do something; and the poem closes

Come all you parents far and near,
These melancholy lines who hear,
I beg a warning you would take,
And never matches try to break.
Come all young people far and nigh,
Remember you were born to die,
Set not your hearts on things below,
For love has been my overthrow.
He wanders up and down alone,
And like a dove does daily moan;
And he has moan'd his many a year,
But never can enjoy his dear.

There is every evidence that the poem was written after the young man had become distracted, thus making him a true forerunner of some poets of today.

Parody is rare, and not happy, depending upon a certain knack somewhat beyond these rhymesters. A single instance will illustrate. The original is The Legacy[2] and opens:

When in death I shall calm recline,
  Oh bear my heart to my mistress dear,
Tell her it lived upon smiles and wines,
  Of the brightest hue while it linger'd here.

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[1]161. [2]145.

The parody imitates:

> When in bed I am drunk's a swine,
> This bottle bear to my comrades dear,
> Tell them 'twas fill'd with Madeira wine,
> I drank it off and it laid me here.

There is no finesse about it—brutal in its descent to the gutter.

The form of the verse would give little results as a literary study. There is no suspicion of the original intention of the ballad, a song sung to the rythmic movement of a dancing chorus. Could the suppression of dancing by the reformation and puritan waves account for this? Few rise above the commonplace utterances of an untrained user of verse—Skelton's "in bastarde ryme after the doggrell gyse." There is no summoning of the muse, few references to noted characters in poetry or history, no attempt at a bit of character drawing. Simple and direct they are intended for a circle summoned by the opening lines—as a singer or orator clears his throat to attract attention:

> Draw near you young Gallants, while I do unfold
> A tragical story as ever was told;[1]

> Come all you gallant heroes and listen unto me,
> While I relate a battle that was lately fought at sea,[2]

> Come all ye yankee heroes, come listen to my song,
> I'll tell you of a bloody fight before that it be long.[3]

Somehow the lines suggest a barroom, navy plug, grog and the half tipsy sailor singing and not caring if he have a listener or not, intent only on freeing himself of the burden of the song. His complete absorption in this task is apt to be comic, for he is himself so serious; yet often the phrasing is so true, the quaver so fetching and the cadence pathetic, being based upon a natural rendering.

The authorship of most of these verses can never be so much as conjectured. Like the productions of

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[1]278. [2]276. [3]183.

Grub-street (now metamorphosed into a butterfly—Milton Street) they were manufactured for the printer or bookseller and the author sank his fame for the price of a dinner or less. Was Theatre Alley corner of Milk Street the resort of Grub Street of Boston? That alley, extending between Milk and Franklin Streets, was obliterated in 1859 by the extension of Devonshire Street. Certainly Nathaniel Coverly, father and son, were the supporters of the ballad, perhaps on a small scale, the Dilly of the region. It is rather strange that the ballad appears to have been so peculiar to Boston, for I know not of like productions in New York or Philadelphia upon the same scale. Being local one might assume that even hack writers would leave some trace of themselves, for Boston was still a town in spirit as well as name. Perhaps an examination of the newspapers of this time will disclose the first appearance of some, for the "Poet's Corner" was an institution. Yet so many of them bear every evidence of having been prepared on the spot, to meet an immediate demand, that I much doubt if they could have borne the delay even of a week, or the blue pencil of any self-respecting editor. Born of the minute they passed with that minute, on the whole the rarest of issues of the modern press and doomed to a lasting forgetfulness on their merits.[1] Only their connection with historical events justifies this waste of your time in digging them out of this quite unique and notable purchase by Isaiah Thomas.

A word on the printers of these ballads is called for, if only to place on record some particulars on their little known careers. Nathaniel Coverly of Boston was married by Rev. Charles Chauncy, November 2, 1769, to Susanna Cowell. She was baptized in the New Brick Church, Boston, August 20, 1749.[2] It is a

[1]In the "Journal of Joseph Valpey, Jr., of Salem," recently published by the Michigan Society of Colonial Wars, may be found a number of original ballads, written by him when in Dartmoor Prison. They indicate a possible source of such material, and a study of like records might add to our knowledge of the subject.

[2]Boston Record Commission, xxx. 66.

somewhat unusual occurrence in our formal records, but on declaring their intention to marry, December 13, 1768, it was "forbid," no cause being assigned.[1] In 1770 the first title printed by Coverly is found and from 1770 to 1774 he was in Boston, living so quietly as not to draw upon himself the attention of authorities or his fellow townsmen. He had nothing to ask of the former and the latter never sought him for a town officer. He was obliged to leave Boston when occupied by Gage and his troops, and removing to Chelmsford set up a printing press in the south part of the town. There he formed a publishing connection with Elisha Rich, a baptist teacher and also a blacksmith by trade, who was ordained in October, 1775, over the baptist meeting of Chelmsford, continuing to serve until December 15, 1777. Rich turned occasionally to poetry and besides some ballads called out by the events around Boston, Coverly published for him "The Number of the Beast found out by spiritual Arithmetic," (1775), and "Poetical Dialogues calculated for the Help of Timorous and Tempted Christians" (1795). Remaining in Chelmsford for about two years Coverly was in Concord in 1776, returned to Boston in 1779 and until 1785 printed there by himself or in partnership with Robert Hodge. He then set up in Plymouth, where he printed the "Plymouth Journal," and later in Middleborough, operating in each place for about two years, when in 1788 the call for Boston induced him again to set up his fortunes in that town.[2] It is more than probable that this success was not encouraging, for he issued matter of little importance, except for a reprint of Robert Cushman's Sermon at Plymouth—the third edition of that work, which is found with titles dated 1785 and 1788, the earlier being the true

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[1]Boston Record Commission, xxx. 428.

[2]He is in the census of 1790, with seven in his family—five males and two females. He was living on Back (now a part of Hanover) Street, on which street Zachariah Fowle printed, 1751-1754.

year of publication. In 1795 Coverly is found in Amherst, New Hampshire, where he set up the first newspaper of that region, "The Amherst Journal and New Hampshire Advertiser," beginning January 16, 1795, and running until January 9, 1796, completing fifty-two issues, when it was succeeded or absorbed by the "Village Messenger" of the same place. On April 24, 1795, Coverly announced that he had taken as partner his son [Nathaniel], the firm being known as Nathaniel Coverly and Son. They did not confine themselves to the newspapers but also printed some pamphlets.

Wells in his "History of Newbury, Vermont," states that:

> In 1794, Nathaniel Coverly, Jr., came here from Salem, Mass., and started the first printing office in the Connecticut valley, north of Hanover, in a building since burned. It stood on the other side of the road from the dwelling of the late Miss Swasey, at the Ox-bow. He did a considerable amount of printing, including a few small books, in a creditable manner. . . He carried on a store for the sale of books and stationery in the front part of the building, the printing office being at the rear. In 1796, probably in May, he began the publication of a newspaper called the "Orange Nightingale and Newbury Morning Star." . . . This paper was short-lived for want of funds and patronage, and Mr. Coverly closed out his business here and returned to Salem.[1]

The only file located, that in the Harvard College Library, runs from May 19, 1796, the second issue to September 4, 1797.

There is probably some confusion here. It is possible but not probable that the son set up business in 1794 in Newbury, but he was certainly in partnership with his father at Amherst after April, 1795, and in 1796 the firm of father and son were at Haverhill, New Hampshire. The son did establish a newspaper at Newbury in 1796, and that year is the more likely to have been the time of his going to that place. Yet in

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[1]Page 243.

March, 1796, the two began to publish "The Grafton Minerva, and Haverhill Weekly Bud," at Haverhill, New Hampshire, a paper which ran for forty-six known numbers (January, 1797), printed a part of the time by Nathaniel Coverly alone. This journal was no more self-supporting than their earlier ventures and in 1798 and 1799 both partners were printing in Medford, and in the latter year at Salem, where they remained certainly until 1803[1]. The son was taxed in Salem in 1802. He had married at Boston, February 10, 1800, Eunice Johnson of Andover.

In 1805 the father was printing in Boston on Federal Court which ran from Union and Hanover Streets to the Mills, and the son is given at No. 55, Hanover Street. They do not appear to have had fixed abodes and from the town directory may be gathered the following items:

	Father	Son.
1806	Printer, 6, Orange Street	Printer, Russell Street
1807	Printer, 52, Orange Street	———
1808	Printer, 52, Orange Street	Russell Street
1810	Printer, house Lendell Lane	Printer, house, Milk Street
1813	Printer, High Street	Printer, house, Milk Street
1814	Printer, High Street	Printer, house, Milk Street
1818	———	Printer, house, 16, Milk Street
1820	———	Printer and bookseller, Milk Street
1821-23	———	Pamphlet shop, Milk Street
1825-28	Eunice Coverely, pamphlet shop, 16, Milk Street	
1829	Eunice Coverly, pamphlet shop, 40, Milk Street	

The father seems to have dropped out between 1814 and 1818 and the son probably died about 1823, having already passed from being a printer (he again ventured into journalism with "The Idiot," Boston, 1818-1819) to a seller of pamphlets, to which business his wife succeeded in 1824. Nothing further is known of them, and no wills are found in the Probate Office.

[1]Bentley (II. 298) has the curious record: "A. [N?] Coverly, Bookseller, printer, &c., just appeared here and vanished away."

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