

On some Star Chamber Proceedings, 34th Elizabeth, 1592.

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THE following narrative, taken from the Proceedings of the Star Chamber Court, has been extracted *verbatim* on account of its immediate local interest, and as bringing to notice some very curious manners and customs of the time.

The complainant in the case was "Roger Sydenham, of North Quarum, in the parish of Exton, Somt., Gent., Ranger of the Forest of Exmore in Somt. and Devon." He sets out that "there had always ben kept a Game of Red Deare in the forest; and being given to understand of some spoile lately committed on them by Humphry Sydenham, Robert Langham, Richard Hurford, and others, he made known the same to Sir John Poyntz, Kt., Chief Forester of the said Forest; whereupon Sir John, in the Term of St. Michael 'last past,' preferred a Bill of Complaint against the above offenders, and willed Roger Sydenham to follow the said cause against them. Subpænas were served upon them, which they contemptuously disobeyed, and Process was ordered against them." The remainder of the story will be better told in its original wording. "Thereupon, they, about the Feast of the Birth of our Lord last past, confederating with one Humphry Quireke and others, it was agreed that a Bill of Complaint should be preferred, in the name of John Langham and Edmund Horner, as Plaintiffs against Roger Sydenham, and it was agreed, that a certeyn Ale should be made in the name of some poor men, without any Licence or Authority, to procure the people and in-

habitants of sundry Parishes thereabouts to come to the said Ale, and then to expend divers somes of money, which was indeed to no other end, but that such benefit as should rise and come by means thereof, should be bestowed on the maintenance of such suits so commenced against your Subject, as should defray such fees as should be required, which Ale the said Robert Langham and the others caused to be proclaimed to be sold in the Church House of the Parish of Skilgate, Somerset, of which Parish your Subject being then Churchwarden, and disliking of the publication, and putting of the said Ale in the said Church House, did desire the same to be removed, and removing thereof, some of the said Ale became wasted. After which tyme, the same Robert Langham and the other confederates did, in vearly riotous and disordered manner, break open the door of the said Church House, and did again place there the aforesaid Ale, privately, of three or four Hundred Gallons, and about Easter last past, did send unto near about 16 or 17 Parish Churches, near unto Skilgate, Notes in Writing to the Parson, Vicar, or Curate of every of the said Parishes, requiring and willing them, openly in their Churches, at the tyme of Divine Service, upon some Sunday or Hollyday, to signify and unlawfully make proclamacion unto his Parishioners, that the said Robert Langham and others, whose names were colourably used, would request the inhabitants of the said Parishes to come and spend their money at the aforesaid Ale, which was done in everie of the said Parish Churches accordingly.”

“And further also, in most manifest abuse of these Ministries, the aforesaid Humphry Sydenham, a Captaine of a certeyne Band of trained soldiers within the said County, did send forth precepts, or commandments, to all or most parts of the trained Soldiers of his Band, to appear before him at Skilgate, with their furniture, to muster. And thereupon, dyvers of them, to their great trouble and hindrance of their other occasions of business, repaired to Skilgate at that tyme, where-

as there was no sufficient warrant or just cause why any such muster at all should be; but being in this sort assembled, where thene employed only in the drinkinge of Ale, and for fear of their Captaine's displeasure, were made to spend money at the Ale more than some of them had gotten in money before."

"The like whereof, he, Humphry Sydenham, performed at divers other tymes, in the 32nd and 33rd years of Your Majesty's Reign, at all which several tymes, Humphry Sydenham did, by his Precept and Warrant as a Captain of 300 soldiers, send for and sommon about 100 men of his Trained Band, with their furniture and weapons, to come to Dulverton, in the said County, to a Byd-ale of one John Glasse, a servant or friend of Humphry Sydenham, or of some other; upon which somons, the said Company thither repaired accordingly, and were employed only in drinking of Ale, and spending their money in such sort, as is aforesaid."

"And upon Thursday in Easter Week last past, being a Hollyday, Humphry Quircke and others, by appointment with the said Robert Langham and others, did, in very riotous, disordered, and unwarranted manner, in great troupes and companyes, to the terror of the whole Country, repair from the Town of Taunton and other places, to Skilgate, to the said Ales, and brought there divers persons, so many as they could by any means procure, and appointed one Milton, son of John Milton, to stand upon a hill near unto Skilgate Church, where he might view, almost a myle from the said hill, the coming of the said appointed companyes, to the intent that he might bring intelligence of their coming to the said Langham, (Hurford and others being then in the said Church of Skilgate at the time of Divine Service,) of purpose that, whensoever they came near, they would cause Divine Service to be surceased, and the Belles to be runge out, with many other outrageous practices; and Milton, so watching, and attending to view, as far as he could, the coming of the said companye, as soon as

he hadd espied a great number of them coming in such sort as before, did very vehemently come into the said Church of Skilgate, the Curate then being, with the whole assemblie of the Parishioners there come, in the myddest of Divine Service, in the forenoon of the same day, and in the beginning of his reading of the Homily then appointed to be redd, and then and there, the said Milton cried out with a loud voice, ‘ They are come! they are come! Mr. Langham; ring out the Bells!!’ Whereupon the said Langham privately commanded the Curate to surcease service, and caused the Bells of the Church there to be rung oute, and dyvers baggpipes to be blowne out, to the great dishonour of Almighty God, and in contempt of your Majestie’s Laws, and disturbance of the said Divine Service, and to the great admiracion and evil example of all the people there present, and the raising upp of numbers of people in the Country about, by this unwonted ringing out of Bells. And, in this outrageous and lawles manner, they went out of the said Church of Skilgate, to meet the said Companyes so coming, to go to drinke. Also this and many other such like unlawful demeanours were used, in and about the selling of the aforesaid Ale, and the procuring of companye to spend their money.”

“ And they, by way of extortion upon your Majesties subjects, have levyed to the some of or about three score pounds, and have also, within one year last past, by confederacy, collected and gathered divers other somes among themselves, and sundry other confederates, by way of maintenance, of purpose to be imployed to the maintenance of suites against the aforesaid Sir John Poyntz, and your said subject and their friendes, all which now is, and dayly hath been ever sithence, (by the said Robert Langham, John Langham, Edmund Horner, Humphry Quirecke, Richard Hurford, John Milton) used and spent, and imployed by way of maintenance accordingly, to the great vexacion and injury of your said subject and divers of his friends.”



“But they, the said Robert Langham and others not hereby content, but seeking and desiring by any undewe meanes to mayme, wound and spoile your said subject, did, in or about the 2nd of May last past, in very lawless and disordered manner, assemble themselves in the Straunde, in the Countie of Midd<sup>x</sup>, near unto Temple Bar, London; and having procured, then and there, unto themselves divers riotous persons, as, namely, one . . . Rattenbury, and divers others to the number of eight or nine persons, as yet unknown, weaponed and prepared, determining and agreeing to stabb and kill your said subject in his lodging, or wherever he would be found; and did, then and there, lye in wayte to have assaulted your said subject, as he should come from his business abroad to his lodging, being at an Inne called the sign of the ‘Swan,’ in the Straunde aforesaid; and they understanding that he, before their coming, was past to his lodging, by practice and agreement among themselves, sent the said Rattenbury to the chamber and lodging of your subject, to the intent he should pike a quarrell to your said subject, and challenge him to the field, and appoint a place to fight with him, and when your subject should come to the place appointed, he should there, by these riotous persons, have been slayne and killed; which challenge the said Rattenbury came and made unto your said subject, in his owne chamber, about nyne of the clocke in the evening of the same second day of May. And your subject, although not for his own person fearing the said Rattenbury alone, yet for that he doubted of this pretence, and for that also he then had, and yet hath, a wief and divers children, and is possessed of lands, and having them, he would not so rashly put them in aventure, he refused to appoint any place to fight with the said Rattenbury. Whereupon the said Rattenbury, with many threatening words ‘of feight wheresoever he met him,’ departed, and returning to those his said company and confederates, it was then and there againe fully agreed and concluded among them, as before, that the said Rattenbury, or some other of the said company, should

lie in wayte for your said subject, in or near his said lodging in the Strand aforesaid, and should stabb and kill him with his dagger or other weapon, which they, by all means they could, attempted to have performed accordingly.”

“And further, so it is, if it like your Highness, that the said Edmond Horner, being a bad man, and a comon disturber of your Majesties Peace and quiet, procuring unto himself, divers riotous and disordered persons of like quality and conversation to himself, as namely, Jerome Horner, and other persons, to your subject unknown, to the number of 28 persons, all such being furnished, armed, and provided, in unlawful and warlike manner, with holberds, partizans, billes, swerdes, daggers, and other such like weapons, (without regard of your Majesties Lawes and ordinances provided and used against Riots, Routes, and unlawful assemblies), did, in this form and manner, assemble and gather themselves together at, in, or near the Town of Taunton, Somerset, in or upon the 17th day of June, in the one-and-thirtieth year of your Majesties prosperous Raigne; on which daye there was a Faire then kept in the said Towne of Taunton, and a great assembly of people there, and did then in the said open Faire, so armed, weaponed, and prepared as before, in vearly riotous, routeous, and outrageous manner, march up and down in the said Faire, to the great disturbance, terror, and admiracion of all such your Highness’ subjects as weare in the said Faire. And under color of a certain pretended Title, which the said Edmund and Jerome Horner did then make unto the Baylewick of the Liberties of Taunton, they, in a riotous and forcible manner, took from the people in the said Faire divers parcells of their wares, and the same did destroy and kepe: and did, by means of their outrages and forces, compell divers persons which were there then to sell wares, to pay unto them divers somes of money, or to give and deliver to them some parts of their wares, having no such manner of right so to doe.”

Several other charges of Riots in Taunton by the Horners

are made. They resisted the execution of a warrant granted by Edward Lancaster, Gent., the Baylif of the Liberties of Taunton, and refused to obey the same, and "with their weapons, did set upon and assault your said subject and the Bayliffe, and that so furiously, that if they had not defended themselves they should have been slayne and murdered, or maymed, and with force and violence rescued themselves."

"And whereas these riotous persons, neither regarding their dueties towards God, nor esteyming any breaches of your Majesties Lawes, but still demeaning themselves in most lawles and outrageous order, to the disturbance of the said Towne of Taunton and the inhabitants of the whole country thereabouts, in the months of May, June, or July, in the 32nd year of your Majesties Reign, did assemble themselves together at Taunton, about eleven of the Clock in the night of the same day, all weaponed and prepared with monstrous weapons, and in the course of a veary tumult, went from their place of lawful assembly to the house of one George Webb, in Taunton, which did then keep a Beare, or Beares, and comying thither about 12 of the clock at night, called out with very loude voyce, in strong and unwonted manner, and willed the said Beare-Keeper to bring out to them his Beare to the Ring to be bayted in the market-place of Taunton, which the Beare-Keeper refused to do, and told them 'it was no fitt tyme to bayte Beares at that season of the night;' thereupon the said rioters, with their weapons, did then and there, in riotous and forcible manner, break open the doors of the house of the Beare-Keeper and assaulted him in the said House, and riotously and forcibly did take from him his Beare, and carryed him through the streets of Taunton, near haulfe a myle in length, and also in divers villages near about Taunton, hooping and hollowing, and making most strange outcrys and unwonted noyses, beating at the doors of divers people; and some of the said doors they did break open, and suffered the said Beare to rome aboute lose, thereby disturbing the whole Town, and also the inhabitants of divers villages, whereby

many of the inhabitants were so terrified that they were like to have been dryven out of their wittes and fallen madd ; and so in that sorte they caryed the said Beare into the open market place at Taunton, then being between the hours of twelve and one in the night, and then and there did, at that season of the night, by the space of three howers, with dogges and other devices, and whippes and wheelbarrows, bayt the said Beare, and did not tye the said Beare, but in this manner bayted him lose, and did then and there fall at variance with divers very honest inhabitants of good account and credit, which came out of their houses to view the said outrage ; and did hurt very dangerously sundry of the Inhabitants of the said Town, which had in courteous manner endeavoured to persuade them to surcease and leave of their said misdemeanours. And they suffered the said Beare willingly to come into a house near unto the market-place, in which house was then a woman great with child, by reason whereof she was in great danger, and lyke to have been slayne by the said Beare. And the like riotous behaviour, bayting of the Beare, disturbance of the Town of Taunton, hurting of your Majesties subjects there, and the like misdemeanours, were by the said H. Quircke and others done in Taunton.”

“ They also assembled in riotous manner, and beate down all or most of the signs and Wyne hoopes of the Innes and Taverns of Taunton.”

Many other misdemeanours, such as riots, perjury, etc., were charged against them.

The sentences of the Star Chamber Court are not extant.

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