



The Ballads and Songs of Yorkshire, C.J. Davison Ingledew,
Bell & Daldy, London, 1860

BOLD NEVISON, THE HIGHWAYMAN.*

WILLIAM NEVISON was born in Yorkshire, though the place is uncertain ; some say at Nevison hall, in Upsall, near Thirsk, others, at Pontefract and Wortley. He was notorious during the reign of Charles II., and was named by the " merry monarch " Swift Nick. After committing a robbery in London, about sunrise, he rode his mare to York in the course of the day, and appeared upon the Bowling- green of that city before sunset. From this latter circumstance, when brought to trial for the offence, he established an alibi to the satisfaction of the jury, though he was in reality guilty. But, though he escaped this time, he was afterwards apprehended in a public-house at Sandal-Three-Houses, near Wakefield, for another offence, convicted and hanged at York, May 4th, 1685.

" Thus it was related," says Lord Macaulay in his " History of England," of William Nevison, the great robber of the north of Yorkshire, that he levied a quarterly tribute on all the northern drovers, and in return not only spared them himself, but protected them against all other thieves ; that he demanded purses in the most courteous manner ; that he gave largely to the poor what he had taken from the rich ; that his life was once spared by the royal clemency, but that he again tempted his fate, and at length died, in 1685, on the gallows at York."

Did you ever hear tell of that hero,
Bold Nevison that was his name ?
He rode about like a bold hero.
And with that he gained great fame.

He maintained himself like a gentleman,
Besides he was good to the poor ;
He rode about like a bold hero.
And he gain'd himself favour therefore.

Oh the Twenty-first day of last month.
Proved an unfortunate day ;
Captain Milton was riding to London,
And by mischance he rode out of his way.

He call'd at a house by the road-side,
It was the sign of the Magpie,
Where Nevison he sat a drinking,
And the captain soon did he espy.

Then a constable very soon was sent for,
And a constable very soon came ;
With three or four more in attendance,
With pistols charged in the king's name.

They demanded the name of this hero,
" My name it is Johnson," said he.
When the captain laid hold of his shoulder.
Saying, " Nevison thou goeth with me."

Oh ! then in this very same speech.
They hastened him fast away ;
To a place call'd Swinington bridge,
A place where he used to stay.

John S. Sargent (fw62)



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They call'd for a quart of good liquor.
It was the sign of the Black Horse,
Where there was all sorts of attendance,
But for Nevison it was the worst.

He call'd for a pen, ink, and paper,
And these were the words that he said,
" I will write for some boots, shoes, and stockings,
For of them I have very gi'eat need."

'Tis now before my lord judge.
Oh ! guilty or not do you plead ;
He smiled into the judge and jury.
And these were the words that he said,

" I've now robb'd a gentleman of two pence,
I've neither done murder nor kill'd,
But guilty I've been all my life time,
So gentlemen do as you will.

" Its when that I rode on the highway
I've always had money in great store ;
And whatever I took from the rich
I freely gave it to the poor.

" But my peace I have made with my Maker,
And with you I'm quite ready to go ;
So here's adieu ! to this world and its vanities,
For I'm ready to suffer the law."

* To Edward Hailstone, esq., F.S. A., F.G.S., &c. of Horton hall, Bradford, I am greatly indebted for the above, and also for the following broadsides, from his valuable collection of Yorkshire lore : -
The Sheffield 'Prentice, The Great Exhibition, Bill Brown, The Funny Wedding, The Crafty Plough Boy, Miss Bailey's Ghost, The Yorkshire Lad in London, Speucer Broughton, and The Bonny Scotch Lad.

**THE BALLADS AND SONGS
OF YORKSHIRE,**

**TRANSCRIBED FROM PRIVATE MANUSCRIPTS, RARE BROADSIDES,
AND SCARCE PUBLICATIONS ; WITH NOTES
AND A GLOSSARY.**

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