

SUMMARY: *The Repentance of Robert Greene* was entered to John Danter in the Stationers' Register on 6 October 1592. However a few months earlier a work entitled *The Repentance of a Conycatcher, with the life and death of [blank] Mourton and Ned Browne, two notable conycatchers The one latelie executed at Tyborne the other at Aix in Ffraunce* had been entered to Danter on 21 August 1592 (see Jowett, John, 'Johannes Factotum: Henry Chettle and Greene's Groatsworth of Wit', *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, December 1993, 87:4, pp.453-86 at p.464). The material described in this entry of 21 August 1592 pertaining to the life and repentance of Ned Browne was published in the same year under a new title as *The Black Book's Messenger*. The remaining material mentioned in this entry involving the life and repentance of Mourton was never published as *The Repentance of a Conycatcher*, despite a promise to that effect by Greene in the epistle to *The Black Book's Messenger*, and it seems likely that this material concerning the life and repentance of Mourton was revised and published after Greene's death on 3 September 1592 as *The Repentance of Robert Greene*. See, for example, the passages in *The Repentance of Robert Greene* which use the cant language of thieves and cony-catchers, and the author's confession that he has 'exceeded all other' in theft and murder, which suggest that Mourton's life and repentance formed the original of *The Repentance of Robert Greene*. Moreover after decades of intensive research scholars have been unable to find the slightest trace in the historical records of Norwich of a Greene family which corresponds in any particular to the description given of Robert Greene's alleged family in *The Repentance of Robert Greene*, which suggests that the family background in Norwich described in *The Repentance of Robert Greene* may actually have been the family background of the cony-catcher Mourton. If this is in fact what occurred, all the biographical material concerning the writer Robert Greene contained in *The Repentance of Robert Greene* becomes, by definition, highly suspect. The modern spelling version of *The Repentance of Robert Greene* below was prepared from the University of Michigan microfilm of the copy of *The Repentance of Robert Greene* in the Bodleian Library.

## THE REPENTANCE OF ROBERT GREENE, MASTER OF ARTS

Wherein by himself is laid open his loose life, with the manner of his death

At London

Printed for Cuthbert Burbie, and are to be sold at the middle shop in the Poultry under  
Saint Mildred's Church

1592

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The printer to the gentlemen readers

Gentlemen, I know you are not unacquainted with the death of Robert Greene, whose pen in his lifetime pleased you as well on the stage as in the stationers' shops, and to speak truth, although his loose life was odious to God and offensive to men, yet forasmuch as at his last end he found it most grievous to himself (as appeareth by this, his repentant discourse), I doubt not but he shall for the same deserve favour both of God and men. And considering, gentlemen, that Venus hath her charms to enchant, that fancy is a sorceress bewitching the senses, and folly the only enemy to all virtuous actions, and forasmuch as the purest glass is the most brickle, the finest lawn the soonest stained, the highest oak most subject to the wind, and the quickest wit the more easily won to folly, I doubt not but you will with regard forget his follies, and like to the bee gather honey out of the good counsels of him who was wise, learned and politic had not his lascivious life withdrawn him from those studies which had been far more profitable to him.

For herein appeareth that he was a man given over to the lust of his own heart, forsaking all godliness, & one that daily delighted in all manner of wickedness. Since other therefore have forerun him in the like faults and have been forgiven both of God and men, I trust he shall be the better accepted that by the working of God's holy spirit returns with such a resolved repentance, being a thing acceptable to both God and men.

To conclude, forasmuch as I found this discourse very passionate and of wonderful effect to withdraw the wicked from their ungodly ways, I thought good to publish the same, and the rather for that by his repentance they may as in a glass see their own folly, and thereby in time resolve that it is better to die repentant than to live dishonest.

Yours, C.B.

To all the wanton youths of England, Robert Greene wisheth reformation of wilfulness

When I consider (kind countrymen) that youth is like to the spring-time of man's age, ready in the bloom to be nipped with every misfortune, and that a young man is like to a tender plant, apt to be wrested by nurture either to good or evil as his friends like good gardeners shall with care endeavour his education, seeing in the prime of our years vice is most ready to creep in, and that want of experience committeth sundry wanton desires, I thought good to lay before you a precedent of such prejudicial inconveniences which at the first seeming sweet unto youth, at the last grow into fruits of bitter repentance, for a young man led on by self-will (having the reins of liberty in his own hand) foreseeeth not the ruth of folly, but aimeth at present pleasures, for he gives himself up to delight, and thinketh everything good, honest, lawful and virtuous that fitteth for the content of his lascivious humour. He foreseeeth not that such as climb hastily fall suddenly, that bees have stings as well as honey, that vices have ill ends as well as sweet beginnings, and whereof grows this heedless life but of self-conceit, thinking the good counsel of age is dotage, that the advice of friends proceeds of envy and not of love, that when their fathers correct them for their faults they hate them, whereas when the black ox hath trod on their feet and the crow's foot is seen in their eyes, then touched with the feeling of their own folly they sigh out had-I-wist when repentance cometh too late. Or like as wax is ready to receive every new form that is stamped into it, so is youth apt to admit of every vice that is objected unto it, and in young years wanton desires is chiefly predominate, especially the two ringleaders of all other mischiefs, namely pride and whoredom; these are the sirens that with their enchanting melodies draw them on to utter confusion, for after a young man hath sucked in that sin of pride he groweth into contempt, and as he increaseth proud in his attire, so he is scornful in his looks, and disdains the wholesome admonition of his honest friends, whose advice he supposeth to be done of malice, and therefore esteemeth his own ways best, and had rather hazard his life than to lose an inch of his credit. Pride is like to fire, that will die and go out if it be not maintained with fuel, and yet lay on never so big logs, it consumes them all to ashes; so pride craves maintenance or else it will fade, and had a young man never so great revenues, pride at last will reduce it to beggar you [sic for 'beggary'?), for it is such a sin as once got into the bone, it will step into the flesh; he that once jetteth in his bravery, if he have no means to maintain it, it [sic for 'he'?) will leave no bad course of life unattempted but he will have corners to uphold his folly. Hereof grows cozenages, thefts, murders, and a thousand other petty mischiefs, and causes many proper persons to be trussed up at the gallows, purchasing thereby infamy to themselves, and heart-breaking sorrow to their friends and parents forever.

Companion to this vice is lust and lechery, which is the viper whose venom is incurable, and the only sin that in this life leadeth unto shame, and after death unto hell-fire, for he that giveth himself over to harlots selleth his soul to destruction, and maketh his body subject to all incurable diseases. These two vices do not only waste a man's substance, but also consumeth his body and soul, and maketh him attempt to do any mischief for his maintenance therein. If happily the young man hath any grace and is loath to take any unlawful ways, the ordinary course of his copesmates is straight to call him coward and cast him out of their favour, or else by sweet persuasions and flattering words make him

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forsake God and all good means of life whatsoever. This is the manner, life and course of such as will not listen to the grave advice of their parents, but seek thereby to bring their grey hairs with grief unto their graves.

This ensuing discourse, gentle reader, doth lay open the graceless endeavours of myself, who although I were for a long time given over to the lust of my own heart, yet in the end God's grace did so favourably work in me that I trust herein thou shalt perceive my true and unfeigned repentance. Accept it in good part, and if it may profit any, I have my desire.

Farewell, R.G.

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 The repentance of Robert Greene, Master of Arts

As there is no steel so stiff but the stamp will pierce, no flint so hard but the drops of rain will hollow, so there is no heart so void of grace or given over to wilful folly but the merciful favour of God can mollify. An instance of the like chanced to myself, being a man wholly addicted to all graceless endeavours, given from my youth to wantonness, brought up in riot, who as I grew in years, so I waxed more ripe in ungodliness, that I was the mirror of mischief and the very pattern of prejudicial actions, for I neither had care to take any good course of life nor yet to listen to the friendly persuasions of my parents. I seemed as one of no religion, but rather as a mere atheist, contemning the holy precepts uttered by any learned preacher. I would smile at such as would frequent the church or such place of godly exercise, and would scoff at any that would check me with any wholesome or good admonition, so that herein I seemed a mere reprobate, the child of Satan, one wiped out of the book of life, and as an outcast from the face and favour of God I was given over to drunkenness so that I lightly accounted of that company that would not entertain my inordinate quaffing. And to this beastly sin of gluttony I added that detestable vice of swearing, taking a felicity in blaspheming and profaning the name of God, confirming nothing idly but with such solemn oaths that it amazed even my companions to hear me. And that I might seem to heap one sin upon another, I was so rooted therein that whatsoever I got, I still consumed the same in drunkenness.

Living thus a long time, God (who suffereth sinners to heap coals of fire upon their own heads, and to be fed fat with sin against the day of vengeance) suffered me to go forward in my loose life. Many warnings I had to draw me from my detestable kind of life, and divers crosses to contrary my actions, but all in vain, for though I were sundry times afflicted with many foul and grievous diseases and thereby scourged with the rod of God's wrath, yet when by the great labour & friendship of sundry honest persons they had (though to their great charges) sought & procured my recovery, I did with the dog *redire in vomitum*, I went again with the sow to wallow in the mire, and fell to my former follies as frankly as if I had not tasted any jot of want, or never been scourged for them. *Consuetudo peccandi tollit sensum peccati*, my daily custom in sin had clean taken away the feeling of my sin, for I was so given to these vices aforesaid that I counted them rather venial scapes & faults of nature than any great and grievous offence, neither did I care for death, but held it only as the end of life. For coming one day into Aldersgate Street to a well-willer's house of mine, he with other of his friends persuaded me to leave my bad course of life which at length would bring me to utter destruction, whereupon I scoffingly made them this answer. *Tush, what better is he that dies in his bed than he that ends his life at Tyburn? All owe God a death. If I may have my desire while I live, I am satisfied; let me shift after death as I may.* My friends, hearing these words, greatly grieved at my graceless resolution, made this reply: *If you fear not death in this world, nor the pains of the body in this life, yet doubt the second death & the loss of your soul, which without hearty repentance must rest in hell-fire for ever and ever.*

*Hell, quoth I, what talk you of hell to me? I know if I once come there I shall have the company of better men than myself. I shall also meet with some mad knaves in that place, & so long as I shall not sit there alone, my care is the less. But you are mad folks,*

quoth I, *for if I feared the judges of the bench no more than I dread the judgments of God, I would before I slept dive into one carl's bags or other and make merry with the shells I found in them so long as they would last.* And though some in this company were friars of mine own fraternity to whom I spake the words, yet were they so amazed at my profane speeches that they wished themselves forth of my company. Whereby appeareth that my continual delight was in sin, and that I made myself drunk with the dregs of mischief.

But being departed thence unto my lodging, and now grown to the full, I was checked by the mighty hand of God, for sickness (the messenger of death) attached me, and told me my time was but short and that I had not long to live, whereupon I was vexed in mind and grew very heavy. As thus I sat solemnly thinking of my end and feeling myself wax sicker and sicker, I fell into a great passion and was wonderfully perplexed, yet no way discovered my agony, but sat still calling to mind the lewdness of my former life, at what time suddenly taking the *Book Of Resolution* in my hand I light upon a chapter therein which discovered unto me the miserable state of the reprobate, what hell was, what the worm of conscience was, what torments there was appointed for the damned souls, what unspeakable miseries, what unquenchable flames, what intolerable agonies, what incomprehensible griefs, that there was nothing but fear, horror, vexation of mind, deprivation from the sight and favour of God, weeping and gnashing of teeth, and that all those tortures were not terminated or dated within any compass of years, but everlasting, world without end, concluding all in this of the Psalms: *Ab inferis nulla est redemptio.*

After that I had with deep consideration pondered upon these points, such a terror struck into my conscience that for very anguish of mind my teeth did beat in my head, my looks waxed pale and wan, and fetching a great sigh I cried unto God and said: If all this be true, oh what shall become of me? If the reward of sin be death and hell, how many deaths and hells do I deserve that have been a most miserable sinner? If damnation be the meed for wickedness, then am I damned, for in all the world there never lived a man of worsen life. Oh what shall I do? I cannot call to God for mercy, for my faults are beyond the compass of his favour. The punishment of the body hath an end by death, but the pains of the soul by death are made everlasting. Then what a miserable case am I in if I die, yet if my death might redeem my offences & wash away my sins, oh might I suffer every day twenty deaths while seven years lasteth, it were nothing, but when I shall end a contempt to the world I shall enjoy the disdain of men, the displeasure of God, & my soul (that immortal creature) shall everlastingly be damned. Oh, woe is me, why do I live, nay rather, why was I born? Cursed be the day wherein I was born, and hapless be the breasts that gave me suck. Why did God create me to be a vessel of wrath? Why did he breathe life into me thus to make me a lost sheep? Oh, I feel a hell already in my conscience. The number of my sins do muster before my eyes, the poor men's plaints that I have wronged cries out in mine ears and saith: *Robin Greene, thou art damned.* Nay, the justice of God tells me I cannot be saved. Now I do remember (though too late) that I have read in the scriptures how neither adulterers, swearers, thieves nor murderers shall inherit the kingdom of heaven. What hope then can I have of any grace when (given over from all grace) I exceeded all other in these kind of sins? If thus upon earth and alive I feel a hell, oh what a thing is that hell where my soul shall everlastingly live in torments.

I am taught by the scripture to pray, but to whom should I pray? To him that I have blasphemed, to him that I have contemned and despised, whose name I have taken in vain? No, no, I am in a hell. Oh that my last gasp were come, that I might be with Judas or Cain, for their place is better than mine, or that I might have power with these hands to unloose my soul from this wretched carcass that hath imprisoned so many wicked villainies within it. Oh I have sinned, not against the Father, nor against the Son, but against the Holy Ghost, for I presumed upon grace, and when the spirit of God cried in my mind & thought, and said, drunkenness is a vice, whoredom is a vice, I carelessly (in contempt) resisted this motion, and as it were in a bravery committed these sins with greediness. Oh now I shall cry with Dives to have one drop of water for my tongue, but shall not be heard; I have sinned against my own soul, and therefore shall be cast into utter darkness, and further I shall not come till I have paid the uttermost farthing, which I shall never be able to satisfy. Oh happy are you that feel the sparks of God's favour in your hearts, happy are you that have hope in the passion of Christ, happy are you that believe that God died for you, happy are you that can pray. Oh why doth not God show the like mercy unto me? The reason is, because in all my life I never did any good. I always gloried in sin and despised them that embraced virtue. God is just, and cannot pardon my offences, and therefore I would I were out of this earthly hell so I were in that second hell, that my soul might suffer torments, for now I am vexed in both soul and body.

In this despairing humour searching further into the said *Book Of Resolution*, I found a place that greatly did comfort me, & laid before me the promises of God's mercy, showing me that although the justice of God was great to punish sinners, yet his mercy did exceed his works, and though my faults were as red as scarlet, yet washed with his blood they should be made as white as snow. Therein was laid before mine eyes that David (who was called a man after his own heart) did both commit adultery and sealed it with murder, yet when he did repent, God heard him and admitted him to his favour. Therein was laid before me the obstinate sin of Peter, that not only denied his master Christ, but also forswore himself, yet so soon as he shed tears and did heartily repent him, his offences were pardoned. Therein was laid open the thief that had lived licentiously, and had scarce in all his life done one good deed, and yet he was saved by hope in the mercies of God. Therein was also laid open how the severity of the law was mitigated with the sweet and comfortable promises of the gospel, insomuch that I began to be somewhat pacified & a little quieted in mind, taking great joy and comfort in the pithy persuasions and promises of God's mercy alleged in that book. And yet I was not presently resolved in my conscience that God would deal so favourably with me, for that still the multitude of my sins presented me with his justice, and would therefore reason thus with myself: why, those men (before-mentioned) were elected and predestinated to be chosen vessels of God's glory, & therefore though they did fall, yet they rose again, & did show it in time with some other fruits of their election, but contrariwise I (the most wicked of all men) was even brought up from my swaddling-clouts in wickedness, my infancy was sin, & my riper age increased in wickedness. I took no pleasure but in ill, neither was my mind set upon anything but upon the spoil; then seeing all my life was led in lewdness, and I never but once felt any remorse of conscience, how can God pardon me, that repent rather for fear than for love? Yet calling unto mind the words of Esay,

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that at what time soever a sinner doth repent him from the bottom of his heart, the Lord would wipe away all his wickedness out of his remembrance.

Thus being at a battle between the spirit and the flesh, I began to feel a greater comfort in my mind, so that I did [+with] tears confess and acknowledge that although I was a most miserable sinner, yet the anguish that Christ suffered on the cross was able to purge and cleanse me from all my offences, so that taking hold with faith upon the promises of the gospel I waxed strong in spirit, and became able to resist and withstand all the desperate attempts that Satan had given before to my weak and feeble conscience. When thus I had considerably thought on the wretchedness of my life, and therewithal looked into the uncertainty of death, I thought good to write a short discourse of [-my] the same, which I have joined to this treatise, containing as followeth.

### The life and death of Robert Greene, Master of Arts

I need not make long discourse of my parents, who for their gravity and honest life is well known and esteemed amongst their neighbours, namely in the city of Norwich where I was bred and born. But as out of one selfsame clod of clay there sprouts both stinking weeds and delightful flowers, so from honest parents often grow most dishonest children, for my father had care to have me in my nonage brought up at school that I might through the study of good letters grow to be a friend to myself, a profitable member to the commonwealth, and a comfort to him in his age. But as early pricks the tree that will prove a thorn, so even in my first years I began to follow the filthiness of mine own desires, and neither to listen to the wholesome advertisements of my parents nor be ruled by the careful correction of my master. For being at the University of Cambridge, I light amongst wags as lewd as myself with whom I consumed the flower of my youth, who drew me to travel into Italy and Spain, in which places I saw and practised such villainy as is abominable to declare. Thus by their counsel I sought to furnish myself with coin, which I procured by cunning sleights from my father and my friends, and my mother pampered me so long and secretly helped me to the oil of angels that I grew thereby prone to all mischief, so that being then conversant with notable braggarts, boon companions, and ordinary spendthrifts that practised sundry superficial studies, I became as a scion grafted into the same stock, whereby I did absolutely participate of their nature and qualities. At my return into England I ruffled out in my silks in the habit of malcontent, and seemed so discontent that no place would please me to abide in, nor no vocation cause me to stay myself in, but after I had by degrees proceeded Master of Arts, I left the university, and away to London, where (after I had continued some short time, and driven myself out of credit with sundry of my friends), I became an author of plays and a penner of love pamphlets, so that I soon grew famous in that quality that who for that trade grown so ordinary about London as Robin Greene? Young yet in years, though old in wickedness, I began to resolve that there was nothing bad that was profitable, whereupon I grew so rooted in all mischief that I had as great a delight in wickedness as sundry hath in godliness, and as much felicity I took in villainy as others had in honesty.

Thus was the liberty I got in my youth the cause of my licentious living in my age, and, being the first step to hell, I find it now the first let from heaven.

But I would wish all my native countrymen that read this my repentance, first to fear God in their whole life, which I never did; secondly, to obey their parents and to listen unto the wholesome counsel of their elders. So shall their days be multiplied upon them here on earth, and inherit the crown of glory in the kingdom of heaven. I exhort them also to leave the company of lewd and ill-livers, for conversing with such copesmates draws them into sundry dangerous inconveniences, nor let them haunt the company of harlots, whose throats are as smooth as oil, but their feet lead the steps unto death and destruction, for they, like sirens with their sweet enchanting notes, soothed me up in all kind of ungodliness.

Oh take heed of harlots (I wish you, the unbridled youth of England), for they are the basilisks that kill with their eyes; they are the sirens that allure with their sweet looks, and they lead their favourers unto their destruction as a sheep is led unto the slaughter.

From whoredom I grew to drunkenness, from drunkenness to swearing and blaspheming the name of God; hereof grew quarrels, frays, and continual controversies which are now as worms in my conscience gnawing me incessantly. And did I not through hearty repentance take hold of God's mercies, even these detestable sins would drench me down into the damnable pit of destruction, for *Stipendium peccati mors*.

Oh know (good countrymen) that the horrible sins and intolerable blasphemy I have used against the majesty of God is a block in my conscience, and that so heavy that there were no way with me but desperation if the hope of Christ's death and passion did not help to ease me of so intolerable and heavy a burden.

I have long with the deaf adder stopped mine ears against the voice of God's ministers, yea, my heart was hardened with Pharaoh against all the motions that the spirit of God did at any time work in my mind to turn me from my detestable kind of living.

Yet let me confess a truth, that even once, and yet but once, I felt a fear and horror in my conscience, & then the terror of God's judgments did manifestly teach me that my life was bad, that by sin I deserved damnation, and that such was the greatness of my sin that I deserved no redemption. And this inward motion I received in Saint Andrew's church in the city of Norwich at a lecture or sermon then preached by a godly learned man whose doctrine and the manner of whose teaching I liked wonderfully well; yea (in my conscience) such was his singleness of heart and zeal in his doctrine that he might have converted the most monster of the world.

Well at that time, whosoever was worst, I knew myself as bad as he, for being new come from Italy (where I learned all the villainy under the heavens) I was drowned in pride, whoredom was my daily exercise, and gluttony with drunkenness was my only delight.

At this sermon the terror of God's judgments did manifestly teach me that my exercises were damnable, and that I should be wiped out of the book of life if I did not speedily repent my looseness of life and reform my misdemeanours.

At this sermon the said learned man (who doubtless was the child of God) did beat down sin in such pithy and persuasive manner that I began to call unto mind the danger of my soul and the prejudice that at length would befall me for those gross sins which with greediness I daily committed, insomuch as sighing I said in myself: *Lord have mercy upon me, and send me grace to amend and become a new man.*

But this good motion lasted not long in me, for no sooner had I met with my copesmates, but seeing me in such a solemn humour they demanded the cause of my sadness, to whom when I had discovered that I sorrowed for my wickedness of life and that the preacher's words had taken a deep impression on my conscience, they fell upon me in jesting manner, calling me puritan and precisian, and wished I might have a pulpit, with such other scoffing terms that by their foolish persuasion the good and wholesome lesson I had learned went quite out of my remembrance, so that I fell again with the dog to my old vomit and put my wicked life in practice, and that so thoroughly as ever I did before.

Thus although God sent his holy spirit to call me, and though I heard him, yet I regarded it no longer than the present time, when suddenly forsaking it, I went forward obstinately in my miss. Nevertheless soon after I married a gentleman's daughter of good account with whom I lived for awhile, but forasmuch as she would persuade me from my wilful wickdness, after I had a child by her, I cast her off, having spent up the marriage money which I obtained by her.

Then left I her at six or seven, who went into Lincolnshire, and I to London, where in short space I fell into favour with such as were of honourable and good calling. But here note that though I knew how to get a friend, yet I had not the gift or reason how to keep a friend, for he that was my dearest friend, I would be sure so to behave myself towards him that he should ever after profess to be my utter enemy, or else vow never after to come in my company.

Thus my misdemeanours (too many to be recited) caused the most part of those so much to despise me that in the end I became friendless, except it were in a few ale-houses, who commonly for my inordinate expenses would make much of me until I were on the score far more than ever I meant to pay by twenty nobles thick. After I had wholly betaken me to the penning of plays (which was my continual exercise) I was so far from calling upon God that I seldom thought on God, but took such delight in swearing and blaspheming the name of God that none could think otherwise of me than that I was the child of perdition.

These vanities and other trifling pamphlets I penned of love and vain fantasies was my chiefest stay of living, and for those my vain discourses I was beloved of the more vainer sort of people, who being my continual companions came still to my lodging, and there would continue quaffing, carousing and surfeiting with me all the day long.

But I thank God that he put it in my head to lay open the most horrible cozenages of the common cony-catchers, cozeners and crossbiters which I have indifferently handled in those my several discourses already imprinted. And my trust is that those discourses will do great good, and be very beneficial to the commonwealth of England.

But oh, my dear wife, whose company and sight I have refrained these six years, I ask God and thee forgiveness for so greatly wronging thee, of whom I seldom or never thought until now. Pardon me (I pray thee) wheresoever thou art, and God forgive me all my offences.

And now to you all that live and revel in such wickedness as I have done, to you I write, and in God's name wish you to look to yourselves, and to reform yourselves for the safeguard of your own souls. Dissemble not with God, but seek grace at his hands; he hath promised it, and he will perform it.

God doth sundry times defer his punishment unto those that run a wicked race, but *Quid defertur non aufertur*, that which is deferred is not quitted; a day of reckoning will come when the Lord will say: *Come give account of thy stewardship*. What God determineth, man cannot prevent. He that binds two sins together cannot go unpunished in the one; so long the pot goeth to the pit that at last it comes broken home.

Therefore (all my good friends) hope not in money, nor in friends, in favours, in kindred; they are all uncertain, and they are furthest off when men think them most nigh. Oh were I now to begin the flower of my youth, were I now in the prime of my years, how far would I be from my former follies, what a reformed course of life would I take, but it is too late; only now the comfortable mercies of the Lord is left me to hope in.

It is bootless for me to make any long discourse to such as are graceless as I have been; all wholesome warnings are odious unto them, for they with the spider suck poison out of the most precious flowers, & to such as God hath in his secret counsel elected, few words will suffice. But howsoever my life hath been, let my repentant end be a general example to all the youth in England to obey their parents, to fly whoredom, drunkenness, swearing, blaspheming, contempt of the word, and such grievous and gross sins, lest they bring their parents' heads with sorrow to their graves, and lest (with me) they be a blemish to their kindred, and to their posterity forever.

Thus may you see how God hath secret to himself the times of calling, and when he will have them into his vineyard, some he calls in the morning, some at noon, and some in the evening, and yet hath the last his wages as well as the first, for as his judgments are inscrutable, so are his mercies incomprehensible. And therefore let all men learn these two lessons, not to despair, because God may work in them through his spirit at the last hour, nor to presume, lest God give them over for their presumption, and deny them repentance, and so they die impenitent, which *finalis impenitentia* is a manifest sin against the Holy Ghost.

To this doth that golden sentence of St. Augustine allude which he speaketh of the thief hanging on the cross: *There was (saith he) one thief saved and no more, therefore presume not, and there was one saved, and therefore despair not.* And to conclude, take these caveats hereafter following:

Certain caveats sent by Robert Greene to a friend of his (as a farewell), written with his own hand

1. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; therefore serve God lest he suffer thee to be led into temptation.
2. Despise neither his word nor his minister, for he that heareth not can have no faith, & without faith no man can be saved.
3. Obey the prince, for he that lifteth his hand against the Lord's anointed shall be like unto a withered plant.
4. Despise not the counsel of thy father nor the wholesome admonition of thy mother, for he that listeneth not to their lessons shall be cut off in his youth.
5. Spend the prime of thy years in virtue; so dost thou lay an earnest-penny of honourable age.
6. Fly the sweetness of the grape, for a man that is given to much wine shall never be rich.
7. Take not the name of God in vain, for then thou shalt not [sic?] be guiltless, nor shall the curse of God come near thy house.
8. A man that delights in harlots shall heap sin upon his soul; he shall be an open shame in the streets, and his place shall not be known.
9. He that robbeth from his neighbour purchaseth discredit to himself and his kindred, and he shall not go to his grave with honour.
10. Who meddleth with pitch shall be defiled, and he that eateth the bread of robbers fatteneth himself against the day of vengeance.
11. Give not thy youth over to the devil, neither vow the dregs of thy old age unto God, for a repentant mind cometh from God.
12. Remember thy end, and thou shalt never do amiss, and let the law of the Lord be a lantern to thy feet; so shall thy paths be aright, and thou die with honour.

Robert Greene

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The manner of the death and last end of Robert Greene, Master of Arts

After that he had penned the former discourse (then lying sore sick of a surfeit which he had taken with drinking), he continued most patient and penitent, yea, he did with tears forsake the world, renounced swearing, and desired forgiveness of God and the world for all his offences, so that during all the time of his sickness (which was about a month's space) he was never heard to swear, rave or blaspheme the name of God as he was accustomed to do before that time, which greatly comforted his well-willers, to see how mightily the grace of God did work in him.

He confessed himself that he was never heart-sick, but said that all his pain was in his belly. And although he continually scoured, yet still his belly swelled, and never left swelling upward until it swelled him at the heart and in his face.

During the whole time of his sickness he continually called upon God, and recited these sentences following:

*O Lord, forgive me my manifold offences.*

*O Lord, have mercy upon me.*

*O Lord, forgive me my secret sins, and in thy mercy, Lord, pardon them all.*

*Thy mercy, O Lord, is above thy works.*

And with suchlike godly sentences he passed the time, even till he gave up the ghost.

And this is to be noted, that his sickness did not so greatly weaken him but that he walked to his chair & back again the night before he departed, and then (being feeble) laying him down on his bed, about nine of the clock at night a friend of his told him that his wife had sent him commendations, and that she was in good health, whereat he greatly rejoiced, confessed that he had mightily wronged her, and wished that he might see her before he departed. Whereupon (feeling his time was but short) he took pen and ink, & wrote her a letter to this effect:

*Sweet wife, as ever there was any goodwill or friendship between thee and me, see this bearer (my host) satisfied of his debt; I owe him ten pound, and but for him I had perished in the streets. Forget and forgive my wrongs done unto thee, and Almighty God have mercy on my soul. Farewell till we meet in heaven, for on earth thou shalt never see me more.*

*This 2 of September, 1592.*

*Written by thy dying husband,*

*Robert Greene*

## Greene's prayer in the time of his sickness

O Lord Jesus Christ my Saviour and Redeemer, I humbly beseech thee to look down from heaven upon me, thy servant, that am grieved with thy spirit, that I may patiently endure to the end thy rod of chastisement, and forasmuch as thou art Lord of life and death, as also of strength, health, age, weakness, and sickness, I do therefore wholly submit myself unto thee to be dealt withal according to thy holy will and pleasure, and seeing, O merciful Jesu, that my sins are innumerable like unto the sands of the sea, and that I have so often offended thee that I have worthily deserved death and utter damnation, I humbly pray thee to deal with me according to thy gracious mercy, and not agreeable to my wicked deserts. And grant that I may, O Lord, through thy spirit with patience suffer and bear this cross which thou hast worthily laid upon me, notwithstanding how grievous soever the burden thereof be, that my faith may be found laudable and glorious in thy sight to the increase of thy glory & my everlasting felicity. For even thou, O Lord, most sweet Saviour, didst first suffer pain before thou wert crucified; since therefore, O meek Lamb of God, that my way to eternal joy is to suffer with thee worldly grievances, grant that I may be made like unto thee by suffering patiently adversity, trouble and sickness. And lastly, forasmuch as the multitude of thy mercies doth put away the sins of those which truly repent, so as thou remembreth them no more, open the eye of thy mercy and behold me a most miserable and wretched sinner, who for the same doth most earnestly desire pardon and forgiveness. Renew, O Lord, in me whatsoever hath been decayed by the fraudulent malice of Satan or my own carnal wilfulness; receive me, O Lord, into thy favour, consider of my contrition, and gather up my tears into thy heavenly habitation, and seeing, O Lord, my whole trust and confidence is only in thy mercy, blot out my offences and tread them underfeet, so as they may not be a witness against me at the day of wrath. Grant this, O Lord, I humbly beseech thee, for thy mercy's sake. Amen.

FINIS