

**MOTHER BUNCH'S CLOSET  
NEWLY BROKE OPEN, AND  
THE HISTORY OF MOTHER  
BUNCH OF THE WEST**

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Mother Bunch's Closet Newly Broke Open, and the History of Mother Bunch of the West by  
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**GEORGE LAURENCE GOMME**

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*Chap-Books*  
and  
*Folk-Lore Tracts.*

*Edited by*

*G. L. Gomme, F.S.A.*

and

*H. B. Wheatley, F.S.A.*

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*First Series.*

**III.**

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MOTHER BUNCH'S CLOSET  
NEWLY BROKE OPEN, [1665]  
AND THE  
HISTORY OF MOTHER BUNCH OF  
THE WEST. [1736?]

PRINTED FROM  
THE EARLIEST EXTANT COPIES,  
AND EDITED, WITH AN INTRODUCTION,

BY

GEORGE LAURENCE GOMME, F.S.A.

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## Introduction.

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This chap-book is not a story. It is a collection of charms and dreams supposed to have been communicated by a personage bearing the name of Mother Bunch, a name unhistorical and, so far as I have been able to ascertain, unknown to any other department of literature.

The edition here printed is made up of two distinct parts. The first part is the oldest, and at one time the only portion extant. This is reprinted from the copy in the Pepsyan Library at Cambridge, dated 1685. The second part is printed from the copy in the British Museum library, and dated by the authorities there 1780, this being the earliest version I have been able to find.

From the wording of its title, "Mother Bunch's Closet Newly Broke Open," there is evidence of the first part being a continuation of a chap-book already issued upon the same subject. For this we must refer to a jest-book first published in 1604, the title of which runs as follows: *Pasquill's Jestes, mixed with Mother Bunche's Merriments*. . . . This book is a well-known collection of jests of a rather broad nature, and



its style of composition lent itself to a continuation such as we have in the chap-book now under consideration. There is no other connection between the two publications than the title.\*

The later editions of this chap-book differ considerably from that of 1685 in the Pepsyan Collection. Almost every page varies, and that too in no inconsiderable manner. It is not perhaps necessary to point out all the variations because they are not of great literary or historical interest, but it may be well to indicate the chief differences. The 1685 edition, as here printed, contains two parts. These in later editions are amalgamated, and the title on page 10, "The second part of Mother Bunch, who lived at Bonny Venter in the West," does not therefore appear. As a specimen of the later editions, the following is the opening passages of the 1780 edition, and other pages are similarly altered :

"Mother Bunch's Cabinet Broke Open.

"Reading over many ancient histories, it was my chance to meet with a story of an old woman who lived in the west country, who took delight in studying her fortune; when she found herself full twenty years old, she thought her luck worse than some who were married at fifteen or sixteen, which

\* *Pasquil's Jest* will be reprinted in one of the series of the present collection. Hazlitt's *Handbook to Popular Literature* says there are editions in 1604, 1609, 1629, 1635, 1650 and 1669. Mr. Hazlitt has reprinted it in the third series of his *Old English Jest Books*, 1864.

much troubled her mind; but to prevent all doubts she resolved to try a story she had often heard her mother talk of, and, finding it true, she resolved to teach other wonders.

“On a time this old woman, having newly buried her husband, was taking a walk in the fields for the benefit of the air, sometimes thinking of the loss of her husbands, for she had had three, yet had a great desire for the fourth. So it happened as she was walking alone she espied a young maid by a meadow side. Good morrow, maid, said the old woman; how do you do? are not you well? Yes, mother, I am very well, but somewhat troubled in mind.”

The paragraph on page 20 is entirely left out in the later editions, and the following addition is made :

Now Mother Bunch's store exhaust,  
She sits her down to spin;  
Then studies how she soon may make  
Her Second Part begin.

Which now is finished and sold  
Where you have had the First,  
'Twill make you wise, also to laugh,  
Untill your sides do burst.

These are all the points of difference which it will be necessary to note between the 1685 edition, now reprinted, and those that appeared later in conjunction with the new second part.

The woodcuts in these chap-books are of the rudest description, and they did not appear worth reproducing. Mr. Ashton, in his *Chap-books of the Eighteenth Century*, pp. 84-87, has given three woodcuts from the second part of the 1780 edition, and the following lines, which, together with the funeral picture, make the finish of the book. These lines are not printed on our last page :

Then all her Art at length could not her save,  
From death's dire stroke, and mould'ring in the grave.

We will now discuss the special importance of Mother Bunch's collection of dreams and prognostications. It is well known that these subjects form a not unimportant branch of folk-lore, and it is therefore interesting to find that through the medium of this seventeenth-century chap-book we have preserved to us some scraps of folk-lore which are of value. They for the most part group themselves round certain days in the calendar, and it will therefore perhaps be best to adopt this arrangement for our consideration of them. Thus we have St. Agnes' Day (21 Jan.), Valentine's Day (14 Feb.), 20th April, Midsummer Eve (24 June), St. Luke's Day (Oct. 18), St. Thomas's Day (Dec. 21). Almost all the customs recorded by Mother Bunch on these days are incorporated by Sir Henry Ellis in his edition of Brand's *Popular Antiquities*; but their original value is ascertained by the independent practice of the self-same customs in many parts of England, as noted by authorities who did not know Mother