

Austin Dobson (1840-1921)

1 *The Ballad of "Beau Brocade"*

"Hark! I hear the sound of coaches!"

Beggar's Opera

Seventeen hundred and thirty-nine: —
That was the date of this tale of mine.

First great GEORGE was buried and gone;
GEORGE the Second was plodding on.

LONDON then, as the "Guides" aver, 5
Shared its glories with *Westminster*;

And people of rank, to correct their "tone,"
Went out of town to *Marybone*.

Those were the days of the War with *Spain*, 10
PORTO-BELLO would soon be ta'en;

WHITEFIELD preached to the colliers grim,
Bishops in lawn sleeves preached at him;

WALPOLE talked of "a man and his price";
Nobody's virtue was over-nice: —

Those, in fine, were the brave days when 15
Coaches were stopped by . . . *Highwaymen!*

And of all the knights of the gentle trade
Nobody bolder than "BEAU BROCADE."

This they knew on the whole way down;
Best, — maybe, — at the "*Oak and Crown*." 20

(For timorous cits on their pilgrimage
Would "club" for a "Guard" to ride the stage;

And the Guard that rode on more than one
Was the Host of this hostel's sister's son.)

Open we here on a March-day fine, 25
Under the oak with the hanging sign.

There was Barber DICK with his basin by;
Cobbler JOE with the patch on his eye;

Portly product of Beef and Beer,
JOHN the host, he was standing near. 30

Straining and creaking, with wheels awry,
Lumbering came the "*Plymouth Fly*"; —

Lumbering up from *Bagshot Heath*,
Guard in the basket armed to the teeth;

Passengers heavily armed inside; 35
Not the less surely the coach had been tried!

Tried! — but a couple of miles away,
By a well-dressed man! — in the open day!

Tried successfully, never a doubt, —
Pockets of passengers all turned out! 40

Cloak-bags rifled, and cushions ripped, —
Even an Ensign's wallet stripped!

Even a Methodist hosier's wife
Offered the choice of her Money or Life!

Highwayman's manners no less polite, 45
Hoped that their coppers (returned) were right; —

Sorry to find the company poor,
Hoped next time they 'd travel with more; —

Plucked them all at his ease, in short: —
Such was the "*Plymouth Fly's*" report. 50

Sympathy! horror! and wonderment!
“Catch the Villain!” (But Nobody went.)

Hosier’s wife led into the Bar;
(That ’s where the best strong waters are!)

Followed the tale of the hundred-and-one 55
Things that Somebody ought to have done.

Ensign (of BRAGG’s) made a terrible clangour:
But for the Ladies had drawn his hanger!

Robber, of course, was “BEAU BROCADE”;
Out-spoke DOLLY the Chambermaid. 60

Devonshire DOLLY, plump and red,
Spoke from the gallery overhead; —

Spoke it out boldly, staring hard: —
“Why did n’t you shoot then, GEORGE the Guard?”

Spoke it out bolder, seeing him mute: — 65
“GEORGE the Guard, why did n’t you shoot?”

Portly JOHN grew pale and red,
(JOHN was afraid of her, people said:)

Gasped that “DOLLY was surely cracked,” 70
(JOHN was afraid of her — that ’s a fact!)

GEORGE the Guard grew red and pale,
Slowly finished his quart of ale: —

“Shoot? Why — Rabbit him! — did n’t he shoot?”
Muttered — “The Baggage was far too ’cute!”

“Shoot? Why he ’d flashed the pan in his eye!” 75
Muttered — “She ’d pay for it by and by!”
Further than this made no reply.

Nor could a further reply be made,
For GEORGE was in league with "BEAU BROCADE"!

And JOHN the Host, in his wakefullest state, 80
Was not — on the whole — immaculate.

But nobody's virtue was over-nice
When WALPOLE talked of "a man and his price";

And wherever Purity found abode,
'Twas certainly *not* on a posting road. 85

II.

"Forty" followed to "Thirty-nine."
Glorious days of the *Hanover* line!

Princes were born, and drums were banged;
Now and then batches of Highwaymen hanged.

"Glorious news!" — from the *Spanish Main*;
PORTO-BELLO at last was ta'en. 90

"Glorious news!" — for the liquor trade;
Nobody dreamed of "BEAU BROCADE."

People were thinking of *Spanish Crowns*;
Money was coming from seaport towns! 95

Nobody dreamed of "BEAU BROCADE,"
(Only DOLLY the Chambermaid!)

Blessings on VERNON! Fill up the cans;
Money was coming in "*Flys*" and "*Vans*."

Possibly, JOHN the Host had heard; 100
Also, certainly, GEORGE the Guard.

And DOLLY had possibly tidings, too,
That made her rise from her bed anew,

Plump as ever, but stern of eye,

With a fixed intention to warn the “*Fly*.” 105

Lingering only at JOHN his door,
Just to make sure of a jerky snore;

Saddling the gray mare, *Dumpling Star*;
Fetching the pistol out of the bar;

(The old horse-pistol that, they say, 110
Came from the battle of *Malplaquet*;))

Loading with powder that maids would use,
Even in “Forty,” to clear the flues;

And a couple of silver buttons, the Squire 115
Gave her, away in *Devonshire*.

These she wadded — for want of better —
With the B — SH — P of L — ND — N’s “Pastoral Letter”;

Looked to the flint, and hung the whole,
Ready to use, at her pocket-hole.

Thus equipped and accoutred, DOLLY 120
Clattered away to “*Exciseman’s Folly*”; —

Such was the name of a ruined abode,
Just on the edge of the *London* road.

Thence she thought she might safely try,
As soon as she saw it, to warn the “*Fly*.” 125

But, as chance fell out, her rein she drew,
As the BEAU came cantering into the view.

By the light of the moon she could see him drest
In his famous gold-sprigged tambour vest;

And under his silver-gray surtout, 130
The laced, historical coat of blue,

That he wore when he went to *London-Spaw*,
And robbed Sir MUNGO MUCKLETHRAW.

Out-spoke DOLLY the Chambermaid,
(Trembling a little, but not afraid,) 135
“Stand and Deliver, O ‘BEAU BROCADE!’”

But the BEAU rode nearer, and would not speak,
For he saw by the moonlight a rosy cheek;

And a spavined mare with a rusty hide;
And a girl with her hand at her pocket-side. 140

So never a word he spoke as yet,
For he thought ’twas a freak of MEG or BET; —
A freak of the “*Rose*” or the “*Rummer*” set.

Out-spoke DOLLY the Chambermaid,
(Tremulous now, and sore afraid,) 145
“Stand and Deliver, O ‘BEAU BROCADE!’” —

Firing then, out of sheer alarm,
Hit the BEAU in the bridle-arm.

Button the first went none knows where,
But it carried away his *solitaire*; 150

Button the second a circuit made,
Glanced in under the shoulder blade; —
Down from the saddle fell “BEAU BROCADE”!

Down from the saddle and never stirred! —
DOLLY grew white as a *Windsor* curd. 155

Slipped not less from the mare, and bound
Strips of her kirtle about his wound.

Then, lest his Worship should rise and flee,
Fettered his ankles — tenderly.

Jumped on his chestnut, BET the fleet 160

(Called after BET of *Portugal Street*);

Came like the wind to the old Inn-door; —
Roused fat JOHN from a three-fold snore; —

Vowed she 'd 'peach if he misbehaved . . .
Briefly, the "*Plymouth Fly*" was saved! 165

Staines and *Windsor* were all on fire: —
DOLLY was wed to a *Yorkshire* squire;
Went to Town at the K — G's desire!

But whether His M — J — STY saw her or not,
HOGARTH jotted her down on the spot; 170

And something of DOLLY one still may trace
In the fresh contours of his "*Milkmaid's*" face.

GEORGE the Guard fled over the sea:
JOHN had a fit — of perplexity;

Turned King's evidence, sad to state; — 175
But JOHN was never immaculate.

As for the BEAU, he was duly tried,
When his wound was healed, at *Whitsuntide*;

Served — for a day — as the last of "sights,"
To the world of *St. James's-Street* and "*White's*", 180

Went on his way to TYBURN TREE,
With a pomp befitting his high degree.

Every privilege rank confers: —
Bouquet of pinks at *St. Sepulchre's*;

Flagon of ale at *Holborn Bar*; 185
Friends (in mourning) to follow his Car —
("t" is omitted where HEROES are!)

Every one knows the speech he made;

Swore that he “rather admired the Jade!” —

Waved to the crowd with his gold-laced hat; 190
Talked to the Chaplain after that;

Turned to the Topsman undismayed . . .
This was the finish of “BEAU BROCADE”!

*And this is the Ballad that seemed to hide
In the leaves of a dusty “LONDONER’S GUIDE”;* 195

*“Humbly Inscrib’d” (with curls and tails)
By the Author to FREDERICK, Prince of WALES: —*

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1876

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