Richard Garnett (1835-1906)

1 The Highwayman's Ghost

Twelve o'clock — a misty night — Glimpsing hints of buried light — Six years strung in an iron chain — Time I stood on the ground again!

So — by your leave! Slip, easy enough, Withered wrists from the rusty cuff. The old chain rattles, the old wood groans, O the clatter of clacking bones!

Here I am, uncoated, unhatted, Shirt all mildewed, hair all matted, Sockets that each have royally Fed the crow with a precious eye.

O for slashing Bess the brown! Where, old lass, have they earthed thee down? Sobb'st beneath a carrier's thong? Strain'st a coalman's cart along?

Shame to foot it! — must be so. See, the mists are smitten below; Over the moorland, wide away, Moonshine pours her watery day.

There the long white-dusted track, There a crawling speck of black. The Northern mail, ha, ha! and he There on the box is Anthony.

Coachman I scared him from brown to grey, Witness he lied my blood away. Haste, Fred! haste, boy! never fail! Now or never! catch the mail! 25

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The horses plunge, and sweating stop. Dead falls Tony, neck and crop. Nay, good guard, small profit thus, Shooting ghosts with a blunderbuss!

Crash wheel! coach over! How it rains Hampers, ladies, wigs, and canes! O the spoil! to sack it and lock it! But, woe is me, I have never a pocket!

(From *Poems*. London, 1893)

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