

Matthew Prior (1664-1721)

3 *The Thief and the Cordelier, a Ballad*

To the Tune of King John and the Abbot of Canterbury.

- 1 Who has e'er been at Paris must needs know the Greve,
The fatal retreat of th' unfortunate brave;
Where honour and justice most oddly contribute,
To ease heroes' pains by a halter and gibbet;
Derry down, down, hey derry down. 5
- 2 There death breaks the shackles which force had put on;
And the hangman completes what the judge but begun;
There the squire of the pad, and the knight of the post,
Find their pains no more balked, and their hopes no more crossed.
Derry down, etc. 10
- 3 Great claims are there made, and great secrets are known;
And the king, and the law, and the thief has his own;
But my hearers cry out; What a deuce dost thou ail?
Cut off thy reflections, and give us thy tale.
Derry down, etc. 15
- 4 'Twas there then, in civil respect to harsh laws,
And for want of false witness, to back a bad cause,
A Norman, though late, was obliged to appear;
And who to assist, but a grave Cordelier?
Derry down, etc. 20
- 5 The squire, whose good grace was to open the scene,
Seemed not in great haste, that the show should begin;
Now fitted the halter, now traversed the cart;
And often took leave; but was loth to depart.
Derry down, etc. 25
- 6 What frightens you thus, my good son, says the priest;
You murdered, are sorry, and have been confessed.
O father! my sorrow will scarce save my bacon;
For 'twas not that I murdered, but that I was taken.
Derry down, etc. 30

- 7 Pugh! pr'ythee ne'er trouble thy head with such fancies:
Rely on the aid you shall have from Saint Francis;
If the money you promised be brought to the chest,
You have only to die; let the church do the rest.
Derry down, etc. 35
- 8 And what will folks say, if they see you afraid;
It reflects upon me, as I knew not my trade:
Courage, friend; to-day is your period of sorrow;
And things will go better, believe me, to-morrow.
Derry down, etc. 40
- 9 To-morrow? our hero replied in a fright:
He that's hanged before noon, ought to think of to-night:
Tell your beads, quoth the priest, and be fairly trussed up,
For you surely to-night shall in paradise sup.
Derry down, etc. 45
- 10 Alas! quoth the squire, howe'er sumptuous the treat,
Parbleu, I shall have little stomach to eat;
I should therefore esteem it great favour and grace,
Would you be so kind, as to go in my place.
Derry down, etc. 50
- 11 That I would, quoth the father, and thank you to boot;
But our actions, you know, with our duty must suit.
The feast, I proposed to you, I cannot taste;
For this night, by our order, is marked for a fast.
Derry down, etc. 55
- 12 Then turning about to the hangman, he said;
Dispatch me, I pr'ythee, this troublesome blade:
For thy cord, and my cord both equally tie;
And we live by the gold for which other men die.
Derry down, etc. 60

1718

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