

W. M. Thackeray (1811-63)

6 *The Flying Duke*

“Say, whose can yonder chariot be,  
That thunders on so fast?  
And who was he that sat within?  
I marked him as he past.”

“Twas Arthur, Duke of Wellington, 5  
Who in that chariot sat,  
All in his martial cloak, and in  
His proudly-plumed cocked-hat.”

“Not Arthur, Duke of Wellington, 10  
That poster fierce could be,  
Nor yet a living nobleman:  
Some Demon Duke is he.”

“Twas he — to Folkestone he is bound,  
To town by rail to wend;  
Wherefrom to Windsor he must hie, 15  
A Council to attend.”

With whizz and whistle, snort and puff,  
The Duke is borne to town,  
Nor stops until near London Bridge  
The train hath set him down. 20

There waits a Brougham on Wellington:  
To Apsley House he flies,  
Whereat at a messenger in red  
Doth meet his Grace’s eyes.

“How now, thou scarlet messenger! 25  
Thy tidings briefly tell.”  
The Queen invites your Grace to dine  
To-morrow.”

“Very well.”

To Paddington by cab, to Slough  
By steam — away, away! 30  
To Windsor, thence, he goes by fly;  
But there he must not stay —

For that his Grace at Walmer hath  
A tryst this night to keep;  
And he hath warned his serving-men 35  
He shall be back to sleep.

The Council's o'er; back posts his Grace,  
As fast as fast might be.  
Hurrah! hurrah! well speeds the Duke —  
He'll be in time for tea. 40

The morrow comes; again away  
The noble Duke is gone  
To Folkestone, and to London Bridge,  
And thence to Paddington.

"Away, away to Paddington, 45  
As fast as you can drive;  
'Twixt eight and nine the Queen doth dine:  
Be there by half-past five."

Fast have they fled, right fleetly sped,  
And Paddington is won. 50  
"How, office-swain, about the train?"  
"Tis just this instant gone."

"Your Grace, we just have missed the train,  
It grieveth me to say."  
"To Apsley House!" then cried the Duke, 55  
"As quickly as you may."

The loud halloo of "Go it, you!"  
Beneath the gas-light's glare,  
O'er wood and stone they rattle on,  
As fast as they can tear. 60

On, on they went, with hue and cry,  
Until the Duke got home,  
The axle-trees on fire well nigh,  
The horses in a foam.

Out stepp'd the Duke, serene and cool, 65  
And calmly went upstairs,  
And donn'd the dress, the which, at Court,  
He generally wears.

"Windsor I may not reach in time  
To make my toilet there; 70  
So thus the hour I will employ,  
Which I, perforce, must spare.

"What is't o'clock?" "Your Grace, near seven."  
"Then bear me hence again;  
And mark me — this time take good care 75  
You do not miss the train."

Off, off again, the coachman drives,  
With fury fierce and fell,  
'Mid whoop and shout from rabble rout,  
And oath, and scream, and yell. 80

To right and left a way they cleft  
Amid the bustling throng;  
While, meteor-like, the carriage-lamps  
Flash'd as they flew along.

Hurrah! Hurrah! the station's nigh. 85  
"What ho, there! shout amain!  
Here comes the Duke, he's going down;  
Give word to stop the train."

The engineer and stoker hear;  
Duke Arthur takes his place; 90  
Behold him now, on way to Slough,  
Borne at a whirlwind's pace.

"At Slough who stops?" His Grace out pops,

His ticket is resigned.  
“To Windsor haste, like felon chased,  
Or I shall be behind.” 95

Off bounds the hack, while, far aback,  
The night-hawk plies his wing;  
The race is run, the Castle’s won,  
“Come, this is just the thing.” 100

At half-past eight, for Queens don’t wait,  
The noble guests appear  
In banquet-hall; and of them all  
The Duke brings up the rear.

MORAL.

“Tis money,” as the proverb says, 105  
“That makes the mare to go.”  
The Duke has cash to cut a dash;  
Would we could all do so!

1843

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