

William Maginn (1793-1842)

2 *The Eve of St. Jerry*

Dick Gossip the barber arose with the cock,  
And pulled his breeches on;  
Down the staircase of wood, as fast as he could,  
The valiant shaver ran.

He went not to the country forth 5  
To shave or frizzle hair;  
Nor to join in the battle to be fought  
At Canterbury fair.

Yet his hat was fiercely cocked, and his razors in his pocket, 10  
And his torturing irons he bore;  
A staff of crab-tree in his hand had he,  
Full five feet long and more.

The barber returned in three days' space, 15  
And blistered were his feet;  
And sad and peevish were his looks,  
As he turned the corner street.

He came not from where Canterbury 20  
Ran ankle-deep in blood;  
Where butcher Jem, and his comrades grim,  
The shaving tribe withstood.

Yet were his eyes bruised black and blue;  
His cravat twisted and tore;  
His razors were with gore imbued –  
But it was not professional gore.

He halted at the painted pole, 25  
Full loudly did he rap,  
And whistled on his shaving boy,  
Whose name was Johnny Strap.

Come hither, come hither, young tickle-beard, 30  
And mind that you tell me true,  
For these three long days that I've been away,

What did Mrs. Gossip do?

When the clock struck eight, Mrs. Gossip went straight,  
In spite of the pattering rain,  
Without stay or stop to the butcher's shop, 35  
That lives in Cleaver Lane.

I watched her steps, and secret came  
Where she sat upon a chair:  
No person was in the butcher's shop –  
The devil a soul was there. 40

The second night I spied a light  
As I went up the Strand,  
'Twas she who ran, with pattens on,  
And a lantern in her hand;

She laid it down upon a bench, 45  
And shook her wet attire;  
And drew in the elbow-chair, to warm  
Her toes before the fire.

In the twinkling of a walking-stick,  
A greasy butcher came, 50  
And with a pair of bellows he  
Blew up the dying flame.

And many a word the butcher spoke  
To Mrs. Gossip there;  
But the rain fell fast, and it blew such a blast 55  
That I could not tell what they were.

The third night there the sky was fair,  
There neither was wind nor rain;  
And again I watched the secret pair  
At the shop in Cleaver Lane. 60

And I heard her say, "Dick Gossip's away,  
So we'll be blithe and merry,  
And the bolts I'll undo, sweet butcher, to you,  
On the eve of good St. Jerry."

"I cannot come, I must not come" – 65  
"For shame, faint-hearted snarler,

Must I then moan, and sit alone,  
In Dicky Gossip's parlor?

"The dog shall not tear you, and Strap shall not hear you,  
And blankets I'll spread on the stair; 70  
By the blood-red sherry, and holy St. Jerry,  
I conjure thee, sweet butcher, be there."

"Though the dog should not tear me, and Strap should not hear me,  
And blankets be spread on the stair,  
Yet there's Mr. Parrot, who sleeps in the garret, 75  
To my footsteps he could swear."

"Fear not Mr. Parrot, who sleeps in the garret,  
For to Hampstead the way he has ta'en:  
An inquest to hold, as I have been told,  
On the corpse of a butcher that's slain." 80

He turned him round, and grimly he frowned,  
And he laugh'd right scornfully,  
"The inquest that's held, on the man that's been killed,  
May as well be held on me.

"At the lone midnight hour, when hobgoblins have power, 85  
In thy chamber I'll appear;  
With that he was gone, and your wife left alone,  
And I came running here."

Then changed, I trow, was the barber's brow,  
From the chalk to the beet-root red: 90  
"Now tell me the mien of the butcher thou'st seen,  
By Mambrino I'll smite off his head."

"On the point of his nose, which was like a red rose,  
Was a wart of enormous size;  
And he made a great vapping with a blue and white apron, 95  
And red stockings rolled up to his thighs."

"Thou liest, thou liest, young Johnny Strap,  
It is all a fib you tell,  
For the butcher was taken, as dead as bacon,  
From the bottom of Carisbrook well." 100

"My master, attend, and I'll be your friend,

I don't value madam a button;  
But I heard Mistress say, Don't leave, I pray,  
Sweet Timothy Slaughter-mutton."

He oped the shop door, the counter he jumped o'er, 105  
And overturned Strap,  
Then bolted up the stair, where he found his lady fair,  
With the kitten on her lap.

"Now hail, now hail, thou lady bright, -  
Now hail, thou barber trim, 110  
What news from Canterbury fight,  
What news from bloody Jem?"

"Canterbury is red with gore,  
For many a barber fell;  
And the mayor has charged us for evermore 115  
To watch the butcher's well."

Mrs. Gossip blushed, and her cheek was flushed,  
But the barber shook his head;  
And having observed that the night was cold,  
He tumbled into bed. 120

Mrs. Gossip lay and mourned, and Dicky tossed and turned;  
And he muttered while half asleep,  
The stone is large and round, and the halter tight and sound,  
And the well thirty fathoms deep.

The gloomy dome of St. Paul's struck three, 125  
The morning began to blink,  
And Gossip slept, as if his wife  
Had put laudanum in his drink.

Mrs. Gossip drew wide the curtains aside,  
The candle had burned to the socket, 130  
And lo! Timothy stood, all covered with blood,  
With his right hand in his pocket.

"Dear Slaughter-mutton, away," she cried,  
"I pray thee do not stop."  
"Mrs. Gossip, I know who sleeps by thy side, 135  
But he sleeps as sound as a top.

“Near Carisbrook well, I lately fell  
    Beneath a barber’s knife;  
The coroner’s inquest was held on me –  
    But it did not restore me to life. 140

“By thy husband’s hand was I foully slain,  
    He threw me into the well,  
And my sprite in the shop, in Cleaver Lane,  
    For a season is doomed to dwell.”

Love mastered fear. “What brings thee here?” 145  
    The Love-sick matron said;  
“Is thy fair carcass gone to pot?”  
    The goblin shook his head.

“I slaughtered sheep, and slaughtered was,  
    And for breaking the marriage bands, 150  
My flesh and bones go to David Jones,  
    But let us first shake hands.”

He laid his left fist on an oaken chest,  
    And, as she cried, “Don’t burn us;”  
With the other he grasped her by the nose, 155  
    And scorched her like a furnace.

There is a felon in Newgate jail,  
    Who dreads the next assize;  
A woman doth dwell in Bedlam cell,  
    With a patch between her eyes. 160

The woman who dwells in Bedlam cell,  
    Whose reason is not worth a button,  
Is the wife of a barber in Newgate jail,  
    Who slaughtered Slaughter-mutton.

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