

THE EXAMINER:

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EDWARD WHELAN]

This is true Liberty, when free-born Men, having to advise the Public, may speak free.—EURIPIDES.

[EDITOR AND PUBLISHER

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Literature.

SELECTED FOR THE EXAMINER.

TO ONE I LOVE.

Thou art drooping on thy stem, my flower,
Like the lily on the wave;
A spirit breath hath passed thro' thee,
That presageth the grave.

The light sleeps in thine eye, my flower,
Just waiting to be woken,
The sweet word, dreaming on thy lips,
Will soon in Heaven be spoken.

Thou art preparing for the skies, my flower,
Thy mother's smile doth call,
Her marble kiss, upon thy lips,
Bids thee forsake us all.

Thou art trembling into life, my flower,
Thou art fading from our view,
And loved and loving ones must lose
A friend most kind and true.

A blessing beamed from thee, my flower,
When all my soul was dark,
Thy look drew forth my truest truth
As steel from flint, the spark.

I bless thee, dear and fading flower,
Thras thine for aye to bless,
And when we give thee back to Heaven,
Thou wilt not love us less.

K.

POETRY ON THE RAILWAY.

(From Dickens's Household Words.)

If I succeed in the object I have proposed to myself in this paper, I shall consider that I am entitled to the gratitude of all poets, present and to come. For I shall have found them a new subject for verse: a discovery, I submit, as important as that of a new metal, or of a new motive power, a new pleasure, a new pattern for shawls, a new colour, or a new strong drink. No member of the tuneful craft; no gentleman whose eyes are in the habit of rolling in a fine frenzy; no sentimental young lady with an album will deny that the whole present domain of poetry is used up:—that it has been surveyed, travelled over, explored, ticketed, catalogued, classified, and analysed to the last inch of ground, to the last petal of the last flower, to the last blade of grass. Every poetical subject has been worn as threadbare as Sir John Cutler's stockings. The sea, its blueness, depth, vastness, raininess, freedom, noisiness, calmness/darkness and brightness; its weels, and waves, and funny denizens; its laughter, wailings, sighings, and deep bellowings; the ships that sail, and the boats that dance, and the tempests that howl over it; the white winged birds that skim over its billows; the great whales, and sharks, and monsters, to us yet unknown, that sport themselves in its lowest depths, and swing the scaly horrors of their folded tails in its salt hiding places; the mermaids that wag their tails and comb their tresses in its coral caves; the sirens that sing fashions farther than plummet ever sounded; the jewels and gold that lie hidden in its caverns, measureless to man; the dead that it is to give up:—the sea, and all appertaining to it, have been sung dry these thousand years. We heard the roar of its billows in the first line of the *Iliad*, and Mr. Sharp, the comic singer, will sing about it this very night at the Tivoli Gardens, in connection with the *Gravesend steamer*, the steward, certain basins, and a boiled leg of mutton.

As for the Sun, he has had as many verses written about him as he is miles distant from the earth. His heat, brightness, roundness, and smiling face; his incorrigible propensities for getting up in the east and going to bed in the west; his obliging disposition in tipping the hills with gold, and bathing the evening sky with crimson, have all been sung. Every star in the firmament has had a stanza; Saturn's rings have all had their verses, and Mars, Bacchus, Apollo, and *Vivorum*, have all been chanted. As for the poor ill-used Moon, she has been ground on every barrel-organ in Parnassus since poetry existed. Her pallid complexion, chastity or lightness of conduct, treacherous, contemplative, or servative disposition, her silver or sickly smile, have all been over-celebrated in verse. And everything else belonging to the sky—the clouds, murky, purple, or silver lined, the hail, the rain, the snow, the rainbow, the wind in its circuits, the fowls that fly, and the insects that hover—they have all had their poets, and too many of them.

Is there anything new in poetry, I ask, to be said about Love? Surely that viand has been done to rags. We have it with every variety of dressing. Love and madness; love and smiles, tears, folly, crime, innocence and charity. We have had love in a village, a palace, a cottage, a camp, a prison, and a tub. We have had the loves of pirates, highwaymen, lords and ladies, shepherds and shepherdesses; the Loves of the Angels and the Loves of the New Police. Gunning was even good enough to impress the abstruse science of mathematics into the service of Poetry and Love; and to sing about the loves of ardent axioms, postulates, tangents, oscillation, cisoids, conchoids, the square of the hypothenuse, asymptotes, parabolas, and conic sections—in short, all the Loves of the Triangles. Doctor Darwin gave us the Loves of the Plants, and in the economy of vegetation we had the loves of granite rocks, argillaceous strata, noduled flints, blue clay, silica, chert, and the limestone formation. We have had in connection with love in poetry hearts, darts, spells, wrath, despair, withering smiles, burning tears, sighs, roses, posies, pearls and other precious stones; blighted hopes, beaming eyes, misery, wretchedness, and unutterable woe. It is too much. Everything is worn out. The whole of the flower-garden, from the brazen sunflower to the timid violet, has been exhausted long ago. All the birds in the world could never sing so loud or so long as the poets have sung about them. The birds have sung right through *Lem-priere's Classical Dictionary*, *Buffon's Natural History*, *Malte Brun's Geography* (for what country, city, mountain, or stream, remains unsung), and the *Biographic Universelle*. Every hero, and almost every scoundrel, has had his epie. We have had the poetical Pleasures of Hope, Memory, Imagination, and Friendship; likewise the Vanity of Human Wisher, the Fallacies of Hope, and the Triumphs of Temper.

The heavenly muse has sung of man's first disobedience, and the mortal fruit of the forbidden tree, that brought death into the world and all our woes. The honest muse has arisen and sung the Man of Ross. All the battles that ever were fought—all the arms and all the men—have been celebrated in numbers. Arts, commerce, laws, learning, and our old nobility, have had their poet. Suicide has found a member of the Court of Apollo musical and morbid enough to sing self-murder; and the Corn Laws have been rescued from Blue Books, and enshrined in Ballads. Mr. Pope has called upon my lord Bolingbroke to awake, and "expatiate free o'er all this scene of man;" and the pair have, together, passed the whole catalogue of human virtues and vices in review. Drunkenness has been sung; so has painting, so has music. Poems have been written on the Art of Poetry. The Grave has been sung. The earth, and the waters under it, and the fearsome region under that; its "adamantine chains and penal fire," its "ever burning sulphur unconsumed," its "darkness visible," its burning marl and sights of terror. We have heard the last lays of all the Last Minstrels, and the Last Man has had his say, or rather his song, under the auspices of Campbell. The harp that once hung in Tara's halls has not a string left, and nobody ought to play upon it any more.

Take instead, oh ye poets, the wires of the Electric Telegraph, and run your tuneful fingers over those chords. Sing the poetry of Railways. But what can there be of the poetical, or even the picturesque, element in a Railway? Trunk-lines, branch-lines, loop-lines, and sidings; cuttings, embankments, gradients, curves, and inclines; points, switches, sleepers, frog-signals, and turn-tables; locomotives, break-vans, buffers, tenders, and whistles; platforms, tunnels, tubs, goods-sheds, return-tickets, axle-grease, cattle-trains, pilot-engines, time-tables, and coal-trunks: all these are eminently prosaic matter-of-fact things, determined, measured and maintained by line and rule, by the chapter and verse of printed regulations and bye-laws signed by Directors and allowed by Commissioners of Railways. Can there be any poetry in the Secretary's office; in dividends, debentures, scrip, preference-shares, and deferred bonds? Is there any poetry in Railway time—the atrociously matter-of-fact system of calculation that has corrupted the half-past two o'clock of the old watchman into two-thirty? Is Bradshaw poetical? Are Messrs. Pickford and Chaplin and Horne poetical? How the deuce (I put words into my opponent's mouths) are you to get any poetry out of that dreariest combination of straight lines, a railroad:—straight rails, straight posts, straight stations, and straight termini.

As if there could be anything poetical about a Railroad! I hear Gusto the great fine art critic and judge of literature say this with a sneer, turning up his fine Roman nose meanwhile. Poetry on a Railway! cries Proseyard, the man of business—nonsense! There may be some nonsensical verses or so in the books that Messrs. W. H. Smith and Sons sell at their stalls at the different stations; but Poetry on or in the Railway itself—ridiculous! Poetry on the Rail! echoes Heavypace, the commercial traveller—fudge! I travel fifteen thousand miles by railway every year. I know every line, branch, and station in Great Britain. I never saw any poetry on the Rail. And a crowd of passengers, directors, shareholders, engine-drivers, guards, stokers, station-masters, signal-men, and porters, with, I am ashamed to fear, a considerable proportion of the readers of *Household Words*, seem, to the ears of my mind, to take up the cry, to laugh scornfully at the preposterous idea of there being possibly any such thing as poetry connected with so matter-of-fact an institution as a Railway, and to look upon me in the light of a fantastic visionary.

But I have tied myself to the stake; nailed my colours to the mast; drawn the sword and thrown away the scabbard; in fact, I have written the title of this article, and must abide the issue.

Take a Tunnel—in all its length, its utter darkness, its dark coldness and tempestuous windiness. To me a Tunnel is all poetry. To be suddenly snatched away from the light of day, from the pleasant companionship of the fleecy clouds, the green fields spangled with flowers, the golden wheat, the fantastically changing embankments,—now geological, now floral, now rocky, now chalky; the hills, the valleys, and the winding streams; the high mountains in the distance that know they are emperors of the landscape, and so wear purple robes right imperially; the silly sheep in the meadows, that graze so contentedly, unwitting that John Hinds the butcher is coming down by the next train to purchase them for the slaughter-house; the little lambs that are not quite up to railway-trains, their noise and bustle and smoke, yet, and that scamper nervously away, carrying their simple tails behind them; the sententious cattle that munch, and lazily watch the steam from the funnel as it breaks into fleecy rags of vapour, and then fall to munching again;—to be hurried from all these into pitchy obscurity, seem to me poetical and picturesque in the extreme. It is like death in the midst of life, a sudden suspension of vitality—the gloom and terror of the grave pouncing like a hawk upon the warmth and cheerfulness of life. Many an ode, many a ballad could be written on that dark and gloomy tunnel—the whirring roar and scream and jar of echoes, the clanging of wheels, the strange voices that seem to make themselves heard as the train rushes through the tunnel,—now in passionate supplication, now in fierce anger and loud invective, now in an infernal chorus of fiendish mirth and demonic exultation, now in a loud and long-continued though inarticulate screech—a meaningless howl like the ravings of a madman. To understand and appreciate a tunnel in its full aspect of poetic and picturesque horror, you should travel in a third-class carriage. To the first and second class passengers the luxury of lamplight is by the gracious favour of the Directors of the Company condescendingly extended; and in passing through a tunnel they are enabled dimly to desery their fellow-travellers; but for the third class voyager darkness both outer and inner are provided—darkness so complete and so intense, that as we are borne invisibly on our howling way, dreadful thoughts spring up in our minds of blindness; that we have lost our sight for ever! Vainly we endeavour to peer through the darkness, to strain our eyes to desery one ray of light, one outline—be it ever so dim—of a human figure; one thin bead of day upon a panel, a ledge, a window-sill, or a door. Is there not matter for bards in all this?—in the length of the tunnel, its darkness and clamour; in the rage and fury of the engine eating the strong heart, burnt up by inward fire like a man consumed by his own passions; in the seemingly everlasting duration of the deprivation of light and day and life; but a deprivation which ends at last. Ah, how glad and welcome that restoration to sunshine is! We seem to have had a sore and dangerous sickness, and to be suddenly and graciously permitted to rise from a bed of pain and suffering,

and enter at once into the enjoyment of the rudest health, with all its comforts and enjoyments, with all its cheerful pleasures and happy forgetfulness of the ills that are gone, and unconscious rescience of the ills that are to come, and that must come, and surely.

Whenever I pass through a tunnel I meditate upon these things, and wish heartily that I were a poet, that I might tune my heart to sing the poetry of railway tunnels. I don't know whether the same thoughts strike other people. I suppose they do,—I hope they do. It may be that I muse more on tunnels, and shape their length and blackness, and coldness and noise, to subjects fit to be wedded to immortal verse; because I happen to reside on a railway, and that almost every morning and evening throughout the week I have to pass through a tunnel of prodigious length,—to say the truth, nearly as long as the Box Tunnel on the Great Western Railway. Morning and night we dash from the fair fields of Kent,—from the orchards and the hop-gardens,—from the sight of the noble river in the distance, with its boat and barges and huge ships, into this Erebus, pitch dark, nearly three miles long, and full of horrid noises. Sometimes I travel in the lamp-lit carriages, and then I find it poetical to watch the flickering gleams of the sickly light upon the shrouded figures, muffled closely in railway rugs and mantles and shawls,—the ladies, who cover timidly in corners; the children, who, half-pleased, half-frightened, don't seem to know whether to laugh or cry, and compromise the matter by sitting with their mouths wide open, and incessantly asking why it is so dark, and why there is such a noise. Sometimes, and I am not ashamed to confess, much more frequently, I make my journey in the poor man's carriage—the "parly," or third class. In that humble "parly" train, believe me, there is much more railway poetry attainable than in the more aristocratic compartments. Total darkness, mere noise (for the windows are generally open, and the reverberation consequently much greater,) more mocking voices, more mystery, and more romance. I have even gone through tunnels in those vile open standing-up cars, called by an irreverent public "pig-boxes," and seemingly provided by railway directors as a cutting reproach on, and stern punishment for, poverty. Yet I have drunk deeply of railway poetry in a "pig-box." There is something grand, there is something epic; there is something really sublime in the gradual melting away of the darkness into light; in the decadence of total eclipse and the glorious restoration of the sun to his golden rights again. Standing up in the coverless car you see strange, dim, fantastic, changing shapes above you. The daylight becomes irraguous, like dew upon the stream from the funnel, the roofs of carriages, the brickwork sides of the tunnel itself. But nothing is defined, nothing fixed; all the shapes are irresolute, floating, confused, like the events in the memory of an old man. The tunnel becomes a phantom tub—a dry Styx—the train seems changed into Charon's boat, and the engine-driver turns into the infernal ferryman. And the end of that awful navigation must surely be Tartarus. You think so, you fancy yourself in the boat, as Dante and Virgil were in the Divine Comedy; ghosts cling to the sides, vainly repining, uselessly lamenting; Francesca of Rimini despairs by far off, mingled with the rattle of wheels, are heard the faint wailing moans of Ugolino's children. Hark to that awful shrilly, hideous, prolonged yell—a scream like that they say that Catherine of Russia gave on her death-bed, and which, years afterwards, was wont to haunt the memories of those that had heard it. Lord be good to us! there is the scream again: it is the first scream of a lost spirit's last agony; the cry of the child of earth waking up into the Ever and Ever of pain; it is Faecinata screaming in her sepulchre of flames—no, it is simply the railway whistle as the train emerges from the tunnel into sunlight again. The ghosts vanish, there are no more horrible sights and noises, no flying sparks, no red lamps at intervals like demon eyes. I turn back to the "pig box," and look at the arched entrance to the tunnel we have just quitted. I seemed to fancy there should be an inscription over it bidding all who enter to leave Hope behind; but instead of that there is simply, hard by, a placard on a post relative to cattle straying on the railway.

A railway accident! Ah, poets! how much of poetry could you find in that, were you so minded. Odes and ballads, sapphics, alcaics and dactyls, strophes, chorusses and semichorusses might be sung—rugged poems, rough as the rocky numbers of Ossian, soothing poems, "soft pity to infuse," running "softly sweet in Lydian measure" upon the woes of railway accidents, the widowhoods and orphanages that have been made by the carelessness of a driver, a faulty engine, an unturned "point," a mistaken signal. Think of the bride of yesterday, the first child of our manhood, the last child of our age; think of the dear friend who has been absent for years, who has been estranged from us by those whispering tongues that poison truth, and is coming swiftly along the iron road to be reconciled to us at last. Think of these torn from us by a sudden, cruel, unprepared-for death; think of these, falling upon that miserable battle-field, without glory, without foes to fight with, yet with fearfuller, ghastlier hurts, with more carnage and horror in destruction than you could meet with even on those gory Cheronsean battle-fields after storms of shot and shell, after the fierce assaults of the bayonet's steel, and the trampling of the horses, and the stroke of the sharp sword. There are bards to wail over the warrior who falls in the fray, for the horse and his rider blasted by the scarlet whirlwind. There are tears and songs for the dead that the sea engulfs, to cradle them in its blue depths till Time and Death shall be no more. There are elegies and epitaphs and mourning verses for those that sleep in the churchyard, that have laid their heads upon a turf, that eat their salad from the roots, that dwell with worms and entertain creeping things in the cells and little chambers of their eyes. There is poetry even for the murderer on his gibbet; but who cares to sing the railway victims? who bids the line restore its dead? who adjurates the engine to bring back the true and brave? They are killed, and are buried; the inquest meet; the juryman give their verdict, and forget all about it two days afterwards. Somebody is tried for manslaughter and acquitted, for, of course, there is nobody to blame! It is all over, and the excursion train, crammed with jovial excursionists, sweethearts, married couples, clubs of gay fellows, laughing children, baskets of prog, bottles of beer, and surreptitious, yet officially connived at, pipes; the engine dressed in ribbons, the stoker—oh, wonder!—in a clean shirt; the excursion train, I say, rattles gaily over the very place where, a month since, the accident took place; over the very spot where the earth drank up blood, and the rails were violently wrenched and twisted, and the sleepers were ensanguined, and death and havoc and desolation were strewn all around,

and the wild flowers in the embankment were scalded with the steam from the shattered boiler.

Can you form an idea, poets, of a haunted line? Suppose the same excursion train I was speaking of to be on its way home, late at night, say from Cripplegate-super-mare or Baffington Wells. Everybody has enjoyed himself very much—the children are tired, but happy. The bonnets of the married ladies have made their proper impressions upon the population of Cripplegate-super-mare, and they are satisfied with them, their husbands and themselves. The married gentlemen have found out of what the contents of the black bottles consisted—they smoke pipes openly now, quite defiant, if not oblivious, of bye-laws and forty-shilling fines. Nobody objects to smoking—not even the asthmatical old gentleman in the respirator and the red comforter—not even the tall lady, with the severe countenance and the green umbrella, who took the mild fair man in spectacles so sharply to task this morning about the mild cigar which he was timidly smoking up the sleeve of his poncho. Even the guards and officials at the stations do not object to smoking. One whiskered individual of the former class, ordinarily the terror of the humble third-class passenger, whom he, with fierce contempt, designates as "you, sir," and hauls out of the carriage on the slightest provocation, condescends to be satirical on the smoke subject; he puts his head in at the window, and asks the passengers "how they like it—mild or full flavoured?" This is a joke, and everybody, of course, laughs immensely, and goes on smoking unmolested. Bless me! how heartily we can laugh at the jokes of people we are afraid of, or want to eringe to for a purpose.

Surely a merrier excursion train as this was never due at the Babylon Bridge station at eleven-thirty. Funny stories are told. A little round man, in a grey coat, and a hat like a sailor's, sings a comic song seven miles long, for he begins it at one station, and ends it at another seven miles distant. A pretty, timorous widow is heard softly joining in the chorus of "tol de rol lol." A bilious man of melancholy mien, hitherto speechless, volunteers a humorous recitation, and promises feats of conjuring after they have passed the next station. Strangers are invited to drink out of strange bottles, and drink. Everybody is willing to take everybody's children on his knee. People pencil down addresses by the lamplight, and exchange them with people opposite, hoping that they shall become better acquainted. The select clubs of jolly fellows are very happy—they even say, "wrappy." There is laughing, talking, jesting, courting and tittering. None are silent but those who are asleep. Hurrah for this jovial excursion train, for the Nor-Nor-West by Eastern Railway Company, its cheap fares, and admirable management!

Suppose that just at the spot where this allegro train now is, there occurred the great accident of last July. You remember, the excursion train, through some error, the cause of which was unfortunately never discovered, ran into the luggage train; the driver and stoker of the former were dashed to pieces—thirty-three persons were killed or wounded. Suppose some man of poetical temperament, of fantastic imagination, of moody fancies, were in the carriage of this merry train to-night, looking from the window, communing with the yellow moonlight, the light clouds placidly floating along the sea of heaven, as if it said of a sure anchorage at last. He knows the line, he knows the place where that grim accident was—he muses on it—yes; this was the spot, there laid the bodies.

Heavens and earth! suppose the line were haunted! See, from a siding comes slowly, noiselessly along the rail the PHANTOM TRAIN! There is no rattle of wheels, no puffing and blowing of the engine, only, from time to time, the engine whistle is heard in a fitful, murmuring, wailing gust of sound; the lamps in front burn blue, sickly lambent flames leap from the funnel and the furnace door. The carriages are lamplit too, but with corpse candles. The carriages themselves are mere skeletons—they are all shattered, dislocated, ruined, yet, by some deadly principle of cohesion, they keep together, and through the interstices of their cracking ribs and framework you may see the passengers. Horrible sight to see! Some have limbs bound up in splinters, some lie on stretchers, but they have all faces and eyes; and the eyes and the faces; together with the phantom guard with his lantern, from which long rays of ghastly light proceed; together with the phantom driver, with his jaw bound up; the phantom stoker, who stokes with a mattock and spade, and feels the fire as though he were making a grave; the phantom commercial travellers wrapped in shrouds for railway rugs; the pair of lovers in the first-class coupe, looked in the same embrace of death in which they were found after the accident, the stout old gentleman with his head in his lap, the legs of the man the rest of whose body was never found, but who still has a face and eyes, the skeletons of horses in the horse-boxes, the stacks of coffins in the luggage-vans (for all is transparent), and you can see the fatal verge of the embankment beyond, through the train. All these sights of horror flit continually past, up and down, backwards and forwards, haunting the line where the accident was.

But, ah me! these are, perhaps, but silly fancies after all. Respectability may be right, and there may be no more poetry in a railway than in my boots. Yet I should like to find poetry in everything, even in boots. I am afraid railways are ugly, dull, prosaic, straight; yet the line of beauty, honest Hogarth tells us, is a curve, and curves you may occasionally find on the straightest of railways—and where beauty is, poetry, you may be sure of it, is not far off. I am not quite sure but you may find it in ugliness too, if there be anything beautiful in your own mind.

LOUIS XIV.

"He watched over all, arranged the smallest details, and yet never compromised his dignity. He was always able to invest himself with a glory, which made others look upon him as a sort of providence. He had the secret of accomplishing a great deal in a calm, dignified manner, without pomp or display. His physical powers were finely developed; and so majestic and imposing was his air that those who addressed him must first accustom themselves to his appearance, not to be overawed. None knew better than he how to preserve his dignity, and how to maintain a certain manner, which made him appear great, while it kept others at a distance. He himself observed a minute and strict etiquette; and by this means prevented that familiarity to which he would otherwise have been exposed, especially by his great fondness for the society of women. We have some curious and characteristic details on this subject. 'He never,' says St. Simon, 'passed a hood or bonnet without raising his hat, even to the chambermaids, knowing them to be such, as often the case at Marly; to ladies he entirely removed his hat, but to a greater or less distance; to titled men he half removed it, either