

Wonderful Effects of the Leicester Railroad

Synopsis

Celebrates the new railway and bids good riddance to the stage coach.

Themes: Anticipated economic benefits of railways
 Impact of the railway upon road traffic
 Unemployment and poverty caused by introduction of steam power
 Impact on Family Life

Text

Of all the great wonders that ever were known -
And some wonderful things have occurred in this town -
The Leicester railroad it will beat them all hollow;
And the man who first thought on't he was a fine fellow.

The drunken stage-coachmen to break people's necks,
Turned o'er into ditches, sprawled on out on your backs;
No blustering guard that, through some mistake,
His blunderbuss fires if a mouse should but squeak.

No, no, my good friends, now this rail road is finished,
All coachmen and cattle henceforth shall be banished.
You may ride up to London in three hours and a quarter,
With nothing to drive but a kettle of water.

What a beautiful site it is for to see
A long string of carriages on the railway'
All loaded with passengers inside and out,
And moved by what comes from a tea-kettle's spout.

And then what a lot of employment 'twill make,
The Leicester bricklayers may now undertake
To send ready-built houses to London by steam;
No doubt it will turn out a very good scheme.

Now any old woman that has enough sense
By racking and scraping to save eighteen pence,
In service in London is she has a daughter,
She may ride up to see her by this boiler of water.

The ostlers and innkeepers and such riff raff,
The railroad will blow them away, just like chaff;
They may 'list for Her Highness, the great Queen of Spain,
And curse the inventors of railroads and steam.

Coach horses that eat up more corn in a year
Than would maintain three parts of the labouring poor,
They are all to go to the fellmonger's yard
Where they will be rendered into good hog's lard.

And all the coach proprietors who've rolled in wealth
Must ride upon donkeys for the good of their health,
And to keep up their spirits must strike up this theme
And curse all the railroads and boiling hot steam.

Glossary:

Blunderbuss	A short gun with a large bore, firing many balls or slugs, and capable of doing execution within a limited range without exact aim (OED)
Cattle	When the song was written "cattle" would include horses
In Service	Working as a domestic servant
Fellmonger	A dealer in skins or hides of animals (OED)

Source of Text: Palmer, Roy; A Touch on the Times
Palmer cites Broadside printed by Smith of Leicester (Madden 20/141)

Music. No tune given

Source of Music: No tune given

Printer: Smith

Where Printed: Leicester

Author : Anonymous

Date: 1840 or soon after

Notes of the Song and Its Historical Background

The Midlands County Railway opened in 1840 providing a route to London via Rugby causing the prompt closure of the stage coach services. (Ref. Simmonds J, Public Transport in Leicestershire 1840 – 1880 <http://www.le.ac.uk/lahs/downloads/simmonsvolumeLXX-3sm.pdf>)

The phrase "*They may 'list for Her Highness, the great Queen of Spain*" is a reference to a British military force called the Auxiliary Legion, or British Legion (*La Legión Británica*) that existed from 1835 to 1837 and was sent to Spain in support of Queen Isabella II during the First Carlist War (1833-1839) http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Auxiliary_Legion, fought over the succession to the throne and the nature of the Spanish state http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_Carlist_War.

The line "*Coach horses that eat up more corn in a year / Than would maintain three parts of the labouring poor*" thus addresses a real grievance. (A horse eats 20 – 35 lbs of food in a day (depending on its size and the work it is doing <http://www.horsebarn.com/content/horse-care/how-much-horse-eat-daily.aspx> while a human eats about 4lbs http://wiki.answers.com/Q/How_many_pounds_of_food_does_the_average_person_eat_each_day coach horses being fairly hard-worked would probably be on the upper end - say 30lbs - and the labouring poor would be lucky to get 4lbs so a coach horse ate seven times the amount of a poor person.

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In 1827 Feed for a horse was about £30 per year - more than the groom's wages. [ref: High Society: A Social History of the Regency Period, 1788-1830, Murray, Venetia, ISBN 0-670-85758-0]

The expense of keeping horses was an important factor in the popularity of the railway among the upper classes.