

The *Port-of-Spain Gazette*,¹ 11 April 1843, p. 2

“**Noctes Trinidadianae**”—No. 5²

“Here are we met, four merry boys—
Four merry boys I trow are we:
And mony a nicht we’ve merry been,
And many mair we hope to see.”

SCENE—*The Traveller’s Rest Tavern, Embryo City of Queenstown, Victoria Bay.* Time,
8 p.m. In presentibus—*Moonshine, Humbug, Shortcrop, and Fiddlededee.*

FIDDLEDEE.³

Weel, weel! sin’ ye’ll a’ hae it sae, I man juist agree till’t. I humbly apoligeese to ye, Maister Humbug, for a’ the havers and ither ill mainners it seems I was guilty o’ the last nicht o’ our meeting. Ye may a’ ken that I man hae been sairly disguised wi’ drink when I was sae far left to mysel’ as to fling a demijohn at yer head, Maister Humbug, as I hae a maist profoun’ regaird for a’ kinds o’ bottles, and wadna hairm ane o’ them for ony consideration — no to speak o’ yer ane head — sae ye may sell a’ kinds o’ breeks and coatees, and hams and mackerel, and sautfish, and cheat the niggers as muckle as ye like, from henceforth and for aye. I totally abjure meddling wi’ ony body’s *private economy*, be he Proprietor or Attorney, or Mawneger or Overseer, or Road Commissioner, or inventer o’ new ways o’ makin’ sugar or rum, or planting or explaining the natur’ o’ comets’ tails or beards, or any ither humbug, public or private, wi’ whulk I hae nathin’ to do. By-the-by, Maister Muinshine, do ye ken ought about this lang-tailed star that’s ta’en up sic’ a large space o’ the heevens? He pits me in mind o’ ma Attorney whan he comes to the yestate, kicking up a great fuss and makin’ a deevil o’ a din about nathin’, and

then carrying awa his tail and disappearing in the distance, doing neither muckle guid nor muckle ill, but pittin' fowke to a heap o' unnecesssary fash.

MOONSHINE.

My acquaintance with comets, Mr. Fiddlededee, is very limited. It appears that they are very eccentric sort of wanderers, having no regular orbits, but cutting capers among the more orderly stars, and now and then sporting their tails within sight of our world. The "Synopsis of the Astronomy of Comets" says, "The mean distance of a comet from the sun may be found by comparing its period with the time of the earth's revolution round the sun—thus the period of the comet which appeared in 1531, 1607, 1682, and 1759, being about 76 years, its mean distance is found by this proportion: as the square of one year, the earth's periodical time, is to 5776, the square of 76, the comet's periodical time; so is 1,000,000 the cube of 100, the earth's mean distance from the sun to 5,776,000,000, the cube of the comet's mean distance, the cube root of which is 1794, the mean distance itself, in such parts as the mean distance of the earth contains 100." So that if this comet's last appearance was in 1759, and its period consists of 76 years, it ought to have appeared in 1835; but again, "the effects of both Jupiter and Saturn on the return of the same comet were calculated more accurately by Clairant, who found that it would be retarded 511 days by the action of the former planet, and 100 by the action of the latter," nearly two years—this added to 1835, makes 1837; it has however been delayed until 1843—*six* years longer,—which no doubt Philosophers will account for, from the eccentricity of its orbit and longer detention from the effects of both Jupiter and Saturn.

FIDDLEDEE

I scarcely epine, Maister Muinshine, that ye wad tak' it upon ye at this yerly period o' the night, whan I'm as sober as a Seceder Elder, to flam us wi' a' that jargon o' blathers anent cube

ruits and maitters far ayont ma leemited capawcity. Gif there's ony meaning ava in what ye hae noo stated—o' whiik I am verra doubtful—I plainly avoo that its juist as incomprehensible to me as a gaelic riddle; indeed, to be cawndid wi' ye, I am really o' opinion that ye've juist made up that string o' clavers on purpose to dumbfou'er me, and Shortcrap, and Humbug, thinking that we will be the foles to try and repeat the sam' to our neebors, and get ousels lauched at for our pains. Ma opinion o' this comet is a verra plain and rational ane. I opine that it's naethin' mair nor less than a kind o' sky steam boat,⁴ and the tail o't the lum, invented by some Pawtent Royal Joint Stock Steam Company in the muin—and gangs aboot to a' the wee stars to carry ilka ane its supply o' coals for lichting up the dark nichts, in order that honest folks may fin' their way hame, particularly whan they're o't dining or at a Noctes, and may be chance to get a wee drap owre muckle drink, and couldna fin' their way hame readily without starlicht, yespecially whan the muin is owre lazy to shaw her face. Anent the yeffects o' the comet I can speak frae sad yexperience—I ken fu' weel that it has brunt up the chief pairt o' ma ratoon canes, sae that wadge the mill as tight as I can, it's wi' muckle ado I can get mair than a hogshead a kerry, besides it has cracked a' the cylinders and contracted the valves and bedeeviled a' the water pipes o' the greatest feck o' the engines in the quarter— for by gizzening a hale keg o' whusky whiik I bought the ither day frae Cawptain Barleykail, sae that fient a' draps left in it ava, I'll tak' care that I'll buy nae mair sae lang as it's veesible.

SHORTCROP.

Your theory, Mr. Fiddlededee, is just as probable as any other, and I have no doubt but were you to correspond with the sages of the “Transactions of the Royal Society,” you might be admitted a Member.

FIDDLEDEDEE.

Hech! Sirs, but I'm thirsty—ho! Hercules, man! bring in the potables, gif this Comet hasna played the sam' trick in the speerits as it did wi' Cawptain Barleykail's whusky, surely it hasna the power o' gizzening a demijohn as well as a keg. Here's to a' yer guid healths. Hech! Sirs, but that's strong brandy! De'il rin aff wi' ye Hercules, gif ye've no putten' gin into the goglets instead o' water. Gif I thocht ye did it out o' anything but a mistak', I wad soon place ma sign manual on yer ill faur'd face, ye yemancipated villain!

HERCULES.

Beg parden, Massa, tree demijohn dere a press—brandy, gin, watta—make mistake, massa, take de gin for de watta.

FIDDLEDEDEE.

Weel, weel, I daure say ye did mak' a mistak' as ye say, but (hiccup) tak' care neist time, I wanna pit up wi' ony mair siclike mistak' (hiccup) y—heary.

SHORTCROP.

It is much complained of Mr. Fiddledede, that you don't speak English, but stick to the Scotch slang, so that many persons can scarcely understand the meaning of the many valuable hints you are constantly throwing out on such a variety of subjects.

FIDDLEDEDEE.

Me no speak English!! weel, gif I ever heerd a piece o' mair daaring impudence than this I tell ye, Marster Shortcrop that I speak muckle better English than yerself or ony ither haveral wha Rens naether' o' grawmmar or the pocket ductionary, I'll bet a doubloon that I can get a certificawt frae a' the honest folks o' San Fernandy, shawing that I speak maist clawssical and pure English, and that they understawn' ilka mollyseyllable that I speak, let the soobjeck be what

it may—truly, ignorance is verra prevalent in this quarter,—me no able to speak English weel! after that I ken naethin owre absured to be advanced by the gomerals o’ thae pairts—me no speak English!!— Weel! it beats a’, —me no speak English!—umph!

MOONSHINE.

Shortcrop, Mr. Fiddledeedee, meant no offence to you, he does not say that you do not speak English, he merely means that your English is clothed in Scotch costume, and not so intelligible to those who are not conversant with it in such a dress, and who would more readily appreciate your acumen, were its expressions more obvious to themselves.

FIDDLEDEDEE.

I hae nae business wi’ ither folks stoopedity—its their ain misfortin’ that they haena learned the Scotch language, its weel kent thro’ a’ ceevilized lawnds that Inverness in the Highlan’s is the chief emporium in the warl’ for pure English, and as I was born in the neist Countie, it follows o’ coorse that gif I dinna juist speak sae weel as they do in Inverness, that I speak the neist thing ti’eet and that’s juist enuch for me,—a’ the niggers understawn’ what I say whiek is a mawnifest pruif that ma English is juist what providence intended I shoued hae, and o’ coorse man be richt. I bet ye that a thae chiels wha objeck to ma English, understawn’ me weel enuch when I say, “*Gentlemen, what wull ye hae to drink*, I never kent ane o’ them tae wham that wasna obvious enuch! I never needed to say sic athing twice owre whiek is ocular demonstration that I’m wiel understand, and how could it be itherwise haena I a copy o’ Robie Burn’s poems, and the Pulgrims Progress, and “The Laird o’ Coul’s Ghaist,” and “Leper the Tailor” and Herveys Meditations and ae volume o’ an auld Gazeteer, a gran’ English Standard warks, enuch whae learned English to “Ossian the Lin of Fingal”, himsel wha I understawn’ was a Highlan’ King afore the creation, and issued proclamations and manufactured Tariffs and

orders in Council, a' written in real gaelic, commanding the fowkes o' thae days to meet thegither at "the feast o' shells" whiek I suppose was to eat lampits and cockers wi' His Majesty—unco puir kin' o' meat—and whiek I jealouse wadna be muckle relished by Queen Victoria in thae days—but I'm really tired o' speaking—sae here's to a' yer guid guid healths—and noo I'll gie ye a sing by way o' a change.

FIDDLEDEDEE'S SONG.

AIR—"My Father the Deacon before me."

Ye may talk o' the chiels a' the countra aroun'
 Wha meddle wi' ither folks' maitters,
 But we wha are lichts o' this embryo town
 Will shaw them that we are their betters.

Then hear me—and when wi' my sang I bae dune,
 I am sure that ye a' will encore me;
 When I shaw ye how canny and sing I get on,
 Like ma frien', Auld Stan'over, afore me.

To him I was fag—and of *scandal* and *news*,
 I ays was the readiest bearer;
 And nuo that he's aff—I've slupt into his shoes,
 And I'm thinkin' they fit wi' the wearer.

Lots o' pork for the niggers I've constantly bought,
 And for this a' their women adore me;
 But ye weel may believe, I give naethin' for nought,
 Like ma frien', Auld Stan'over, afore me.

Mang the laaborers' houses I slip in and out,⁵
 Wi' their dochtors keep cooing and billing;
 I loe a' my *neebors*, the kintra throughout,
 And this is the Scripture fulfilling.

I care na a doit, no an auld ingine peel,
 For wha wad wi' gammon come owre me;
 Sic greenhorns and gouks may a' gang to the dell,
 Like ma friend', Auld Stan'over, afore me.

MOONSHINE.

That is a good enough sort of song in its way, Mr. Fiddlededee, although not shewing your own character in a very respectable light.

FIDDLEDEDEE.

Ma character!—it's no ma character, man, Maister Muinshine. Save us! but yer makin' a sair mistak'. I really houp that ye dinna tak' it for me—its weel kent that I'm a man o' maist respectable character. The puir chiel whilk it was made upon is dead, man—he had an unco failing o' aye daundering aboot the nigger houses, saying that the fowks wadna wark unless he was aye amang them. A puir sham, Maister Muinshine, man! I really houp that ye couldna opine that I wad be capable o' sic behaaviour. It's no me, I assure ye; as fac' as death, its no me, man!—it's no me!

MOONSHINE.

Well, perhaps not.

SHORTCROP.

What is your opinion, Mr. Fiddlededee, of the comparative capabilities of the Steam Engine and the Cattle Mill?

FIDDLEDEDEE.

Comparative capawbeelities d'ye say, Maister Shortcrap! Man, there's nae compawrison ava, gie me a guid whacking lump o' a cattle mill whare there's nae vawlves, nor eccentrics nor pistons, nor stu[.]ing boxes nor ither clamjamphy to be eternally gaaing wrang. I never yet kent a steam engine yestate but was sure ither to be short o' water, or had a broken vawlve or a pump that wadna draw, or pipes that drew air instead of water—or nae coals, or some ither deevilry attending its macheenary. "I'm saying, Maister Nozzles," quoth ma neebor Temperlime ane day

to his engineer, “how’s this that the engine wanna gang?” “I really dinna ken, sir,” says Nozzles, “unless a lump o’ criesh can hae stickit in the cylinder.” “Gang awa, man, wi’ yer havers,” responded Temperlime, “and dinna be thinkin’ o’ comin owre me wi’ yer jokes; gif ye dinna get the engine to wark, I’ll juist hae to send for Maister Plummerblock, the new engineer wha kens how to mak’ an engine wark whether she’s right or wrang.” Gie me, as I hae said, a guid iron cattle mill wi’ two lang sweeps and lots o’ mules, and awa wi’ yer steam engines. I weel remember the day whan I made 20 hogsheads a week wi’ ma cattle mill. It was grand man to hear the wee black laddies crawcking their muckle whups yearly in the mornin’, and to see the mules galloping and flinging and kicking the sweeps, and perching and rinnin’ roun’ and roun’ a’ day. Hech! Sirs, it’s different noo a days: there’s a sad fa’ing awa frae the 20 hogsheads a week—I wanna say how muckle. Hech, hech! Grammachree! I wish that the auld times were back again—whan we had lots o’ dennurs and Militia⁶ lunches, and fowkes could get fou’ and naebody ken ought about it; but noo a days we hae sae mony Ministers and Temperance Mongers⁷, that whenever a puir chiel gets a wee drap owre muckle drink, it’s a’ kent frae Dan to Beersheby. I really opine, wi’ the Hon’ble Maister Burnley, that we hae nae use for Ministers ava neither here nor in San Fernandy, nor yespecially in Savanna Grande, whare a’ the fowkes are squatters, and o’ coorse canna be expeckit to hae sowles ava; it’s really mair nor superfluous to be biggin Kirks and Parsonages, and payin’ Clergymen to preach a sermon at ye, gin ye happen to hae the misfortin’ o’ no being owre moral in yer chawracter. I am really o’ opinion that it wad be far better to keep the siller until it becom’ a muckle sum and then try to bribe the Parliament to let’s hae back slavery again, for really I am clean tired o’ this freedom—naethin’ has gane richt sin’ we had it, the verra steam engines and the cattle mills themsels hae groun lazy sin’ the emawncipation (Here’s t’y a’ gentlemen—drinks). I’ve really been sairly fashed wi’

drouth ever sin' the appearance o' this comet. Sing us a sang, Maister Humbug, man—sing us a sang.

HUMBUG.

I'll try to oblige you, Mr. Fiddlededee, but really I am no singer—however, I'll do my best in a small way.

SONG.

Oh! Lady, sing that lovely song,
 That song of other times;
 Its music bears my soul along
 To distant, dearer climes.

I heard it at the evening's close,
 Upon my native shore;
 It was a favorite song with those
 That I shall see no more.

How many dreams of other years
 Are waken'd by the strain;
 Tis fraught with early hopes and fears,
 Oh! sing that song again.

FIDDLEDEE.

Thank ye, Maister Humbug, for yer sang, altho I man say its unco short, and rawther owre muckle o' the namby pamby molashes and water schule for ma taste,—I canna abide (nae offence tae ye tho'), to see a plawnter openin' his mouth and sen' in forth a lang, doleful, melancholy howl o' a sang sic as Kelvin Grey and the Bawbes in the Wood, or the death o' Nelson and siclike havers, I'm aye obleeged to make my brandy and water thicker on thae occasions. When I ask for a Sang, I aye like to heaar “Maggie Lauder,” or Jenny dang the weaver” or the “De'il ran awa wi' the Excesenian” or “Nid Noddlin,” or ony thing sensible and sentimentae, like thae sangs nane o' yer milk and water, sangs about broken hearts an' days o'

ither years for me—ne, na, I canna thole yer blin’ ma [...] sangs ava.

MOONSHINE.

What is your opinion Mr. Fiddlededee of our Council, excluding the Foreign Slave Islands from any participation in their grant of £1000 sterling, to the sufferers from the late Earthquake?

FIDDLEDEE.

Its no bad [in] its way ava, I like weel and it man be unco refreshing to a’ body to see Trinidad stannin’ up for freedom, and lookin’ doun wi’ an Anti-slavery face on her unfortunate sister Guadeloupe and saying, “Mrs. Guadeloupe ye weel deserve a’ ye hae gotton frae the yearthquake,⁸ and a’ because yer no *a free Colony like me*. I’ll no spare ye a doit in yer misfortunes, gif I was to gie you onything ye wad be mendin’ yer mills and makin’ *slave sugar*, whiek is an abomination in ma e’en, when ye yemancipate a yer niggers, and ruin the proprietors and pay sax bits a day, and fish, and rum and pork, and frying pans to yer laaborers for neist thing to naething, like me *then*, gif ye happen whae anither yearthquake that ruins ye again whan ye *are a free colony*, I may perhaps tak’ yer case into consideration—gif by that time I happen to hae onything left, whiek frae the way my lang purse is now being suucked is unco doubtfu’.—
But really Gentlemen, it man be gettin late for I see that I’ve feenished ma saxteenth tummler o’ brandy and water; for bye that fearfu’ drink I got o’ the gin and brandy in a mistak’ O Hercules!
Its weel for us to be aff sae lang as —(Sings).

“We’re nae sae feu’, we’re nae that fou’,
But juist a drappee in our e’e;
The cock may crawl, the day may draw,
(*Omnnes* But aye weel taste, the barley bree.”

(*Exeunt Omnes*)

PARTIAL ENDNOTES (LW)

¹ The *Port of Spain Gazette* was a newspaper of the planters, and was generally hostile to Emancipation.

² Scotsmen commonly served as managers and overseers on West Indian estates (see Douglas J. Hamilton, *Scotland, the Caribbean and the Atlantic World 1750-1820*, Manchester U. Press, 2005).

³ Fiddlededee was probably not the estate owner, but a manager or “attorney”, someone who looked after an estate, especially when the owner was absent.

⁴ Steam engines were introduced onto sugar estates by 1904. By 1843, all larger estates had steam.

⁵ Reference to white men having sexual relations with enslaved black women.

⁶ The militia had been abolished in Trinidad after full emancipation in 1838.

⁷ Most incoming ministers of religion were Non-Conformist; Baptist, Methodist and Presbyterians were all temperance supporters. Trinidad was, however, traditionally Catholic in the planter class.

⁸ A severe earthquake struck the Caribbean in 1843, affecting Antigua and other areas, particularly Guadeloupe, which remained a slave colony of France until 1848.