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Ballads

By John Masefield



LONDON: ELKIN MATHEWS, VIGO STREET, W.

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BALLADS



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BY

JOHN MASEFIELD

LONDON

ELKIN MATHEWS, VIGO STREET

1903



18-2-19
New York
1918

TO MY WIFE

I thank the Editors of the *Broad Sheet*, *Green Sheaf*, *Pall Mall Magazine*, and *Speaker*, for permission to reprint the Ballads in this volume.

J. M.

Contents

	PAGE
The Ballad of Sir Bors	9
Spanish Waters	12
Cargoes	18
Captain Stratton's Fancy.	20
News from Whydah	23
St. Mary's Bells	25
London Town.	27
The Emigrant.	31
Port of Holy Peter.	33
Beauty	36
The Seekers	37
Hall Sands	40
Dawn	43
Laugh and be Merry	44
Blind Man's Vigil	46
Roadways	49
Midsummer Night	51
The Harper's Song.	53
The Gentle Lady	55

NOTE.—Some of these Ballads will be issued separately with the score of the music proper to them.

J. M.

The Ballad of Sir Bors

WOULD I could win some quiet and rest, and a
 little ease,
In the cool grey hush of the dusk, in the dim
 green place of the trees,
Where the birds are singing, singing, singing,
 crying aloud
The song of the red, red rose that blossoms
 beyond the seas.

Would I could see it, the rose, when the light
 begins to fail,
And a lone white star in the West is glimmering
 on the mail;

THE BALLAD OF SIR BORS

The red, red passionate rose of the sacred blood
of the Christ,
In the shining chalice of God, the cup of the
Holy Grail.

The dusk comes gathering grey, and the dark-
ness dims the West,
The oxen low to the byre, and all bells ring to
rest;
But I ride over the moors, for the dusk still
bides and waits,
That brims my soul with the glow of the rose
that ends the Quest.

My horse is spavined and ribbed, and his bones
come through his hide,
My sword is rotten with rust, but I shake the
reins and ride,

THE BALLAD OF SIR BORS

For the bright white birds of God that nest in
the rose have called,
And never a township now is a town where I
can bide.

It will happen at last, at dusk, as my horse
limps down the fell,
A star will glow like a note God strikes on a
silver bell,
And the bright white birds of God will carry
my soul to Christ,
And the sight of the Rose, the Rose, will pay
for the years of hell.

Spanish Waters

Air—"Sir Harry Lingen's Riding."

SPANISH waters, Spanish waters, you are ringing
in my ears,
Like a sweet quaint piece of music from the
grey forgotten years;
Telling tales, and weaving runes, and bringing
weary thoughts to me
Of the sandy beach at Muertos, where I would
that I could be.

Oh the sunny beach at Muertos, and the windy
spit of sand,
Off of which we came to anchor while the ship-
mates went a-land;

SPANISH WATERS

Where the blue laguna emptied over snags of
rotting trees,
And the golden sunlight quivered on the brilliant
colibris.

We came to port at Muertos when the dipping
sun was red,
And we moored her half-a-mile to sea, to west
of Nigger Head;
And before the mist was on the Key, before the
day was done,
We put ashore to Muertos with the gold that
we had won.

We bore it through the marshes in a half-score
battered chests,
Sinking, staggering in the quagmire till the lush
weed touched the breasts,

SPANISH WATERS

While the slithering feet were squelching in the
pulp of fallen fruits,
And the cold and clammy leeches bit and sucked
us through the boots.

The moon came white and ghostly as we laid
the treasure down,
All the spoil of scuttled carracks, all the loot
of Lima Town.

Copper charms and silver trinkets from the
chests of perished crews,
Gold doubloons and double moydores, louis d'ors
and portagues.

Clumsy yellow-metal earrings from the Indians
of Brazil,
Emerald ouches out of Rio, silver bars from
Guyaquil,

SPANISH WATERS

Silver cups and polished flacons, censers wrought
in flowered bronze,
And the chased enamelled sword hilts of the
courtly Spanish Dons,

We smoothed the place with mattocks, and we
took and blazed the tree,
Which marks you where the gold is hid that
none will ever see,
And we laid aboard the brig again, and south
away we steers,
Through the loud white surf of Muertos which
is beating in my ears.

I'm the last alive that knows it. All the rest
were took and swung
In chains at Execution Dock, where thieves
and such are hung,

SPANISH WATERS

And I go singing, fiddling, old and starved and
castaway,
And I know where all the gold is that we won
with L'Ollonais.

Well, I've had a merry life of it. I'm old and
nearly blind,
But the sun-dried swinging shipmates' chains
are clanking in my mind ;
And I see in dreams, awhile, the beach, the
sun's disc dipping red,
And the tall brig, under topsails, swaying in
past Nigger Head.

I'd be glad to step ashore there. Glad to take
a pick and go
To the lone blazed coco-palm tree in the place
no others know,

SPANISH WATERS

And lift the gold and silver that has mouldered
there for years

By the loud white surf of Muertos which is
beating in my ears.

Cargoes

QUINQUIREME of Nineveh from distant Ophir,
Rowing home to haven in sunny Palestine,
With a cargo of ivory,
And apes and peacocks,
Sandalwood, cedarwood, and sweet white wine.

Stately Spanish galleon coming from the
Isthmus,
Dipping through the Tropics by the palm-green
shores,
With a cargo of diamonds,
Emeralds, amethysts,
Topazes, and cinnamon, and gold moidores.

CARGOES

Dirty British coaster with a salt-caked smoke
stack,
Butting through the Channel in the mad March
days,
With a cargo of Tyne coal,
Road-rails, pig-lead,
Firewood, ironware, and cheap tin trays.

Captain Stratton's Fancy

Air—"Masefield's Own."

Oh some are fond of red wine, and some are
fond of white,
And some are all for dancing by the pale moon-
light,
But rum alone's the tippie, and the heart's delight
Of the old bold mate of Henry Morgan.

Oh some are fond of Spanish wine, and some
are fond of French,
And some 'll swallow tay and stuff fit only for a
wench,
But I'm for right Jamaica till I roll beneath the
bench,
Says the old bold mate of Henry Morgan.

CAPTAIN STRATTON'S FANCY

Oh some are for the lily, and some are for the rose,
But I am for the sugar-cane that in Jamaica
grows.

For it's that that makes the bonny drink to
warm my copper nose,
Says the old bold mate of Henry Morgan.

Oh some are fond of fiddles, and a song well sung.
And some are all for music for to lilt upon the
tongue;

But mouths were made for tankards, and for
sucking at the bung,
Says the old bold mate of Henry Morgan.

Oh some are fond of dancing, and some are fond
of dice,
And some are all for red lips, and pretty lasses'
eyes;

CAPTAIN STRATTON'S FANCY

But a right Jamaica puncheon is a finer prize
To the old bold mate of Henry Morgan.

Oh some that's good and godly ones they hold
that it's a sin,
To troll the jolly bowl around, and let the dollars
spin;
But I'm for toleration, and for drinking at an
inn,
Says the old bold mate of Henry Morgan.

Oh some are sad and wretched folk that go in
silken suits,
And there's a mort of wicked rogues that live in
good repute;
So I'm for drinking honestly, and dying in my
boots,
Like an old bold mate of Henry Morgan.

News from Whydah

Air—"Gara River."

OH did you come by Whydah Roads, my tarry
Buccaneer O?

And did you see the Anna Pink, and whither
did she steer O?

Away O, Heigho, fal lal lero.

Did you see my fancy man in crimson bom-
bazino?

With ear-rings and sea-boots the bravest ever
seen O?

Away O, Heigho, derry down deno.

For the English King's ships caring not a fig O,
Bringing gold, in the hold, to marry me in Sligo
Away O, Heigho, ago and igo.

NEWS FROM WHYDAH

Yes I came by Whydah Roads, my dark Senhora,
There I saw the Anna Pink but she was gone
ashore a.

Away O! Heigho, labora et ora.

Wrack and wreck was on her deck, and she was
full of weed a,
And poor drowned mariners that made my hear
to bleed a.

Away O! Heigho, to bleed indeed a.

There I saw your fancy man hanging from a
tree a,
Dangling in a running noose, and staring out to
sea a.

Away O, Heigho,

Away O, Heigho,

Away O, Heigho, and won't you marry me a?

St. Mary's Bells

Air—"Manzanares."

It 's pleasant in Holy Mary
By San Marie lagoon,
The bells they chime and jingle
From dawn to afternoon.
They rhyme and chime and mingle,
They pulse and boom and beat,
And the laughing bells are gentle
And the mournful bells are sweet.

Oh, who are the men that ring them,
The bells of San Marie,
Oh, who but sonsie seamen
Come in from over sea,

ST. MARY'S BELLS

And merrily in the belfries
They rock and sway and hale,
And send the bells a-jangle,
And down the lusty ale.

It's pleasant in Holy Mary
To hear the beaten bells
Come booming into music,
Which throbs, and clangs, and swells,
From sunset till the daybreak,
From dawn to afternoon.
In port of Holy Mary
On San Marie Lagoon.

London Town

Air—"Bradlow Knoll."

OH London Town 's a fine town, and London
sights are rare,
And London ale is right ale, and brisk 's the
London air,
And busily goes the world there, but crafty
grows the mind,
And London Town of all towns I'm glad to
leave behind.

Then hey for croft and hop-yard, and hill, and
field, and pond,
With Bredon Hill before me and Malvern Hill
beyond.

LONDON TOWN

The hawthorn white i' the hedgerow, and all the
spring's attire
In the comely land of Teme and Lugg, and Clent
and Clee, and Wyre.

Oh London girls are brave girls, in silk and
cloth o' gold,
And London shops are rare shops, where gallant
things are sold,
And bonnily clinks the gold there, but drowsily
blinks the eye,
And London Town of all towns I'm glad to
hurry by.

Then, hey for covert and woodland, and ash and
elm and oak,
Tewkesbury inns, and Malvern roofs, and Wor-
cester chimney smoke,

LONDON TOWN

The red-felled Hereford cattle a-lowing from
field and byre,
And Bradlow Knoll, and Kilbury Camp, and
Ledbury Church's spire.

Oh London tunes are new tunes, and London
books are wise,
And London plays are rare plays, and fine to
country eyes,
But craftily fares the knave there, and wickedly
fares the Jew,
And London Town of all towns I'm glad to
hurry through.

So hey for the road, the west road, by mill and
forge and fold,
Scent of the fern and song of the lark by brook,
and field, and wold,

LONDON TOWN

To the comely folk at the hearth-stone and the
ale beside the fire,
In the hearty land, the home land, my land of
heart's desire.

The Emigrant

Air—"The Ships in Gara River."

GOING by Daly's shanty I heard the boys
within

Dancing the Spanish hornpipe to Driscoll's
violin,

I heard the sea-boots shaking the rough planks
of the floor,

But I was going westward, I hadn't heart for
more.

All down the windy village the noise rang in
my ears,

Old sea boots stamping, shuffling, bringing the
bitter tears,

THE EMIGRANT

The old tune piped and quavered, the lilts came
clear and strong,
But I was going westward, I couldn't join the
song.

There were the grey stone houses, the night
wind blowing keen,
The hill-sides pale with moonlight, the young
corn springing green,
The hearth nooks lit and kindly, with dear
friends good to see,
But I was going westward, and the ship waited
me.

Port of Holy Peter

Air—"Nancy Lass."

THE blue laguna rocks and quivers,
Dull gurgling eddies twist and spin,
The climate does for people's livers,
It's a nasty place to anchor in
Is Spanish port,
Fever port,
Port of Holy Peter.

The town begins on the sea-beaches,
And the town's mad with the stinging flies,
The drinking water's mostly leeches,
It's a far remove from Paradise

PORT OF HOLY PETER

Is Spanish port,
Fever port,
Port of Holy Peter.

There's sand-bagging and throat-slitting,
And quiet graves in the sea slime,
Stabbing, of course, and rum-hitting,
Dirt, and drink, and stink, and crime,
In Spanish port,
Fever port,
Port of Holy Peter.

All the day the wind's blowing,
From the sick swamp below the hills,
All the night the plague's growing,
And the dawn brings the fever chills,
In Spanish port,
Fever port,
Port of Holy Peter.

PORT OF HOLY PETER

You get a thirst there's no slaking,
You get the chills and fever-shakes,
Tongue yellow and head aching,
And then the sleep that never wakes.

And all the year the heat 's baking,
The sea rots and the earth quakes,
In Spanish port,
Fever port,
Port of Holy Peter.

Beauty

I HAVE seen dawn and sunset on moors and
windy hills,

Coming in solemn beauty like slow old tunes of
Spain ;

I have seen the lady April bringing the daffodils,
Bringing the springing grass and the soft warm
April rain.

I have heard the song of the blossoms and the
old chant of the sea,

And seen strange lands from under the arched
white sails of ships ;

But the loveliest things of beauty God ever has
showed to me,

Are her voice, and her hair, and eyes, and the
dear red curve of her lips.

The Seekers

FRIENDS and loves we have none, nor wealth,
nor blessed abode,
But the hope, the burning hope, and the road,
the lonely road.

Not for us are content, and quiet, and peace of
mind,
For we go seeking cities that we shall never
find.

There is no solace on earth for us—for such as
we—
Who search for the hidden beauty that eyes
may never see.

THE SEEKERS

Only the road and the dawn, the sun, the wind,
and the rain,
And the watch-fire under stars, and sleep, and
the road again.

We seek the City of God, and the haunt where
beauty dwells,
And we find the noisy mart and the sound of
burial bells.

Never the golden city, where radiant people
meet,
But the dolorous town where mourners are going
about the street.

We travel the dusty road till the light of the day
is dim,
And sunset shows us spires away on the world's
rim.

THE SEEKERS

We travel from dawn to dusk, till the day is
past and by,
Seeking the Holy City beyond the rim of the
sky.

Friends and loves we have none, nor wealth
nor blest abode,
But the hope, the burning hope, and the road,
the lonely road.

Hall Sands

[The village of Hall Sands, between Dartmouth and Start Point, in South Devonshire, is imminently threatened by the sea. Its natural breakwater of sand and shingle was removed a few months ago by a Government contractor, and since its removal the sea has encroached upon the foreshore, and is now undermining some of the houses.

The land on which the village stands is beginning to slip and settle. The sea takes a heavy toll of earth at each high tide. The fishermen are in danger of utter ruin, and the first gale from the south-east is likely to sweep the village from its site.]

THE moon is bright on Devon sands,
The pale moon brings the tide,
The cold green water's greedy hands
Are clutching far and wide
Where the brown nets are dried.

Oh! snaky are the salt green waves
That wash the scattered shells ;
They come from making sailors' graves

HALL SANDS

And tolling sunk ships' bells—
But now their tossing swells
Are lipping greedy at the stone
Which props the scattered town.
They cannot leave the rocks alone,
They mean to sink and drown
The wretched cabins down.

The beams are creaking, and the walls
Are cracking, while the sea
Lips landward steadily and galls
Those huts of brick and tree
Which men's homes used to be.

Lithe, wicked eddies twist and spin
Where once they dragged the boats.
The nimble shrimps are nesting in
The rye-patch—and the throats
Of sea-snails glut the oats.

HALL SANDS

It is all falling, slipping swift ;
The thievish tides intend
To crumble down and set adrift,
To eat away, and rend.
And steal, and make an end.

Soon, when the wind is setting cold
And sharp from the south-east,
The great salt water running bold
Will give the fish a feast,
And the town will have ceased,

But that its wretched ruins then—
Though sunken utterly—
Will show how the brute greed of men
Helps feed the greedy sea.

Dawn

THE dawn comes cold: the haystack smokes,
The green twigs crackle in the fire,
The dew is dripping from the oaks,
And sleepy men bear milking-yokes
Slowly towards the cattle-byre.

Down in the town a clock strikes six,
The grey east heaven burns and glows,
The dew shines on the thatch of ricks,
A slow old crone comes gathering sticks,
The red cock in the ox-yard crows.

Beyond the stack where we have lain
The road runs twisted like a snake
(The white road to the land of Spain),
The road that we must foot again,
Though the feet halt and the heart ache.

Laugh and be Merry

LAUGH and be merry, remember, better the
world with a song,

Better the world with a blow in the teeth of a
wrong.

Laugh for the time is brief, a thread the length
of a span.

Laugh and be proud to belong to the old proud
pageant of man.

Laugh and be merry : remember, in olden time,
God made Heaven and Earth for joy He took
in a rhyme,

Made them, and filled them full with the strong
red wine of His mirth,

The splendid joy of the stars : the joy of the
earth.

LAUGH AND BE MERRY

So we must laugh and drink from the deep blue
cup of the sky

Join the jubilant song of the great stars sweep-
ing by,

Laugh, and battle, and work, and drink of the
wine outpoured

In the dear green earth, the sign of the joy of
the Lord.

Laugh and be merry together, like brothers akin,
Guesting awhile in the rooms of a beautiful inn,
Glad till the dancing stops, and the lilt of the
music ends.

Laugh till the game is played; and be you
merry, my friends.

Blind Man's Vigil

MUMBLIN' under the gallows, hearin' the clank
o' the chain,

Hearin' the suck o' the sea as the tide goes by
the stair,

I fiddles a lilt o' tune to the bones o' the men o'
the Main,

Who dangle, rattle, and dance in the rusty
chains on air.

Poor old mariners' bones, a mark for cobbles
and hoys,

As they go about in the Reach when the
dingy tide 's at flood.

BLIND MAN'S VIGIL

Bones of Billy's old shipmates, bones o' the
merry boys,
Whose faults were dollars and girls, and a too
quick tick o' the blood.

They wasn't the lads to rest in a patch of
Christian mould,
Under a marble slab with a verse o' Scriptor
to 't.

They asked for liquor, an' fun, an' a friend to
share the gold,
An' a dance in hemp at last wi' nothin' but
air to foot.

I fiddles 'em bits o' tunes, an' ballads, an' songs,
an' rhymes,
Of the sort that brought the anchor home, an'
the yard to the masthead ;

BLIND MAN'S VIGIL

An' I think they likes to hear, for it makes 'em
mind the times,

When the blood was hot, an' the throat was
dry, an' a woman's lips were red.

Fiddlin' under the gallows I mumbles tunes
an' words

To the danglin', janglin' rags an' bones that
once were lads I knew;

(An' I think they likes to hear), an' it scares
away the birds,

From the men who go where the wind blows,
an' went where the wind blew.

Roadways

ONE road leads to London,

One road runs to Wales,

My road leads me seawards

To the white dipping sails.

One road leads to the river,

As it goes singing slow ;

My road leads to shipping,

Where the bronzed sailors go.

Leads me, lures me, calls me

To salt green tossing sea ;

A road without earth's road-dust

Is the right road for me.

ROADWAYS

A wet road heaving, shining,
And wild with sea-gulls' cries,
A mad salt sea-wind blowing
The salt spray in my eyes.

My road calls me, lures me
West, east, south, and north ;
Most roads lead men homewards,
My road leads me forth
To add more miles to the tally
Of grey miles left behind,
In quest of that one beauty
God put me here to find.

Midsummer Night

“They tell a tale in the taverns of a white lady riding in the wood each Beltane. They call her Queen Elizabeth, though it is but a changing of the name. It is the lady Dian gone a-masquerading.”—*Samuel Trairon's MS.*

THE perfect disc of the sacred moon
Through still blue heaven serenely swims,
And the lone bird's liquid music brims
The peace of the night with a perfect tune.

This is that holiest night o' the year
When (the mowers say) may be heard and
seen
The ghostly court of the English queen,
Who rides to harry and hunt the deer.

MIDSUMMER NIGHT

And the woodland creatures cower awake,
A strange unrest is on harts and does,
For the maiden Dian a-hunting goes,
And the trembling deer are a-foot in the brake.

They start at a shaken leaf: the sound
Of a dry twig snapped by a squirrel's foot
Is a nameless dread: and to them the hoot
Of a mousing owl is the cry of a hound.

Oh soon the forest will ring with cries,
The dim green coverts will flash: the grass
Will glow as the radiant hunters pass
After the quarry with burning eyes.

The hurrying feet will range unstayed
Of questing goddess and hunted fawn,
Till the east is grey with the sacred dawn,
And the red cock wakens the milking maid.

The Harper's Song

THIS sweetness trembling from the strings

The music of my troublous lute

Hath timed Herodias' Daughter's foot ;

Setting a-clink her ankle-rings

Whenas she danced to feasted kings.

Where gemmed apparel burned and caught

The sunset 'neath the golden dome,

To the dark beauties of old Rome

My sorrowful lute hath haply brought

Sad memories sweet with tender thought.

When night had fallen and lights and fires

Were darkened in the homes of men,

Some sighing echo stirred :—and then

The old cunning wakened from the wires

The old sorrows and the old desires.

THE HARPER'S SONG

Dead kings in long forgotten lands,
And all dead beauteous women. Some
Whose pride imperial hath become
Old armour resting in the sands,
And shards of iron in dusty hands,

Have heard my lyre's soft rise and fall
Go trembling down the paven ways,
Till every heart was all ablaze—
Hasty each foot—to obey the call
To triumph or to funeral.

Could I begin again the slow
Sweet mournful music filled with tears,
Surely the old, dead, dusty ears
Would hear : the old drowsy eyes would glow,
Old memories come : old hopes and fears,
And time restore the long ago.

The Gentle Lady

So beautiful, so dainty-sweet
So like a lyre's delightful touch—
A beauty perfect, ripe, complete
That art's own hand could only smutch
And nature's self not better much.

So beautiful, so purely wrought,
Like a fair missal penned with hymns,
So gentle, so surpassing thought—
A beauteous soul in lovely limbs,
A lantern that an angel trims.

THE GENTLE LADY

So simple-sweet, without a sin
Like gentle music gently timed,
Like rhyme-words coming aptly in,
To round a moonéd poem rhymed
To tunes the laughing bells have chimed.

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