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BALLADS · FROM
THE · DANISH · ·
and · · · · ·
Original · Verses ·

E · M · SMITH · DAMPIER



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BALLADS
FROM THE DANISH
AND
ORIGINAL VERSES

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AND
ORIGINAL VERSES

BY
E. M. SMITH-DAMPIER

LONDON :: ANDREW MELROSE
3 YORK STREET, COVENT GARDEN

1910

PRINTED BY
HAZELL, WATSON AND VINEY, LD.,
LONDON AND AYLESBURY.

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TO THE
MEMORY OF MY PARENTS

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BALLADS FROM THE DANISH

NOTE

In the translations the metre of the original has in all cases been scrupulously followed.

KING OLAF AND THE TROLLS

HE set his sail for Norroway,
Saint Olaf our good king ;
For Hornelummer he shaped his course
To see what luck would bring.

(Red as the ruddy gold, the sun sets over
Trondhjem.)

Up and spake the steersman bold,
Stood by the lading-gear :

“At Hornelummer is no good haven,
So grim a troll dwells there :

“Eyes he hath like a burning brand ;
With his mouth he well can roar ;
His nails stand out, like the horns of a buck,
A good ell’s length and more ;

“A beard he hath like a horse’s mane,
Hangs downward to his knee ;
A long and loathly tail he hath ;
His claws they are ill to see.”

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Up and spake Saint Olaf the king,
As the ship swung to and fro :
“Cast off the ropes in the name of God,
And let the vessel go !”

So soft she sank, so light she rose,
O'er the billows she went a-striding ;
And fast she made for Hornelummer,
Where the ugly troll was bidding.

Out he stalked from his hold i' the hill,
By the rocky rifts a-going,
And there he saw Saint Olaf the king
In his vessel swiftly rowing.

“Now who comes here, so overbold,
My magic to defy it?
Harken, thou with the ruddy beard !
Full sore thou shalt abide it !”

“Now nor never by this my coast
Dares any ship to linger !
I could drag thee into the rifts o' the rocks
With the touch of my smallest finger !”

“Hear now, Ara, thou ancient imp,
Nor anger thyself at all !
Seize thou the ship as it liketh thee,
And see what will befall.”

He took the ship by stem and stern,
To work her dule and dree,
When lo! he sank down into the stone,
That held him by the knee.

“Here stand I, sunken in the stone,
To go no more a-roving!
At wrestling or at hand-play hard
Thy strength I'd fain be proving.”

“Now tarry thou there, thou wilful wight,
All under my powerful charm—
Tarry thou there till Doomsday dread,
And work no Christian harm.”

Out came running his evil mate,
And stretched her neck so grim;
Saint Olaf spake one little word,
Bade her stand still by him.

Up and spake the little trolls
Who sat i' the hill down under—
They asked where the mother-troll might be,
With mickle woe and wonder.

“Perchance this is the Red-beard's work
Who hath harried our race so long!
But come we forth with our brands of iron,
To work him wrong for wrong.”

6 BALLADS FROM THE DANISH

Up and spake our goodly king—
He held it a game so merry :
“Stone to stone, and rock to rock,
Together ye all shall tarry !”

Out they sailed from Hornelummer,
Well-pleased with the fair adventure ;
The hill he blocked with a mighty stone,
That none therein might enter.

Thanks, thanks to Olaf our gallant king !
He wrought a goodly charm !
Now men may sail by Hornelummer,
And take no hurt nor harm.

Red as the ruddy gold, the sun sets over
Trondhjem.

SIR KARL'S LYKEWAKE

It was young Sir Karel,
His mother's rede did pray
If he should to the convent ride,
And bear his love away.
(The roses and the lilies all a-blowing.)

“Lo, on a bier thou'lt lay thee down,
A corse so white and wan—
And never a one shall ask of thee
If thou art a living man.”

Late, so late at even,
Sore sickness on him fell;
All in the early morning
They tolled for him the bell.

They took him, young Sir Karel,
And streaked him for a corpse;
And all to bear the tidings round,
His page has taken horse.

8 BALLADS FROM THE DANISH

Upon his bier they bore him
To the convent door so wide—
The Prioress came to meet them
With mickle pomp and pride.

Forth then went his little page,
Was clad in the scarlet red—
He bade the maidens come to watch—
“For young Sir Karl is dead.”

It was little Kirsten
Who asked her mother dear :
“Mother, may I to the watching wend
Over the young knight’s bier?”

“Put thou on thy scarlet cloak,
And deck thy head with gold ;
But be thou ware of young Sir Karl,
His wiles are manifold !”

She went in where the black bier stood
Betwixt the tapers tall ;
She could not see their burning flames
So fast her tears did fall.

Right soothly for his soul she prayed,
All sitting at his head ;
“Alas! thou wast my liefest love
In the days ere thou wast dead !”

She laid her face against his feet,
All on the linen white—
“Oh, in the days ere thou wast dead
Thou wast my heart's delight!”

Right softly then to her he spake:
“Nay, cease thy bitter crying!
For lo! 'tis all for love of thee
That on this bier I'm lying.

“My steed stands in the cloister-garth
A-tarrying all for thee,
If thou now, little Kirsten,
Wilt fare afar with me.”

It was young Sir Karel
Rose up in his shroud so white—
And as they went from the convent-door
She bade them a gay good-night.

The nuns they all sat silent,
Each reading on her book;
They thought it was God's good angel
The beauteous maid that took.

The nuns they all sat silent—
Each to herself said she:
“God grant that His good angel
May speedily come for me!”

The roses and the lilies all a-blowing.

THE AVENGING SWORD

SIR PETER he rode to the castle stout,
The King o' the Danes he stood without.
(Forward, hurrah ! ride forward.)

“ Welcome hither, my comrade good !
Hast thou avenged thy father's blood ? ”

“ Oh, I have been so southerly
Until the sun sank down to me.

“ And I have been so westerly
Until the sun set close to me.

“ And I have been so northerly
Until the sun was frore to see.

“ And I have been so easterly
Until the day was fair to see.

“ But never could I find the wight
My father's death could rede me right.”

“Say, what gift wilt give the wight
Thy father’s death can rede thee right?”

“Of silver he shall have his fill,
And of good red gold whate’er he will.”

He smiled, the king, his words to heed—
“Here stand I, that did the deed!

“By God in heaven, I tell thee true!
None but I thy father slew.”

Sir Peter smote himself on the breast—
“Heart, be still, nor break thy rest!

“Heart, be still, bide patiently!
Sure and swift shall my vengeance be!”

Alone Sir Peter stayed
To speak with his good blade.

“Harken, sword so good!
Wilt steep thyself in blood?”

“Good brown brand, wilt fight for me?
No brother have I in the world but thee.”

“Say, how can I fight for thee?
My good hilt lies in pieces three.”

12 BALLADS FROM THE DANISH

Straight to the smith he wended
To have the fault amended.

He gave him iron, he gave him steel
Of proof and price, the hurt to heal.

“Good brown brand, wilt fight for me?
No brother have I in the world but thee.”

“Deal thou thy strokes so lustily
As I’ll be sharp and swift for thee.

“Be thou in thy blows so bold
As strongly to my hilt I’ll hold.”

Sir Peter went to the hall
Where the knights were drinking all.

To prove his sword he was so fain,
Eight of the champions there lay slain.

He struck so strong, he hewed so hard,
Neither wife nor maid he spared.

Behind the arras there he thrust—
The king and his sons they bit the dust.

Up spake the babe, in cradle lay:
“A red revenge dost thou wreak to-day!

“A red revenge for that sire o’ thine!—
God give me a day for avenging mine!”

“And have I avenged him, sire o’ mine?
Thou shalt have no day for avenging thine.”

He seized the babe amain,
And hewed it straight in twain.

“Cease, good sword, thy thirst to slake!
Bide thou still, for God his sake!”

Wearily whispered the sword and still—
“Fain of thy blood I’d have my fill!

“Hadst thou not named my name, I vow
I would have slain thee, here and now!”

Forward, hurrah! ride forward.

THE AVENGING DAUGHTERS

ELDER to younger said
(For him who first loved me),
“Sister, wilt thou not wed?”
(She dwells beneath the greenwood tree.)

“None will I wed while I draw breath
Till I have avenged our father’s death.”

“Thou speak’st an idle word,
We have neither mail nor sword.”

“There are rich franklins dwelling hard by—
Mail will they lend us, and swords to try.”

Each maiden bound a sword by her side,
Featly fared they forth to ride.

When they rode to Rosy-Bower
They met Sir Erland the self-same hour.

‘Bridegrooms are ye both, ye two,
Or else ye are riding forth to woo.’

“Bridegrooms are we not, we two,
But we are riding forth to woo.”

“I rede ye ride where dwell in a bower
Two fatherless maidens, with gold for dower.”

“If they have store of pelf
Why seek’st them not thyself?”

“I would flee them rather,
For I have slain their father,

“And I have slain their brother,
And I have beguiled their mother.”

“And hast thou slain father and brother,
Thou liest concerning our mother.”

So child-like out the swords they drew—
So man-like did they hack and hew.

They hewed Sir Erland all so small
As the linden leaves that flutter and fall,

16 BALLADS FROM THE DANISH

Sore did the maidens weep for woe
When to shrive them they must go.

All they got for the deed of dread
Was Fridays three on water and bread!

For him who first loved me :
She dwells beneath the greenwood tree.

YOUNG DANNEVED AND BOY TRUST

WHAT shall I do in Denmark ?
My corselet sore doth gall—
The Danish knights make mock o' me,
For I am young and small.
(Ne'er shall I speak good Danish !)

Firm he sat in the saddle ;
His spurs were sharp and long.
At Lundy kirk in Skaane
There heard he even-song.

Up and spake Sir Peter,
That was his parish priest :
“ Welcome to thee, young Danneved !
To-day shalt be my guest.”

“ For meat I will not tarry,
Nor will I wait for wine,
Until I come to Berneskov,
To talk with mother mine.”

“Harken now, young Danneved,
 And give thou heed to me!
 A troop of thy deadly foemen
 Are lying in wait for thee.”

“First I trust my goodly sword,
 And next my steed so tall,
 And then I trust my Danish men—
 But myself the most of all.”

“First trustest thou thy goodly sword,
 And next thy steed so tall—
 Then trustest thou thy Danish men
 Will fail thee first of all.”

It was gallant Danneved
 Rode forth i' the gloaming grey—
 And there he saw his foemen,
 Three lances' length away.

There he saw his foemen,
 Three lances' length away—
 Then took they leave, his meiné,
 To flee from him that day.

Leave took all his meiné
 To turn and flee away,
 All save the lad so little,
 Who straight did up and say :

YOUNG DANNEVED AND BOY TRUST 19

“Lo! thy bread I’ve eaten,
And I have worn thy weed;
And I will stand by thee to-day
To help thee in thy need.

“I thy sword have sharpened,
And I have stalled thy steed;
And I will stand by thee to-day
To help thee in thy need.”

They drew their ranks together
All by the greenwood bower—
Five there fought a couple
With mickle strength and stour.

They drew their ranks together
Under the greenwood tree—
Five there fought a couple—
A fearful fight to see.

It was gallant Danneved,
His sword sheathed at his side—
“Come thou hither, little boy Trust,
’Tis time for us to ride.”

It was gallant Danneved
Rode to his castle fair;
His mother came to meet him
In velvet wrapped and vair.

“Stand up, now, lady mother,
And pour for us the wine!
For I will give him, little boy Trust,
The hand of sister mine.”

Ne'er shall I speak good Danish!

THE KNAVISH MERMAN

GAY was the dance in the kirkyard fair.

(Well aday!)

There danced maidens with flowing hair.

(Methinks 'tis hard to ride away.)

There danced knights with shining sword—

“None of them all is worth a word!”

Proud was the Princess, thus did she say,

That heard the merman under water that lay.

Up stood the merman; thus spake he:

“Perchance the king's daughter will wed with
me.”

He shaped him garments all glimmering;

He called him Sir Alfast, son of a king.

He shaped him a steed, so black and bold;

He rode like a knight in a saddle of gold.

22 BALLADS FROM THE DANISH

He tied his steed where the shade was mirk;
Withershins went he round the kirk.

Into the kirk he went, so gay,
And all the holy images they turned their
heads away.

Up spake the priest by the altar that stood—
“Who may he be, this knight so good?”

The Princess smiled 'neath her veil so fine—
“Would to God that the knight were mine!”

“Listen, proud Princess, and love thou me—
A crown of gold I'll give to thee.”

“Over three kingdoms my father was king,
But he never gave me so fair a thing.”

He wrapped her in his cloak of blue—
Out of the kirk they went, they two.

They met upon the wold
The steed with saddle of gold.

When they rode o'er the lea,
He became a troll, so foul to see.

When they rode down to the water's brim,
He became a troll, so fierce and grim.

“Sir Alfast, thou art christened man—
What wilt thou with this water wan?”

“No knight am I, nor christened man—
My home is in this water wan.”

When they reached the midmost Sound,
Fifty fathom they sank to ground.

Long heard the fishers with dread and dree
How the king's daughter sobbed under the sea!

Well aday!
Methinks 'tis hard to ride away.

THE WOOD-RAVEN

THE raven flies at even
That flies not in the light,
And he must take the black fortune
That may not take the white.
(At even flies the raven.)

It was little Elva
Fared forth from the castle high ;
She saw the wild wood-raven
That flew across the sky.

“ Fly down, thou wild wood-raven,
And speak a word with me ;
All my secret sorrow
That I will tell to thee.

“ My father gave me the son of a king
To plight me heart and hand—
She sent him, my cruel step-mother,
Afar to a foreign land.

“She sent him, my cruel step-mother,
Forth under spell and ban;
She bade me love her brother foul,
Was liker a troll than a man.”

“Say now, little Elva,
What wilt thou give to me
All to the land of thy lover
If I shall carry thee?”

“I’ll give to thee the silver white,
But and the ruddy gold—
Be kind, thou wild wood-raven!
Thy spells are manifold.”

“A fairer gift than silver!
A goodlier gift than gold!
The first-born son that thou shalt bear
Him will I have and hold.”

All in the swarthy raven’s claw
Her snow-white hand she laid;
She promised him her first-born son
By the faith of a Christian maid.

He took her, little Elva,
Set her his wings between—
With mickle toil and pain he flew
Across the sea so green.

It was the wild wood-raven
 Upon the tower stood still ;
 “ Be glad now, little Elva !
 Thou shalt have all thy will ! ”

Forth came bold Sir Nilus
 With gold rings on his hand ;
 “ Welcome now, little Elva,
 All to this foreign land !

“ Thanks to thee, wild wood-raven !
 Fly o'er the land amain,
 And when a year is past and gone
 Then come thou here again.”

He went, the wild wood-raven,
 Flew o'er the land amain,
 And when a year was past and gone
 He came to them again.

It was the wild wood-raven,
 Upon the tower perched he—
 “ Hast thou forgotten, Elva,
 The gift thou shalt give to me ? ”

“ Now wrap him in the linen white,
 The little babe I bore !
 Take him, thou wild wood-raven—
 His mother he'll see no more.”

He's pierced him in the lily breast,
And drunk the hot heart's blood—
Then rose the raven as fair a knight
As e'er in the country stood.

At even flies the raven.

AN OWER-TRUE TALE

So merry the knights were sitting
 Around the queen's own board—
Many a laugh was among them,
 And many a waggish word.
(Under the lindens, there will I bide.)

No word of the kirk was spoken,
 And never a word of the cloister,
But many a word of the ladies
 Who had fair maids to foster.

“ I will have a maiden
 Who can both broider and sew ;
I will not have a maiden
 Goes gadding to and fro.

“ I will have a maiden
 Who well can spread the board ;
I will not have a maiden
 Too ready with her word.”

Silent sat all the maidens,
And never spoke a word;
All save the youngest maiden,
Stood at the queen's own board.

“If I so old were waxen
That my maiden days were over,
So help me God in Heaven!
Thou shouldst not be my lover.

“I must bide in my bower . . .
I can both broider and sew—
Thou wouldst mount thy gallant steed,
Go gadding to and fro.

“I must bide in my bower . . .
Right well can I spread my board—
Thou in the Thing wouldst be standing,
And wasting full many a word.

“I must bide in my bower,
A-guiding my household gear—
Thou wouldst be sitting 'mid lords and knights,
Nor holding thy tongue for fear.”

Up he stood, Sir Peter,
So ready with his tongue—
“Lo! I have found the self-same maid
That I had sought so long!”

Merry were all the maidens
That goodly game to see ;
The queen she gave the maid away,
Sir Peter's bride to be !

Under the lindens, there will I bide.

THE WOOING OF RANIL JONSON

RANIL bade saddle his steed so free—
“The wealthy Margrave I’ll go see,
Tho’ I am severed both from friends and
kinsmen.”

Sir Ranil rode into the courtyard fair,
There stood the Margrave, wrapped all in vair.
(Lo! I am severed both from friends and kins-
men.)

“There standest thou, Margrave, in furs so fine!
Give me now Kirsten, true love o’ mine,
For sorely am I severed from friends and kins-
men.”

Up spake her mother, who loved her so dear—
“Never a sweetheart shalt thou have here,
Since thou art severed both from friends and
kinsmen.”

“If ye refuse me my heart’s desire
 All that ye have I will burn with fire,
 Since I am severed both from friends and kins-
 men.”

“All that I have wilt thou burn with fire?
 Then ride thou away with thy heart’s desire,
 Tho’ thou art severed both from friends and
 kinsmen.”

They wrapped her in a cloak of red,
 And lifted her on to Ranil’s steed,
 Tho’ he was severed both from friends and
 kinsmen.

Nought for their bridal bower they found
 But the wood and the wild and the low green
 ground—
 So sorely was he severed from friends and kins-
 men.

“If King Eric thou hadst not slain,
 In the fair castles we might have lain—
 Now we are severed both from friends and kins-
 men.”

He struck her on the brow so fair—
 “One should order one’s words when guests are
 there,
 Now we are severed both from friends and kins-
 men.”

THE WOOING OF RANIL JONSON 33

He struck her on the cheek so red—

“I never wished King Eric dead,
Altho’ I am severed both from friends and kins-
men.

“Forests have ears, and fields have eyes—

We must wander, my maid, as the wild swan
flies,

Now we are severed both from friends and kins-
men.”

LOVEL AND JOHN

Lo now, I bid you, my merry men all,
Put your armour on,*
Bind on your helms of the burning gold,
And follow Sir John!

Sir Peter rides home from the Thing so fleet,
(Put your armour on),
Little Kirstin comes forth her father to greet—
And ask after John.

“Welcome, dear father, home from the Thing!
(Put your armour on)
Say now, what tidings hast thou to bring?”
What news of Sir John?

“This is the news that I bring to thee—
(Put your armour on),
That young Sir Lovel thy bridegroom shall be,
And not Sir John.”

* *Lit.* Be ye well boun!

“If young Sir Lovel my bridegroom shall be
(Put your armour on),
Sorrow and care he shall have with me.”
Oh fickle Sir John!

Sir Lovel he rides to his bridal bright ;
(Put your armour on)—
Sir John has saddled his war-horse white—
“I go too,” says John.

Sir John he rode to the blithe bridale
(Put your armour on)
High on his horse, in his coat of mail.
“I’m coming,” said John.

The bride she busked her, so runs the rime
(Put your armour on),
As the bells were ringing a merry chime—
“I’m ready,” said John.

Down to the kirk-door came the bride,
(Put your armour on)—
And bold Sir John was close at her side—
“I’m first,” said John.

He lifted her up on his war-horse white
(Put your armour on)—
“I wish Sir Lovel a gay good-night !”
All from Sir John.

When dawn is red, and the small birds sing
 (Put your armour on),
 Sir Lovel has ridden to seek the king.
 "I go too," says John.

"My liege, my liege, an thou wilt hear
 (Put your armour on),
 I've a tale of wrong for thy gracious ear!"
 "'Tis of me," said John.

"Yest're'en it was my bridal gay
 (Put your armour on),
 But another knight bore the bride away."
 "'Twas I," said John.

"Since to ye both the maid is so dear
 (Put your armour on),
 Lo! for her love ye shall break a spear."
 "I shall win," said John.

The first course that they rode together
 (Put your armour on),
 Sir Lovel he broke his stirrup-leather.
 "Hold up," said John.

But when they ran the second course
 (Put your armour on),
 Dead fell Sir Lovel, hurled from his horse—
 "Lie there!" said John.

The bride clapped her hands to see the show

(Put your armour on)—

“Ha! ha! for the wolf and the carrion-crow!”

So he won, Sir John.

Bind on your helms of the burning gold,

And follow Sir John!

RIME OF THE DEAD LOVER

THREE maidens sat in a bower,
Two broidered with gold—
The third she wept her lover
Under darksome mould.
(For she loved the knight so truly.)

It was the knight Sir Aager
Rode in his own countrie ;
He loved the lady Elsa,
So fair was she.

He wooed the lady Elsa
With gifts and gold—
On Monday thereafter
Lay he i' the mould.

She wrung her hands, fair Elsa,
With wellaway—
That heard the knight Sir Aager
Low where he lay.

Up stood the knight Sir Aager,
His coffin took amain,
And forth he fared to his true-love's bower
With mickle pain.

There knocked he with his coffin—
No sword had he—
“Stand up, thou Lady Elsa!
Open to me!”

Then spake the lady Elsa,
With tears spake she:
“Canst thou name our Saviour
I'll open to thee.”

“Stand up, thou lady Elsa!
Open thy door!
For I can name our Saviour
As I could before.”

Up stood she, lady Elsa,
With drearihead—
Straight opened she her bower door,
Let in the dead.

She took her golden comb
To comb his hair—
For every lock she ordered
Down fell a tear.

“Hear, thou knight Sir Aager,
Liefest love o’ mine!
How is it under darksome earth
In grave of thine?”

“So is it in the darksome earth
In my low bed,
As up in holy heaven,
Where all are glad.”

“Hear, thou knight Sir Aager,
Liefest love and dear!
Down with thee in darksome earth
Fain would I fare.”

“So is it in the darksome earth
Down where I dwell,
As it is grim and ghastly
In blackest hell.

“For every tear thou weepst
In woeful mood,
Into my coffin falls a drop
Of thy heart’s blood.

“Up above mine head
The green grass grows;
Down beside my feet
The wild worm goes.

“When thy mood is merry,
 For each word said,
 Out of my grave there springeth up
 Roses red.

“I hear the red cock crowing
 I’ the mirk so grey,
 And all the doors are opening—
 I must away.

“I hear the black cock crowing
 In the farm-stead—
 And I must to the kirkyard
 With all the dead.”

Up stood the knight Sir Aager,
 His coffin took again :
 He went his way to the kirkyard
 With mickle pain.

Up she rose, proud Elsa,
 Sad was her mood—
 She followed him, her own true love,
 To the dark wood.

When through the wood they wended
 To kirkyard fair,
 Wan it grew and faded,
 His goodly golden hair.

“Behold thou up in heaven
The stars so bright !
There mayst thou see so soothly
How goes the night.”

She saw them up in heaven,
The stars so fair ;
Down in the earth the dead man sank
Ere she was 'ware.

Home went the lady Elsa,
With care so cold—
On Monday thereafter
Lay she i' the mould.

For she loved the knight so truly.

ORIGINAL VERSES

THE KING'S HUNTING

THE king has busked him forth to ride
All on his steed so brown—
He's halted him by the standing stone
To see the sun sink down.

And is it the moan of the mourning pine
Doth in his ear complain?
The wizened bough of the lean thorn-tree
That clutches his bridle-rein?

He looks, and knows the grisly witch
That wears the grey wolf-skin—
“Ruth, ruth, oh king, on the deadly wrong
That's wrought thy realm within!

“Thou hast taken a wife of alien life
From far beyond the sea;
And she's brought in a foreign faith
To flout thy gods and thee.

“The kirk-bell rings, the pale priest sings,
By thorpe and tower and town—
The black rood stands with arms spread wide
Where of old the blood ran down.

“The carven stone stands drear and lone—
And the old gods in their pain
Rave high and wail in the winter gale
And sob in the running rain.

“Harken and hear—for I crouched this eve
Where thistle and dock grow tall,
And I saw her steal from the postern-gate
And creep by the palace-wall.

“She’s off and away to the lonely kirk
To keep a cursèd tryst;
She’s taken thy son, to be bound for aye
A slave to the wan White Christ.”

The king he rides by holt and heath,
The witch goes on before,
By the carven stone on the moorland lone
Where the blood ran down of yore.

Oh, wan was the glint of the misty moon
In the brimming burn, and shrill
The wind it wailed in the lean thorn-trees
That crouch upon the hill.

“The font is dight, the taper bright,
I hear the sound of prayer—
Lest I be banned with bell and book
I dare not enter there.”

All lily-white the fair queen stood—
In strode the angry king—
“Thy God is thine, but my son is mine,
And I will not have this thing!”

White as a lily-flower, the queen
Fell down upon her knee—
“Have pity, have pity, thou cruel king,
On the souls of mine and me!”

The pale priest stood before the rood,
His look was proud and grim—
“Stand back, unshriven! the King of Heaven
Doth claim the babe for Him!”

Most like the wail of a winter gale
The grisly witch laughed loud—
“The christening-robcs are white enow
To serve as a goodly shroud!”

She's witched his arm, she's witched his heart,
She's witched his blade so true,
She's cast the glamour o'er his eyes,
The deadly deed to do.

The king, he drew his trusty brand,
And clove him to the chin—
“Short shrift at least is thine, proud priest,
Thy God His grace to win!”

Alas! alas! for the bloody chrism
The king's son got that day!
For the queen fell down at the self-same stroke
Nor turned not where she lay.

He's seized his young son in his arms,
And busked his steed to flee;
Like a crooked shadow the grisly witch
Runs ever beside his knee.

With laughter shrill she's by him still
While the misty moon grows dim—
Ere he can cross the running burn
She's reft the babe from him.

Where the priests of eld high worship held
The witch-wife laughs alone;
“The babe she bore shall learn my lore,
And dance by the carven stone!”

The tapers' light is quenched in night—
Hushed is the holy bell—
The pale priest's blood is on the rood—
The old gods have their will.

.

Now on a day when years are gone
The knights they rise apace—
For the sound of the horn in the dim red morn
Has called them to the chase.

The gaunt grey wolf-hounds growl and grin,
And the king is at their head—
His face is white in the breaking light
As the face of one new-dead ;

His voice is hollow as one that cries
In a dreary vault of stone ;
And, on thin lips, his smile is grim,
For the trampled branches sound to him
Like the cracking of bare-bleached bone.

Ho, holla-ho ! the game's afoot !
He breaks for the open moor !
But hearts grow chill, as the pack cries shrill,
That ne'er felt fear before.

The horses sweat, they plunge and fret,
Tho' the spur with blood drop fast—
Each man looks on his fellow's face,
And sees it all aghast—

Aghast and pale, he knows not why—
But the king's is red with wrath—
“How now, my masters ! Shake like babes
To follow the grey wolf's path ?”

And none spake word but the eldest lord:
“God shield us from the chase!
For the quarry crossed me as he ran,
And the eyes I saw were the eyes of a man,
Tho’ they looked from a grey wolf’s face.”

Loud laughed the king; “A fitting tale
For doting age to tell!
Who lists turn back, but I follow the track
Tho’ it lead to the fires of hell.”

The king doth force his restless horse
Till like the deer he bounds,
Like a flying breath, o’er the windy heath
Behind the calling hounds.

The knightly train spur on amain
As fast as they may flee—
And two are down by the broken bank,
And one by the fallen tree.

Their shadows run in the wan low sun,
Like ghosts they flit beside—
And one is down where the snow lies late,
And two where the marsh is wide.

“Stay, stay, oh king! of all thy train
Alone I am left to follow!”
But the wind beat back the labouring breath
That rattled hoarse and hollow.

In the fearful flight each gallant knight
Lies cold, a broken corse ;
By two, by one, the hounds drop dead ;
But the king checks not, nor turns his head,
Nor curbs his foaming horse.

Among the lines of the sombre pines
He rides o'er moss and mire ;
And lo! their boughs as a brooding smoke,
Their stems as a burning fire!

And had the red sun scorched his sight
Ere he entered the lonely wood ?
For he saw in the air but a shifting glare
Like a floating pool of blood.

And was it but the sighing bough
That whispered in his ear
A boding thought, an evil breath?—
Till he could not tell for fear
Whether a fiend spake in his soul,
Or a voice spake in his ear.

In the heart of the wood, a darksome den
Where the lightning-blasted tree
Gleamed in the gloom like whitened bones,
He saw the quarry flee,

With lolling tongue and foaming jaws,
With faint and faltering pace,
And eyes like the eyes of a soul in pain,
Tho' they looked from a grey wolf's face.

Lo! with the crash of a falling tree,
The gallant steed drops dead!
But he loosed his foot from the stirrup-iron,
And fast and far he fled.

Thro' grey twilight, thro' falling night
Rang the tireless steps and fleet,
And the throb of his heart kept feverish time
To the falling of his feet.

Oh, thick and tall by the lone kirk-wall
Grew thistle and broom and bent;
The holy bell lay where it fell,
And the walls were riven and rent.

Like a fair white shroud on the altar-stone
Lay the late-lingering snow,
And in the window towards the east
The waning moon hung low.

Now, when the beast had reached the kirk,
It moaned like one in pain,
And swerved, but the hunter cried behind,
And drove it on again.

But when it came to the altar-stone,
It started, and leapt, and fell—
And the shout of the king as he gripped its
throat
Mixed with its dying yell.

And lo! some evil ban was loosed
By the power of the holy place—
And the glazing eyes with ghastly gleam
Glared from a dead man's face!

Black as a pall did darkness fall
As the moon hid in a cloud—
And still lay the king by that nameless thing,
Nor knew that he cried aloud,

Till the white face glimmered thro' the gloom
As the moon stole out again;
When he dashed from his eyes the reeking blood
And stared upon the slain.

And who may tell, save those of hell,
Of the horror cold and grim
That he felt, who saw in that mirk midnight
His own face look at him?

His own dead face, with the haunting eyes
Of the wife his youth had won?
Woe, woe! in the were-wolf's grisly guise,
Oh king, thou hast slain thy son!

BALLAD OF SIR HERLUIN

THIS is the rime of Sir Herluin,
A knight both true and tried,
Who rode from the fray at close of day
With a spear-thrust in his side.

“The Bread and Wine of the Feast Divine
Are all the food I crave :
And in all the land, six feet of sand,
To serve me for a grave.

“How oft, how blithe along the moor,
I've rid to the bugle's sound !
But to-night 'tis I am the hunted deer
And Death the hateful hound,

“That followeth ever, pace by pace—
And Satan the hunter fell
That drives me down to the yawning grave,
And the burning flames of hell.”

Oh, he rode on, and on he rode
By heather and pine and birk,
By moss and moor, till he lighted down
All at the lonely kirk.

He stopped nor stayed where the dead were laid
In purple and in pall,
But he sought a mound at the wall's far bound,
Where thistle and dock grew tall.

He hid his brow amid the grass,
And the words he spake were three :
" Oh, sweet Marg'ret, oh, dear Marg'ret,
Wake, wake, and speak to me ! "

'Twas when the waning moon rose up,
And night waxed chill and cold,
That he heard a murmur from the grave
And a low voice from the mould.

Most like the moan of a mourning wind
That voice did speak and say :
" I had thought to lie in the kindly earth
Asleep till Judgment Day,

" With heart so still, and closèd eyne,
And hands across my breast—
There's never a voice in the world but thine
Could call me from my rest."

"Twas at the hour before the dawn,
 When hushed was every sound,
 That the dead corpse stirred within the grave,
 And rose up out o' the ground—

Rose up, and stood in the wan moonlight
 All in her winding-sheet—
 Sir Herluin, he hid his face,
 And lay still at her feet.

"Oh Herluin! oh Herluin!
 Didst hold my heart in fee—
 And the grave's not deep nor wide enough
 To sunder me and thee."

"Margaret, oh Margaret!
 Can love be strong as death?"
 "Love breaks not with the broken heart,
 Nor flies with the fleeting breath."

"Ah, love! The pain I cost thee
 Was a bitter pain and fell;
 And, but thou canst forgive it me,
 'Twill hale my soul to hell."

She kissed him where his brow was marked
 With the bitter brand of dole—
 "Herluin, oh Herluin!
 God's peace upon thy soul!

“Now lay thee down, oh Herluin,
And sleep i’ the kindly mould—
He rests full well whose heart is still,
Whose burning brow is cold.

“And sleep thou sound, oh Herluin,
Amid the song o’ the stream!
For I have heard a secret word
From an angel, in a dream.

“And I swear to thee by the ring of gold,
And I swear by cross and pall,
And I swear to thee by my broken heart,
That love is lord of all.”

This is the rime of Sir Herluin,
Who sleeps where he lay and died—
With a whin at his head, and a whin at his feet,
And the lean sand for a winding-sheet,
And a mourning pine beside.

BOTHWELL'S SOOTHSAYING

OH, the goodwives they go out and in,
And gossip beside the well;
But the witless wife, she fares alone,
With never a tale to tell.

Oh, the goodwives go to the holy kirk,
And bow their knees to pray;
But the witless wife, she steeks her door,
And keeps no holy-day.

Oh, the lasses and lads run up and down,
Their gleeful games to tread,
And they fleer and flout at the witless wife
That goes with a shaking head.

But when she turns on them, lasses and lads,
They take to their heels and flee,
For they fear the curse of the witless wife
And the look of her blinking e'e.

When the owlet shrill called from the hill,
And night was dark and deep,
One came and knocked at her cottage door
And roused her from her sleep.

“Oh, the clink I hear of a gallant's gear,
And the tread of steelèd shoon!
And he that knocks at my door so late
Is neither knave nor loon!”

“Come forth, come forth, thou witless wife,
And earn a goodly wage!
There's a rune to read, and a spell to speed,
In the hold of Hermitage!”

“Now nay, now nay, thou black Bothwell!
I dare not for deadly sin!
There's a heavy spell on that cursed cell
That none may enter in.”

“Oh, the walls are rent, and the roof is riven,
And gone is the sealing stone;
And the night is deep, and all men sleep,
Save thou and I alone.”

“There's an echo aloof in the riven roof
Of grisly grammarye!
And one that doth sleep where the dust lies deep
That brooks not a mortal's eye!”

Black, black, I ween, grew Bothwell's mien ;
 " If thou dost not my will
Thine ending shall be a nine-days' tale
 To the crowd on the Castle Hill !

" Faggot and fire, a goodly pyre,
 Shall pay the witch her fee !
The leaping lowe shall send a glow
 To the ships far out at sea ! "

The witch-wife goes with shaking head—
 Black Bothwell goes before—
To the secret cell where a heavy spell
 Was laid by a lord of yore.

No light was there in earth or air,
 No light in all the land,
Save the red torch, like an evil eye,
 That glimmered in his hand.

When the owlet shrill called from the hill,
 And all men were asleep,
Slow did they fare by the broken stair,
 And down to the dungeon deep.

There was nought to see in the doleful vault
 Save the mould and the mildew green—
But the hair stood up on Bothwell's head
 As he and the witch went in.

Oh, deep and still was the secret cell—
 There was never a sound to hear
 Save the echo aloof in the riven roof—
 But his knees were loosed for fear.

Oh, thrice she bent, and thrice she bowed,
 As she muttered the secret spell—
 The grisly lore they learned of yore
 That loosens the fiends of hell.

She rose on her feet, and she stood upright,
 And high she reared her head ;
 Oh, her face was wan to look upon
 As the face of one that's dead.

And like the dead, in the torchlight red,
 Her eyes were bleared and dim,
 And her lips were still, yet ghostly shrill
 The voice came forth from them.

Like an echo aloof in the riven roof
 The eldritch voice made moan—
 "Alas for my sleep in the dust so deep!
 Alas for the sealing stone!"

"Now heed, now hark, thou spirit dark,
 And look thou tell me true.
 Say, is it meet, for a lady sweet,
 A philtre fine to brew?"

“No philtre fine she needs o’ mine
To turn her heart to thee—
Thou hast set the spell on her thysel
With the glint o’ thy bold black e’e!”

“Dost see her dight in bridal white,
In satin of shimmering fold?
Does she go like a queen, amid the sheen
Of gems, and the red, red gold?”

“I see her dight in lily-white,
But not for the bridal-day—
And the red round the neck of that shimmering
sark
Is not of the gold so gay!

“Oh, pay the fee that’s due to me,
The precious price of sin,
That I may dig a grave, a grave,
And lay me down therein!”

“Now hark, now heed! if thou indeed
Dost bend her to my will,
Thou shalt ask what fee thou wilt of me
And take it to thy fill.”

“Oh, a fearful fee I ask of thee,
And a bitter from thy bride—
For pay she must in her people’s trust
In pomp and place and pride.

“The hue so fair of bonnie brown hair—
The glint of gladsome e’e—
And lightsome step, and pride of youth,
She must pay for the love of thee!

“And as for thee, thou shalt know my fee
And curse me, in that day
When thou stretchest thine arms o’er the wan
water
To the land that’s far away.”

His laughter rang in the riven roof—
“I shall not pale nor pine!
Each dog, they say, must have its day,
And shall I not have mine?”

He’s up and out of the doleful vault,
In the misty dawn so dim
That glimmers pale on his coat of mail—
And the witch steals after him.

Oh, her look is cowed, and her back is bowed,
And tottering is her tread—
And she’s but a witless wife again
That goes with a shaking head.

The queen sits wan in Jethart town
Beside her Maries three—
“Alas! for the wish I dare not name
Betwixt my heart and me!

“ There’s a merry bird in the garden green
That lilt the livelong day ;
And aye the ower-word of his song
Is the name I must not say !

“ Oh, pride of youth, and high heart’s truth,
Were all too light a fee,
And the bitter tears of years on years,
To win his heart to me ! ”

The queen has mounted her palfry white,
And called her trusty page—
And she’s away o’er moss and moor
To the hold of Hermitage !

NOTE.—The vault referred to in this ballad is that beneath the castle of Hermitage in which the “ Wicked Lord Soulis ” practised his sorceries—the custody of which, at his execution, he committed to Redcap, his familiar demon. By the time (some three centuries later) that Bothwell, as Warden of the Marches, took up residence at Hermitage, I have ventured to suppose that the vault (always looked on with horror) might have become ruinous.

THE RIDING OF THE SHEE *

A BALLAD OF PRINCE CHARLIE

September 1745

THEY'VE stabled their steeds where the heather
grows high
And the deer has ranging-room ;
The prince has laid him down to rest
All under a bush of broom.

There was a breeze in the whispering fern,
And a star that danced in the stream,
When the Men of Peace came riding by
Betwixt a dream and a dream.

In mantle of green, on coal-black steed,
They passed, and he saw them plain ;
Out of the mist or ever he wist,
And into the mist again.

(Twixt Beltane fire and Hallow-e'en
Men that have sight may see
The hosts who pass, nor stir the grass—
The riding of the Shee.)

* Gaelic DUÍONE SIDHE (shee) = fairy-folk.

“In the fields where never the dawn grows old
There’s a place of refuge still
From the weary strife of death and life,
The strife of good and ill.

“And this you shall have for a golden crown,
And this for a place of pride—
The star that shines where the sun goes down,
The peace where the hills spread wide.

“You shall have, for the clamour of men, the
call
Of the free wind in your ears;
You shall have the stainless well-water
For the burning of salt, salt tears.

“Our saying for you is sooth and sad—
For the troth wherein you trust,
Yea, the shining sword, and the plighted word,
Are ashes, and dross, and dust.

“And this you shall have if you will not heed—
A road with never an end,
A bitter smart, and a broken heart,
And Death for your kindest friend.

“This you shall have as a sorrow in sleep—
A sigh that shall never be still—
The song of the burn in Scotland’s fern,
The cry of the horn on the hill.

“This shall be yours as a waking woe
 That shall tear your heart in twain—
 The faith forlorn, and the losing love
 Of those that have hoped in vain.”

The prince he started in his sleep,
 And spoke like one in mirth:
 “Oh, dearer to me than fairy dreams
 The chances and cheer of earth!

“This I will have—the fate of a man,
 With my sword to be my friend,
 And burning life, and love, and strife,
 And Death to make an end.”

There was a cloud o’er the waning moon,
 And never a stir in the grass,
 When the Men of Peace rode over the hill,
 And passed as the shadows pass.

“Out of the mist whenever we list,
 And into the mist once more!
 Oh, it’s hand to hilt, and the doomed to die,
 As ever it was of yore!

“Oh, the Rose will soon be sere and sad
 Beneath the winter rain!
 Not all the blood in broad Scotland
 Can make it bloom again.”

BALLAD OF LONDON TOWN

A SONG OF THE FORTY-FIVE

OH, London is a bonnie town
Whose streets are paved with gold;
And out o' the North my friends came forth
That gift to have and hold.

There was one who rode before us a'
From Perth to Preston town,
Wi' winsome word and shining sword,
To gain a golden crown.

Oh, his head was high, and his gallant brow
Was blithe as a merry morn—
But a' we won for his father's son
Was a crown o' piercing thorn.

The Chief led forth his Hielandmen
Wi' pipes a' sounding shrill—
And the gift he got was the grisly axe,
Red-wet on Tower Hill.

Oh, I came forth fra' the naked North
Wi' lord and loon and laird—
And a' the gold they gave to me
Was the straw in Newgate yard.

The sun comes glinting thro' the reek
And gilds my galling chain ;
Oh, our lives are sold for fairy-gold,
And glamour is a' our gain !

Oh, I'd give my heart fra' out of my breast,
Or the fell fra' my flesh, to see
One little star of a' the stars
That shine on mine own countrie !

The wheels they groan on the paving stone—
And I dream that their dreary din
Is the song o' the burn afar in the fern,
Or the wind that wails in the whin.

Oh, the rat to his hole, and the bird to his nest,
And the deer to the hills so free!—
But I that drew sword at my king's own word
Must hang on a gallows-tree !

BALLAD OF THE TRAITOR'S HEAD
(1746)

WASTED and wan, under sun and star,
Stares the head of the traitor on Temple Bar.

Sere are his sunken cheeks, and grim
Is the leering laugh on the lips of him.

The lights are out ; the silent street
Echoes to the watchman's feet.

Ho, cold comrade ! sure the time
Passes slow till morning-chime.

There are none but we that watch so late,
I in my garret, thou on thy gate.

Hast forgot the trick of speech ?
Let's hold converse, each with each—

For I see you, methinks, awake and aware,
Now the wind from the north blows thro' your
hair.

BALLAD OF THE TRAITOR'S HEAD 71

*Oh, he fares so far ere he blows on me,
He can bring no word from mine own countrie.*

Lithe now and listen, and tell me true,
What are the world and its ways to you?

Do you not grudge when the men pass by?
I shudder to think that such was I!

*They flee and they flout as they gaze on me—
The traitor that died on the gallows-tree!*

What is it to you when the ladies pass?
You'd an eye, methinks, for a pretty lass.

*What are they now to me, handsome and kind?
Red rose-leaves blowing down the wind.*

*They shudder and shrink when they gaze on me—
The traitor that died on the gallows-tree!*

What do you hear in the running rain?
Ten thousand tears all shed in vain.

What do you read in the misty moon?
Loss of love, and sorrows' swoon.

What is your dream in the driving dust?
Of bodies that bleach and swords that rust.

What do you feel when the hailstones rattle?
Spent shot, and the brunt of battle.

Oh, what do you say when the sun sinks down
Behind the spires of London town?

*The last red gleam, as he fails forlorn,
Is the drooping flag of a cause outworn.*

What do you see when the stars shine bright,
Serried and still, in the vast o' the night,

Above the wind as he wandereth?
The souls of the brave that have done with death!

*Lords and ladies, fair and fine,
None of you see with these eyes of mine!*

*Prince and peer and potentate,
Never a man of you keeps my state!*

*Mockers that mock and cowards that crawl,
I have the laugh of you, one and all!*

*For fear and fraud, and lies and lust,
I doffed them all with the doleful dust,*

*And Death must bonnet his head to me—
The traitor that died on the gallows-tree!*

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