

Robert Southey: Ballads

The Cross Roads

The circumstance related in the following Ballad happened about forty years ago in a village adjacent to Bristol. A person who was present at the funeral, told me the story and the particulars of the interment, as I have versified them.

There was an old man breaking stones
To mend the turnpike way,
He sat him down beside a brook
And out his bread and cheese he took,
For now it was mid-day.

He lent his back against a post,
His feet the brook ran by;
And there were water-cresses growing,
And pleasant was the water's flowing
For he was hot and dry.

A soldier with his knapsack on
Came travelling o'er the down,
The sun was strong and he was tired,
And of the old man he enquired
How far to Bristol town.

Half an hour's walk for a young man
By lanes and fields and stiles.
But you the foot-path do not know,
And if along the road you go
Why then 'tis three good miles.

The soldier took his knapsack off
For he was hot and dry;
And out his bread and cheese he took
And he sat down beside the brook
To dine in company.

Old friend! in faith, the soldier says
I envy you almost;
My shoulders have been sorely prest
And I should like to sit and rest,
My back against that post.

In such a sweltering day as this
A knapsack is the devil!
And if on t'other side I sat
It would not only spoil our chat
But make me seem uncivil.

The old man laugh'd and moved. I wish
It were a great-arm'd chair!
But this may help a man at need;
And yet it was a cursed deed
That ever brought it there.

There's a poor girl lies buried here
Beneath this very place.
The earth upon her corpse is prest
This stake is driven into her breast
And a stone is on her face.

The soldier had but just lent back
And now he half rose up.
There's sure no harm in dining here,
My friend? and yet to be sincere
I should not like to sup.

God rest her! she is still enough
Who sleeps beneath our feet!
The old man cried. No harm I trow
She ever did herself, tho' now
She lies where four roads meet.

I have past by about that hour
When men are not most brave,
It did not make my heart to fail,
And I have heard the nightingale
Sing sweetly on her grave.

I have past by about that hour
When Ghosts their freedom have,
But there was nothing here to fright,
And I have seen the glow-worm's light
Shine on the poor girl's grave.

There's one who like a Christian lies
Beneath the church-tree's shade;
I'd rather go a long mile round
Than pass at evening thro' the ground
Wherein that man is laid.

There's one that in the church-yard lies
For whom the bell did toll;
He lies in consecrated ground,
But for all the wealth in Bristol town
I would not be with his soul!

Did'st see a house below the hill
That the winds and the rains destroy?
'Twas then a farm where he did dwell,
And I remember it full well
When I was a growing boy.

And she was a poor parish girl
That came up from the west,
From service hard she ran away
And at that house in evil day
Was taken in to rest.

The man he was a wicked man
And an evil life he led;
Rage made his cheek grow deadly white
And his grey eyes were large and light,
And in anger they grew red.

The man was bad, the mother worse,
Bad fruit of a bad stem,
'Twould make your hair to stand-on-end
If I should tell to you my friend
The things that were told of them!

Did'st see an out-house standing by?
The walls alone remain;
It was a stable then, but now
Its mossy roof has fallen through
All rotted by the rain.

The poor girl she had serv'd with them
Some half-a-year, or more,
When she was found hung up one day
Stiff as a corpse and cold as clay
Behind that stable door!

It is a very lonesome place,
No hut or house is near;
Should one meet a murderer there alone
'Twere vain to scream, and the dying groan
Would never reach mortal ear.

And there were strange reports about
That the coroner never guest.
So he decreed that she should lie
Where four roads meet in infamy,
With a stake drove in her breast.

Upon a board they carried her
To the place where four roads met,
And I was one among the throng
That hither followed them along,
I shall never the sight forget!

They carried her upon a board
In the cloaths in which she died;
I saw the cap blow off her head,
Her face was of a dark dark red
Her eyes were starting wide:

I think they could not have been closed
So widely did they strain.
I never saw so dreadful a sight,
And it often made me wake at night,
For I saw her face again.

They laid her here where four roads meet.
Beneath this very place,
The earth upon her corpse was prest,
This post is driven into her breast,
And a stone is on her face.

The Sailor (who had served in the Slave Trade)

In September, 1798, a Dissenting Minister of Bristol, discovered a Sailor in the neighbourhood of that City, groaning and praying in a hovel. The circumstance that occasioned his agony of mind is detailed in the annexed Ballad, without the slightest addition or alteration. By presenting it as a Poem the story is made more public, and such stories ought to be made as public as possible.

He stopt,--it surely was a groan
That from the hovel came!
He stopt and listened anxiously
Again it sounds the same.

It surely from the hovel comes!
And now he hastens there,
And thence he hears the name of Christ
Amidst a broken prayer.

He entered in the hovel now,
A sailor there he sees,
His hands were lifted up to Heaven
And he was on his knees.

Nor did the Sailor so intent
His entering footsteps heed,
But now the Lord's prayer said, and now
His half-forgotten creed.

And often on his Saviour call'd
With many a bitter groan,
In such heart-anguish as could spring
From deepest guilt alone.

He ask'd the miserable man
Why he was kneeling there,
And what the crime had been that caus'd
The anguish of his prayer.

Oh I have done a wicked thing!
It haunts me night and day,
And I have sought this lonely place
Here undisturb'd to pray.

I have no place to pray on board
So I came here alone,
That I might freely kneel and pray,
And call on Christ and groan.

If to the main-mast head I go,
The wicked one is there,
From place to place, from rope to rope,
He follows every where.

I shut my eyes,--it matters not--
Still still the same I see,--
And when I lie me down at night
'Tis always day with me.

He follows follows every where,
And every place is Hell!
O God--and I must go with him
In endless fire to dwell.

He follows follows every where,
He's still above--below,
Oh tell me where to fly from him!
Oh tell me where to go!

But tell me, quoth the Stranger then,
What this thy crime hath been,
So haply I may comfort give
To one that grieves for sin.

O I have done a cursed deed
The wretched man replies,
And night and day and every where
'Tis still before my eyes.

I sail'd on board a Guinea-man
And to the slave-coast went;
Would that the sea had swallowed me
When I was innocent!

And we took in our cargo there,
Three hundred negroe slaves,
And we sail'd homeward merrily
Over the ocean waves.

But some were sulky of the slaves
And would not touch their meat,
So therefore we were forced by threats
And blows to make them eat.

One woman sulkier than the rest
Would still refuse her food,--
O Jesus God! I hear her cries--
I see her in her blood!

The Captain made me tie her up
And flog while he stood by,
And then he curs'd me if I staid
My hand to hear her cry.

She groan'd, she shriek'd--I could not spare
For the Captain he stood by--
Dear God! that I might rest one night
From that poor woman's cry!

She twisted from the blows--her blood
Her mangled flesh I see--
And still the Captain would not spare--
Oh he was worse than me!

She could not be more glad than I
When she was taken down,
A blessed minute--'twas the last
That I have ever known!

I did not close my eyes all night,
Thinking what I had done;
I heard her groans and they grew faint
About the rising sun.

She groan'd and groan'd, but her groans grew
Fainter at morning tide,
Fainter and fainter still they came
Till at the noon she died.

They flung her overboard;--poor wretch
She rested from her pain,--
But when--O Christ! O blessed God!
Shall I have rest again!

I saw the sea close over her,
Yet she was still in sight;
I see her twisting every where;
I see her day and night.

Go where I will, do what I can
The wicked one I see--
Dear Christ have mercy on my soul,
O God deliver me!

To morrow I set sail again
Not to the Negroe shore--
Wretch that I am I will at least
Commit that sin no more.

O give me comfort if you can--
Oh tell me where to fly--
And bid me hope, if there be hope,
For one so lost as I.

Poor wretch, the stranger he replied,
Put thou thy trust in heaven,
And call on him for whose dear sake
All sins shall be forgiven.

This night at least is thine, go thou
And seek the house of prayer,
There shalt thou hear the word of God
And he will help thee there!

Jaspar

The stories of the two following ballads are wholly imaginary. I may say of each as John Bunyan did of his Pilgrim's Progress, It came from mine own heart, so to my head, And thence into my fingers trickled; Then to my pen, from whence immediately On paper I did dribble it daintily.

Jaspar

Jaspar was poor, and want and vice
Had made his heart like stone,
And Jaspar look'd with envious eyes
On riches not his own.

On plunder bent abroad he went
Towards the close of day,
And loitered on the lonely road
Impatient for his prey.

No traveller came, he loiter'd long
And often look'd around,
And paus'd and listen'd eagerly
To catch some coming sound.

He sat him down beside the stream
That crossed the lonely way,
So fair a scene might well have charm'd
All evil thoughts away;

He sat beneath a willow tree
That cast a trembling shade,
The gentle river full in front
A little island made,

Where pleasantly the moon-beam shone
Upon the poplar trees,
Whose shadow on the stream below
Play'd slowly to the breeze.

He listen'd--and he heard the wind
That waded the willow tree;
He heard the waters flow along
And murmur quietly.

He listen'd for the traveller's tread,
The nightingale sung sweet,--
He started up, for now he heard
The sound of coming feet;

He started up and graspt a stake
And waited for his prey;
There came a lonely traveller
And Jaspar crost his way.

But Jaspar's threats and curses fail'd
The traveller to appal,
He would not lightly yield the purse
That held his little all.

Awhile he struggled, but he strove
With Jaspar's strength in vain;
Beneath his blows he fell and groan'd,
And never spoke again.

He lifted up the murdered man
And plunged him in the flood,
And in the running waters then
He cleansed his hands from blood.

The waters closed around the corpse
And cleansed his hands from gore,
The willow waved, the stream flowed on
And murmured as before.

There was no human eye had seen
The blood the murderer spilt,
And Jaspar's conscience never knew
The avenging goad of guilt.

And soon the ruffian had consum'd
The gold he gain'd so ill,
And years of secret guilt pass'd on
And he was needy still.

One eve beside the alehouse fire
He sat as it befell,
When in there came a labouring man
Whom Jaspar knew full well.

He sat him down by Jaspar's side
A melancholy man,
For spite of honest toil, the world
Went hard with Jonathan.

His toil a little earn'd, and he
With little was content,
But sickness on his wife had fallen
And all he had was spent.

Then with his wife and little ones
He shared the scanty meal,
And saw their looks of wretchedness,
And felt what wretches feel.

That very morn the Landlord's power
Had seized the little left,
And now the sufferer found himself
Of every thing bereft.

He lent his head upon his hand,
His elbow on his knee,
And so by Jasper's side he sat
And not a word said he.

Nay--why so downcast? Jasper cried,
Come--cheer up Jonathan!
Drink neighbour drink! 'twill warm thy heart,
Come! come! take courage man!

He took the cup that Jasper gave
And down he drain'd it *quic
I have a wife, said Jonathan,
And she is deadly sick.

She has no bed to lie upon,
I saw them take her bed.
And I have children--would to God
That they and I were dead!

Our Landlord he goes home to night
And he will sleep in peace.
I would that I were in my grave
For there all troubles cease.

In vain I pray'd him to forbear
Tho' wealth enough has he--
God be to him as merciless
As he has been to me!

When Jasper saw the poor man's soul
On all his ills intent,
He plied him with the heartening cup
And with him forth he went.

This landlord on his homeward road
'Twere easy now to meet.
The road is lonesome--Jonathan,
And vengeance, man! is sweet.

He listen'd to the tempter's voice
The thought it made him start.
His head was hot, and wretchedness
Had hardened now his heart.

Along the lonely road they went
And waited for their prey,
They sat them down beside the stream
That crossed the lonely way.

They sat them down beside the stream
And never a word they said,
They sat and listen'd silently
To hear the traveller's tread.

The night was calm, the night was dark,
No star was in the sky,
The wind it waved the willow boughs,
The stream flowed quietly.

The night was calm, the air was still,
Sweet sung the nightingale,
The soul of Jonathan was sooth'd,
His heart began to fail.

'Tis weary waiting here, he cried,
And now the hour is late,--
Methinks he will not come to night,
'Tis useless more to wait.

Have patience man! the ruffian said,
A little we may wait,
But longer shall his wife expect
Her husband at the gate.

Then Jonathan grew sick at heart,
My conscience yet is clear,
Jaspar--it is not yet too late--
I will not linger here.

How now! cried Jaspar, why I thought
Thy conscience was asleep.
No more such qualms, the night is dark,
The river here is deep,

What matters that, said Jonathan,
Whose blood began to freeze,
When there is one above whose eye
The deeds of darkness sees?

We are safe enough, said Jaspar then
If that be all thy fear;
Nor eye below, nor eye above
Can pierce the darkness here.

That instant as the murderer spake
There came a sudden light;
Strong as the mid-day sun it shone,
Though all around was night.

It hung upon the willow tree,
It hung upon the flood,
It gave to view the poplar isle
And all the scene of blood.

The traveller who journies there
He surely has espied
A madman who has made his home
Upon the river's side.

His cheek is pale, his eye is wild,
His look bespeaks despair;
For Jaspar since that hour has made
His home unshelter'd there.

And fearful are his dreams at night
And dread to him the day;
He thinks upon his untold crime
And never dares to pray.

The summer suns, the winter storms,
O'er him unheeded roll,
For heavy is the weight of blood
Upon the maniac's soul.
Lord William

No eye beheld when William plunged
Young Edmund in the stream,
No human ear but William's heard
Young Edmund's drowning scream.

Submissive all the vassals own'd
The murderer for their Lord,
And he, the rightful heir, possessed
The house of Erlingford.

The ancient house of Erlingford
Stood midst a fair domain,
And Severn's ample waters near
Roll'd through the fertile plain.

And often the way-faring man
Would love to linger there,
Forgetful of his onward road
To gaze on scenes so fair.

But never could Lord William dare
To gaze on Severn's stream;
In every wind that swept its waves
He heard young Edmund scream.

In vain at midnight's silent hour
Sleep closed the murderer's eyes,
In every dream the murderer saw
Young Edmund's form arise.

In vain by restless conscience driven
Lord William left his home,
Far from the scenes that saw his guilt,
In pilgrimage to roam.

To other climes the pilgrim fled,
But could not fly despair,
He sought his home again, but peace
Was still a stranger there.

Each hour was tedious long, yet swift
The months appear'd to roll;
And now the day return'd that shook
With terror William's soul.

A day that William never felt
Return without dismay,
For well had conscience kalendered
Young Edmund's dying day.

A fearful day was that! the rains
Fell fast, with tempest roar,
And the swoln tide of Severn spread
Far on the level shore.

In vain Lord William sought the feast
In vain he quaff'd the bowl,
And strove with noisy mirth to drown
The anguish of his soul.

The tempest as its sudden swell
In gusty howlings came,
With cold and death-like feelings seem'd
To thrill his shuddering frame.

Reluctant now, as night came on,
His lonely couch he prest,
And wearied out, he sunk to sleep,
To sleep, but not to rest.

Beside that couch his brother's form
Lord Edmund seem'd to stand,
Such and so pale as when in death
He grasp'd his brother's hand;

Such and so pale his face as when
With faint and faltering tongue,
To William's care, a dying charge
He left his orphan son.

"I bade thee with a father's love
My orphan Edmund guard--
Well William hast thou kept thy charge!
Now take thy due reward."

He started up, each limb convuls'd
With agonizing fear,
He only heard the storm of night--
'Twas music to his ear.

When lo! the voice of loud alarm
His inmost soul appals,
What ho! Lord William rise in haste!
The water saps thy walls!

He rose in haste, beneath the walls
He saw the flood appear,
It hemm'd him round, 'twas midnight now,
No human aid was near.

He heard the shout of joy, for now
A boat approach'd the wall,
And eager to the welcome aid
They crowd for safety all.

My boat is small, the boatman cried,
This dangerous haste forbear!
Wait other aid, this little bark
But one from hence can bear.

Lord William leap'd into the boat,
Haste--haste to yonder shore!
And ample wealth shall well reward,
Ply swift and strong the oar.

The boatman plied the oar, the boat
Went light along the stream,
Sudden Lord William heard a cry
Like Edmund's drowning scream.

The boatman paus'd, methought I heard
A child's distressful cry!
'Twas but the howling wind of night
Lord William made reply.

Haste haste--ply swift and strong the oar!
Haste haste across the stream!
Again Lord William heard a cry
Like Edmund's drowning scream.

I heard a child's distressful scream
The boatman cried again.
Nay hasten on--the night is dark--
And we should search in vain.

Oh God! Lord William dost thou know
How dreadful 'tis to die?
And can'st thou without pity hear
A child's expiring cry?

How horrible it is to sink
Beneath the chilly stream,
To stretch the powerless arms in vain,
In vain for help to scream?

The shriek again was heard. It came
More deep, more piercing loud,
That instant o'er the flood the moon
Shone through a broken cloud.

And near them they beheld a child,
Upon a crag he stood,
A little crag, and all around
Was spread the rising flood.

The boatman plied the oar, the boat
Approach'd his resting place,
The moon-beam shone upon the child
And show'd how pale his face.

Now reach thine hand! the boatman cried
Lord William reach and save!
The child stretch'd forth his little hands
To grasp the hand he gave.

Then William shriek'd; the hand he touch'd
Was cold and damp and dead!
He felt young Edmund in his arms
A heavier weight than lead.

The boat sunk down, the murderer sunk
Beneath the avenging stream;
He rose, he scream'd, no human ear
Heard William's drowning scream.

A Ballad, Shewing how an old Woman rode Double, and who rode before her.

The Raven croak'd as she sate at her meal,
And the Old Woman knew what he said,
And she grew pale at the Raven's tale,
And sicken'd and went to her bed.

Now fetch me my children, and fetch them with speed,
The Old Woman of Berkeley said,
The monk my son, and my daughter the nun
Bid them hasten or I shall be dead.

The monk her son, and her daughter the nun,
Their way to Berkeley went,
And they have brought with pious thought
The holy sacrament.

The old Woman shriek'd as they entered her door,
'Twas fearful her shrieks to hear,
Now take the sacrament away
For mercy, my children dear!

Her lip it trembled with agony,
The sweat ran down her brow,
I have tortures in store for evermore,
Oh! spare me my children now!

Away they sent the sacrament,
The fit it left her weak,
She look'd at her children with ghastly eyes
And faintly struggled to speak.

All kind of sin I have rioted in
And the judgment now must be,
But I secured my childrens souls,
Oh! pray my children for me.

I have suck'd the breath of sleeping babes,
The fiends have been my slaves,
I have noited myself with infants fat,
And feasted on rifled graves.

And the fiend will fetch me now in fire
My witchcrafts to atone,
And I who have rifled the dead man's grave
Shall never have rest in my own.

Bless I intreat my winding sheet
My children I beg of you!
And with holy water sprinkle my shroud
And sprinkle my coffin too.

And let me be chain'd in my coffin of stone
And fasten it strong I implore
With iron bars, and let it be chain'd
With three chains to the church floor.

And bless the chains and sprinkle them,
And let fifty priests stand round,
Who night and day the mass may say
Where I lie on the ground.

And let fifty choristers be there
The funeral dirge to sing,
Who day and night by the taper's light
Their aid to me may bring.

Let the church bells all both great and small
Be toll'd by night and day,
To drive from thence the fiends who come
To bear my corpse away.

And ever have the church door barr'd
After the even song,
And I beseech you children dear
Let the bars and bolts be strong.

And let this be three days and nights
My wretched corpse to save,
Preserve me so long from the fiendish throng
And then I may rest in my grave.

The Old Woman of Berkeley laid her down
And her eyes grew deadly dim,
Short came her breath and the struggle of death
Did loosen every limb.

They blest the old woman's winding sheet
With rites and prayers as due,
With holy water they sprinkled her shroud
And they sprinkled her coffin too.

And they chain'd her in her coffin of stone
And with iron barr'd it down,
And in the church with three strong chains
They chain'd it to the ground.

And they blest the chains and sprinkled them,
And fifty priests stood round,
By night and day the mass to say
Where she lay on the ground.

And fifty choristers were there
To sing the funeral song,
And a hallowed taper blazed in the hand
Of all the sacred throng.

To see the priests and choristers
It was a goodly sight,
Each holding, as it were a staff,
A taper burning bright.

And the church bells all both great and small
Did toll so loud and long,
And they have barr'd the church door hard
After the even song.

And the first night the taper's light
Burnt steadily and clear.
But they without a hideous rout
Of angry fiends could hear;

A hideous roar at the church door
Like a long thunder peal,
And the priests they pray'd and the choristers sung
Louder in fearful zeal.

Loud toll'd the bell, the priests pray'd well,
The tapers they burnt bright,
The monk her son, and her daughter the nun
They told their beads all night.

The cock he crew, away they flew
The fiends from the herald of day,
And undisturb'd the choristers sing
And the fifty priests they pray.

The second night the taper's light
Burnt dimly and blue,
And every one saw his neighbour's face
Like a dead man's face to view.

And yells and cries without arise
That the stoutest heart might shock,
And a deafening roaring like a cataract pouring
Over a mountain rock.

The monk and nun they told their beads
As fast as they could tell,
And aye as louder grew the noise
The faster went the bell.

Louder and louder the choristers sung
As they trembled more and more,
And the fifty priests prayed to heaven for aid,
They never had prayed so before.

The cock he crew, away they flew
The fiends from the herald of day,
And undisturb'd the choristers sing
And the fifty priests they pray.

The third night came and the tapers flame
A hideous stench did make,
And they burnt as though they had been dipt
In the burning brimstone lake.

And the loud commotion, like the rushing of ocean,
Grew momentarily more and more,
And strokes as of a battering ram
Did shake the strong church door.

The bellmen they for very fear
Could toll the bell no longer,
And still as louder grew the strokes
Their fear it grew the stronger.

The monk and nun forgot their beads,
They fell on the ground dismay'd,
There was not a single saint in heaven
Whom they did not call to aid.

And the choristers song that late was so strong
Grew a quaver of consternation,
For the church did rock as an earthquake shock
Uplifted its foundation.

And a sound was heard like the trumpet's blast
That shall one day wake the dead,
The strong church door could bear no more
And the bolts and the bars they fled.

And the taper's light was extinguish'd quite,
And the choristers faintly sung,
And the priests dismay'd, panted and prayed
Till fear froze every tongue.

And in He came with eyes of flame
The Fiend to fetch the dead,
And all the church with his presence glowed
Like a fiery furnace red.

He laid his hand on the iron chains
And like flax they moulder'd asunder,
And the coffin lid that was barr'd so firm
He burst with his voice of thunder.

And he bade the Old Woman of Berkeley rise
And come with her master away,
And the cold sweat stood on the cold cold corpse,
At the voice she was forced to obey.

She rose on her feet in her winding sheet,
Her dead flesh quivered with fear,
And a groan like that which the Old Woman gave
Never did mortal hear.

She followed the fiend to the church door,
There stood a black horse there,
His breath was red like furnace smoke,
His eyes like a meteor's glare.

The fiendish force flung her on the horse
And he leapt up before,
And away like the lightning's speed they went
And she was seen no more.

They saw her no more, but her cries and shrieks
For four miles round they could hear,
And children at rest at their mother's breast,
Started and screamed with fear.

The Surgeon's Warning

The subject of this parody was given me by a friend, to whom also I am indebted for some of the stanzas.

Respecting the patent coffins herein mentioned, after the manner of Catholic Poets, who confess the actions they attribute to their Saints and Deity to be but fiction, I hereby declare that it is by no means my design to depreciate that useful invention; and all persons to whom this Ballad shall come are requested to take notice, that nothing here asserted concerning the aforesaid Coffins is true, except that the maker and patentee lives by St. Martin's Lane.

The Doctor whispered to the Nurse
And the Surgeon knew what he said,
And he grew pale at the Doctor's tale
And trembled in his sick bed.

Now fetch me my brethren and fetch them with speed
The Surgeon affrighted said,
The Parson and the Undertaker,
Let them hasten or I shall be dead.

The Parson and the Undertaker
They hastily came complying,
And the Surgeon's Prentices ran up stairs
When they heard that their master was dying.

The Prentices all they entered the room
By one, by two, by three,
With a sly grin came Joseph in,
First of the company.

The Surgeon swore as they enter'd his door,
'Twas fearful his oaths to hear,--
Now send these scoundrels to the Devil,
For God's sake my brethren dear.

He foam'd at the mouth with the rage he felt
And he wrinkled his black eye-brow,
That rascal Joe would be at me I know,
But zounds let him spare me now.

Then out they sent the Prentices,
The fit it left him weak,
He look'd at his brothers with ghastly eyes,
And faintly struggled to speak.

All kinds of carcasses I have cut up,
And the judgment now must be--
But brothers I took care of you,
So pray take care of me!

I have made candles of infants fat
The Sextons have been my slaves,
I have bottled babes unborn, and dried
Hearts and livers from rifled graves.

And my Prentices now will surely come
And carve me bone from bone,
And I who have rifled the dead man's grave
Shall never have rest in my own.

Bury me in lead when I am dead,
My brethren I intreat,
And see the coffin weigh'd I beg
Lest the Plumber should be a cheat.

And let it be solder'd closely down
Strong as strong can be I implore,
And put it in a patent coffin,
That I may rise no more.

If they carry me off in the patent coffin
Their labour will be in vain,
Let the Undertaker see it bought of the maker
Who lives by St. Martin's lane.

And bury me in my brother's church
For that will safer be,
And I implore lock the church door
And pray take care of the key.

And all night long let three stout men
The vestry watch within,
To each man give a gallon of beer
And a keg of Holland's gin;

Powder and ball and blunder-buss
To save me if he can,
And eke five guineas if he shoot
A resurrection man.

And let them watch me for three weeks
My wretched corpse to save,
For then I think that I may stink
Enough to rest in my grave.

The Surgeon laid him down in his bed,
His eyes grew deadly dim,
Short came his breath and the struggle of death
Distorted every limb.

They put him in lead when he was dead
And shrouded up so neat,
And they the leaden coffin weigh
Lest the Plumber should be a cheat.

They had it solder'd closely down
And examined it o'er and o'er,
And they put it in a patent coffin
That he might rise no more.

For to carry him off in a patent coffin
Would they thought be but labour in vain,
So the Undertaker saw it bought of the maker
Who lives by St. Martin's lane.

In his brother's church they buried him
That safer he might be,
They lock'd the door and would not trust
The Sexton with the key.

And three men in the vestry watch
To save him if they can,
And should he come there to shoot they swear
A resurrection man.

And the first night by lanthorn light
Thro' the church-yard as they went,
A guinea of gold the sexton shewed
That Mister Joseph sent.

But conscience was tough, it was not enough
And their honesty never swerved,
And they bade him go with Mister Joe
To the Devil as he deserved.

So all night long by the vestry fire
They quaff'd their gin and ale,
And they did drink as you may think
And told full many a tale.

The second night by lanthorn light
Thro' the church-yard as they went,
He whisper'd anew and shew'd them two
That Mister Joseph sent.

The guineas were bright and attracted their sight
They look'd so heavy and new,
And their fingers itch'd as they were bewitch'd
And they knew not what to do.

But they waver'd not long for conscience was strong
And they thought they might get more,
And they refused the gold, but not
So rudely as before.

So all night long by the vestry fire
They quaff'd their gin and ale,
And they did drink as you may think
And told full many a tale.

The third night as by lanthorn light
Thro' the church-yard they went,
He bade them see and shew'd them three
That Mister Joseph sent.

They look'd askance with eager glance,
The guineas they shone bright,
For the Sexton on the yellow gold
Let fall his lanthorn light.

And he look'd sly with his roguish eye
And gave a well-tim'd wink,
And they could not stand the sound in his hand
For he made the guineas chink.

And conscience late that had such weight,
All in a moment fails,
For well they knew that it was true
A dead man told no tales,

And they gave all their powder and ball
And took the gold so bright,
And they drank their beer and made good cheer,
Till now it was midnight.

Then, tho' the key of the church door
Was left with the Parson his brother,
It opened at the Sexton's touch--
Because he had another.

And in they go with that villain Joe
To fetch the body by night,
And all the church look'd dismally
By his dark lanthorn light.

They laid the pick-axe to the stones
And they moved them soon asunder.
They shovell'd away the hard-prest clay
And came to the coffin under.

They burst the patent coffin first
And they cut thro' the lead,
And they laugh'd aloud when they saw the shroud
Because they had got at the dead.

And they allowed the Sexton the shroud
And they put the coffin back,
And nose and knees they then did squeeze
The Surgeon in a sack.

The watchmen as they past along
Full four yards off could smell,
And a curse bestowed upon the load
So disagreeable.

So they carried the sack a-pick-a-back
And they carv'd him bone from bone,
But what became of the Surgeon's soul
Was never to mortal known.

The Victory

Hark--how the church-bells thundering harmony
Stuns the glad ear! tidings of joy have come,
Good tidings of great joy! two gallant ships
Met on the element,--they met, they fought
A desperate fight!--good tidings of great joy!
Old England triumphed! yet another day
Of glory for the ruler of the waves!
For those who fell, 'twas in their country's cause,
They have their passing paragraphs of praise
And are forgotten.

There was one who died
In that day's glory, whose obscurer name
No proud historian's page will chronicle.
Peace to his honest soul! I read his name,
'Twas in the list of slaughter, and blest God
The sound was not familiar to mine ear.
But it was told me after that this man
Was one whom lawful violence¹ had forced
From his own home and wife and little ones,
Who by his labour lived; that he was one
Whose uncorrupted heart could keenly feel
A husband's love, a father's anxiousness,
That from the wages of his toil he fed
The distant dear ones, and would talk of them
At midnight when he trod the silent deck
With him he valued, talk of them, of joys
That he had known--oh God! and of the hour
When they should meet again, till his full heart
His manly heart at last would overflow
Even like a child's with very tenderness.
Peace to his honest spirit! suddenly
It came, and merciful the ball of death,
For it came suddenly and shattered him,
And left no moment's agonizing thought
On those he loved so well.

He ocean deep
Now lies at rest. Be Thou her comforter
Who art the widow's friend! Man does not know
What a cold sickness made her blood run back
When first she heard the tidings of the fight;
Man does not know with what a dreadful hope
She listened to the names of those who died,
Man does not know, or knowing will not heed,
With what an agony of tenderness
She gazed upon her children, and beheld
His image who was gone. Oh God! be thou
Her comforter who art the widow's friend!

Henry the Hermit

It was a little island where he dwelt,
Or rather a lone rock, barren and bleak,
Short scanty herbage spotting with dark spots
Its gray stone surface. Never mariner
Approach'd that rude and uninviting coast,
Nor ever fisherman his lonely bark
Anchored beside its shore. It was a place
Befitting well a rigid anchoret,
Dead to the hopes, and vanities, and joys
And purposes of life; and he had dwelt
Many long years upon that lonely isle,
For in ripe manhood he abandoned arms,
Honours and friends and country and the world,
And had grown old in solitude. That isle
Some solitary man in other times
Had made his dwelling-place; and Henry found
The little chapel that his toil had built
Now by the storms unroofed, his bed of leaves
Wind-scattered, and his grave o'ergrown with grass,
And thistles, whose white seeds winged in vain
Withered on rocks, or in the waves were lost.
So he repaired the chapel's ruined roof,
Clear'd the grey lichens from the altar-stone,
And underneath a rock that shelter'd him
From the sea blasts, he built his hermitage.

The peasants from the shore would bring him food
And beg his prayers; but human converse else
He knew not in that utter solitude,
Nor ever visited the haunts of men
Save when some sinful wretch on a sick bed
Implor'd his blessing and his aid in death.
That summons he delayed not to obey,
Tho' the night tempest or autumnal wind.
Maddened the waves, and tho' the mariner,
Albeit relying on his saintly load,
Grew pale to see the peril. So he lived
A most austere and self-denying man,
Till abstinence, and age, and watchfulness
Exhausted him, and it was pain at last
To rise at midnight from his bed of leaves
And bend his knees in prayer. Yet not the less
Tho' with reluctance of infirmity,
He rose at midnight from his bed of leaves
And bent his knees in prayer; but with more zeal
More self-condemning fervour rais'd his voice
For pardon for that sin, 'till that the sin
Repented was a joy like a good deed.

One night upon the shore his chapel bell
Was heard; the air was calm, and its far sounds
Over the water came distinct and loud.
Alarmed at that unusual hour to hear
Its toll irregular, a monk arose.
The boatmen bore him willingly across
For well the hermit Henry was beloved.
He hastened to the chapel, on a stone
Henry was sitting there, cold, stiff and dead,
The bell-rope in his band, and at his feet
The lamp¹ that stream'd a long unsteady light

¹ This story is related in the English Martyrology, 1608.