

VARIOUS

IN THE SADDLE: A
COLLECTION OF POEMS
ON HORSEBACK-RIDING

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Poems on Horseback-Riding**

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In the Saddle: A Collection of Poems on Horseback-Riding

DESCRIPTION OF A HORSE

Look, when a painter would surpass the life,
In limning out a well-proportioned steed,
His art with nature's workmanship at strife,
As if the dead the living should exceed;
So did this horse excel a common one,
In shape, in courage, color, pace, and bone.

Round-hoofed, short-jointed, fetlocks shag and long,
Broad breast, full eye, small head, and nostril wide,
High crest, short ears, straight legs, and passing strong,
Thin mane, thick tail, broad buttock, tender hide:
Look, what a horse should have, he did not lack,
Save a proud rider on so proud a back.

Venus and Adonis.

A DAY'S RIDE: A LIFE'S ANALOGY

'Mid tangled forest and o'er grass plains wide,
By many a devious path and bridle-way,
Through the short brightness of an Indian day,
In middle winter 'twas my lot to ride,
Skirting the round-topped, pine-clad mountain side,
While far away upon the steely blue
Horizon, half concealèd, half in view,
Himalay's peaks upreared their snow-crowned pride,
In utter purity and vast repose.
I, ere the first faint flush of morning glowed
Within her eastern chamber, took the road,
And, slowly riding between day and night,
I marked how, through the wan, imperfect light,
Ghost-like and gray loomed the eternal snows.

So near they seemed, each crack and crevice small
Like bas-relief work showed, while in the light
Of ruddy morn, gray changed through pink to white.
But soon the sun, up-climbing, flooded all
The heavens, and then a thin and misty pall
Of exhalations rose, and pale of hue
And fainter ever those far summits grew,
Until the day waned low, and shadows tall
Sloped eastward. Then once more, in radiance clear,
Of setting sunlight, beautiful as brief,
Each peak and crag stood out in bold relief,
Till, slowly, pink faded to ghostly gray.
So through life's morning, noontide, evening, may
Ideal hopes dawn, fade, and reappear.

The Spectator.

ON HORSEBACK

Hurrah! for a ride in the morning gray,
On the back of a bounding steed.
What pleasure to list how the wild winds play;
Hark! Hark! to their music, – away! away!
Gallop away with speed.
'Neath the leaf and the cloud in spring-time's pride
There is health in a morning's joyous ride.

And hurrah! for a ride in the sultry noon,
When the summer has mounted high,
'Neath the shady wood in the glowing June,
When the rivulet chanteth its lullaby tune
To the breeze as it wanders by,
Quietly down by the brooklet's side; —
Sweet is the summer's joyous ride.

And do you not love at evening's hour,
By the light of the sinking sun,
To wend your way o'er the widening moor,
Where the silvery mists their mystery pour,
While the stars come one by one?
Over the heath by the mountain's side,
Pensive and sweet is the evening's ride.

I tell thee, O stranger, that unto me
The plunge of a fiery steed
Is a noble thought, – to the brave and free
It is music, and breath, and majesty, —
'Tis the life of a noble deed;
And the heart and the mind are in spirit allied
In the charm of a morning's glorious ride.

Then hurrah! for the ring of the bridle rein, —
Away, brave horse, away!
The preacher or poet may chant their strain,
The bookman his wine of the past may drain, —
We bide not with them to-day;
And yet it is true, we may look with pride
On the mental spoils of a morning's ride.

E. Paxton Hood.

THE HORSEBACK RIDE

When troubled in spirit, when weary of life,
When I faint 'neath its burdens, and shrink from its strife,
When its fruits, turned to ashes, are mocking my taste,
And its fairest scene seems but a desolate waste,
Then come ye not near me, my sad heart to cheer
With friendship's soft accents or sympathy's tear.
No pity I ask, and no counsel I need,
But bring me, oh, bring me my gallant young steed,
With his high archèd neck, and his nostril spread wide,
His eye full of fire, and his step full of pride!
As I spring to his back, as I seize the strong rein,
The strength to my spirit returneth again!
The bonds are all broken that fettered my mind,
And my cares borne away on the wings of the wind;
My pride lifts its head, for a season bowed down,
And the queen in my nature now puts on her crown!

Now we're off – like the winds to the plains whence they came;
And the rapture of motion is thrilling my frame!
On, on speeds my courser, scarce printing the sod,
Scarce crushing a daisy to mark where he trod!
On, on like a deer, when the hound's early bay
Awakes the wild echoes, away, and away!
Still faster, still farther, he leaps at my cheer,
Till the rush of the startled air whirs in my ear!
Now 'long a clear rivulet lieth his track, —
See his glancing hoofs tossing the white pebbles back!
Now a glen dark as midnight – what matter? – we'll down
Though shadows are round us, and rocks o'er us frown;
The thick branches shake as we're hurrying through,
And deck us with spangles of silvery dew!

What a wild thought of triumph, that this girlish hand
Such a steed in the might of his strength may command!
What a glorious creature! Ah! glance at him now,
As I check him a while on this green hillock's brow;
How he tosses his mane, with a shrill joyous neigh,
And paws the firm earth in his proud, stately play!
Hurrah! off again, dashing on as in ire,
Till the long, flinty pathway is flashing with fire!
Ho! a ditch! – Shall we pause? No; the bold leap we dare,
Like a swift-wingèd arrow we rush through the air!
Oh, not all the pleasures that poets may praise,
Not the 'wildering waltz in the ball-room's blaze,
Nor the chivalrous joust, nor the daring race,

Nor the swift regatta, nor merry chase,
Nor the sail, high heaving waters o'er,
Nor the rural dance on the moonlight shore,
Can the wild and thrilling joy exceed
Of a fearless leap on a fiery steed!

Sara Jane Lippincott (Grace Greenwood).

AN EVENING RIDE

FROM GLASHÜTTE TO MÜGELN IN SAXONY

We ride and ride. High on the hills
The fir-trees stretch into the sky;
The birches, which the deep calm stills,
Quiver again as we speed by.

Beside the road a shallow stream
Goes leaping o'er its rocky bed:
Here lie the corn-fields with a gleam
Of daisies white and poppies red.

A faint star trembles in the west;
A fire-fly sparkles, fluttering bright
Against the mountain's sombre breast;
And yonder shines a village light.

Oh! could I creep into thine arms
Beloved! and upon thy face
Read the arrest of dire alarms
That press me close; from thy embrace

View the sweet earth as on we ride.
Alas! how vain our longings are!
Already night is spreading wide
Her sable wing, and thou art far.

Owen Innsly.

THE QUEEN'S RIDE

AN INVITATION

'Tis that fair time of year,
Lady mine,
When stately Guinevere,
In her sea-green robe and hood,
Went a-riding through the wood,
Lady mine.

And as the Queen did ride,
Lady mine,
Sir Launcelot at her side
Laughed and chatted, bending over,
Half her friend and all her lover,
Lady mine.

And as they rode along,
Lady mine,
The throstle gave them song,
And the buds peeped through the grass
To see youth and beauty pass,
Lady mine.

And on, through deathless time,
Lady mine,
These lovers in their prime,
(Two fairy ghosts together!)
Ride, with sea-green robe, and feather!
Lady mine.

And so we two will ride,
Lady mine,
At your pleasure, side by side,
Laugh and chat; I bending over,
Half your friend and all your lover!
Lady mine.

But if you like not this,
Lady mine,
And take my love amiss,
Then I'll ride unto the end,
Half your lover, all your friend!
Lady mine.

So, come which way you will,
Lady mine,
Vale, upland, plain, and hill
Wait your coming. For one day
Loose the bridle, and away!
Lady mine.

T. B. Aldrich.

THE LAST RIDE TOGETHER

I said – Then, dearest, since 'tis so,
Since now at length my fate I know,
Since nothing all my love avails,
Since all my life seemed meant for, fails,
Since this was written and needs must be —
My whole heart rises up to bless
Your name in pride and thankfulness!
Take back the hope you gave, – I claim
Only a memory of the same,
– And this beside, if you will not blame,
Your leave for one more last ride with me.

My mistress bent that brow of hers,
Those deep dark eyes where pride demurs
When pity would be softening through,
Fixed me a breathing-while or two
With life or death in the balance – Right!
The blood replenished me again:
My last thought was at least not vain.
I and my mistress, side by side
Shall be together, breathe and ride,
So one day more am I deified.
Who knows but the world may end to-night?

Hush! if you saw some western cloud
All billowy-bosomed, over-bowed
By many benedictions – sun's
And moon's and evening-star's at once —
And so, you, looking and loving best,
Conscious grew, your passion drew
Cloud, sunset, moonrise, star-shine too
Down on you, near and yet more near,
Till flesh must fade for heaven was here! —
Thus leant she and lingered – joy and fear!
Thus lay she a moment on my breast.

Then we began to ride. My soul
Smoothed itself out, a long-cramped scroll
Freshening and fluttering in the wind.
Past hopes already lay behind.
What need to strive with a life awry?
Had I said that, had I done this,
So might I gain, so might I miss.
Might she have loved me? just as well
She might have hated, – who can tell?

Where had I been now if the worst befell?
And here we are riding, she and I.

Fail I alone, in words and deeds?
Why, all men strive and who succeeds?
We rode; it seemed my spirit flew,
Saw other regions, cities new,
As the world rushed by on either side.
I thought, All labor, yet no less
Bear up beneath their unsuccess.
Look at the end of work, contrast
The petty Done the Undone vast,
This present of theirs with the hopeful past!
I hoped she would love me. Here we ride.

What hand and brain went ever paired?
What heart alike conceived and dared?
What act proved all its thought had been?
What will but felt the fleshly screen?
We ride and I see her bosom heave.
There's many a crown for who can reach
Ten lines, a statesman's life in each!
The flag stuck on a heap of bones,
A soldier's doing! what atones?
They scratch his name on the Abbey-stones.
My riding is better, by their leave.

What does it all mean, poet? well,
Your brain's beat into rhythm – you tell
What we felt only; you expressed
You hold things beautiful the best,
And pace them in rhyme so, side by side.
'Tis something, nay 'tis much – but then,
Have you yourself what's best for men?
Are you – poor, sick, old ere your time —
Nearer one whit your own sublime
Than we who never have turned a rhyme?
Sing, riding's a joy! For me, I ride.

And you, great sculptor – so you gave
A score of years to art, her slave,
And that's your Venus – whence we turn
To yonder girl that fords the burn!
You acquiesce and shall I repine?
What, man of music, you grown gray
With notes and nothing else to say,
Is this your sole praise from a friend,
"Greatly his opera's strains intend,
But in music we know how fashions end!"

I gave my youth – but we ride, in fine.

Who knows what's fit for us? Had fate
Proposed bliss here should sublimate
My being; had I signed the bond —
Still one must lead some life beyond,
– Have a bliss to die with, dim-descried.
This foot once planted on the goal,
This glory-garland round my soul,
Could I descry such? Try and test!
I sink back shuddering from the quest —
Earth being so good, would heaven seem best?
Now, heaven and she are beyond this ride.

And yet – she has not spoke so long!
What if heaven be, that, fair and strong
At life's best, with our eyes upturned
Whither life's flower if first discerned,
We, fixed so, ever should so abide?
What if we still ride on, we two,
With life forever old yet new,
Changed not in kind but in degree,
The instant made eternity, —
And heaven just prove that I and she
Ride, ride together, forever ride?

Robert Browning.

RIDING TOGETHER

For many, many days together
The wind blew steady from the east;
For many days hot grew the weather,
About the time of our Lady's Feast.

For many days we rode together,
Yet met we neither friend nor foe;
Hotter and clearer grew the weather,
Steadily did the east-wind blow.

We saw the trees in the hot, bright weather,
Clear-cut, with shadows very black,
As freely we rode on together
With helms unlaced and bridles slack.

And often as we rode together,
We, looking down the green-banked stream,
Saw flowers in the sunny weather,
And saw the bubble-making bream.

And in the night lay down together,
And hung above our heads the rood,
Or watched night-long in the dewy weather,
The while the moon did watch the wood.

Our spears stood bright and thick together,
Straight out the banners streamed behind,
As we galloped on in the sunny weather,
With faces turned towards the wind.

Down sank our threescore spears together,
As thick we saw the pagans ride;
His eager face in the clear fresh weather
Shone out that last time by my side.

Up the sweep of the bridge we dashed together,
It rocked to the crash of the meeting spears;
Down rained the buds of the dear spring weather,
The elm-tree flowers fell like tears.

There, as we rolled and writhed together,
I threw my arms above my head,
For close by my side, in the lovely weather,
I saw him reel and fall back dead.

I and the slayer met together,
He waited the death-stroke there in his place,
With thoughts of death, in the lovely weather
Gapingly mazed at my maddened face.

Madly I fought as we fought together;
In vain: the little Christian band
The pagans drowned, as in stormy weather
The river drowns low-lying land.

They bound my blood-stained hands together,
They bound his corpse to nod by my side:
Then on we rode, in the bright March weather,
With clash of cymbals did we ride.

We ride no more, no more together;
My prison-bars are thick and strong,
I take no heed of any weather,
The sweet Saints grant I live not long.

William Morris.

SIR LAUNCELOT AND QUEEN GUINEVERE

A FRAGMENT

Like souls that balance joy and pain,
With tears and smiles from heaven again
The maiden Spring upon the plain
Came in a sunlit fall of rain.
In crystal vapor everywhere
Blue isles of heaven laughed between,
And far, in forest-deeps unseen,
The topmost elm-tree gathered green
From draughts of balmy air.

Sometimes the linnet piped his song:
Sometimes the throstle whistled strong:
Sometimes the sparrowhawk, wheeled along,
Hushed all the groves from fear of wrong:
By grassy capes with fuller sound
In curves the yellowing river ran,
And drooping chestnut-buds began
To spread into the perfect fan,
Above the teeming ground.

Then, in the boyhood of the year,
Sir Launcelot and Queen Guinevere
Rode through the coverts of the deer,
With blissful treble ringing clear.
She seemed a part of joyous Spring:
A gown of grass-green silk she wore,
Buckled with golden clasps before;
A light-green tuft of plumes she bore
Closed in a golden ring.

Now on some twisted ivy-net,
Now by some tinkling rivulet,
In mosses mixt with violet
Her cream-white mule his pastern set:
And fleeter now she skimmed the plains
Than she whose elfin prancer springs
By night to eery warblings,
When all the glimmering moorland rings
With jingling bridle-reins.

As she fled fast through sun and shade,

The happy winds upon her played,
Blowing the ringlet from the braid:
She looked so lovely, as she swayed
The rein with dainty finger-tips,
A man had given all other bliss,
And all his worldly worth for this,
To waste his whole heart in one kiss
Upon her perfect lips.

Alfred Tennyson.

THE KING OF DENMARK'S RIDE

Word was brought to the Danish king,
Hurry!
That the love of his heart lay suffering,
And pined for the comfort his voice would bring;
O, ride as though you were flying!
Better he loves each golden curl
On the brow of that Scandinavian girl
Than his rich crown jewels of ruby and pearl;
And his rose of the isles is dying!

Thirty nobles saddled with speed;
Hurry!
Each one mounting a gallant steed
Which he kept for battle and days of need;
O, ride as though you were flying!
Spurs were struck in the foaming flank;
Worn-out chargers staggered and sank;
Bridles were slackened, and girths were burst;
But ride as they would, the king rode first,
For his rose of the isles lay dying!

His nobles are beaten, one by one;
Hurry!
They have fainted, and faltered, and homeward gone;
His little fair page now follows alone,
For strength and for courage trying!
The king looked back at that faithful child;
Wan was the face that answering smiled;
They passed the drawbridge with clattering din,
Then he dropped; and only the king rode in
Where his rose of the isles lay dying!

The king blew a blast on his bugle-horn;
Silence!
No answer came; but faint and forlorn
An echo returned on the cold gray morn,
Like the breath of a spirit sighing.
The castle portal stood grimly wide;
None welcomed the king from that weary ride;
For dead, in the light of the dawning day,
The pale sweet form of the welcomer lay,
Who had yearned for his voice while dying!

The panting steed, with a drooping crest,
Stood weary.

The king returned from her chamber of rest,
The thick sobs choking in his breast;
And, that dumb companion eying,
The tears gushed forth which he strove to check;
He bowed his head on his charger's neck;
"O steed, that every nerve didst strain,
Dear steed, our ride hath been in vain
To the halls where my love lay dying!"

Hon. Caroline Norton.

RHYME OF THE DUCHESS MAY

Broad the forests stood (I read) on the hills of Linteged —

Toll slowly.

And three hundred years had stood mute adown each hoary wood,
Like a full heart having prayed.

And the little birds sang east, and the little birds sang west, —

Toll slowly.

And but little thought was theirs of the silent antique years,
In the building of their nest.

Down the sun dropt large and red, on the towers of Linteged, —

Toll slowly.

Lance and spear upon the height, bristling strange in fiery light,
While the castle stood in shade.

There, the castle stood up black, with the red sun at its back, —

Toll slowly.

Like a sullen smouldering pyre, with a top that flickers fire,
When the wind is on its track.

And five hundred archers tall did besiege the castle wall, —

Toll slowly.

And the castle seethed in blood, fourteen days and nights had stood,
And to-night, was near its fall.

Yet thereunto, blind to doom, three months since, a bride did come, —

Toll slowly.

One who proudly trod the floors, and softly whispered in the doors,
"May good angels bless our home."

Oh, a bride of queenly eyes, with a front of constancies, —

Toll slowly.

Oh, a bride of cordial mouth, – where the untired smile of youth
Did light outward its own sighs.

'Twas a Duke's fair orphan-girl, and her uncle's ward, the Earl,

Toll slowly.

Who betrothed her, twelve years old, for the sake of dowry gold,
To his son Lord Leigh, the churl.

But what time she had made good all her years of womanhood,

Toll slowly.

Unto both those Lords of Leigh, spake she out right sovrantly,
"My will runneth as my blood."

"And while this same blood makes red this same right hand's veins,"
she said, —

Toll slowly.

"'Tis my will as lady free, not to wed a Lord of Leigh,
But Sir Guy of Linteged."

The old Earl he smiled smooth, then he sighed for willful youth, —

Toll slowly.

"Good my niece, that hand withal looketh somewhat soft and small
For so large a will, in sooth."

She, too, smiled by that same sign, — but her smile was cold and fine, —

Toll slowly.

"Little hand clasps muckle gold, or it were not worth the hold
Of thy son, good uncle mine!"

Then the young lord jerked his breath, and sware thickly in his teeth, —

Toll slowly.

"He would wed his own betrothed, an she loved him an she loathed,
Let the life come or the death."

Up she rose with scornful eyes, as her father's child might rise, —

Toll slowly.

"Thy hound's blood, my Lord of Leigh, stains thy knightly heel," quoth
she,

"And he moans not where he lies.

"But a woman's will dies hard, in the hall or on the sward!" —

Toll slowly.

"By that grave, my lords, which made me orphaned girl and dowered
lady,

I deny you wife and ward."

Unto each she bowed her head, and swept past with lofty tread.

Toll slowly.

Ere the midnight-bell had ceased, in the chapel had the priest
Blessed her, bride of Linteged.

Fast and fain the bridal train along the night-storm rode amain: —

Toll slowly.

Hard the steeds of lord and serf struck their hoofs out on the turf,
In the pauses of the rain.

Fast and fain the kinsmen's train along the storm pursued amain —

Toll slowly.

Steed on steed-track, dashing off — thickening, doubling, hoof on hoof,
In the pauses of the rain.

And the bridegroom led the flight on his red-roan steed of might, —

Toll slowly.

And the bride lay on his arm, still, as if she feared no harm,
Smiling out into the night.

"Dost thou fear?" he said at last; – "Nay!" she answered him in haste, —

Toll slowly.

"Not such death as we could find – only life with one behind —
Ride on fast as fear – ride fast!"

Up the mountain wheeled the steed – girth to ground, and fetlocks
spread, —

Toll slowly.

Headlong bounds, and rocking flanks, – down he staggered – down the
banks,

To the towers of Linteged.

High and low the serfs looked out, red the flambeaus tossed about, —

Toll slowly.

In the courtyard rose the cry – "Live the Duchess and Sir Guy!"
But she never heard them shout.

On the steed she dropt her cheek, kissed his mane and kissed his neck,
—

Toll slowly.

"I had happier died by thee, than lived on a Lady Leigh,"
Were the first words she did speak.

But a three months' joyaunce lay 'twixt that moment and to-day, —

Toll slowly.

When five hundred archers tall stand beside the castle wall,
To recapture Duchess May.

And the castle standeth black, with the red sun at its back, —

Toll slowly.

And a fortnight's siege is done – and, except the Duchess, none
Can misdoubt the coming wrack.

......*...*

Oh, the little birds sang east, and the little birds sang west, —

Toll slowly.

On the tower the castle's lord leant in silence on his sword,
With an anguish in his breast.

With a spirit-laden weight, did he lean down passionate. —

Toll slowly.

They have almost sapped the wall, – they will enter therewithal,

With no knocking at the gate.

Then the sword he leant upon, shivered – snapped upon the stone, —
Toll slowly.

"Sword," he thought, with inward laugh, "ill thou servest for a staff
When thy nobler use is done!

"Sword, thy nobler use is done! – tower is lost, and shame begun" —
Toll slowly.

"If we met them in the breach, hilt to hilt or speech to speech,
We should die there, each for one.

"If we met them at the wall, we should singly, vainly fall," —
Toll slowly.

"But if *I* die here alone, – then I die, who am but one,
And die nobly for them all.

"Five true friends lie for my sake, – in the moat and in the brake," —
Toll slowly.

"Thirteen warriors lie at rest, with a black wound in the breast,
And not one of these will wake.

"And no more of this shall be! – heart-blood weighs too heavily," —
Toll slowly.

"And I could not sleep in grave, with the faithful and the brave
Heaped around and over me.

"Since young Clare a mother hath, and young Ralph a plighted faith," —
—
Toll slowly.

"Since my pale young sister's cheeks blush like rose when Ronald
speaks,
Albeit never a word she saith —

"These shall never die for me – life-blood falls too heavily." —
Toll slowly.

"And if *I* die here apart, – o'er my dead and silent heart
They shall pass out safe and free.

"When the foe hath heard it said – 'Death holds Guy of Linteged,'" —
Toll slowly.

"That new corse new peace shall bring, and a blessed, blessed thing
Shall the stone be at its head.

"Then my friends shall pass out free, and shall bear my memory," —
Toll slowly.

"Then my foes shall sleek their pride, soothing fair my widowed bride
Whose sole sin was love of me.

"With their words all smooth and sweet, they will front her and entreat,"

—

Toll slowly.

"And their purple pall will spread underneath her fainting head
While her tears drop over it.

"She will weep her woman's tears, she will pray her woman's prayers,"

—

Toll slowly.

"But her heart is young in pain, and her hopes will spring again
By the suntime of her years.

"Ah, sweet May – ah, sweetest grief! – once I vowed thee my belief," —

Toll slowly.

"That thy name expressed thy sweetness, – May of poets, in
completeness!

Now my May-day seemeth brief."

All these silent thoughts did swim o'er his eyes grown strange and dim,

—

Toll slowly.

Till his true men in the place wished they stood there face to face
With the foe instead of him.

"One last oath, my friends that wear faithful hearts to do and dare!"

Toll slowly.

"Tower must fall, and bride be lost! – swear me service worth the cost!"
– Bold they stood around to swear.

"Each man clasp my hand and swear, by the deed we failed in there," —

Toll slowly.

"Not for vengeance, not for right, will ye strike one blow to-night!" —
Pale they stood around – to swear.

"One last boon, young Ralph and Clare! faithful hearts to do and dare!"

—

Toll slowly.

"Bring that steed up from his stall, which she kissed before you all, —
Guide him up the turret-stair.

"Ye shall harness him aright, and lead upward to this height!" —

Toll slowly.

"Once in love and twice in war, hath he borne me strong and far,
He shall bear me far to-night."

Then his men looked to and fro, when they heard him speaking so. —

Toll slowly.

– "Las! the noble heart," they thought, – "he in sooth is grief-
distraught.

Would, we stood here with the foe!"

But a fire flashed from his eye, 'twixt their thought and their reply, —
Toll slowly.

"Have ye so much time to waste? We who ride here, must ride fast,
As we wish our foes to fly."

They have fetched the steed with care, in the harness he did wear, —
Toll slowly.

Past the court and through the doors, across the rushes of the floors,
But they goad him up the stair.

Then from out her bower chambère, did the Duchess May repair. —
Toll slowly.

"Tell me now what is your need," said the lady, "of this steed,
That ye goad him up the stair?"

Calm she stood; unbodkined through, fell her dark hair to her shoe, —
Toll slowly.

And the smile upon her face, ere she left the tiring-glass,
Had not time enough to go.

"Get thee back, sweet Duchess May! hope is gone like yesterday," —
Toll slowly.

"One half-hour completes the breach; and thy lord grows wild of
speech, —
Get thee in, sweet lady, and pray.

"In the east tower, high'st of all, – loud he cries for steed from stall." —
Toll slowly.

"He would ride as far," quoth he, "as for love and victory,
Though he rides the castle-wall.

"And we fetch the steed from stall, up where never a hoof did fall." —
Toll slowly.

"Wifely prayer meets deathly need! may the sweet Heavens hear thee
plead
If he rides the castle-wall."

Low she dropt her head, and lower, till her hair coiled on the floor, —
Toll slowly.

And tear after tear you heard, fall distinct as any word
Which you might be listening for.

"Get thee in, thou soft ladye! – here, is never a place for thee!" —
Toll slowly.

"Braid thine hair and clasp thy gown, that thy beauty in its moan
May find grace with Leigh of Leigh."

She stood up in bitter case, with a pale yet steady face,

Toll slowly.

Like a statue thunderstruck, which, though quivering, seems to look
Right against the thunder-place.

And her foot trod in, with pride, her own tears i' the stone beside, —

Toll slowly.

"Go to, faithful friends, go to! — Judge no more what ladies do, —
No, nor how their lords may ride!"

Then the good steed's rein she took, and his neck did kiss and stroke: —

Toll slowly.

Soft he neighed to answer her, and then followed up the stair,
For the love of her sweet look.

Oh, and steeply, steeply wound up the narrow stair around, —

Toll slowly.

Oh, and closely, closely speeding, step by step beside her treading, —
Did he follow, meek as hound.

On the east tower, high'st of all, — there, where never a hoof did fall, —

Toll slowly.

Out they swept, a vision steady, — noble steed and lovely lady,
Calm as if in bower or stall.

Down she knelt at her lord's knee, and she looked up silently, —

Toll slowly.

And he kissed her twice and thrice, for that look within her eyes
Which he could not bear to see.

Quoth he, "Get thee from this strife, — and the sweet saints bless thy
life!" —

Toll slowly.

"In this hour, I stand in need of my noble red-roan steed —
But no more of my noble wife."

Quoth she, "Meekly have I done all thy biddings under sun: " —

Toll slowly.

"But by all my womanhood, which is proved so true and good,
I will never do this one.

"Now by womanhood's degree, and by wifehood's verity," —

Toll slowly.

"In this hour if thou hast need of thy noble red-roan steed,
Thou hast also need of *me*.

"By this golden ring ye see on this lifted hand pardiè," —

Toll slowly.

"If, this hour, on castle-wall, can be room for steed from stall,

Shall be also room for *me*.

"So the sweet saints with me be" (did she utter solemnly), —
Toll slowly.

"If a man, this eventide, on this castle wall will ride,
He shall ride the same with *me*."

Oh, he sprang up in the selle, and he laughed out bitter-well, —
Toll slowly.

"Wouldst thou ride among the leaves, as we used on other eves,
To hear chime a vesper-bell?"

She clang closer to his knee – "Ay, beneath the cypress-tree!" —
Toll slowly.

"Mock me not, for elsewhere than along the greenwood fair,
Have I ridden fast with thee!

"Fast I rode with new-made vows, from my angry kinsman's house!"
Toll slowly.

"What! and would you men should reckon that I dared more for love's
sake

As a bride than as a spouse?

"What, and would you it should fall, as a proverb, before all," —
Toll slowly.

"That a bride may keep your side while through castle-gate you ride,
Yet eschew the castle-wall?"

Ho! the breach yawns into ruin, and roars up against her suing, —
Toll slowly.

With the inarticulate din, and the dreadful falling in —
Shrieks of doing and undoing!

Twice he wrung her hands in twain, but the small hands closed again,
—

Toll slowly.

Back he reined the steed – back, back! but she trailed along his track
With a frantic clasp and strain.

Evermore the foemen pour through the crash of window and door, —
Toll slowly.

And the shouts of Leigh and Leigh, and the shrieks of "kill!" and "flee!"
Strike up clear amid the roar.

Thrice he wrung her hands in twain, – but they closed and clung again,
—

Toll slowly.

Wild she clung, as one, withstood, clasps a Christ upon the rood,
In a spasm of deathly pain.

She clung wild and she clung mute, – with her shuddering lips half-shut, —

Toll slowly.

Her head fallen as half in swoond, – hair and knee swept on the ground,

—
She clung wild to stirrup and foot.

Back he reined his steed back-thrown on the slippery coping-stone, —

Toll slowly.

Back the iron hoofs did grind on the battlement behind,

Whence a hundred feet went down.

And his heel did press and goad on the quivering flank bestrode,

Toll slowly.

"Friends, and brothers! save my wife! – Pardon, sweet, in change for life, —

But I ride alone to God."

Straight as if the Holy name had upbreathed her like a flame, —

Toll slowly.

She upsprang, she rose upright, – in his selle she sate in sight,

By her love she overcame.

And her head was on his breast, where she smiled as one at rest, —

Toll slowly.

"Ring," she cried, "O vesper-bell, in the beechwood's old chapelle!

But the passing-bell rings best."

They have caught out at the rein, which Sir Guy threw loose – in vain,

—
Toll slowly.

For the horse in stark despair, with his front hoofs poised in air,

On the last verge rears amain.

Now he hangs, the rocks between – and his nostrils curdle in, —

Toll slowly.

Now he shivers head and hoof – and the flakes of foam fall off;

And his face grows fierce and thin!

And a look of human woe from his staring eyes did go, —

Toll slowly.

And a sharp cry uttered he, in a foretold agony

Of the headlong death below, —

And, "Ring, ring, thou passing-bell," still she cried, "i' the old chapelle!" —

Toll slowly.

Then back-toppling, crashing back, – a dead weight flung out to wrack,

Horse and riders overfell.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning.

IRMINGARD'S ESCAPE

I am the Lady Irmgard,
Born of a noble race and name!
Many a wandering Suabian bard,
Whose life was dreary and bleak and hard,
Has found through me the way to fame.
Brief and bright were those days, and the night
Which followed was full of a lurid light.
Love, that of every woman's heart
Will have the whole, and not a part,
That is to her, in Nature's plan,
More than ambition is to man,
Her light, her life, her very breath,
With no alternative but death,
Found me a maiden soft and young,
Just from the convent's cloistered school,
And seated on my lowly stool,
Attentive while the minstrels sung.

Gallant, graceful, gentle, tall,
Fairest, noblest, best of all,
Was Walter of the Vogelweid;
And, whatsoever may betide,
Still I think of him with pride!
His song was of the summer-time,
The very birds sang in his rhyme;
The sunshine, the delicious air,
The fragrance of the flowers, were there;
And I grew restless as I heard,
Restless and buoyant as a bird,
Down soft, aerial currents sailing,
O'er blossomed orchards, and fields in bloom,
And through the momentary gloom
Of shadows o'er the landscape trailing,
Yielding and borne I knew not where,
But feeling resistance unavailing.

And thus, unnoticed and apart,
And more by accident than choice,
I listened to that single voice
Until the chambers of my heart
Were filled with it by night and day.
One night – it was a night in May, —
Within the garden, unawares,
Under the blossoms in the gloom,
I heard it utter my own name

With protestations and wild prayers;
And it rang through me, and became
Like the archangel's trump of doom,
Which the soul hears, and must obey;
And mine arose as from a tomb.
My former life now seemed to me
Such as hereafter death may be,
When in the great Eternity
We shall awake and find it day.

It was a dream, and would not stay;
A dream, that in a single night
Faded and vanished out of sight.
My father's anger followed fast
This passion, as a freshening blast
Seeks out and fans the fire, whose rage
It may increase, but not assuage.
And he exclaimed: "No wandering bard
Shall win thy hand, O Irmingard!
For which Prince Henry of Hoheneck
By messenger and letter sues."

Gently, but firmly, I replied:
"Henry of Hoheneck I discard!
Never the hand of Irmingard
Shall lie in his as the hand of a bride!"
This said I, Walter, for thy sake;
This said I, for I could not choose.
After a pause, my father spake
In that cold and deliberate tone
Which turns the hearer into stone,
And seems itself the act to be
That follows with such dread certainty;
"This, or the cloister and the veil!"
No other words than these he said,
But they were like a funeral wail;
My life was ended, my heart was dead.

That night from the castle-gate went down,
With silent, slow, and stealthy pace,
Two shadows, mounted on shadowy steeds,
Taking the narrow path that leads
Into the forest dense and brown.
In the leafy darkness of the place,
One could not distinguish form nor face,
Only a bulk without a shape,
A darker shadow in the shade;
One scarce could say it moved or stayed.
Thus it was we made our escape!

A foaming brook, with many a bound,
Followed us like a playful hound;
Then leaped before us, and in the hollow
Paused, and waited for us to follow,
And seemed impatient, and afraid
That our tardy flight should be betrayed
By the sound our horses' hoof-beats made.
And when we reached the plain below,
We paused a moment and drew rein
To look back at the castle again;
And we saw the windows all aglow
With lights, that were passing to and fro;
Our hearts with terror ceased to beat;
The brook crept silent to our feet;
We knew what most we feared to know.

Then suddenly horns began to blow;
And we heard a shout, and a heavy tramp,
And our horses snorted in the damp
Night-air of the meadows green and wide,
And in a moment, side by side,
So close, they must have seemed but one,
The shadows across the moonlight run,
And another came, and swept behind,
Like the shadow of clouds before the wind!

How I remember that breathless flight
Across the moors, in the summer night!
How under our feet the long, white road
Backward like a river flowed,
Sweeping with it fences and hedges,
Whilst farther away, and overhead,
Paler than I, with fear and dread,
The moon fled with us, as we fled
Along the forest's jagged edges!

All this I can remember well;
But of what afterwards befell
I nothing further can recall
Than a blind, desperate, headlong fall;
The rest is a blank and darkness all.
When I awoke out of this swoon,
The sun was shining, not the moon,
Making a cross upon the wall
With the bars of my windows narrow and tall;
And I prayed to it, as I had been wont to pray,
From early childhood, day by day,
Each morning, as in bed I lay!
I was lying again in my own room!

And I thanked God, in my fever and pain,
That those shadows on the midnight plain
Were gone, and could not come again!
I struggled no longer with my doom!

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow.

WILLIAM AND HELEN

From heavy dreams fair Helen rose,
And eyed the dawning red:
"Alas, my love, thou tarriest long!
O art thou false or dead?" —

With gallant Fred'rick's princely power
He sought the bold Crusade;
But not a word from Judah's wars
Told Helen how he sped.

With Paynim and with Saracen
At length a truce was made,
And every knight returned to dry
The tears his love had shed.

Our gallant host was homeward bound
With many a song of joy;
Green waved the laurel in each plume,
The badge of victory.

And old and young, and sire and son,
To meet them crowd the way,
With shouts and mirth and melody,
The debt of love to pay.

Full many a maid her true-love met,
And sobbed in his embrace,
And fluttering joy in tears and smiles
Arrayed full many a face.

Nor joy nor smile for Helen sad;
She sought the host in vain;
For none could tell her William's fate,
If faithless, or if slain.

The martial band is past and gone;
She rends her raven hair,
And in distraction's bitter mood
She weeps with wild despair.

"O rise, my child," her mother said,
"Nor sorrow thus in vain;
A perjured lover's fleeting heart
No tears recall again." —

"O mother, what is gone, is gone,
What's lost forever lorn;
Death, death alone can comfort me;
O had I ne'er been born!

"O break, my heart, – O break at once!
Drink my life-blood, Despair!
No joy remains on earth for me,
For me in heaven no share." —

"O enter not in judgment, Lord!"
The pious mother prays;
"Impute not guilt to thy frail child!
She knows not what she says.

"O say thy pater noster, child!
O turn to God and grace!
His will, that turned thy bliss to bale,
Can change thy bale to bliss." —

"O mother, mother, what is bliss?
O mother, what is bale?
My William's love was heaven on earth,
Without it earth is hell.

"Why should I pray to ruthless Heaven,
Since my loved William's slain?
I only prayed for William's sake,
And all my prayers were vain." —

"O take the sacrament, my child,
And check these tears that flow;
By resignation's humble prayer,
O hallowed be thy woe!" —

"No sacrament can quench this fire,
Or slake this scorching pain;
No sacrament can bid the dead
Arise and live again.

"O break, my heart, – O break at once!
Be thou my god, Despair!
Heaven's heaviest blow has fallen on me,
And vain each fruitless prayer." —

"O enter not in judgment, Lord,
With thy frail child of clay!
She knows not what her tongue has spoke;
Impute it not, I pray!

"Forbear, my child, this desperate woe,
And turn to God and grace;
Well can devotion's heavenly glow
Convert thy bale to bliss." —

"O mother, mother, what is bliss?
O mother, what is bale?
Without my William what were heaven,
Or with him what were hell?" —

Wild she arraigns the eternal doom,
Upbraids each sacred power,
Till, spent, she sought her silent room,
All in the lonely tower.

She beat her breast, she wrung her hands,
Till sun and day were o'er,
And through the glimmering lattice shone
The twinkling of the star.

Then, crash! the heavy drawbridge fell
That o'er the moat was hung;
And, clatter! clatter! on its boards
The hoof of courser rung.

The clank of echoing steel was heard
As off the rider bounded;
And slowly on the winding stair
A heavy footstep sounded.

And hark! and hark! a knock – Tap! tap!
A rustling stifled noise; —
Door-latch and tinkling staples ring; —
At length a whispering voice.

"Awake, awake, arise, my love!
How, Helen, dost thou fare?
Wakest thou, or sleepest? laughest thou, or weepst?
Hast thought on me, my fair?" —

"My love! my love! – so late by night! —
I waked, I wept for thee:
Much have I borne since dawn of morn;
Where, William, couldst thou be!" —

"We saddle late – from Hungary
I rode since darkness fell;
And to its bourne we both return

Before the matin-bell." —

"O rest this night within my arms,
And warm thee in their fold!
Chill howls through hawthorn bush the wind: —
My love is deadly cold." —

"Let the wind howl through hawthorn bush!
This night we must away;
The steed is wight, the spur is bright;
I cannot stay till day.

"Busk, busk, and boune!¹ Thou mount'st behind
Upon my black barb steed:
O'er stock and stile, a hundred miles,
We haste to bridal bed." —

"To-night – to-night a hundred miles! —
O dearest William, stay!
The bell strikes twelve – dark, dismal hour?
O wait, my love, till day!" —

"Look here, look here – the moon shines clear —
Full fast I ween we ride;
Mount and away! for ere the day
We reach our bridal bed.

"The black barb snorts, the bridle rings;
Haste, busk, and boune, and seat thee!
The feast is made, the chamber spread,
The bridal guests await thee." —

Strong love prevailed: she busks, she bounes,
She mounts the barb behind,
And round her darling William's waist
Her lily arms she twines.

And, hurry! hurry! off they rode,
As fast as fast might be;
Spurned from the courser's thundering heels
The flashing pebbles flee.

And on the right, and on the left,
Ere they could snatch a view,
Fast, fast each mountain, mead, and plain,
And cot, and castle, flew.

¹ *Busk*– to dress. *Boune*– to prepare one's self for a journey.

"Sit fast – dost fear? – The moon shines clear —
Fleet goes my barb – keep hold!
Fearest thou?" – "O no!" she faintly said;
"But why so stern and cold?"

"What yonder rings? what yonder sings?
Why shrieks the owlet gray?" —
"'Tis death-bells' clang, 'tis funeral song,
The body to the clay.

"With song and clang, at morrow's dawn.
Ye may inter the dead:
To-night I ride, with my young bride,
To deck our bridal bed.

"Come with thy choir, thou coffined guest,
To swell our nuptial song!
Come, priest, to bless our marriage feast!
Come all, come all along!" —

Ceased clang and song; down sunk the bier;
The shrouded corpse arose:
And, hurry, hurry! all the train
The thundering steed pursues.

And, forward! forward! on they go;
High snorts the straining steed;
Thick pants the rider's laboring breath,
As headlong on they speed.

"O William, why this savage haste?
And where thy bridal bed?" —
"'Tis distant far, low, damp, and chill,
And narrow, trustless maid." —

"No room for me?" – "Enough for both; —
Speed, speed, my barb, thy course!"
O'er thundering bridge, through boiling surge,
He drove the furious horse.

Tramp! tramp! along the land they rode,
Splash! splash! along the sea;
The scourge is wight, the spur is bright,
The flashing pebbles flee.

Fled past on right and left how fast
Each forest, grove, and bower!
On right and left fled past how fast
Each city, town, and tower!

"Dost fear? dost fear? The moon shines clear,
Dost fear to ride with me? —
Hurrah! hurrah! the dead can ride!"
"O William, let them be! —

"See there, see there! What yonder swings
And creaks 'mid whistling rain?" —
"Gibbet and steel, th' accursed wheel;
A murderer in his chain. —

"Hollo! thou felon, follow here:
To bridal bed we ride;
And thou shalt prance a fetter dance
Before me and my bride." —

And, hurry! hurry! clash, clash, clash!
The wasted form descends;
And fleet as wind through hazel bush
The wild career attends.

Tramp! tramp! along the land they rode,
Splash! splash! along the sea;
The scourge is red, the spur drops blood,
The flashing pebbles flee.

How fled what moonshine faintly showed!
How fled what darkness hid!
How fled the earth beneath their feet,
The heaven above their head!

"Dost fear? dost fear? The moon shines clear.
And well the dead can ride;
Does faithful Helen fear for them?" —
"O leave in peace the dead!" —

"Barb! Barb! methinks I hear the cock;
The sand will soon be run:
Barb! Barb! I smell the morning air;
The race is well-nigh done." —

Tramp! tramp! along the land they rode;
Splash! splash! along the sea;
The scourge is red, the spur drops blood,
The flashing pebbles flee.

"Hurrah! hurrah! well ride the dead;
The bride, the bride is come;
And soon we reach the bridal bed,

For, Helen, here's my home." —

Reluctant on its rusty hinge
Revolved an iron door,
And by the pale moon's setting beam
Were seen a church and tower.

With many a shriek and cry whiz round
The birds of midnight, scared;
And rustling like autumnal leaves
Unhallowed ghosts were heard.

O'er many a tomb and tombstone pale
He spurred the fiery horse,
Till sudden at an open grave
He checked the wondrous course.

The falling gauntlet quits the rein,
Down drops the casque of steel,
The cuirass leaves his shrinking side,
The spur his gory heel.

The eyes desert the naked skull,
The mouldering flesh the bone,
Till Helen's lily arms entwine
A ghastly skeleton.

The furious barb snorts fire and foam,
And, with a fearful bound,
Dissolves at once in empty air,
And leaves her on the ground.

Half seen by fits, by fits half heard,
Pale spectres flit along,
Wheel round the maid in dismal dance,
And howl the funeral song:

"E'en when the heart's with anguish cleft,
Revere the doom of Heaven.
Her soul is from her body reft;
Her spirit be forgiven!"

Bürger's "Leonore" – Translated by Sir Walter Scott.

THE GREETING ON KYNAST

She said: This narrow chamber is not for me the place,
Said the lady Kunigunde of Kynast!
'Tis pleasanter on horseback, I'll hie me to the chase,
Said the lady Kunigunde!

She said: The knight who weds me, I do require of him,
Said the lady Kunigunde of Kynast!
To gallop round the Kynast and break not neck nor limb.

A noble knight came forward and galloped round the wall;
The lady Kunigunde of Kynast,
The lady, without lifting a finger, saw him fall.

And yet another galloped around the battlement;
The lady Kunigunde,
The lady saw him tumble, yet did she not relent.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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