

# **Bush Ballads and Galloping Rhymes**

Adam Lindsay Gordon

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# Bush Ballads and Galloping Rhymes

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## A Dedication

to the Author of "Holmby House"

They are rhymes rudely strung with intent less  
Of sound than of words,  
In lands where bright blossoms are scentless,  
And songless bright birds;

## Bush Ballads and Galloping Rhymes

Where, with fire and fierce drought on her tresses,  
Insatiable Summer oppresses  
Sere woodlands and sad wildernesses,  
And faint flocks and herds.

Where in dreariest days, when all dews end,  
And all winds are warm,  
Wild Winter's large flood-gates are loosen'd,  
And floods, freed by storm,  
From broken up fountain heads, dash on  
Dry deserts with long pent up passion  
Here rhyme was first framed without fashion,  
Song shaped without form.

Whence gather'd? The locust's glad chirrup  
May furnish a stave;  
The ring of a rowel and stirrup,  
The wash of a wave.  
The chaunt of the marsh frog in rushes,  
That chimes through the pauses and hushes  
Of nightfall, the torrent that gushes,  
The tempests that rave.

In the deep'ning of dawn, when it dapples  
The dusk of the sky,  
With streaks like the redd'ning of apples,  
The ripening of rye.  
To eastward, when cluster by cluster,  
Dim stars and dull planets that muster,  
Wax wan in a world of white lustre  
That spreads far and high.

In the gathering of night gloom o'erhead, in  
The still silent change,  
All fire-flushed when forest trees redden  
On slopes of the range.  
When the gnarl'd, knotted trunks Eucalyptian  
Seem carved, like weird columns Egyptian,  
With curious device quaint inscription,  
And hieroglyph strange.

In the Spring, when the wattle gold trembles  
'Twixt shadow and shine,  
When each dew-laden air draught resembles  
A long draught of wine;  
When the sky-line's blue burnish'd resistance  
Makes deeper the dreamiest distance,  
Some song in all hearts hath existence,  
Such songs have been mine.

They came in all guises, some vivid

## Bush Ballads and Galloping Rhymes

To clasp and to keep;  
Some sudden and swift as the livid  
Blue thunder-flame's leap.  
This swept through the first breath of clover  
With memories renew'd to the rover  
That flash'd while the black horse turn'd over  
Before the long sleep.

To you (having cunning to colour  
A page with your pen,  
That through dull days, and nights even duller,  
Long years ago ten,  
Fair pictures in fever afforded)  
I send these rude staves, roughly worded  
By one in whose brain stands recorded  
As clear now as then,

"The great rush of grey `Northern water',  
The green ridge of bank,  
The `sorrel' with curved sweep of quarter  
Curl'd close to clean flank,  
The Royalist saddlefast squarely,  
And where the bright uplands stretch fairly,  
Behind, beyond pistol-shot barely,  
The Roundheaded rank.

"A long launch, with clinging of muscles,  
And clenching of teeth!  
The loose doublet ripples and rustles!  
The swirl shoots beneath!"  
Enough. In return for your garland  
In lieu of the flowers from your far land  
Take wild growth of dreamland or starland,  
Take weeds for your wreath.

Yet rhyme had not fail'd me for reason,  
Nor reason for rhyme,  
Sweet Song! had I sought you in season,  
And found you in time.  
You beckon in your bright beauty yonder,  
And I, waxing fainter, yet fonder,  
Now weary too soon when I wander  
Now fall when I climb.

It matters but little in the long run,  
The weak have some right  
Some share in the race that the strong run,  
The fight the strong fight.  
If words that are worthless go westward,  
Yet the worst word shall be as the best word,  
In the day when all riot sweeps restward,

In darkness or light.

## The Sick Stockrider

Hold hard, Ned! Lift me down once more, and lay me in the shade.  
Old man, you've had your work cut out to guide  
Both horses, and to hold me in the saddle when I sway'd,  
All through the hot, slow, sleepy, silent ride.  
The dawn at "Moorabinda" was a mist rack dull and dense,  
The sunrise was a sullen, sluggish lamp;  
I was dozing in the gateway at Arbutnot's bound'ry fence,  
I was dreaming on the Limestone cattle camp.  
We crossed the creek at Carricksford, and sharply through the haze,  
And suddenly the sun shot flaming forth;  
To southward lay "Katawa", with the sandpeaks all ablaze,  
And the flush'd fields of Glen Lomond lay to north.  
Now westward winds the bridle path that leads to Lindisfarm,  
And yonder looms the double-headed Bluff;  
From the far side of the first hill, when the skies are clear and calm,  
You can see Sylvester's woolshed fair enough.  
Five miles we used to call it from our homestead to the place  
Where the big tree spans the roadway like an arch;  
'Twas here we ran the dingo down that gave us such a chase  
Eight years ago or was it nine? last March.

'Twas merry in the glowing morn, among the gleaming grass,  
To wander as we've wandered many a mile,  
And blow the cool tobacco cloud, and watch the white wreaths pass,  
Sitting loosely in the saddle all the while.  
'Twas merry 'mid the blackwoods, when we spied the station roofs,  
To wheel the wild scrub cattle at the yard,  
With a running fire of stockwhips and a fiery run of hoofs;  
Oh! the hardest day was never then too hard!

Aye! we had a glorious gallop after "Starlight" and his gang,  
When they bolted from Sylvester's on the flat;  
How the sun-dried reed-beds crackled, how the flint-strewn ranges rang  
To the strokes of "Mountaineer" and "Acrobat".  
Hard behind them in the timber, harder still across the heath,  
Close beside them through the tea-tree scrub we dash'd;  
And the golden-tinted fern leaves, how they rustled underneath!  
And the honeysuckle osiers, how they crash'd!

## Bush Ballads and Galloping Rhymes

We led the hunt throughout, Ned, on the chestnut and the grey,  
And the troopers were three hundred yards behind,  
While we emptied our six-shooters on the bushrangers at bay,  
In the creek with stunted box-tree for a blind!  
There you grappled with the leader, man to man and horse to horse,  
And you roll'd together when the chestnut rear'd;  
He blazed away and missed you in that shallow watercourse  
A narrow shave his powder singed your beard!

In these hours when life is ebbing, how those days when life was young  
Come back to us; how clearly I recall  
Even the yarns Jack Hall invented, and the songs Jem Roper sung;  
And where are now Jem Roper and Jack Hall?

Aye! nearly all our comrades of the old colonial school,  
Our ancient boon companions, Ned, are gone;  
Hard livers for the most part, somewhat reckless as a rule,  
It seems that you and I are left alone.

There was Hughes, who got in trouble through that business with the cards,  
It matters little what became of him;  
But a steer ripp'd up MacPherson in the Cooraminta yards,  
And Sullivan was drown'd at Sink-or-swim;  
And Mostyn poor Frank Mostyn died at last a fearful wreck,  
In "the horrors", at the Upper Wandinong,  
And Carisbrooke, the rider, at the Horsefall broke his neck,  
Faith! the wonder was he saved his neck so long!

Ah! those days and nights we squandered at the Logans' in the glen  
The Logans, man and wife, have long been dead.  
Elsie's tallest girl seems taller than your little Elsie then;  
And Ethel is a woman grown and wed.

I've had my share of pastime, and I've done my share of toil,  
And life is short the longest life a span;  
I care not now to tarry for the corn or for the oil,  
Or for the wine that maketh glad the heart of man.  
For good undone and gifts misspent and resolutions vain,  
'Tis somewhat late to trouble. This I know  
I should live the same life over, if I had to live again;  
And the chances are I go where most men go.

The deep blue skies wax dusky, and the tall green trees grow dim,  
The sward beneath me seems to heave and fall;  
And sickly, smoky shadows through the sleepy sunlight swim,  
And on the very sun's face weave their pall.  
Let me slumber in the hollow where the wattle blossoms wave,  
With never stone or rail to fence my bed;  
Should the sturdy station children pull the bush flowers on my grave,  
I may chance to hear them romping overhead.

## The Swimmer

With short, sharp, violent lights made vivid,  
To southward far as the sight can roam,  
Only the swirl of the surges livid,  
The seas that climb and the surfs that comb.  
Only the crag and the cliff to nor'ward,  
And the rocks receding, and reefs flung forward,  
And waifs wreck'd seaward and wasted shoreward  
On shallows sheeted with flaming foam.

A grim, grey coast and a seaboard ghastly,  
And shores trod seldom by feet of men  
Where the batter'd hull and the broken mast lie,  
They have lain embedded these long years ten.  
Love! when we wander'd here together,  
Hand in hand through the sparkling weather,  
From the heights and hollows of fern and heather,  
God surely loved us a little then.

The skies were fairer and shores were firmer  
The blue sea over the bright sand roll'd;  
Babble and prattle, and ripple and murmur,  
Sheen of silver and glamour of gold  
And the sunset bath'd in the gulf to lend her  
A garland of pinks and of purples tender,  
A tinge of the sun-god's rosy splendour,  
A tithe of his glories manifold.

Man's works are graven, cunning, and skilful  
On earth, where his tabernacles are;  
But the sea is wanton, the sea is wilful,  
And who shall mend her and who shall mar?  
Shall we carve success or record disaster  
On the bosom of her heaving alabaster?  
Will her purple pulse beat fainter or faster  
For fallen sparrow or fallen star?

I would that with sleepy, soft embraces  
The sea would fold me would find me rest,  
In luminous shades of her secret places,



## Bush Ballads and Galloping Rhymes

In depths where her marvels are manifest;  
So the earth beneath her should not discover  
My hidden couch nor the heaven above her  
As a strong love shielding a weary lover,  
I would have her shield me with shining breast.

When light in the realms of space lay hidden,  
When life was yet in the womb of time,  
Ere flesh was fettered to fruits forbidden,  
And souls were wedded to care and crime,  
Was the course foreshaped for the future spirit  
A burden of folly, a void of merit  
That would fain the wisdom of stars inherit,  
And cannot fathom the seas sublime?

Under the sea or the soil (what matter?  
The sea and the soil are under the sun),  
As in the former days in the latter,  
The sleeping or waking is known of none.  
Surely the sleeper shall not awaken  
To griefs forgotten or joys forsaken,  
For the price of all things given and taken,  
The sum of all things done and undone.

Shall we count offences or coin excuses,  
Or weigh with scales the soul of a man,  
Whom a strong hand binds and a sure hand looses,  
Whose light is a spark and his life a span?  
The seed he sow'd or the soil he cumber'd,  
The time he served or the space he slumber'd,  
Will it profit a man when his days are number'd,  
Or his deeds since the days of his life began?

One, glad because of the light, saith, "Shall not  
The righteous Judge of all the earth do right,  
For behold the sparrows on the house-tops fall not  
Save as seemeth to Him good in His sight?"  
And this man's joy shall have no abiding,  
Through lights departing and lives dividing,  
He is soon as one in the darkness hiding,  
One loving darkness rather than light.

A little season of love and laughter,  
Of light and life, and pleasure and pain,  
And a horror of outer darkness after,  
And dust returneth to dust again.  
Then the lesser life shall be as the greater,  
And the lover of life shall join the hater,  
And the one thing cometh sooner or later,  
And no one knoweth the loss or gain.

## Bush Ballads and Galloping Rhymes

Love of my life! we had lights in season  
Hard to part from, harder to keep  
We had strength to labour and souls to reason,  
And seed to scatter and fruits to reap.  
Though time estranges and fate disperses,  
We have HAD our loves and our loving mercies;  
Though the gifts of the light in the end are curses,  
Yet bides the gift of the darkness sleep!

See! girt with tempest and wing'd with thunder,  
And clad with lightning and shod with sleet,  
The strong winds treading the swift waves sunder  
The flying rollers with frothy feet.  
One gleam like a bloodshot sword-blade swims on  
The sky-line, staining the green gulf crimson,  
A death stroke fiercely dealt by a dim sun,  
That strikes through his stormy winding-sheet.

Oh! brave white horses! you gather and gallop,  
The storm sprite loosens the gusty reins;  
Now the stoutest ship were the frailest shallop  
In your hollow backs, or your high arch'd manes.  
I would ride as never a man has ridden  
In your sleepy, swirling surges hidden,  
To gulfs foreshadow'd through straits forbidden,  
Where no light wearies and no love wanes.

## From the Wreck

"Turn out, boys!" "What's up with our super. to-night?  
The man's mad Two hours to daybreak I'd swear  
Stark mad why, there isn't a glimmer of light."  
"Take Bolingbroke, Alec, give Jack the young mare;  
Look sharp. A large vessel lies jamm'd on the reef,  
And many on board still, and some wash'd on shore.  
Ride straight with the news they may send some relief  
From the township; and we we can do little more.  
You, Alec, you know the near cuts; you can cross  
'The Sugarloaf' ford with a scramble, I think;  
Don't spare the blood filly, nor yet the black horse;  
Should the wind rise, God help them! the ship will soon sink.  
Old Peter's away down the paddock, to drive

## Bush Ballads and Galloping Rhymes

The nags to the stockyard as fast as he can  
A life and death matter; so, lads, look alive."  
Half-dress'd, in the dark, to the stockyard we ran.

There was bridling with hurry, and saddling with haste,  
Confusion and cursing for lack of a moon;  
"Be quick with these buckles, we've no time to waste;"  
"Mind the mare, she can use her hind legs to some tune."  
"Make sure of the crossing-place; strike the old track,  
They've fenced off the new one; look out for the holes  
On the wombat hills." "Down with the slip rails; stand back."  
"And ride, boys, the pair of you, ride for your souls."

In the low branches heavily laden with dew,  
In the long grasses spoiling with deadwood that day,  
Where the blackwood, the box, and the bastard oak grew,  
Between the tall gum-trees we gallop'd away  
We crash'd through a brush fence, we splash'd through a swamp  
We steered for the north near "The Eaglehawk's Nest"  
We bore to the left, just beyond "The Red Camp",  
And round the black tea-tree belt wheel'd to the west  
We cross'd a low range sickly scented with musk  
From wattle-tree blossom we skirted a marsh  
Then the dawn faintly dappled with orange the dusk,  
And peal'd overhead the jay's laughter note harsh,  
And shot the first sunstreak behind us, and soon  
The dim dewy uplands were dreamy with light;  
And full on our left flash'd "The Reedy Lagoon",  
And sharply "The Sugarloaf" rear'd on our right.  
A smothered curse broke through the bushman's brown beard,  
He turn'd in his saddle, his brick-colour'd cheek  
Flush'd feebly with sundawn, said, "Just what I fear'd;  
Last fortnight's late rainfall has flooded the creek."

Black Bolingbroke snorted, and stood on the brink  
One instant, then deep in the dark sluggish swirl  
Plunged headlong. I saw the horse suddenly sink,  
Till round the man's armpits the waves seemed to curl.  
We follow'd, one cold shock, and deeper we sank  
Than they did, and twice tried the landing in vain;  
The third struggle won it; straight up the steep bank  
We stagger'd, then out on the skirts of the plain.

The stockrider, Alec, at starting had got  
The lead, and had kept it throughout; 'twas his boast  
That through thickest of scrub he could steer like a shot,  
And the black horse was counted the best on the coast.  
The mare had been awkward enough in the dark,  
She was eager and headstrong, and barely half broke;  
She had had me too close to a big stringy-bark,  
And had made a near thing of a crooked sheoak;

From the Wreck

## Bush Ballads and Galloping Rhymes

But now on the open, lit up by the morn,  
She flung the white foam—flakes from nostril to neck,  
And chased him I hatless, with shirt sleeves all torn  
(For he may ride ragged who rides from a wreck)  
And faster and faster across the wide heath  
We rode till we raced. Then I gave her her head,  
And she stretching out with the bit in her teeth  
She caught him, outpaced him, and passed him, and led.

We neared the new fence, we were wide of the track;  
I look'd right and left she had never been tried  
At a stiff leap; 'twas little he cared on the black.  
"You're more than a mile from the gateway," he cried.  
I hung to her head, touched her flank with the spurs  
(In the red streak of rail not the ghost of a gap);  
She shortened her long stroke, she pricked her sharp ears,  
She flung it behind her with hardly a rap  
I saw the post quiver where Bolingbroke struck,  
And guessed that the pace we had come the last mile  
Had blown him a bit (he could jump like a buck).  
We galloped more steadily then for a while.

The heath was soon pass'd, in the dim distance lay  
The mountain. The sun was just clearing the tips  
Of the ranges to eastward. The mare could she stay?  
She was bred very nearly as clean as Eclipse;  
She led, and as oft as he came to her side,  
She took the bit free and untiring as yet;  
Her neck was arched double, her nostrils were wide,  
And the tips of her tapering ears nearly met  
"You're lighter than I am," said Alec at last;  
"The horse is dead beat and the mare isn't blown.  
She must be a good one ride on and ride fast,  
You know your way now." So I rode on alone.

Still galloping forward we pass'd the two flocks  
At M'Intyre's hut and M'Allister's hill  
She was galloping strong at the Warrigal Rocks  
On the Wallaby Range she was galloping still  
And over the wasteland and under the wood,  
By down and by dale, and by fell and by flat,  
She gallop'd, and here in the stirrups I stood  
To ease her, and there in the saddle I sat  
To steer her. We suddenly struck the red loam  
Of the track near the troughs then she reeled on the rise  
From her crest to her croup covered over with foam,  
And blood—red her nostrils, and bloodshot her eyes,  
A dip in the dell where the wattle fire bloomed  
A bend round a bank that had shut out the view  
Large framed in the mild light the mountain had loomed,  
With a tall, purple peak bursting out from the blue.

## Bush Ballads and Galloping Rhymes

I pull'd her together, I press'd her, and she  
Shot down the decline to the Company's yard,  
And on by the paddocks, yet under my knee  
I could feel her heart thumping the saddle—flaps hard.  
Yet a mile and another, and now we were near  
The goal, and the fields and the farms flitted past;  
And 'twixt the two fences I turned with a cheer,  
For a green grass—fed mare 'twas a far thing and fast;  
And labourers, roused by her galloping hoofs,  
Saw bare—headed rider and foam—sheeted steed;  
And shone the white walls and the slate—coloured roofs  
Of the township. I steadied her then I had need  
Where stood the old chapel (where stands the new church  
Since chapels to churches have changed in that town).  
A short, sidelong stagger, a long, forward lurch,  
A slight, choking sob, and the mare had gone down.  
I slipp'd off the bridle, I slacken'd the girth,  
I ran on and left her and told them my news;  
I saw her soon afterwards. What was she worth?  
How much for her hide? She had never worn shoes.

## No Name

"A stone upon her heart and head,  
But no name written on that stone;  
Sweet neighbours whisper low instead,  
This sinner was a loving one." Mrs. Browning.

'Tis a nameless stone that stands at your head  
The gusts in the gloomy gorges whirl  
Brown leaves and red till they cover your bed  
Now I trust that your sleep is a sound one, girl!

I said in my wrath, when his shadow cross'd  
From your garden gate to your cottage door,  
"What does it matter for one soul lost?  
Millions of souls have been lost before."

Yet I warn'd you ah! but my words came true  
"Perhaps some day you will find him out."  
He who was not worthy to loosen your shoe,

## Bush Ballads and Galloping Rhymes

Does his conscience therefore prick him? I doubt.

You laughed and were deaf to my warning voice  
Blush'd and were blind to his cloven hoof  
You have had your chance, you have taken your choice  
How could I help you, standing aloof?

He has prosper'd well with the world he says  
I am mad if so, and if he be sane,  
I, at least, give God thanksgiving and praise  
That there lies between us one difference plain.

\* \* \* \* \*

You in your beauty above me bent  
In the pause of a wild west country ball  
Spoke to me touched me without intent  
Made me your servant for once and all.

Light laughter rippled your rose-red lip,  
And you swept my cheek with a shining curl,  
That stray'd from your shoulder's snowy tip  
Now I pray that your sleep is a sound one, girl!

From a long way off to look at your charms  
Made my blood run redder in every vein,  
And he he has held you long in his arms,  
And has kiss'd you over and over again.

Is it well that he keeps well out of my way?  
If we met, he and I we alone we two  
Would I give him one moment's grace to pray?  
Not I, for the sake of the soul he slew.

A life like a shuttlecock may be toss'd  
With the hand of fate for a battledore;  
But it matters much for your sweet soul lost,  
As much as a million souls and more.

And I know that if, here or there, alone,  
I found him, fairly and face to face,  
Having slain his body, I would slay my own,  
That my soul to Satan his soul might chase.

He hardens his heart in the public way  
Who am I? I am but a nameless churl;  
But God will put all things straight some day  
Till then may your sleep be a sound one, girl!

## Wolf and Hound

"The hills like giants at a hunting lay  
Chin upon hand, to see the game at bay." Browning.

You'll take my tale with a little salt,  
But it needs none, nevertheless,  
I was foil'd completely, fairly at fault,  
Dishearten'd, too, I confess.  
At the splitters' tent I had seen the track  
Of horse-hoofs fresh on the sward,  
And though Darby Lynch and Donovan Jack  
(Who could swear through a ten-inch board)  
Solemnly swore he had not been there,  
I was just as sure that they lied,  
For to Darby all that is foul was fair,  
And Jack for his life was tried.

We had run him for seven miles and more  
As hard as our nags could split;  
At the start they were all too weary and sore,  
And his was quite fresh and fit.  
Young Marsden's pony had had enough  
On the plain, where the chase was hot;  
We breasted the swell of the Bittern's Bluff,  
And Mark couldn't raise a trot;  
When the sea, like a splendid silver shield,  
To the south-west suddenly lay;  
On the brow of the Beetle the chestnut reel'd,  
And I bid good-bye to M'Crea  
And I was alone when the mare fell lame,  
With a pointed flint in her shoe,  
On the Stony Flats: I had lost the game,  
And what was a man to do?

I turned away with no fixed intent  
And headed for Hawthorndell;  
I could neither eat in the splitters' tent,  
Nor drink at the splitters' well;  
I knew that they gloried in my mishap,  
And I cursed them between my teeth  
A blood-red sunset through Brayton's Gap  
Flung a lurid fire on the heath.

## Bush Ballads and Galloping Rhymes

Could I reach the Dell? I had little reck,  
And with scarce a choice of my own  
I threw the reins on Miladi's neck  
I had freed her foot from the stone.  
That season most of the swamps were dry,  
And after so hard a burst,  
In the sultry noon of so hot a sky,  
She was keen to appease her thirst  
Or by instinct urged or impelled by fate  
I care not to solve these things  
Certain it is that she took me straight  
To the Warrigal water springs.

I can shut my eyes and recall the ground  
As though it were yesterday  
With a shelf of the low, grey rocks girt round,  
The springs in their basin lay;  
Woods to the east and wolds to the north  
In the sundown sullenly bloom'd;  
Dead black on a curtain of crimson cloth  
Large peaks to the westward loomed.  
I led Miladi through weed and sedge,  
She leisurely drank her fill;  
There was something close to the water's edge,  
And my heart with one leap stood still,

For a horse's shoe and a rider's boot  
Had left clean prints on the clay;  
Someone had watered his beast on foot.  
'Twas he he had gone. Which way?  
Then the mouth of the cavern faced me fair,  
As I turned and fronted the rocks;  
So, at last, I had pressed the wolf to his lair,  
I had run to his earth the fox.

I thought so. Perhaps he was resting. Perhaps  
He was waiting, watching for me.  
I examined all my revolver caps,  
I hitched my mare to a tree  
I had sworn to have him, alive or dead,  
And to give him a chance was loth.  
He knew his life had been forfeited  
He had even heard of my oath.  
In my stocking soles to the shelf I crept,  
I crawl'd safe into the cave  
All silent if he was there he slept  
Not there. All dark as the grave.

Through the crack I could hear the leaden hiss!  
See the livid face through the flame!  
How strange it seems that a man should miss



## Bush Ballads and Galloping Rhymes

When his life depends on his aim!  
There couldn't have been a better light  
For him, nor a worse for me.  
We were coop'd up, caged like beasts for a fight,  
And dumb as dumb beasts were we.

Flash! flash! bang! bang! and we blazed away,  
And the grey roof reddened and rang;  
Flash! flash! and I felt his bullet flay  
The tip of my ear. Flash! bang!  
Bang! flash! and my pistol arm fell broke;  
I struck with my left hand then  
Struck at a corpse through a cloud of smoke  
I had shot him dead in his den!

## De Te

A burning glass of burnished brass,  
The calm sea caught the noontide rays,  
And sunny slopes of golden grass  
And wastes of weed-flower seem to blaze.  
Beyond the shining silver-greys,  
Beyond the shades of denser bloom,  
The sky-line girt with glowing haze  
The farthest, faintest forest gloom,  
And the everlasting hills that loom.

We heard the hound beneath the mound,  
We scared the swamp hawk hovering nigh  
We had not sought for that we found  
He lay as dead men only lie,  
With wan cheek whitening in the sky,  
Through the wild heath flowers, white and red,  
The dumb brute that had seen him die,  
Close crouching, howl'd beside the head,  
Brute burial service o'er the dead.

The brow was rife with seams of strife  
A lawless death made doubly plain  
The ravage of a reckless life;  
The havoc of a hurricane  
Of passions through that breadth of brain,

## Bush Ballads and Galloping Rhymes

Like headlong horses that had run  
Riot, regardless of the rein  
"Madman, he might have lived and done  
Better than most men," whispered one.

The beams and blots that Heaven allots  
To every life with life begin.  
Fool! would you change the leopard's spots,  
Or blanch the Ethiopian's skin?  
What more could he have hoped to win,  
What better things have thought to gain,  
So shapen so conceived in sin?  
No life is wholly void and vain,  
Just and unjust share sun and rain.

Were new life sent, and life misspent,  
Wiped out (if such to God seemed good),  
Would he (being as he was) repent,  
Or could he, even if he would,  
Who heeded not things understood  
(Though dimly) even in savage lands  
By some who worship stone or wood,  
Or bird or beast, or who stretch hands  
Sunward on shining Eastern sands?

And crime has cause. Nay, never pause  
Idly to feel a pulseless wrist;  
Brace up the massive, square-shaped jaws,  
Unclench the stubborn, stiff'ning fist,  
And close those eyes through film and mist  
That kept the old defiant glare;  
And answer, wise Psychologist,  
Whose science claims some little share  
Of truth, what better things lay there?

Aye! thought and mind were there, some kind  
Of faculty that men mistake  
For talent when their wits are blind,  
An aptitude to mar and break  
What others diligently make.  
This was the worst and best of him  
Wise with the cunning of the snake,  
Brave with the she wolf's courage grim,  
Dying hard and dumb, torn limb from limb.

And you, Brown, you're a doctor; cure  
You can't, but you can kill, and he  
"WITNESS HIS MARK" he signed last year,  
And now he signs John Smith, J.P.  
We'll hold our inquest NOW, we three;  
I'll be your coroner for once;

## Bush Ballads and Galloping Rhymes

I think old Oswald ought to be  
Our foreman Jones is such a dunce,  
There's more brain in the bloodhound's sconce.

No man may shirk the allotted work,  
The deed to do, the death to die;  
At least I think so, neither Turk,  
Nor Jew, nor infidel am I,  
And yet I wonder when I try  
To solve one question, may or must,  
And shall I solve it by-and-by,  
Beyond the dark, beneath the dust?  
I trust so, and I only trust.

Aye, what they will, such trifles kill.  
Comrade, for one good deed of yours,  
Your history shall not help to fill  
The mouths of many brainless boors.  
It may be death absolves or cures  
The sin of life. 'Twere hazardous  
To assert so. If the sin endures,  
Say only, "God, who has judged him thus,  
Be merciful to him and us."

## How we Beat the Favourite

### A Lay of the Loamshire Hunt Cup

"Aye, squire," said Stevens, "they back him at evens;  
The race is all over, bar shouting, they say;  
The Clown ought to beat her; Dick Neville is sweeter  
Than ever he swears he can win all the way.

"A gentleman rider well, I'm an outsider,  
But if he's a gent who the mischief's a jock?  
You swells mostly blunder, Dick rides for the plunder,  
He rides, too, like thunder he sits like a rock.

"He calls 'hunted fairly' a horse that has barely  
Been stripp'd for a trot within sight of the hounds,  
A horse that at Warwick beat Birdlime and Yorick,  
And gave Abdelkader at Aintree nine pounds.

## Bush Ballads and Galloping Rhymes

"They say we have no test to warrant a protest;  
Dick rides for a lord and stands in with a steward;  
The light of their faces they show him his case is  
Prejudged and his verdict already secured.

"But none can outlast her, and few travel faster,  
She strides in her work clean away from The Drag;  
You hold her and sit her, she couldn't be fitter,  
Whenever you hit her she'll spring like a stag.

"And p'rhaps the green jacket, at odds though they back it,  
May fall, or there's no knowing what may turn up;  
The mare is quite ready, sit still and ride steady,  
Keep cool; and I think you may just win the Cup."

Dark-brown with tan muzzle, just stripped for the tussle,  
Stood Iseult, arching her neck to the curb,  
A lean head and fiery, strong quarters and wiry,  
A loin rather light, but a shoulder superb.

Some parting injunction, bestowed with great unction,  
I tried to recall, but forgot like a dunce,  
When Reginald Murray, full tilt on White Surrey,  
Came down in a hurry to start us at once.

"Keep back in the yellow! Come up on Othello!  
Hold hard on the chestnut! Turn round on The Drag!  
Keep back there on Spartan! Back you, sir, in tartan!  
So, steady there, easy!" and down went the flag.

We started, and Kerr made strong running on Mermaid,  
Through furrows that led to the first stake-and-bound,  
The crack, half extended, look'd bloodlike and splendid,  
Held wide on the right where the headland was sound.

I pulled hard to baffle her rush with the snaffle,  
Before her two-thirds of the field got away,  
All through the wet pasture where floods of the last year  
Still loitered, they clotted my crimson with clay.

The fourth fence, a wattle, floor'd Monk and Bluebottle;  
The Drag came to grief at the blackthorn and ditch,  
The rails toppled over Redoubt and Red Rover,  
The lane stopped Lycurgus and Leicestershire Witch.

She passed like an arrow Kildare and Cock Sparrow,  
And Mantrap and Mermaid refused the stone wall;  
And Giles on The Greyling came down at the paling,  
And I was left sailing in front of them all.

## Bush Ballads and Galloping Rhymes

I took them a burster, nor eased her nor nursed her  
Until the Black Bullfinch led into the plough,  
And through the strong bramble we bored with a scramble  
My cap was knock'd off by the hazel-tree bough.

Where furrows looked lighter I drew the rein tighter  
Her dark chest all dappled with flakes of white foam,  
Her flanks mud-bespattered, a weak rail she shattered  
We landed on turf with our heads turn'd for home.

Then crash'd a low binder, and then close behind her  
The sword to the strokes of the favourite shook;  
His rush roused her mettle, yet ever so little  
She shortened her stride as we raced at the brook.

She rose when I hit her. I saw the stream glitter,  
A wide scarlet nostril flashed close to my knee,  
Between sky and water The Clown came and caught her,  
The space that he cleared was a caution to see.

And forcing the running, discarding all cunning,  
A length to the front went the rider in green;  
A long strip of stubble, and then the big double,  
Two stiff flights of rails with a quickset between.

She raced at the rasper, I felt my knees grasp her,  
I found my hands give to her strain on the bit;  
She rose when The Clown did our silks as we bounded  
Brush'd lightly, our stirrups clash'd loud as we lit.

A rise steeply sloping, a fence with stone coping  
The last we diverged round the base of the hill;  
His path was the nearer, his leap was the clearer,  
I flogg'd up the straight, and he led sitting still.

She came to his quarter, and on still I brought her,  
And up to his girth, to his breastplate she drew;  
A short prayer from Neville just reach'd me, "The devil!"  
He mutter'd lock'd level the hurdles we flew.

A hum of hoarse cheering, a dense crowd careering,  
All sights seen obscurely, all shouts vaguely heard;  
"The green wins!" "The crimson!" The multitude swims on,  
And figures are blended and features are blurr'd.

"The horse is her master!" "The green forges past her!"  
"The Clown will outlast her!" "The Clown wins!" "The Clown!"  
The white railing races with all the white faces,  
The chestnut outpaces, outstretches the brown.

On still past the gateway she strains in the straightway,

How we Beat the Favourite

## Bush Ballads and Galloping Rhymes

Still struggles, "The Clown by a short neck at most,"  
He swerves, the green scourges, the stand rocks and surges,  
And flashes, and verges, and flits the white post.

Aye! so ends the tussle, I knew the tan muzzle  
Was first, though the ring-men were yelling "Dead heat!"  
A nose I could swear by, but Clarke said, "The mare by  
A short head." And that's how the favourite was beat.

## Fragmentary Scenes from the Road to Avernus

An Unpublished Dramatic Lyric

### Scene I. "Discontent"

LAURENCE RABY.

Laurence:  
I said to young Allan M'Ilveray,  
Beside the swift swirls of the North,  
When, in lilac shot through with a silver ray,  
We haul'd the strong salmon fish forth  
Said only, "He gave us some trouble  
To land him, and what does he weigh?  
Our friend has caught one that weighs double,  
The game for the candle won't pay  
    Us to-day,  
We may tie up our rods and away."

I said to old Norman M'Gregor,  
Three leagues to the west of Glen Dhu  
I had drawn, with a touch of the trigger,  
The best BEAD that ever I drew  
Said merely, "For birds in the stubble  
I once had an eye I could swear  
He's down but he's not worth the trouble  
Of seeking. You once shot a bear

## Bush Ballads and Galloping Rhymes

In his lair  
"Tis only a buck that lies there."

I said to Lord Charles only last year,  
The time that we topp'd the oak rail  
Between Wharton's plough and Whyhne's pasture,  
And clear'd the big brook in Blakesvale  
We only at Warburton's double  
He fell, then I finish'd the run  
And kill'd clean said, "So bursts a bubble  
That shone half an hour in the sun  
What is won?  
Your sire clear'd and captured a gun."

I said to myself, in true sorrow,  
I said yestere'en, "A fair prize  
Is won, and it may be to-morrow  
'Twill not seem so fair in thine eyes  
Real life is a race through sore trouble,  
That gains not an inch on the goal,  
And bliss an intangible bubble  
That cheats an unsatisfied soul,  
And the whole  
Of the rest an illegible scroll."

### Scene VII. "Two Exhortations"

A Shooting-box in the West of Ireland. A Bedchamber.  
LAURENCE RABY and MELCHIOR. Night.

Melchior:

Surely in the great beginning God made all things good, and still  
That soul-sickness men call sinning entered not without His will.  
Nay, our wisest have asserted that, as shade enhances light,  
Evil is but good perverted, wrong is but the foil of right.  
Banish sickness, then you banish joy for health to all that live;  
Slay all sin, all good must vanish, good being but comparative.  
Sophistry, you say yet listen: look you skyward, there 'tis known  
Worlds on worlds in myriads glisten larger, lovelier than our own  
This has been, and this still shall be, here as there, in sun or star;  
These things are to be and will be, those things were to be and are.  
Man in man's imperfect nature is by imperfection taught:

## Bush Ballads and Galloping Rhymes

Add one cubit to your stature if you can by taking thought.

Laurence:

Thus you would not teach that peasant, though he calls you "father".

Melchior: True,

I should magnify this present, mystify that future, too  
We adapt our conversation always to our hearer's light.

Laurence:

I am not of your persuasion.

Melchior: Yet the difference is but slight.

Laurence:

I, EVEN I, say, "He who barter's worldly weal for heavenly worth  
He does well" your saints and martyrs were examples here on earth.

Melchior:

Aye, in earlier Christian ages, while the heathen empire stood,  
When the war 'twixt saints and sages cried aloud for saintly blood,  
Christ was then their model truly. Now, if all were meek and pure,  
Save the ungodly and the unruly, would the Christian Church endure?  
Shall the toiler or the fighter dream by day and watch by night,  
Turn the left cheek to the smiter, smitten rudely on the right?  
Strong men must encounter bad men so-called saints of latter days  
Have been mostly pious madmen, lusting after righteous praise  
Or the thralls of superstition, doubtless worthy some reward,  
Since they came by their condition hardly of their free accord.  
'Tis but madness, sad and solemn, that these fakir-Christians feel  
Saint Stylites on his column gratified a morbid zeal.

Laurence:

By your showing, good is really on a par (of worth) with ill.

Melchior:

Nay, I said not so; I merely tell you both some ends fulfil  
Priestly vows were my vocation, fast and vigil wait for me.  
You must work and face temptation. Never should the strong man flee,  
Though God wills the inclination with the soul at war to be. (Pauses.)  
In the strife 'twixt flesh and spirit, while you can the spirit aid.  
Should you fall not less your merit, be not for a fall afraid.  
Whatsoe'er most right, most fit is you shall do. When all is done  
Chaunt the noble Nunc Dimittis Benedicimur, my son.

[Exit MELCHIOR.]

Laurence (alone):

Why do I provoke these wrangles? Melchior talks (as well he may)  
With the tongues of men and angels.  
(Takes up a pamphlet.) What has this man got to say?  
(Reads.) Sic sacerdos fatur (ejus nomen quondam erat Burgo.)



## Bush Ballads and Galloping Rhymes

Mala mens est, caro pejus, anima infirma, ergo  
I nunc, ora, sine mora orat etiam Sancta Virgo.

(Thinks.)

(Speaks.) So it seems they mean to make her wed the usurer, Nathan Lee.  
Poor Estelle! her friends forsake her; what has this to do with me?

Glad I am, at least, that Helen still refuses to discard

Her, through tales false gossips tell  
in spite or heedlessness. 'Tis hard!

Lee, the Levite! some few years back Herbert horsewhipp'd him the cur  
Show'd his teeth and laid his ears back. Now his wealth has purchased her.

Must his baseness mar her brightness? Shall the callous, cunning churl  
Revel in the rosy whiteness of that golden-headed girl?

(Thinks and smokes.)

(Reads.) Cito certe venit vitae finis (sic sacerdos fatur),

Nunc audite omnes, ite, vobis fabula narratur

Nunc orate et laudate, laudat etiam Alma Mater.

(Muses.) Such has been, and such shall still be,

here as there, in sun or star;

These things are to be and will be, those things were to be and are.

If I thought that speech worth heeding I should Nay, it seems to me

More like Satan's special pleading than like Gloria Domine.

(Lies down on his couch.)

(Reads.) Et tuquoque frater meus facta mala quod fecisti

Denique confundit Deus omnes res quas tetegisti.

Nunc si unquam, nunc aut nunquam, sanguine adjuro Christi.

## Scene IX. "In the Garden"

Aylmer's Garden, near the Lake. LAURENCE RABY and ESTELLE.

He:

Come to the bank where the boat is moor'd to the willow-tree low;  
Bertha, the baby, won't notice, Brian, the blockhead, won't know.

She:

Bertha is not such a baby, sir, as you seem to suppose;  
Brian, a blockhead he may be, more than you think for he knows.

He:

This much, at least, of your brother, from the beginning he knew  
Somewhat concerning that other made such a fool of by you.

## Bush Ballads and Galloping Rhymes

She:

Firmer those bonds were and faster, Frank was my spaniel, my slave.  
You! you would fain be my master; mark you! the difference is grave.

He:

Call me your spaniel, your starling, take me and treat me as these,  
I would be anything, darling! aye, whatsoever you please.  
Brian and Basil are "punting", leave them their dice and their wine,  
Bertha is butterfly hunting, surely one hour shall be mine.  
See, I have done with all duty; see, I can dare all disgrace,  
Only to look at your beauty, feasting my eyes on your face.

She:

Look at me, aye, till your eyes ache! How, let me ask, will it end?  
Neither for your sake, nor my sake, but for the sake of my friend?

He:

Is she your friend then? I own it, this is all wrong, and the rest,  
Frustra sed anima monet, caro quod fortius est.

She:

Not quite so close, Laurence Raby, not with your arm round my waist;  
Something to look at I may be, nothing to touch or to taste.

He:

Wilful as ever and wayward; why did you tempt me, Estelle?

She:

You misinterpret each stray word, you for each inch take an ell.  
Lightly all laws and ties trammel me, I am warn'd for all that.

He (aside):

Perhaps she will swallow her camel when she has strained at her gnat.

She:

Therefore take thought and consider, weigh well, as I do, the whole,  
You for mere beauty a bidder, say, would you barter a soul?

He:

Girl! THAT MAY happen, but THIS IS; after this welcome the worst;  
Blest for one hour by your kisses, let me be evermore curs'd.  
Talk not of ties to me reckless, here every tie I discard  
Make me your girdle, your necklace

She: Laurence, you kiss me too hard.

He:

Aye, 'tis the road to Avernus, n'est ce pas vrai donc, ma belle?  
There let them bind us or burn us, mais le jeu vaut la chandelle.  
Am I your lord or your vassal? Are you my sun or my torch?  
You, when I look at you, dazzle, yet when I touch you, you scorch.

## Bush Ballads and Galloping Rhymes

She:

Yonder are Brian and Basil watching us fools from the porch.

### Scene X. "After the Quarrel"

Laurence Raby's Chamber. LAURENCE enters, a little the worse for liquor.

Laurence:

He never gave me a chance to speak,  
And he call'd her worse than a dog  
The girl stood up with a crimson cheek,  
And I fell'd him there like a log.

I can feel the blow on my knuckles yet  
He feels it more on his brow.  
In a thousand years we shall all forget  
The things that trouble us now.

### Scene XI. "Ten Paces Off"

An open country. LAURENCE RABY and FORREST, BRIAN AYLNER and PRESCOT.

Forrest:

I've won the two tosses from Prescott;  
Now hear me, and hearken and heed,  
And pull that vile flower from your waistcoat,  
And throw down that beast of a weed;  
I'm going to give you the signal  
I gave Harry Hunt at Boulogne,  
The morning he met Major Bignell,  
And shot him as dead as a stone;  
For he must look round on his right hand  
To watch the white flutter that stops

## Bush Ballads and Galloping Rhymes

His aim, for it takes off his sight, and  
I COUGH WHILE THE HANDKERCHIEF DROPS.  
And you keep both eyes on his figure,  
Old fellow, and don't take them off.  
You've got the sawhandled hair trigger  
You sight him and shoot when I cough.

Laurence (aside):

Though God will never forgive me,  
Though men make light of my name,  
Though my sin and my shame outlive me,  
I shall not outlast my shame.  
The coward, does he mean to miss me?  
His right hand shakes like a leaf;  
Shall I live for my friends to hiss me,  
Of fools and of knaves the chief?  
Shall I live for my foes to twit me?  
He has master'd his nerve again  
He is firm, he will surely hit me  
Will he reach the heart or the brain?  
One long look eastward and northward  
One prayer "Our Father which art"  
And the cough chimes in with the fourth word,  
And I shoot skyward the heart.

## Last Scene. "Exeunt"

HELEN RABY.

Where the grave—deeps rot, where the grave—dews rust,  
They dug, crying, "Earth to earth"  
Crying, "Ashes to ashes and dust to dust"  
And what are my poor prayers worth?  
Upon whom shall I call, or in whom shall I trust,  
Though death were indeed new birth.

And they bid me be glad for my baby's sake  
That she suffered sinless and young  
Would they have me be glad when my breasts still ache  
Where that small, soft, sweet mouth clung?  
I am glad that the heart will so surely break  
That has been so bitterly wrung.

Last Scene. "Exeunt"

## Bush Ballads and Galloping Rhymes

He was false, they tell me, and what if he were?  
I can only shudder and pray,  
Pouring out my soul in a passionate prayer  
For the soul that he cast away;  
Was there nothing that once was created fair  
In the potter's perishing clay?

Is it well for the sinner that souls endure?  
For the sinless soul is it well?  
Does the pure child lisp to the angels pure?  
And where does the strong man dwell,  
If the sad assurance of priests be sure,  
Or the tale that our preachers tell?

The unclean has follow'd the undefiled,  
And the ill MAY regain the good,  
And the man MAY be even as the little child!  
We are children lost in the wood  
Lord! lead us out of this tangled wild,  
Where the wise and the prudent have been beguil'd,  
And only the babes have stood.

## Doubtful Dreams

Aye, snows are rife in December,  
And sheaves are in August yet,  
And you would have me remember,  
And I would rather forget;  
In the bloom of the May-day weather,  
In the blight of October chill,  
We were dreamers of old together,  
As of old, are you dreaming still?

For nothing on earth is sadder  
Than the dream that cheated the grasp,  
The flower that turned to the adder,  
The fruit that changed to the asp;  
When the day-spring in darkness closes,  
As the sunset fades from the hills,  
With the fragrance of perish'd roses,  
With the music of parch'd-up rills.

## Bush Ballads and Galloping Rhymes

When the sands on the sea–shore nourish  
Red clover and yellow corn;  
When figs on the thistle flourish,  
And grapes grow thick on the thorn;  
When the dead branch, blighted and blasted,  
Puts forth green leaves in the spring,  
Then the dream that life has outlasted  
Dead comfort to life may bring.

I have changed the soil and the season,  
But whether skies freeze or flame,  
The soil they flame on or freeze on  
Is changed in little save name;  
The loadstone points to the nor'ward,  
The river runs to the sea;  
And you would have me look forward,  
And backward I fain would flee.

I remember the bright spring garlands,  
The gold that spangled the green,  
And the purple on fairy far lands,  
And the white and the red bloom, seen  
From the spot where we last lay dreaming  
Together yourself and I  
The soft grass beneath us gleaming,  
Above us the great grave sky.

And we spoke thus: "Though we have trodden  
Rough paths in our boyish years;  
And some with our sweat are sodden,  
And some are salt with our tears;  
Though we stumble still, walking blindly,  
Our paths shall be made all straight;  
We are weak, but the heavens are kindly,  
The skies are compassionate."

Is the clime of the old land younger,  
Where the young dreams longer are nursed?  
With the old insatiable hunger,  
With the old unquenchable thirst,  
Are you longing, as in the old years  
We have longed so often in vain;  
Fellow–toilers still, fellow–soldiers,  
Though the seas have sundered us twain?

But the young dreams surely have faded!  
Young dreams! old dreams of young days  
Shall the new dream vex us as they did?  
Or as things worth censure or praise?  
Real toil is ours, real trouble,

## Bush Ballads and Galloping Rhymes

Dim dreams of pleasure and pride;  
Let the dreams disperse like a bubble,  
So the toil like a dream subside.

Vain toil! men better and braver  
Rose early and rested late,  
Whose burdens than ours were graver,  
And sterner than ours their hate.  
What fair reward had Achilles?  
What rest could Alcides win?  
Vain toil! "Consider the lilies,  
They toil not neither do spin."

Nor for mortal toiling nor spinning  
Will the matters of mortals mend;  
As it was so in the beginning,  
It shall be so in the end.  
The web that the weavers weave ill  
Shall not be woven aright  
Till the good is brought forth from evil,  
As day is brought forth from night.

Vain dreams! for our fathers cherish'd  
High hopes in the days that were;  
And these men wonder'd and perish'd,  
Nor better than these we fare;  
And our due at last is their due,  
They fought against odds and fell;  
"En avant, les enfants perdus!"  
We fight against odds as well.

The skies! Will the great skies care for  
Our footsteps, straighten our path,  
Or strengthen our weakness? Wherefore?  
We have rather incurr'd their wrath;  
When against the Captain of Hazor  
The stars in their courses fought,  
Did the skies shed merciful rays, or  
With love was the sunshine fraught?

Can they favour man? Can they wrong man?  
The unapproachable skies?  
Though these gave strength to the strong man,  
And wisdom gave to the wise;  
When strength is turn'd to derision,  
And wisdom brought to dismay,  
Shall we wake from a troubled vision,  
Or rest from a toilsome day?

Nay! I cannot tell. Peradventure  
Our very toil is a dream,

Doubtful Dreams

## Bush Ballads and Galloping Rhymes

And the works that we praise or censure,  
It may be, they only seem.  
If so, I would fain awaken,  
Or sleep more soundly than so,  
Or by dreamless sleep overtaken,  
The dream I would fain forego.

For the great things of earth are small things,  
The longest life is a span,  
And there is an end to all things,  
A season to every man,  
Whose glory is dust and ashes,  
Whose spirit is but a spark,  
That out from the darkness flashes,  
And flickers out in the dark.

We remember the pangs that wrung us  
When some went down to the pit,  
Who faded as leaves among us,  
Who flitted as shadows flit;  
What visions under the stone lie?  
What dreams in the shroud sleep dwell?  
For we saw the earth pit only,  
And we heard only the knell.

We know not whether they slumber  
Who waken on earth no more,  
As the stars of the heights in number,  
As sands on the deep sea-shore.  
Shall stiffness bind them, and starkness  
Enthral them, by field and flood,  
Till "the sun shall be turn'd to darkness,  
And the moon shall be turn'd to blood."

We know not! worse may enthrall men  
"The wages of sin are death";  
And so death passed upon all men,  
For sin was born with man's breath.  
Then the labourer spent with sinning,  
His hire with his life shall spend;  
For it was so in the beginning,  
And shall be so in the end.

There is life in the blacken'd ember  
While a spark is smouldering yet;  
In a dream e'en now I remember  
That dream I had lief forget  
I had lief forget, I had e'en lief  
That dream with THIS doubt should die  
"IF WE DID THESE THINGS IN THE GREEN LEAF,  
WHAT SHALL BE DONE IN THE DRY?"



## The Rhyme of Joyous Garde

Through the lattice rushes the south wind, dense  
With fumes of the flowery frankincense  
    From hawthorn blossoming thickly;  
And gold is shower'd on grass unshorn,  
And poppy-fire on shuddering corn,  
With May-dew flooded and flush'd with morn,  
    And scented with sweetness sickly.

The bloom and brilliance of summer days,  
The buds that brighten, the fields that blaze,  
    The fruits that ripen and redden,  
And all the gifts of a God-sent light  
Are sadder things in my shameful sight  
Than the blackest gloom of the bitterest night,  
    When the senses darken and deaden.

For the days recall what the nights efface,  
Scenes of glory and seasons of grace,  
    For which there is no returning  
Else the days were even as the nights to me,  
Now the axe is laid to the root of the tree,  
And to-morrow the barren trunk may be  
    Cut down cast forth for the burning.

Would God I had died the death that day  
When the bishop blessed us before the fray  
    At the shrine of the Saviour's Mother;  
We buckled the spur, we braced the belt,  
Arthur and I together we knelt,  
And the grasp of his kingly hand I felt  
    As the grasp of an only brother.

The body and the blood of Christ we shared,  
Knees bended and heads bow'd down and bared,  
    We listened throughout the praying.  
Eftsoon the shock of the foe we bore,  
Shoulder to shoulder on Severn's shore,  
Till our hilts were glued to our hands with gore,  
    And our sinews slacken'd with slaying.

## Bush Ballads and Galloping Rhymes

Was I far from Thy Kingdom, gracious Lord,  
With a shattered casque and a shiver'd sword,  
    On the threshold of Mary's chapel?  
Pardie! I had well-nigh won that crown  
Which endureth more than a knight's renown,  
When the pagan giant had got me down,  
    Sore spent in the deadly grapple.

May his craven spirit find little grace,  
He was seal'd to Satan in any case,  
    Yet the loser had been the winner;  
Had I waxed fainter or he less faint,  
Then my soul was free from this loathsome taint,  
I had died as a Christian knight no saint  
    Perchance, yet a pardon'd sinner.

But I strove full grimly beneath his weight,  
I clung to his poignard desperate,  
    I baffled the thrust that followed,  
And writhing uppermost rose, to deal,  
With bare three inches of broken steel,  
One stroke Ha! the headpiece crash'd piecemeal,  
    And the knave in his black blood wallow'd.

So I lived for worse in fulness of time,  
When peace for a season sway'd the clime,  
    And spears for a space were idle,  
Trusted and chosen of all the court,  
A favoured herald of fair report,  
I travell'd eastward, and duly brought  
    A bride to a queenly bridal.

Pardie! 'twas a morning even as this  
(The skies were warmer if aught, I wis,  
    Albeit the fields were duller;  
Or it may be that the envious spring,  
Abash'd at the sight of a fairer thing,  
Wax'd somewhat sadder of colouring  
    Because of her faultless colour).

With her through the Lyonesse I rode,  
Till the woods with the noontide fervour glow'd,  
    And there for a space we halted,  
Where the intertwining branches made  
Cool carpets of olive-tinted shade,  
And the floors with fretwork of flame inlaid  
    From leafy lattices vaulted.

And scarf and mantle for her I spread,  
And strewed them over the grassiest bed,

## Bush Ballads and Galloping Rhymes

And under the greenest awning,  
And loosen'd latch and buckle, and freed  
From selle and housing the red roan steed,  
And the jennet of swift Iberian breed,  
That had carried us since the dawning.

The brown thrush sang through the briar and bower,  
All flush'd or frosted with forest flower  
In the warm sun's wanton glances;  
And I grew deaf to the song bird blind  
To blossom that sweeten'd the sweet spring wind  
I saw her only a girl reclined  
In her girlhood's indolent trances.

And the song and the scent and sense wax'd weak,  
The wild rose withered beside the cheek  
She poised on her fingers slender;  
The soft spun gold of her glittering hair  
Ran rippling into a wondrous snare,  
That flooded the round arm bright and bare,  
And the shoulder's silvery splendour.

The deep dusk fires in those dreamy eyes,  
Like seas clear-coloured in summer skies,  
Were guiltless of future treason;  
And I stood watching her, still and mute,  
Yet the evil seed in my soul found root,  
And the sad plant throve, and the sinful fruit  
Grew ripe in the shameful season.

Let the sin be mine as the shame was hers,  
In desolate days of departed years  
She had leisure for shame and sorrow  
There was light repentance and brief remorse,  
When I rode against Saxon foes or Norse,  
With clang of harness and clatter of horse,  
And little heed for the morrow.

And now she is dead, men tell me, and I,  
In this living death must I linger and lie  
Till my cup to the dregs is drunken?  
I looked through the lattice worn and grim,  
With eyelids darken'd and eyesight dim,  
And weary body and wasted limb,  
And sinew slacken'd and shrunken.

She is dead! Gone down to the burial-place,  
Where the grave-dews cleave to her faultless face;  
Where the grave-sods crumble around her;  
And that bright burden of burnish'd gold,  
That once on those waxen shoulders roll'd,

## Bush Ballads and Galloping Rhymes

Will it spoil with the damps of the deadly mould?  
Was it shorn when the church vows bound her?

Now I know full well that the fair spear shaft  
Shall never gladden my hand, nor the haft  
Of the good sword grow to my fingers;  
Now the maddest fray, the merriest din,  
Would fail to quicken this life-stream thin,  
Yet the sleepy poison of that sweet sin  
In the sluggish current still lingers.

Would God I had slept with the slain men, long  
Or ever the heart conceived a wrong  
That the innermost soul abhorred  
Or ever these lying lips were strained  
To her lids, pearl-tinted and purple-vein'd,  
Or ever those traitorous kisses stained  
The snows of her spotless forehead.

Let me gather a little strength to think,  
As one who reels on the outermost brink,  
To the innermost gulf descending.  
In that truce the longest and last of all,  
In the summer nights of that festival  
Soft vesture of samite and silken pall  
The beginning came of the ending.

And one trod softly with sandal'd feet  
Ah! why are the stolen waters sweet?  
And one crept stealthily after;  
I would I had taken him there and wrung  
His knavish neck when the dark door swung,  
Or torn by the roots his treacherous tongue,  
And stifled his hateful laughter.

So the smouldering scandal blazed but he,  
My king, to the last put trust in me  
Aye, well was his trust requited!  
Now priests may patter, and bells may toll,  
He will need no masses to aid his soul;  
When the angels open the judgment scroll,  
His wrong will be tenfold righted.

Then dawn'd the day when the mail was donn'd,  
And the steed for the strife caparison'd,  
But not 'gainst the Norse invader.  
Then was bloodshed not by untoward chance,  
As the blood that is drawn by the jouster's lance,  
The fray in the castle of Melegrance,  
The fight in the lists with Mador.

## Bush Ballads and Galloping Rhymes

Then the guilt made manifest, then the siege,  
When the true men rallying round the liege  
    Beleaguer'd his base betrayer;  
Then the fruitless parleys, the pleadings vain,  
And the hard-fought battles with brave Gawaine,  
Twice worsted, and once so nearly slain,  
    I may well be counted his slayer.

Then the crime of Modred a little sin  
At the side of mine, though the knave was kin  
    To the king by the knave's hand stricken.  
And the once-loved knight, was he there to save  
That knightly king who that knighthood gave?  
Ah, Christ! will he greet me as knight or knave  
    In the day when the dust shall quicken.

Had he lightly loved, had he trusted less,  
I had sinn'd perchance with the sinfulness  
    That through prayer and penance is pardoned.  
Oh, love most loyal! Oh, faith most sure!  
In the purity of a soul so pure  
I found my safeguard I sinn'd secure,  
    Till my heart to the sin grew harden'd.

We were glad together in gladsome meads,  
When they shook to the strokes of our snorting steeds;  
    We were joyful in joyous lustre  
When it flush'd the coppice or fill'd the glade,  
Where the horn of the Dane or the Saxon bray'd,  
And we saw the heathen banner display'd,  
    And the heathen lances cluster.

Then a steel-shod rush and a steel-clad ring,  
And a crash of the spear staves splintering,  
    And the billowy battle blended.  
Riot of chargers, revel of blows,  
And fierce, flush'd faces of fighting foes,  
From croup to bridle, that reel'd and rose,  
    In a sparkle of sword-play splendid.

And the long, lithe sword in the hand became  
As a leaping light, as a falling flame,  
    As a fire through the flax that hasted;  
Slender, and shining, and beautiful,  
How it shore through shivering casque and skull,  
And never a stroke was void and null,  
    And never a thrust was wasted.

I have done for ever with all these things  
Deeds that were joyous to knights and kings,  
    In days that with songs were cherish'd.

## Bush Ballads and Galloping Rhymes

The songs are ended, the deeds are done,  
There shall none of them gladden me now, not one;  
There is nothing good for me under the sun,  
    But to perish as these things perish'd.

Shall it profit me aught that the bishop seeks  
My presence daily, and duly speaks  
    Soft words of comfort and kindness?  
Shall it aught avail me? "Certes," he said,  
"Though thy soul is darken'd, be not afraid  
God hateth nothing that He hath made  
    His light shall disperse thy blindness."

I am not afraid for myself, although  
I know I have had that light, and I know  
    The greater my condemnation.  
When I well-nigh swoon'd in the deep-drawn bliss  
Of that first long, sweet, slow, stolen kiss,  
I would gladly have given, for less than this,  
    Myself, with my soul's salvation.

I would languish thus in some loathsome den,  
As a thing of naught in the eyes of men,  
    In the mouths of men as a by-word,  
Through years of pain, and when God saw fit,  
Singing his praises my soul should flit  
To the darkest depth of the nethermost pit,  
    If HERS could be wafted skyward.

Lord Christ! have patience a little while,  
I have sinn'd because I am utterly vile,  
    Having light, loving darkness rather.  
And I pray Thee deal with me as Thou wilt,  
Yet the blood of Thy foes I have freely spilt,  
And, moreover, mine is the greater guilt  
    In the sight of Thee and Thy Father.

That saint, Thy servant, was counted dear  
Whose sword in the garden grazed the ear  
    Of Thine enemy, Lord Redeemer!  
Not thus on the shattering visor jarr'd  
In this hand the iron of the hilt cross-barr'd,  
When the blade was swallow'd up to the guard  
    Through the teeth of the strong blasphemer.

If ever I smote as a man should smite,  
If I struck one stroke that seem'd good in Thy sight,  
    By Thy loving mercy prevailing,  
Lord! let her stand in the light of Thy face,  
Cloth'd with Thy love and crown'd with Thy grace,  
When I gnash my teeth in the terrible place

## Bush Ballads and Galloping Rhymes

That is fill'd with weeping and wailing.

Shall I comfort my soul on account of this?  
In the world to come, whatsoever it is,  
    There is no more earthly ill-doing  
For the dusty darkness shall slay desire,  
And the chaff may burn with unquenchable fire,  
But for green wild growth of thistle and briar  
    At least there is no renewing.

And this grievous burden of life shall change  
In the dim hereafter, dreamy and strange,  
    And sorrows and joys diurnal.  
And partial blessings and perishing ills  
Shall fade in the praise, or the pang that fills  
The glory of God's eternal hills,  
    Or the gloom of His gulf eternal.

Yet if all things change to the glory of One  
Who for all ill-doers gave His Own sweet Son,  
    To His goodness so shall He change ill,  
When the world as a wither'd leaf shall be,  
And the sky like a shrivell'd scroll shall flee,  
And souls shall be summon'd from land and sea,  
    At the blast of His bright archangel.

## Thora's Song

("Ashtaroth")

We severed in autumn early,  
Ere the earth was torn by the plough;  
The wheat and the oats and the barley  
Are ripe for the harvest now.  
We sunder'd one misty morning,  
Ere the hills were dimm'd by the rain,  
Through the flowers those hills adorning  
Thou comest not back again.

My heart is heavy and weary  
With the weight of a weary soul;  
The mid-day glare grows dreary,  
And dreary the midnight scroll.

## Bush Ballads and Galloping Rhymes

The corn–stalks sigh for the sickle,  
'Neath the load of the golden grain;  
I sigh for a mate more fickle  
Thou comest not back again.

The warm sun riseth and setteth,  
The night bringeth moist'ning dew,  
But the soul that longeth forgetteth  
The warmth and the moisture, too;  
In the hot sun rising and setting  
There is naught save feverish pain;  
There are tears in the night–dews wetting  
Thou comest not back again.

Thy voice in mine ear still mingles  
With the voices of whisp'ring trees;  
Thy kiss on my cheek still tingles  
At each kiss of the summer breeze;  
While dreams of the past are thronging  
For substance of shades in vain,  
I am waiting, watching, and longing  
Thou comest not back again.

Waiting and watching ever,  
Longing and lingering yet,  
Leaves rustle and corn–stalks quiver,  
Winds murmur and waters fret;  
No answer they bring, no greeting,  
No speech save that sad refrain,  
Nor voice, save an echo repeating  
He cometh not back again.

## The Three Friends

(From the French)

The sword slew one in deadly strife;  
One perish'd by the bowl;  
The third lies self–slain by the knife;  
For three the bells may toll  
I loved her better than my life,  
And better than my soul.



## Bush Ballads and Galloping Rhymes

Aye, father! hast thou come at last?  
'Tis somewhat late to pray;  
Life's crimson tides are ebbing fast,  
They drain my soul away;  
Mine eyes with film are overcast,  
The lights are waning grey.

This curl from her bright head I shore,  
And this her hands gave mine;  
See, one is stained with purple gore,  
And one with poison'd wine;  
Give these to her when all is o'er  
How serpent-like they twine!

We three were brethren in arms,  
And sworn companions we;  
We held this motto, "Whoso harms  
The one shall harm the three!"  
Till, matchless for her subtle charms,  
Beloved of each was she.

(These two were slain that I might kiss  
Her sweet mouth. I did well;  
I said, "There is no greater bliss  
For those in heaven that dwell;"  
I lost her; then I said, "There is  
No fiercer pang in hell!")

We have upheld each other's rights,  
Shared purse, and borrow'd blade;  
Have stricken side by side in fights;  
And side by side have prayed  
In churches. We were Christian knights,  
And she a Christian maid.

We met at sunrise, he and I,  
My comrade 'twas agreed  
The steel our quarrel first should try,  
The poison should succeed;  
For two of three were doom'd to die,  
And one was doom'd to bleed.

We buckled to the doubtful fray,  
At first with some remorse;  
But he who must be slain, or slay,  
Soon strikes with vengeful force.  
He fell; I left him where he lay,  
Among the trampled gorse.

Did passion warp my heart and head  
To madness? And, if so,

## Bush Ballads and Galloping Rhymes

Can madness palliate bloodshed?  
It may be I shall know  
When God shall gather up the dead  
From where the four winds blow.

We met at sunset, he and I  
My second comrade true;  
Two cups with wine were brimming high,  
And one was drugg'd we knew  
Not which, nor sought we to descry;  
Our choice by lot we drew.

And there I sat with him to sup;  
I heard him blithely speak  
Of by-gone days the fatal cup  
Forgotten seem'd his cheek  
Was ruddy: father, raise me up,  
My voice is waxing weak.

We drank; his lips turned livid white,  
His cheeks grew leaden ash;  
He reel'd I heard his temples smite  
The threshold with a crash!  
And from his hand, in shivers bright,  
I saw the goblet flash.

The morrow dawn'd with fragrance rare,  
The May breeze, from the west,  
Just fann'd the sleepy olives, where  
She heard and I confess'd;  
My hair entangled with her hair,  
Her breast strained to my breast.

On the dread verge of endless gloom  
My soul recalls that hour;  
Skies languishing with balm of bloom,  
And fields aflame with flower;  
And slow caresses that consume,  
And kisses that devour.

Ah! now with storm the day seems rife,  
My dull ears catch the roll  
Of thunder, and the far sea strife,  
On beach and bar and shoal  
I loved her better than my life,  
And better than my soul.

She fled! I cannot prove her guilt,  
Nor would I an I could;  
See, life for life is fairly spilt!  
And blood is shed for blood;

## Bush Ballads and Galloping Rhymes

Her white hands neither touched the hilt,  
Nor yet the potion brew'd.

Aye! turn me from the sickly south,  
Towards the gusty north;  
The fruits of sin are dust and drouth,  
The end of crime is wrath  
The lips that pressed her rose-like mouth  
Are choked with blood-red froth.

Then dig the grave-pit deep and wide,  
Three graves thrown into one,  
And lay three corpses side by side,  
And tell their tale to none;  
But bring her back in all her pride  
To see what she hath done.

## A Song of Autumn

"Where shall we go for our garlands glad  
At the falling of the year,  
When the burnt-up banks are yellow and sad,  
When the boughs are yellow and sere?  
Where are the old ones that once we had,  
And when are the new ones near?  
What shall we do for our garlands glad  
At the falling of the year?"

"Child! can I tell where the garlands go?  
Can I say where the lost leaves veer  
On the brown-burnt banks, when the wild winds blow,  
When they drift through the dead-wood drear?  
Girl! when the garlands of next year glow,  
YOU may gather again, my dear  
But I go where the last year's lost leaves go  
At the falling of the year."

## The Romance of Britomarte

As related by Sergeant Leigh on the night he got his captaincy  
at the Restoration.

I'll tell you a story; but pass the "jack",  
And let us make merry to-night, my men.  
Aye, those were the days when my beard was black  
I like to remember them now and then  
Then Miles was living, and Cuthbert there,  
On his lip was never a sign of down;  
But I carry about some braided hair,  
That has not yet changed from the glossy brown  
That it showed the day when I broke the heart  
Of that bravest of destriers, "Britomarte".

Sir Hugh was slain (may his soul find grace!)  
In the fray that was neither lost nor won  
At Edgehill then to St. Hubert's Chase  
Lord Goring despatched a garrison  
But men and horses were ill to spare,  
And ere long the soldiers were shifted fast.  
As for me, I never was quartered there  
Till Marston Moor had been lost; at last,  
As luck would have it, alone, and late  
In the night, I rode to the northern gate.

I thought, as I passed through the moonlit park,  
On the boyish days I used to spend  
In the halls of the knight lying stiff and stark  
Thought on his lady, my father's friend  
(Mine, too, in spite of my sinister bar,  
But with that my story has naught to do)  
She died the winter before the war  
Died giving birth to the baby Hugh.  
He pass'd ere the green leaves clothed the bough,  
And the orphan girl was the heiress now.

When I was a rude and a reckless boy,  
And she a brave and a beautiful child,  
I was her page, her playmate, her toy  
I have crown'd her hair with the field-flowers wild,  
Cowslip and crow-foot and colt's-foot bright  
I have carried her miles when the woods were wet,  
I have read her romances of dame and knight;  
She was my princess, my pride, my pet,

## Bush Ballads and Galloping Rhymes

There was then this proverb us twain between,  
For the glory of God and of Gwendoline.

She had grown to a maiden wonderful fair,  
But for years I had scarcely seen her face.  
Now, with troopers Holdsworth, Huntly, and Clare,  
Old Miles kept guard at St. Hubert's Chase,  
And the chatelaine was a Mistress Ruth,  
Sir Hugh's half-sister, an ancient dame,  
But a mettlesome soul had she forsooth,  
As she show'd when the time of her trial came.  
I bore despatches to Miles and to her,  
To warn them against the bands of Kerr.

And mine would have been a perilous ride  
With the rebel horsemen we knew not where  
They were scattered over that country side,  
If it had not been for my brave brown mare.  
She was iron-sinew'd and satin-skin'd,  
Ribb'd like a drum and limb'd like a deer,  
Fierce as the fire and fleet as the wind  
There was nothing she couldn't climb or clear  
Rich lords had vex'd me, in vain, to part,  
For their gold and silver, with Britomarte.

Next morn we muster'd scarce half a score,  
With the serving men, who were poorly arm'd  
Five soldiers, counting myself, no more,  
And a culverin, which might well have harm'd  
Us, had we used it, but not our foes,  
When, with horses and foot, to our doors they came,  
And a psalm-singer summon'd us (through his nose),  
And deliver'd "This, in the people's name,  
Unto whoso holdeth this fortress here,  
Surrender! or bide the siege John Kerr."

'Twas a mansion built in a style too new,  
A castle by courtesy, he lied  
Who called it a fortress yet, 'tis true,  
It had been indifferently fortified  
We were well provided with bolt and bar  
And while I hurried to place our men,  
Old Miles was call'd to a council of war  
With Mistress Ruth and with HER, and when  
They had argued loudly and long, those three,  
They sent, as a last resource, for me.

In the chair of state sat erect Dame Ruth;  
She had cast aside her embroidery;  
She had been a beauty, they say, in her youth,  
There was much fierce fire in her bold black eye.

## Bush Ballads and Galloping Rhymes

"Am I deceived in you both?" quoth she.  
"If one spark of her father's spirit lives  
In this girl here so, this Leigh, Ralph Leigh,  
Let us hear what counsel the springald gives."  
Then I stammer'd, somewhat taken aback  
(Simon, you ale-swiller, pass the "jack").

The dame wax'd hotter "Speak out, lad, say,  
Must we fall in that canting caitiff's power?  
Shall we yield to a knave and a turncoat? Nay,  
I had liever leap from our topmost tower.  
For a while we can surely await relief;  
Our walls are high and our doors are strong."  
This Kerr was indeed a canting thief  
I know not rightly, some private wrong  
He had done Sir Hugh, but I know this much,  
Traitor or turncoat, he suffer'd as such.

Quoth Miles "Enough! your will shall be done;  
Relief may arrive by the merest chance,  
But your house ere dusk will be lost and won;  
They have got three pieces of ordnance."  
Then I cried, "Lord Guy, with four troops of horse,  
Even now is biding at Westbrooke town;  
If a rider could break through the rebel force,  
He would bring relief ere the sun goes down;  
Through the postern door could I make one dart,  
I could baffle them all upon Britomarte."

Miles mutter'd "Madness!" Dame Ruth look'd grave,  
Said, "True, though we cannot keep one hour  
The courtyard, no, nor the stables save,  
They will have to batter piecemeal the tower,  
And thus " But suddenly she halted there.  
With a shining hand on my shoulder laid  
Stood Gwendoline. She had left her chair,  
And, "Nay, if it needs must be done," she said,  
"Ralph Leigh will gladly do it, I ween,  
For the glory of God and of Gwendoline."

I had undertaken a heavier task  
For a lighter word. I saddled with care,  
Nor cumber'd myself with corselet nor casque  
(Being loth to burden the brave brown mare).  
Young Clare kept watch on the wall he cried,  
"Now, haste, Ralph! this is the time to seize;  
The rebels are round us on every side,  
But here they straggle by twos and threes."  
Then out I led her, and up I sprung,  
And the postern door on its hinges swung.

## Bush Ballads and Galloping Rhymes

I had drawn this sword you may draw it and feel,  
For this is the blade that I bore that day  
There's a notch even now on the long grey steel,  
A nick that has never been rasp'd away.  
I bow'd my head and I buried my spurs,  
One bound brought the gliding green beneath;  
I could tell by her back-flung, flatten'd ears,  
She had fairly taken the bit in her teeth  
(What, Jack, have you drain'd your namesake dry,  
Left nothing to quench the thirst of a fly?)

These things are done, and are done with, lad,  
In far less time than your talker tells;  
The sward with their hoof-strokes shook like mad,  
And rang with their carbines and petronels;  
And they shouted, "Cross him and cut him off,"  
"Surround him," "Seize him," "Capture the clown,  
Or kill him," "Shall he escape to scoff  
In your faces?" "Shoot him or cut him down."  
And their bullets whistled on every side;  
Many were near us and more were wide.

Not a bullet told upon Britomarte;  
Suddenly snorting, she launched along;  
So the osprey dives where the seagulls dart,  
So the falcon swoops where the kestrels throng.  
And full in my front one pistol flash'd,  
And right in my path their sergeant got.  
How are jack-boots jarr'd, how are stirrups clash'd,  
While the mare like a meteor past him shot;  
But I clove his skull with a backstroke clean,  
For the glory of God and of Gwendoline.

And as one whom the fierce wind storms in the face,  
With spikes of hail and with splinters of rain,  
I, while we fled through St. Hubert's Chase,  
Bent till my cheek was amongst her mane.  
To the north, full a league of the deer-park lay,  
Smooth, springy turf, and she fairly flew,  
And the sound of their hoof-strokes died away,  
And their far shots faint in the distance grew.  
Loudly I laughed, having won the start,  
At the folly of following Britomarte.

They had posted a guard at the northern gate  
Some dozen of pikemen and musketeers.  
To the tall park palings I turn'd her straight;  
She veer'd in her flight as the swallow veers.  
And some blew matches and some drew swords,  
And one of them wildly hurl'd his pike,  
But she clear'd by inches the oaken boards,

## Bush Ballads and Galloping Rhymes

And she carried me yards beyond the dyke;  
Then gaily over the long green down  
We gallop'd, heading for Westbrooke town.

The green down slopes to the great grey moor,  
The grey moor sinks to the gleaming Skelt  
Sudden and sullen, and swift and sure,  
The whirling water was round my belt.  
She breasted the bank with a savage snort,  
And a backward glance of her bloodshot eye,  
And "Our Lady of Andover's" flash'd like thought,  
And flitted St. Agatha's nunnery,  
And the firs at "The Ferngrove" fled on the right,  
And "Falconer's Tower" on the left took flight.

And over "The Ravenswold" we raced  
We rounded the hill by "The Hermit's Well"  
We burst on the Westbrooke Bridge "What haste?  
What errand?" shouted the sentinel.  
"To Beelzebub with the Brewer's knave!"  
"Carolus Rex and he of the Rhine!"  
Galloping past him, I got and gave  
In the gallop password and countersign,  
All soak'd with water and soil'd with mud,  
With the sleeve of my jerkin half drench'd in blood.

Now, Heaven be praised that I found him there  
Lord Guy. He said, having heard my tale,  
"Leigh, let my own man look to your mare,  
Rest and recruit with our wine and ale;  
But first must our surgeon attend to you;  
You are somewhat shrewdly stricken, no doubt."  
Then he snatched a horn from the wall and blew,  
Making "Boot and Saddle" ring sharply out.  
"Have I done good service this day?" quoth I.  
"Then I will ride back in your troop, Lord Guy."

In the street I heard how the trumpets peal'd,  
And I caught the gleam of a morion  
From the window then to the door I reel'd;  
I had lost more blood than I reckon'd upon;  
He eyed me calmly with keen grey eyes  
Stern grey eyes of a steel-blue grey  
Said, "The wilful man can never be wise,  
Nathless, the wilful must have his way,"  
And he pour'd from a flagon some fiery wine;  
I drain'd it, and straightway strength was mine.

\* \* \* \* \*

I was with them all the way on the brown

The Romance of Britomarte



## Bush Ballads and Galloping Rhymes

"Guy to the rescue!" "God and the king!"  
We were just in time, for the doors were down;  
And didn't our sword-blades rasp and ring,  
And didn't we hew and didn't we hack?  
The sport scarce lasted minutes ten  
(Aye, those were the days when my beard was black;  
I like to remember them now and then).  
Though they fought like fiends, we were four to one,  
And we captured those that refused to run.

We have not forgotten it, Cuthbert, boy!  
That supper scene when the lamps were lit;  
How the women (some of them) sobb'd for joy,  
How the soldiers drank the deeper for it;  
How the dame did honours, and Gwendoline,  
How grandly she glided into the hall,  
How she stoop'd with the grace of a girlish queen,  
And kiss'd me gravely before them all;  
And the stern Lord Guy, how gaily he laugh'd,  
Till more of his cup was spilt than quaff'd.

Brown Britomarte lay dead in her straw  
Next morn we buried her brave old girl!  
John Kerr, we tried him by martial law,  
And we twisted some hemp for the trait'rous churl;  
And she I met her alone said she,  
"You have risk'd your life, you have lost your mare,  
And what can I give in return, Ralph Leigh?"  
I replied, "One braid of that bright brown hair."  
And with that she bow'd her beautiful head,  
"You can take as much as you choose," she said.

And I took it it may be, more than enough  
And I shore it rudely, close to the roots.  
The wine or wounds may have made me rough,  
And men at the bottom are merely brutes.  
Three weeks I slept at St. Hubert's Chase;  
When I woke from the fever of wounds and wine,  
I could scarce believe that the ghastly face  
That the glass reflected was really mine.  
I sought the hall where a wedding HAD BEEN  
The wedding of Guy and of Gwendoline.

The romance of a grizzled old trooper's life  
May make you laugh in your sleeves: laugh out,  
Lads; we have most of us seen some strife;  
We have all of us had some sport, no doubt.  
I have won some honour and gain'd some gold,  
Now that our king returns to his own;  
If the pulses beat slow, if the blood runs cold,  
And if friends have faded and loves have flown,

## Bush Ballads and Galloping Rhymes

Then the greater reason is ours to drink,  
And the more we swallow the less we shall think.

At the battle of Naseby, Miles was slain,  
And Huntly sank from his wounds that week;  
We left young Clare upon Worcester plain  
How the "Ironside" gash'd his girlish cheek.  
Aye, strut, and swagger, and ruffle anew,  
Gay gallants, now that the war is done!  
They fought like fiends (give the fiend his due)  
We fought like fops, it was thus they won.  
Holdsworth is living for aught I know,  
At least he was living two years ago,

And Guy Lord Guy so stately and stern,  
He is changed, I met him at Winchester;  
He has grown quite gloomy and taciturn.  
Gwendoline! why do you ask for her?  
Died as her mother had died before  
Died giving birth to the baby Guy!  
Did my voice shake? Then am I fool the more.  
Sooner or later we all must die;  
But, at least, let us live while we live to-night.  
The DAYS may be dark, but the LAMPS are bright.

For to me the sunlight seems worn and wan:  
The sun, he is losing his splendour now  
He can never shine as of old he shone  
On her glorious hair and glittering brow.  
Ah! those DAYS THAT WERE, when my beard was black,  
NOW I have only the NIGHTS THAT ARE.  
What, landlord, ho! bring in haste burnt sack,  
And a flask of your fiercest usquebaugh.  
You, Cuthbert! surely you know by heart  
The story of HER and of Britomarte.

## Laudamus

The Lord shall slay or the Lord shall save!  
He is righteous whether He save or slay  
Brother, give thanks for the gifts He gave,  
Though the gifts He gave He hath taken away.

## Bush Ballads and Galloping Rhymes

Shall we strive for that which is nothing? Nay.  
Shall we hate each other for that which fled?  
She is but a marvel of modelled clay,  
And the smooth, clear white, and the soft, pure red,  
That we coveted, shall endure no day.

Was it wise or well that I hated you  
For the fruit that hung too high on the tree?  
For the blossom out of our reach that grew,  
Was it well or wise that you hated me?  
My hate has flown, and your hate shall flee.  
Let us veil our faces like children chid  
Can that violet orb we swore by see  
Through that violet-vein'd, transparent lid?  
Now the Lord forbid that this strife should be.

Would you knit the forehead or clench the fist,  
For the curls that never were well caress'd  
For the red that never was fairly kiss'd  
For the white that never was fondly press'd?  
Shall we nourish wrath while she lies at rest  
Between us? Surely our wrath shall cease.  
We would fain know better the Lord knows best  
Is there peace between us? Yea, there is peace,  
In the soul's release she at least is blest.

Let us thank the Lord for His bounties all,  
For the brave old days of pleasure and pain,  
When the world for both of us seem'd too small  
Though the love was void and the hate was vain  
Though the word was bitter between us twain,  
And the bitter word was kin to the blow,  
For her gloss and ripple of rich gold rain,  
For her velvet crimson and satin snow  
Though we never shall know the old days again.

The Lord! His mercy is great, men say;  
His wrath, men say, is a burning brand  
Let us praise Him whether He save or slay,  
And above her body let hand join hand.  
We shall meet, my friend, in the spirit land  
Will our strife renew? Nay, I dare not trust,  
For the grim, great gulf that cannot be spann'd  
Will divide us from her. The Lord is just,  
She shall not be thrust where our spirits stand.

## A Basket of Flowers

from Dawn to Dusk

Dawn

On skies still and starlit  
White lustres take hold,  
And grey flushes scarlet,  
And red flashes gold.  
And sun-glories cover  
The rose shed above her,  
Like lover and lover  
They flame and unfold.

\* \* \* \* \*

Still bloom in the garden  
Green grass-plot, fresh lawn,  
Though pasture lands harden  
And drought fissures yawn.  
While leaves not a few fall,  
Let rose leaves for you fall,  
Leaves pearl-strung with dew-fall,  
And gold shot with dawn.

Does the grass-plot remember  
The fall of your feet  
In autumn's red ember,  
When drought leagues with heat,  
When the last of the roses  
Despairingly closes  
In the lull that reposes  
Ere storm winds wax fleet?

Love's melodies languish  
In "Chastelard's" strain,  
And "Abelard's" anguish  
Is love's pleasant pain!  
And "Sappho" rehearses  
Love's blessings and curses  
In passionate verses  
Again and again.

And I! I have heard of

## Bush Ballads and Galloping Rhymes

All these long ago,  
Yet never one word of  
Their song-lore I know;  
Not under my finger  
In songs of the singer  
Love's litanies linger,  
Love's rhapsodies flow.

Fresh flowers in a basket  
An offering to you  
Though you did not ask it,  
Unbidden I strew;  
With heat and drought striving,  
Some blossoms still living  
May render thanksgiving  
For dawn and for dew.

The garlands I gather,  
The rhymes I string fast,  
Are hurriedly rather  
Than heedlessly cast.  
Yon tree's shady awning  
Is short'ning, and warning  
Far spent is the morning,  
And I must ride fast.

Songs empty, yet airy,  
I've striven to write,  
For failure, dear Mary!  
Forgive me Good-night!  
Songs and flowers may beset you,  
I can only regret you,  
While the soil where I met you  
Recedes from my sight.

For the sake of past hours,  
For the love of old times,  
Take "A Basket of Flowers",  
And a bundle of rhymes;  
Though all the bloom perish  
E'en YOUR hand can cherish,  
While churlish and bearish  
The verse-jingle chimes.

And Eastward by Nor'ward  
Looms sadly MY track,  
And I must ride forward,  
And still I look back,  
Look back ah, how vainly!  
For while I see plainly,  
My hands on the reins lie

## Bush Ballads and Galloping Rhymes

Uncertain and slack.

The warm wind breathes strong breath,  
The dust dims mine eye,  
And I draw one long breath,  
And stifle one sigh.  
Green slopes, softly shaded,  
Have flitted and faded  
My dreams flit as they did  
Good-night! and Good-bye!

\* \* \* \* \*

Dusk

Lost rose! end my story!  
Dead core and dry husk  
Departed thy glory  
And tainted thy musk.  
Night spreads her dark limbs on  
The face of the dim sun,  
So flame fades to crimson  
And crimson to dusk.

## A Fragment

They say that poison-sprinkled flowers  
Are sweeter in perfume  
Than when, untouched by deadly dew,  
They glowed in early bloom.

They say that men condemned to die  
Have quaffed the sweetened wine  
With higher relish than the juice  
Of the untampered vine.

They say that in the witch's song,  
Though rude and harsh it be,  
There blends a wild, mysterious strain  
Of weirdest melody.

A Fragment

## Bush Ballads and Galloping Rhymes

And I believe the devil's voice  
Sinks deeper in our ear  
Than any whisper sent from Heaven,  
However sweet and clear.

[End of Bush Ballads.]