

# **SIR HORNBOOK, or Childe Launcelot's Expedition**

Thomas Love Peacock

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SIR HORNBOOK  
OR  
Childe Launcelot's Expedition

A  
GRAMMATICO-ALLEGORICAL BALLAD

## I.

O'er bush and briar Childe Launcelot sprung  
With ardent hopes elate,  
And loudly blew the horn that hung  
Before Sir Hornbook's gate.

The inner portals opened wide,  
And forward strode the chief,  
Arrayed in paper helmet's pride,  
And arms of golden leaf.

"What means," he cried, "This daring noise,  
That wakes the summer day?  
I hate all idle truant boys:  
Away, Sir Childe, away!"

"No idle, truant boy am I,"  
Childe Launcelot answered straight;  
"Resolved to climb this hill so high,  
I seek thy castle gate.

"Behold the talisman I bear,

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And aid my bold design:"  
Sir Hornbook gazed, and written there,  
Knew Emulation's sign

"If Emulation sent thee here,"  
Sir Hornbook quick replied,  
"My merry men all shall soon appear,  
To aid thy cause with shield and spear,  
And I will head thy bold career,  
And prove thy faithful guide."

Loud rung the chains; the drawbridge fell;  
The gates asunder flew:  
The knight thrice beat the portal bell,  
And thrice he call'd "Halloo."

And out, and out, in hasty rout,  
By ones, twos, threes, and fours;  
His merry men rush'd the walls without,  
And stood before the doors.

## II.

Full six and twenty men were they,  
In line of battle spread:  
The first that came was mighty A,  
The last was little Z.

Six Vocal men Sir Hornbook had,  
Four Double men to boot,  
And four were Liquids soft and sad,  
And all the rest were Mute.

He called his Corporal, Syllable,  
To range the scatter'd throng;  
And Captain Word dispos'd them well  
In bands compact and strong.

"Now mark, Sir Childe," Sir Hornbook said:  
"These well-compacted powers,  
Shall lead thy vent'rous steps to tread  
Through all the Muses' bowers,

"If rightly thou thyself address,  
To use their proffer'd aid:  
Still unallur'd by idleness,

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By labor undismay'd;

"For many troubles intervene,  
And perils widely spread,  
Around the groves of evergreen,  
That crown this mountain's head:  
But rich reward he finds, I ween,  
Who through them all has sped."

Childe Launcelot felt his bosom glow  
At thought of noble deed;  
Resolved through every path to go,  
Where that bold knight should lead.

Sir Hornbook wound his bugle horn,  
Full long, and loud, and shrill;  
His merry men all, for conquest born,  
With armour glittering to the morn,  
Went marching up the hill.

### III.

"What men are you beside the way?"  
The bold Sir Hornbook cried:  
"My name is The, my brother's A,"  
Sir Article replied.

"My brother's home is any where,  
At large and undefin'd;  
But I a preference ever bear  
For one fix'd spot, and settle there;  
Which speaks my constant mind."

"What ho! Childe Launcelot! seize them there,  
And look you have them sure!"  
Sir Hornbook cried, "my men shall bear  
Your captives off secure."

The twain were seized: Sir Hornbook blew  
His bugle loud and shrill:  
His merry men all, so stout and true,  
Went marching up the hill.

IV.

And now a wider space they gained,  
A steeper, harder ground,  
Where by one ample wall contained,  
All earthly things they found:

All beings, rich, poor, weak, or wise,  
Were there, full strange to see,  
And attributes and qualities  
Of high and low degree.

Before the circle stood a knight,  
Sir Substantive his name,  
With Adjective, his lady bright,  
Who seemed a portly dame;

Yet only seemed; for whenso'er  
She strove to stand alone,  
She proved no more than smoke and air,  
Who looked like flesh and bone.

And therefore to her husband's arm  
She clung for evermore,  
And lent him many a grace and charm  
He had not known before;

Yet these the knight felt well advised,  
He might have done without;  
For lightly foreign help he prized  
He was so staunch and stout.

Five sons had they, their dear delight,  
Of different forms and faces;  
And two of them were Numbers bright,  
And three they christened Cases.

Now loudly rung Sir Hornbook's horn;  
Childe Launcelot poised his spear;  
And on they rushed, to conquest borne,  
In swift and full career.

Sir Substantive kicked down the wall:  
It fell with furious rattle:  
And earthly things and beings all  
Rushed forth to join the battle.

But earthly things and beings all,

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Through mixed in boundless plenty,  
Must one by one dissolving fall  
To Hornbook's six-and-twenty.

Childe Launcelot won the arduous fray,  
And, when they ceased from strife,  
Led stout Sir Substantive away,  
His children, and his wife.

Sir Hornbook wound his horn again,  
Full long, and loud, and shrill:  
His merry men all, a warlike train,  
Went marching up the hill.

### V.

Now when Sir Pronoun look'd abroad,  
And spied the coming train,  
He left his fort beside the road,  
And ran with might and main.

Two cloth-yard shafts from I and U,  
Went forth with whizzing sound:  
Like lightning sped the arrows true;  
Sir Pronoun pressed the ground:  
But darts of science ever flew  
To conquer, not to wound.

His fear was great: his hurt was small:  
Childe Launcelot took his hand:  
"Sir Knight," said he, "though doomed to fall  
Before my conquering band,

"Yet knightly treatment shall you find,  
On faith of cavalier:  
Then join Sir Substantive behind,  
And follow our career."

Sir Substantive, that man of might,  
Felt knightly anger rise;  
For he had marked Sir Pronoun's flight  
With no approving eyes.

"Great Substantive, my sovereign liege!"  
Thus sad Sir Pronoun cried,  
"When you had fallen in furious siege,

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Could I the shock abide?"

"That all resistance would be vain,  
Too well, alas! I knew:  
For what could I, when you were ta'en,  
Your poor lieutenant, do?"

Then louder rung Sir Hornbook's horn,  
In signals long and shrill:  
His merry men all, for conquest born,  
Went marching up the hill.

### VI.

Now steeper grew the rising ground,  
And rougher grew the road,  
As up the steep ascent they wound  
To bold Sir Verb's abode.

Sir Verb was old, and many a year,  
All scenes and climates seeing,  
Had run a wild and strange career  
Through every mode of being.

And every aspect, shape, and change  
Of action, and of passion:  
And known to him was all the range  
Of feeling, taste, and fashion.

He was an Augur, quite at home  
In all things present done,  
Deeds past, and every act to come  
In ages yet to run.

Entrenched in intricacies strong,  
Ditch, fort, and palisado,  
He marked with scorn the coming throng,  
And breathed a bold bravado:

"Ho! who are you that dare invade  
My turrets, moats, and fences?  
Soon will your vaunting courage fade,  
When you on the walls, in lines array'd,  
You see me marshal undismay'd  
My host of moods and tenses."



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"In vain," Childe Launcelot cried in scorn,  
"On them is your reliance;"  
Sir Hornbook wound his bugle horn,  
And twange'd a loud defiance.

They swam the moat, they scal'd the wall,  
Sir Verb, with rage and shame,  
Beheld his valiant general fall,  
Infinitive by name.

Indicative declar'd the foes  
Should perish by his hand;  
And stout Imperative arose,  
The squadron to command.

Potential and Subjunctive then  
Came forth with doubt and chance:  
All fell alike, with all their men,  
Before Sir Hornbook's lance.

Action and Passion nought could do  
To save Sir Verb from fate;  
Whose doom poor Participle knew,  
He must participate.

Then Adverb, who had skulk'd behind,  
To shun the mighty jar,  
Came forward, and himself resign'd  
A prisoner of war.

Three children of Imperative,  
Full strong, though somewhat small,  
Next forward came, themselves to give  
To conquering Launcelot's thrall.

Conjunction press'd to join the crowd;  
But Preposition swore,  
Though Interjection sobb'd aloud,  
That he would go before.

Again his horn Sir Hornbook blew,  
Full long, and loud, and shrill;  
His merry men all, so stout and true,  
Went marching up the hill.

## VII.

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Sir Syntax dwelt in thick fir-grove,  
All strown with scraps of flowers,  
Which he had pluck'd to please his love,  
Among the Muses' bowers.

His love was gentle Prosody,  
More fair than morning beam;  
Who liv'd beneath a flowering tree,  
Beside a falling stream.

And these two claim'd, with high pretence  
The whole Parnassian ground,  
Albeit some little difference  
Between their taste was found:  
Sir Syntax he was all for sense,  
And Prosody for sound.

Yet in them both the Muses fair  
Exceedingly delighted;  
And thought no earthly thing so rare,  
That might with that fond twain compare,  
When they were both united.

"Ho! yield, Sir Syntax!" Hornbook cried,  
"This youth must pass thy grove,  
Led on by me, his faithful guide,  
In yonder bowers to rove."

Thereat full much, Sir Syntax said,  
But found resistance vain:  
And through his grove Childe Launcelot sped,  
With all Sir Hornbook's train.

They reach'd the tree where Prosody  
Was singing in the shade:  
Great joy Childe Launcelot had to see,  
And hear that lovely maid.

Now, onward as they press'd along,  
Did nought their course oppose;  
Till full before the martial throng  
The Muses' gates arose.

There Etymology they found,  
Who scorn'd surrounding fruits;  
And ever dug in deepest ground,  
For old and mouldy Roots.

Sir Hornbook took Childe Launcelot's hand,  
And tears at parting fell:

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"Sir Childe," he said, "with all my band  
I bid you here farewell.

"Then wander through these sacred bowers,  
Unfearing and alone:  
All shrubs are here, and fruits, and flowers,  
To happiest climates known."

Once more his horn Sir Hornbook blew,  
A parting signal shrill:  
His merry men all, so stout and true,  
Went marching down the hill.

Childe Launcelot pressed the sacred ground,  
With hope's exulting glow;  
Some future song perchance may sound  
The wondrous thing which there he found,  
If you the same would know.