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Dramatic Lyrics

By Robert Browning

CAVALIER TUNES.

I. MARCHING ALONG.

I.

Kentish Sir Byng stood for his King,
Bidding the crop-headed Parliament swing:
And, pressing a troop unable to stoop
And see the rogues flourish and honest folk droop,
Marched them along, fifty-score strong,
Great-hearted gentlemen, singing this song.

II.

God for King Charles! Pym and such carles
To the Devil that prompts 'em their treasonous parles!
Cavaliers, up! Lips from the cup,
Hands from the pasty, nor bite take nor sup
Till you're---

CHORUS.---Marching along, fifty-score strong,
Great-hearted gentlemen, singing this song.

III.

Hampden to hell, and his obsequies' knell
Serve Hazelrig, Fiennes, and young Harry as well!

England, good cheer! Rupert is near!
Kentish and loyalists, keep we not here

CHORUS.---Marching along, fifty-score strong,
Great-hearted gentlemen, singing this song?

IV.

Then, God for King Charles! Pym and his snarls
To the Devil that pricks on such pestilent carles!
Hold by the right, you double your might;
So, onward to Nottingham, fresh for the fight,

CHORUS.---March we along, fifty-score strong,
Great-hearted gentlemen, singing this song!

II. GIVE A ROUSE.

I.

King Charles, and who'll do him right now?
King Charles, and who's ripe for fight now?
Give a rouse: here's, in hell's despite now,
King Charles!

II.

Who gave me the goods that went since?
Who raised me the house that sank once?
Who helped me to gold I spent since?
Who found me in wine you drank once?

CHORUS.---King Charles, and who'll do him right now?

King Charles, and who's ripe for fight now?
Give a rouse: here's, in hell's despite now,
King Charles!

III.

To whom used my boy George quaff else,
By the old fool's side that begot him?
For whom did he cheer and laugh else,
While Noll's damned troopers shot him?

CHORUS.---King Charles, and who'll do him right now?

King Charles, and who's ripe for fight now?
Give a rouse: here's, in hell's despite now,
King Charles!

III. BOOT AND SADDLE.

I.

Boot, saddle, to horse, and away!
Rescue my castle before the hot day
Brightens to blue from its silvery grey,

CHORUS.---Boot, saddle, to horse, and away!

II.

Ride past the suburbs, asleep as you'd say;
Many's the friend there, will listen and pray
`God's luck to gallants that strike up the lay---

CHORUS.---``Boot, saddle, to horse, and away!''

III.

Forty miles off, like a roebuck at bay,
Flouts Castle Brancepeth the Roundheads' array:
Who laughs, ``Good fellows ere this, by my fay,

CHORUS.---``Boot, saddle, to horse, and away!''

IV.

Who? My wife Gertrude; that, honest and gay,
Laughs when you talk of surrendering, ``Nay!
``I've better counsellors; what counsel they?

CHORUS.---``Boot, saddle, to horse, and away!''

THE LOST LEADER.

I.

Just for a handful of silver he left us,
Just for a riband to stick in his coat---
Found the one gift of which fortune bereft us,
Lost all the others she lets us devote;
They, with the gold to give, doled him out silver,
So much was theirs who so little allowed:
How all our copper had gone for his service!
Rags---were they purple, his heart had been proud!
We that had loved him so, followed him, honoured him,

Lived in his mild and magnificent eye,
Learned his great language, caught his clear accents,
Made him our pattern to live and to die!
Shakespeare was of us, Milton was for us,
Burns, Shelley, were with us,---they watch from their graves!
He alone breaks from the van and the free-men,
---He alone sinks to the rear and the slaves!

II.

We shall march prospering,---not thro' his presence;
Songs may inspirit us,---not from his lyre;
Deeds will be done,---while he boasts his quiescence,
Still bidding crouch whom the rest bade aspire:
Blot out his name, then, record one lost soul more,
One task more declined, one more foot-path untrod,
One more devils'-triumph and sorrow for angels,
One wrong more to man, one more insult to God!
Life's night begins: let him never come back to us!
There would be doubt, hesitation and pain,
Forced praise on our part---the glimmer of twilight,
Never glad confident morning again!
Best fight on well, for we taught him---strike gallantly,
Menace our heart ere we master his own;
Then let him receive the new knowledge and wait us,
Pardoned in heaven, the first by the throne!

``HOW THEY BROUGHT THE GOOD NEWS FROM GHENT TO AIX.``

[16---.]

I.

I sprang to the stirrup, and Joris, and he;
I galloped, Dirck galloped, we galloped all three;
``Good speed!'' cried the watch, as the gate-bolts undrew;
``Speed!'' echoed the wall to us galloping through;
Behind shut the postern, the lights sank to rest,
And into the midnight we galloped abreast.

II.

Not a word to each other; we kept the great pace
Neck by neck, stride by stride, never changing our place;
I turned in my saddle and made its girths tight,
Then shortened each stirrup, and set the pique right,
Rebuckled the cheek-strap, chained slacker the bit,
Nor galloped less steadily Roland a whit.

III.

'Twas moonset at starting; but while we drew near
Lokeren, the cocks crew and twilight dawned clear;
At Boom, a great yellow star came out to see;
At Duffeld, 'twas morning as plain as could be;
And from Mecheln church-steeple we heard the half-chime,
So, Joris broke silence with, ``Yet there is time!''

IV.

At Aershot, up leaped of a sudden the sun,
And against him the cattle stood black every one,
To stare thro' the mist at us galloping past,
And I saw my stout galloper Roland at last,
With resolute shoulders, each hutting away

The haze, as some bluff river headland its spray:

V.

And his low head and crest, just one sharp ear bent back
For my voice, and the other pricked out on his track;
And one eye's black intelligence,---ever that glance
'er its white edge at me, his own master, askance!
And the thick heavy spume-flakes which aye and anon
His fierce lips shook upwards in galloping on.

VI.

By Hasselt, Dirck groaned; and cried Joris, ``Stay spur!
``Your Roos galloped bravely, the fault's not in her,
``We'll remember at Aix'---for one heard the quick wheeze
Of her chest, saw the stretched neck and staggering knees,
And sunk tail, and horrible heave of the flank,
As down on her haunches she shuddered and sank.

VII.

So, we were left galloping, Joris and I,
Past Looz and past Tongres, no cloud in the sky;
The broad sun above laughed a pitiless laugh,
'Neath our feet broke the brittle bright stubble like chaff;
Till over by Dalhem a dome-spire sprang white,
And ``Gallop,' gasped Joris, ``for Aix is in sight!''

VIII.

``How they'll greet us!''---and all in a moment his roan
Rolled neck and croup over, lay dead as a stone;
And there was my Roland to bear the whole weight

Of the news which alone could save Aix from her fate,
With his nostrils like pits full of blood to the brim,
And with circles of red for his eye-sockets' rim.

IX.

Then I cast loose my buffcoat, each holster let fall,
Shook off both my jack-boots, let go belt and all,
Stood up in the stirrup, leaned, patted his ear,
Called my Roland his pet-name, my horse without peer;
Clapped my hands, laughed and sang, any noise, bad or good,
Till at length into Aix Roland galloped and stood.

X.

And all I remember is---friends flocking round
As I sat with his head 'twixt my knees on the ground;
And no voice but was praising this Roland of mine,
As I poured down his throat our last measure of wine,
Which (the burgesses voted by common consent)
Was no more than his due who brought good news from Ghent.

THROUGH THE METIDJA TO ABD-EL-KADR.

[Abd-el-Kadr was an Arab Chief of Algiers who resisted the French in 1833.]

I.

As I ride, as I ride,
With a full heart for my guide,
So its tide rocks my side,

As I ride, as I ride,
That, as I were double-eyed,
He, in whom our Tribes confide,
Is descried, ways untried
As I ride, as I ride.

II.

As I ride, as I ride
To our Chief and his Allied,
Who dares chide my heart's pride
As I ride, as I ride?
Or are witnesses denied---
Through the desert waste and wide
Do I glide unespied
As I ride, as I ride?

III.

As I ride, as I ride,
When an inner voice has cried,
The sands slide, nor abide
(As I ride, as I ride)
O'er each visioned homicide
That came vaunting (has he lied?)
To reside---where he died,
As I ride, as I ride.

IV.

As I ride, as I ride,
Ne'er has spur my swift horse plied,
Yet his hide, streaked and pied,

As I ride, as I ride,
Shows where sweat has sprung and dried,
---Zebra-footed, ostrich-thighed---
How has vied stride with stride
As I ride, as I ride!

V.

As I ride, as I ride,
Could I loose what Fate has tied,
Ere I pried, she should hide
(As I ride, as I ride)
All that's meant me---satisfied
When the Prophet and the Bride
Stop veins I'd have subside
As I ride, as I ride!

NATIONALITY IN DRINKS.

I.

My heart sank with our Claret-flask,
Just now, beneath the heavy sedges
That serve this Pond's black face for mask
And still at yonder broken edges
O' the hole, where up the bubbles glisten,
After my heart I look and listen.

II.

Our laughing little flask, compelled
Thro' depth to depth more bleak and shady;

As when, both arms beside her held,
Feet straightened out, some gay French lady
Is caught up from life's light and motion,
And dropped into death's silent ocean!

Up jumped Tokay on our table,
Like a pygmy castle-warder,
Dwarfish to see, but stout and able,
Arms and accoutrements all in order;
And fierce he looked North, then, wheeling South,
Blew with his bugle a challenge to Drouth,
Cocked his flap-hat with the tosspot-feather,
Twisted his thumb in his red moustache,
Jingled his huge brass spurs together,
Tightened his waist with its Buda sash,
And then, with an impudence nought could abash,
Shrugged his hump-shoulder, to tell the beholder,
For twenty such knaves he should laugh but the bolder:
And so, with his sword-hilt gallantly jutting,
And dexter-hand on his haunch abutting,
Went the little man, Sir Ausbruch, strutting!

Here's to Nelson's memory!
'Tis the second time that I, at sea,
Right off Cape Trafalgar here,
Have drunk it deep in British Beer.
Nelson for ever---any time
Am I his to command in prose or rhyme!
Give me of Nelson only a touch,

And I save it, be it little or much:
Here's one our Captain gives, and so
Down at the word, by George, shall it go!
He says that at Greenwich they point the beholder
To Nelson's coat, ``still with tar on the shoulder:
``For he used to lean with one shoulder digging,
``Jigging, as it were, and zig-zag-zigging
``Up against the mizen-rigging!''

GARDEN FANCIES.

I. THE FLOWER'S NAME

Here's the garden she walked across,
Arm in my arm, such a short while since:
Hark, now I push its wicket, the moss
Hinders the hinges and makes them wince!
She must have reached this shrub ere she turned,
As back with that murmur the wicket swung;
For she laid the poor snail, my chance foot spurned,
To feed and forget it the leaves among.

II.

Down this side of the gravel-walk
She went while her rope's edge brushed the box:
And here she paused in her gracious talk
To point me a moth on the milk-white phlox.
Roses, ranged in valiant row,
I will never think that she passed you by!
She loves you noble roses, I know;
But yonder, see, where the rock-plants lie!

III.

This flower she stopped at, finger on lip,
 Stooped over, in doubt, as settling its claim;
Till she gave me, with pride to make no slip,
 Its soft meandering Spanish name:
What a name! Was it love or praise?
 Speech half-asleep or song half-awake?
I must learn Spanish, one of these days,
 Only for that slow sweet name's sake.

IV.

Roses, if I live and do well,
 I may bring her, one of these days,
To fix you fast with as fine a spell,
 Fit you each with his Spanish phrase;
But do not detain me now; for she lingers
 There, like sunshine over the ground,
And ever I see her soft white fingers
 Searching after the bud she found.

V.

Flower, you Spaniard, look that you grow not,
 Stay as you are and be loved for ever!
Bud, if I kiss you 'tis that you blow not:
 Mind, the shut pink mouth opens never!
For while it pouts, her fingers wrestle,
 Twinkling the audacious leaves between,
Till round they turn and down they nestle---
 Is not the dear mark still to be seen?

VI.

Where I find her not, beauties vanish;
Whither I follow her, beauties flee;
Is there no method to tell her in Spanish
June's twice June since she breathed it with me?
Come, bud, show me the least of her traces,
Treasure my lady's lightest footfall!
---Ah, you may flout and turn up your faces---
Roses, you are not so fair after all!

II. SIBRANDUS SCHAFNABURGENSIS.

Plague take all your pedants, say I!
He who wrote what I hold in my hand,
Centuries back was so good as to die,
Leaving this rubbish to cumber the land;
This, that was a book in its time,
Printed on paper and bound in leather,
Last month in the white of a matin-prime
Just when the birds sang all together.

II.

Into the garden I brought it to read,
And under the arbuter and laurustine
Read it, so help me grace in my need,
From title-page to closing line.
Chapter on chapter did I count,
As a curious traveller counts Stonehenge;
Added up the mortal amount;
And then proceeded to my revenge.

III.

Yonder's a plum-tree with a crevice
An owl would build in, were he but sage;
For a lap of moss, like a fine pont-levis
In a castle of the Middle Age,
Joins to a lip of gum, pure amber;
When he'd be private, there might he spend
Hours alone in his lady's chamber:
Into this crevice I dropped our friend.

IV.

Splash, went he, as under he ducked,
---At the bottom, I knew, rain-drippings stagnate:
Next, a handful of blossoms I plucked
To bury him with, my bookshelf's magnate;
Then I went in-doors, brought out a loaf,
Half a cheese, and a bottle of Chablis;
Lay on the grass and forgot the oaf
Over a jolly chapter of Rabelais.

V.

Now, this morning, betwixt the moss
And gum that locked our friend in limbo,
A spider had spun his web across,
And sat in the midst with arms akimbo:
So, I took pity, for learning's sake,
And, *_de profundis, accentibus l<ae>tis,*
Cantate!_ quoth I, as I got a rake;
And up I fished his delectable treatise.