

The Ex-Classics Book of Ballads

Published by the Ex-classics Project, 2016

<http://www.exclassics.com>

Public Domain

CONTENTS

Casabianca Felicia Hemans	3
Chevy Chase Anonymous.....	4
Johnnie Cope Adam Skirving	8
Bonnie Annie Laurie William Douglas	10
Lilliburlero Thomas Wharton	11
The Lost Chord Adelaide Proctor	13
A Receipt For Salad Sidney Smith	14
Sally in Our Alley Henry Carey.....	15
The Sands of Dee Charles Kingsley	17
The Song of the Shirt Thomas Hood	18
Stagolee Anonymous (USA, c. 1870).....	21
The Shepherd Swaine Anonymous.....	24
The Vicar of Bray Anonymous.....	26
Christmas day in the Workhouse George R Sims.....	28

Casabianca Felicia Hemans

The boy stood on the burning deck
Whence all but he had fled;
The flame that lit the battle's wreck
Shone round him o'er the dead.

Yet beautiful and bright he stood,
As born to rule the storm;
A creature of heroic blood,
A proud, though child-like form.

The flames rolled on - he would not go
Without his Father's word;
That father, faint in death below,
His voice no longer heard.

He called aloud - 'say, Father, say
If yet my task is done?'
He knew not that the chieftain lay
Unconscious of his son.

'Speak, father!' once again he cried,
'If I may yet be gone!'
And but the booming shots replied,
And fast the flames rolled on.

Upon his brow he felt their breath,
And in his waving hair,
And looked from that lone post of death
In still yet brave despair.

And shouted but once more aloud,
'My father! must I stay?'
While o'er him fast, through sail and shroud,
The wreathing fires made way.

They wrapt the ship in splendour wild,
They caught the flag on high,
And streamed above the gallant child,
Like banners in the sky.

There came a burst of thunder sound --
The boy -- oh! where was he?
Ask of the winds that far around
With fragments strewed the sea! --

With mast, and helm, and pennon fair,
That well had borne their part --
But the noblest thing which perished there
Was that young faithful heart.

Chevy Chase

Anonymous

God prosper long our noble king,
Our lives and safeties all!
A woeful hunting once there did
In Chevy Chase befall.

To drive the deer with hound and horn
Earl Percy took his way;
The child may rue that is unborn
The hunting of that day!

The stout Earl of Northumberland
A vow to God did make,
His pleasure in the Scottish woods
Three summer's days to take.

The chiefest harts in Chevy Chase
To kill and bear away.
These tidings to Earl Douglas came,
In Scotland where he lay:

Who sent Earl Percy present word
He would prevent his sport.
The English Earl, not fearing that,
Did to the woods resort,

With fifteen hundred bowmen bold,
All chosen men of might,
Who knew full well in time of need
To aim their shafts aright.

The gallant greyhounds swiftly ran
To chase the fallow deer:
On Monday they began to hunt
Ere daylight did appear;

And long before high noon they had
An hundred fat bucks slain:
Then having dined, the drivers went
To rouse the deer again.

Lord Percy to the quarry went
To view the slaughter'd deer;
Quoth he, Earl Douglas promised
This day to meet me here;

But if I thought he would not come
No longer would I stay

With that a brave young gentleman
Thus to the Earl did say:

Lo, yonder doth Earl Douglas come
His men in armour bright -
Full twenty hundred Scottish spears
All marching in our sight.

Show me, said he, whose men you be
That hunt so boldly here
That, without my consent do chase
And kill my fallow deer?

The first man that did answer make
Was noble Percy, he
Who said, We list not to declare
Nor show whose men we be.

Yet we will spend our dearest blood
Thy chiefest harts to slay.
Then Douglas swore a solemn oath
And thus in rage did say:

Ere thus I will out-braved be
One of us two shall die!
I know thee well, An earl thou art
Lord Percy! so am I.

Our English archers bent their bows,
Their hearts were good and true;
At the first flight of arrows sent
Full fourscore Scots they slew.

At last these two stout Earls did meet
Like captains of great might;
Like lions wud they laid on load
And made a cruel fight.

They fought, until they both did sweat,
With swords of tempered steel,
Until the blood, like drops of rain,
They trickling down did feel.

O yield thee, Percy! Douglas said,
In faith, I will thee bring
Where thou shalt high advanced be
By James our Scottish king;

Thy ransom I will freely give,
And this report of thee,
Thou art the most courageous knight
That ever I did see.

No, Douglas; quoth Earl Percy then,
Thy proffer I do scorn;
I will not yield to any Scot
That ever yet was born!

With that there came an arrow keen
Out of an English bow,
Which struck Earl Douglas to the heart,
A deep and deadly blow;

Who never spake more words than these
Fight on, my merry men all!
For why? my life is at an end,
Lord Percy sees my fall.

Then leaving life, Earl Percy took
The dead man by the hand;
And said, Earl Douglas! For thy life
Would I had lost my land!

O Christ! my very heart doth bleed
With sorrow for thy sake;
For sure a more redoubted knight
Mischance could never take.

A knight among the Scots there was
Who saw Earl Douglas die;
Who straight in wrath did vow revenge
Upon the Lord Percy:

Sir Hugh Montgomery was he called,
Who, with a spear full bright,
Well mounted on a gallant steed,
Ran fiercely through the fight;

And past the English archers all,
Without all dread or fear,
And through Earl Percy's body then
He thrust his hateful spear.

This fight did last from break of day
Till setting of the sun;
For when they rung the evening bell
The battle scarce was done.

And the Lord Maxwell in like case
Did with Earl Douglas die;
Of twenty hundred Scottish spears
Scarce fifty-five did fly;

Of fifteen hundred Englishmen
Went home but fifty-three;

Book of Ballads

The rest were slain in Chevy Chase
Under the greenwood tree.

Next day did many widows come
Their husbands to bewail;
They washed their wounds in brinish tears,
But all would not prevail.

Their bodies bathed in purple gore
They bore with them away;
They kissed their dead a thousand times
When they were clad in clay.

God save our king, and bless this land
With plenty, joy and peace,
And grant henceforth that foule debate
'Twixt noblemen may cease!

Johnnie Cope Adam Skirving

Cope sent a challenge frae Dunbar,
"Charlie, meet me, an' ye daur,
And I'll learn you the airt o' war,
If you'll meet wi' me in the morning".

Hey, Johnnie Cope! are ye waking yet?
Or are your drums a-beating yet?
If ye were waking I would wait
To gang to the coals i' the morning.

When Charlie looked the letter upon,
He drew his sword the scabbard from:
"Come, follow me, my merrie men,
And we 'll meet Johnnie Cope i' the morning.
Hey, Johnnie Cope! &c.

"Now, Johnnie, be as good as your word,
Come let us try baith fire and sword,
And dinna flee like a frighted bird,
That 's chased frae its nest i' the morning."
Hey, Johnnie Cope! &c.

When Johnnie Cope he heard of this,
He thought it wadna be amiss
To hae a horse in readiness,
To flee awa' i' the morning.
Hey, Johnnie Cope! &c.

"Fye now, Johnnie, get up and rin,
The Highland bagpipes mak' a din,
It's best to sleep in a hale skin,
For 't will be a bluddie morning."
Hey, Johnnie Cope! &c.

When Johnnie Cope to Dunbar came,
They speir'd at him, "Where's a' your men?"
"The deil confound me gin I ken,
For I left them a' i' the morning."
Hey, Johnnie Cope! &c.

"Now, Johnnie, troth ye werena blate
To come wi' the news o' your am defeat,
And leave your men in sic a strait,
So early in the morning."
Hey, Johnnie Cope! &c.

"In faith," quo Johnnie, "I got sic flegs
Wi' their claymores and filabegs,

Book of Ballads

If I face them deil break my legs,
So I wish you a' good morning."
Hey, Johnnie Cope! &c.

Bonnie Annie Laurie

William Douglas

Maxwelton's braes are bonnie
Where early fa's the dew
And 'twas there that Annie Laurie
Gave me her promise true
That ne'er forgot shall be
And for Bonnie Annie Laurie
I'd lay me doon and dee.

Her brow is like the snowdrift
Her nape is like the swan
And her face it is the fairest
That 'ere the sun shone on.
And dark blue is her e'e
And for Bonnie Annie Laurie
I'd lay me doon and dee.

Like dew on the gowan lyin'
Is the fall of her fairy feet
And like winds in the summer sighing
Her voice is low and sweet.
And she's all the world to me
And for Bonnie Annie Laurie
I'd lay me doon and dee.

She's backit like a peacock,
She's breastit like a swan,
She's jimp about the middle,
Her waist ye weill may span;
And she has a rolling eye,
And for bonnie Annie Laurie
I'd lay me doon and dee.

Maxwelton banks are bonnie,
Where early fa's the dew;
Where me and Annie Laurie
Made up the promise true;
And never forget will I,
And for bonny Annie Laurie
I'd lay me doon and dee.

Lilliburlero Thomas Wharton

Ho, brother Teague, dost hear de decree,
Lilliburlero, bullen a la,
Dat we shall have a new deputy?
Lilliburlero, bullen a la.

Chorus:

Lero, lero, lilliburlero,
Lilliburlero, bullen a la.
Lero, lero, lilliburlero,
Lilliburlero, bullen a la.

Ho, by my shoul, it is de Talbot,
Lilliburlero, bullen a la,
And he will cut all de English throat.
Lilliburlero, bullen a la.

Chorus

Though, by my shoul, de English do prate,
Lilliburlero, bullen a la,
De law's on their side and Creish knows what,
Lilliburlero, bullen a la.

Chorus

But if dispense do come from de Pope,
Lilliburlero, bullen a la,
We'll hang Magna Carta and dem in a rope.
Lilliburlero, bullen a la.

Chorus

And de good Talbot is made a Lord,
Lilliburlero, bullen a la,
And he with brave lads is coming abroad,
Lilliburlero, bullen a la.

Chorus

Who in all France have taken a swear,
Lilliburlero, bullen a la,
Dat they will have no Protestant heir,
Lilliburlero, bullen a la.

Chorus

O, but why does he stay behind?
Lilliburlero, bullen a la,
Ho, by my shoul, 'tis a Protestant wind!
Lilliburlero, bullen a la.

Chorus

Now Tyrconnel is come ashore,
Lilliburlero, bullen a la,
And we shall have commissions galore.
Lilliburlero, bullen a la.

Chorus

And he dat will not go to Mass,
Lilliburlero, bullen a la,
Shall turn out and look like an ass.
Lilliburlero, bullen a la.

Chorus

Now, now de heretics all go down,
Lilliburlero, bullen a la,
By Creish and St. Patrick, de nation's our own.
Lilliburlero, bullen a la.

Chorus

Dere was an old prophesy found in a bog,
Lilliburlero, bullen a la,
Dat Ireland should be rul'd by an ass and a dog.
Lilliburlero, bullen a la.

Chorus

Dat prophesy's true and now come to pass,
Lilliburlero, bullen a la,
For Talbot's de dog and Tyrconnel's de ass.
Lilliburlero, bullen a la.

Chorus

The Lost Chord Adelaide Proctor

Sir Arthur Sullivan set this poem to music, in which form it enjoyed great popularity from the 1880's to the first World War, which killed Victorian sensibility once and for all. But for all of you who were wondering, here it is.

Seated one day at the organ,
I was weary and ill at ease,
And my fingers wandered idly
Over the noisy keys;
I know not what I was playing,
Or what I was dreaming then,
But I struck one chord of music,
Like the sound of a great Amen.

It flooded the crimson twilight,
Like the close of an angel's psalm,
And it lay on my fevered spirit,
With a touch of infinite calm,
It quieted pain and sorrow,
Like love overcoming strife,
It seemed the harmonious echo
From our discordant life,
It linked all the perplexed meanings
Into one perfect peace,
And trembled away into silence,
As if it were loth to cease;
I have sought but I seek it vainly,
That one lost chord divine,
Which came from the soul of the organ,
And entered into mine.

It may be that death's bright angel
Will speak in that chord again;
It may be that only in Heav'n
I shall hear that great Amen.

A Receipt For Salad Sidney Smith

Most people know the last line, but who knows the rest?

Two large potatoes passed through kitchen sieve,
Unwonted softness to the salad give;
Of ardent mustard add a single spoon,
Distrust the condiment which bites so soon;
But deem it not, thou man of herbs, a fault
To add a double quantity of salt;
Three times the spoon with oil of Lucca crown,
And once with vinegar, procured from town,
True flavour needs it, and your poet begs
The pounded yellow of two well-boiled eggs;
Let onion atoms lurk within the bowl,
And, scarce suspected, animate the whole;
And, lastly, on the flavoured compound toss
A magic teaspoon of anchovy sauce.
Then, though green turtle fail, though venison be tough,
And ham and turkey are not boiled enough,
Serenely full, the epicure may say,---
'Fate cannot harm me, -- I have dined to-day.'

Sally in Our Alley Henry Carey

Of all the Girls that are so smart
There's none like pretty Sally,
She is the Darling of my Heart,
And she lives in our Alley.
There is no Lady in the Land
Is half so sweet as Sally,
She is the Darling of my Heart,
And she lives in our Alley.

Her Father he makes Cabbage-nets,
And through the Streets does cry 'em;
Her Mother she sells Laces long,
To such as please to buy 'em:
But sure such Folks could ne'er beget
So sweet a Girl as Sally!
She is the Darling of my Heart,
And she lives in our Alley.

When she is by I leave my Work,
(I love her so sincerely)
My Master comes like any Turk,
And bangs me most severely; But,
let him bang his Belly full,
I'll bear it all for Sally;
She is the Darling of my Heart,
And she lives in our Alley.

Of all the Days that's in the Week,
I dearly love but one Day,
And that's the Day that comes betwixt

A Saturday and Monday;
For then I'm drest, all in my best,
To walk abroad with Sally;
She is the Darling of my Heart,
And she lives in our Alley.

My Master carries me to Church,
And often am I blamed,
Because I leave him in the lurch,
As soon as Text is named:
I leave the Church in Sermon time,
And slink away to Sally;
She is the Darling of my Heart,
And she lives in our Alley.

When Christmas comes about again,
O then I shall have Money;
I'll hoard it up, and Box and all
I'll give it to my Honey:
And, would it were ten thousand Pounds;
I'd give it all to Sally;
She is the Darling of my Heart,
And she lives in our Alley.

My Master and the Neighbours all,
Make game of me and Sally;
And (but for her) I'd better be
A Slave and row a Galley:
But when my seven long Years are out,
O then I'll marry Sally!
O then we'll wed and then we'll bed,
But not in our Alley.

-- Henry Carey 1715

The Sands of Dee

Charles Kingsley

"O Mary, go and call the cattle home,
And call the cattle home,
And call the cattle home
Across the sands of Dee";
The western wind was wild and dank with foam,
And all alone went she.

The western tide crept up along the sand,
And o'er and o'er the sand,
And round and round the sand,
As far as eye could see.
The rolling mist came down and hid the land:
And never home came she.

"Oh! is it weed, or fish, or floating hair--
A tress of golden hair,
A drowned maiden's hair
Above the nets at sea?
Was never salmon yet that shone so fair
Among the stakes on Dee."

They rowed her in across the rolling foam,
The cruel crawling foam,
The cruel hungry foam,
To her grave beside the sea:
But still the boatmen hear her call the cattle home
Across the sands of Dee.

The Song of the Shirt

Thomas Hood

With fingers weary and worn,
With eyelids heavy and red,
A Woman sat, in unwomanly rags,
Plying her needle and thread --
Stitch! stitch! stitch!
In poverty, hunger, and dirt,
And still with the voice of dolorous pitch
She sang the "Song of the Shirt!"

Work! Work! Work!
While the cock is crowing aloof!
And work -- work -- work,
Till the stars shine through the roof!
It's O! to be a slave
Along with the barbarous Turk,
Where woman has never a soul to save
If this is Christian work!

"Work -- work -- work
Till the brain begins to swim,
Work -- work -- work
Till the eyes are heavy and dim!
Seam, and gusset, and band,
Band, and gusset, and seam,
Till over the buttons I fall asleep,
And sew them on in a dream!

"O, Men with Sisters dear!
O, Men! with Mothers and Wives!
It is not linen you're wearing out,
But human creatures' lives!
Stitch -- stitch -- stitch,
In poverty, hunger, and dirt,
Sewing at once, with a double thread,
A Shroud as well as a Shirt.

"But why do I talk of Death!
That Phantom of grisly bone,
I hardly fear his terrible shape,
It seems so like my own --
It seems so like my own,
Because of the fasts I keep;
O God! that bread should be so dear,
And flesh and blood so cheap!

"Work -- work -- work!
My labour never flags;
And what are its wages? A bed of straw,
A crust of bread -- and rags.
That shatter'd roof, -- and this naked floor --
A table -- a broken chair --
And a wall so blank, my shadow I thank
For sometimes falling there!

"Work -- work -- work!
From weary chime to chime,
Work -- work -- work --
As prisoners work for crime!
Band, and gusset, and seam,
Seam, and gusset, and band,
Till the heart is sick, and the brain benumb'd,
As well as the weary hand.

"Work -- work -- work,
In the dull December light,
And work -- work -- work,
When the weather is warm and bright --
While underneath the eaves
The brooding swallows cling,
As if to show me their sunny backs
And twit me with the spring.

"O, but to breathe the breath
Of the cowslip and primrose sweet! --
With the sky above my head,
And the grass beneath my feet;
For only one short hour
To feel as I used to feel,
Before I knew the woes of want
And the walk that costs a meal!

"O, but for one short hour!
A respite however brief!
No blessed leisure for Love or Hope,
But only time for Grief!
A little weeping would ease my heart,
But in their briny bed
My tears must stop, for every drop
Hinders needle and thread!

"Seam, and gusset, and band,
Band, and gusset, and seam,
Work, work, work,
Like the Engine that works by Steam!
A mere machine of iron and wood
That toils for Mammon's sake --

Ex-Classics

Without a brain to ponder and craze
Or a heart to feel -- and break!"

-- With fingers weary and worn,
With eyelids heavy and red,
A Woman sat, in unwomanly rags,
Plying her needle and thread --
Stitch! stitch! stitch!
In poverty, hunger, and dirt,
And still with a voice of dolorous pitch, --
Would that its tone could reach the Rich! --
She sang this "Song of the Shirt!"

Stagolee
Anonymous (USA, c. 1870)

Stagolee (also Stagalee, Staggerlee, Staker Lee, Stack O'Lee) is one of the most famous of American ballads and exists in many different versions. Here are two of them.

Version A.

It was early, early one mornin',
When I heard my bulldog bark,
Stagolee and Billy Lyons
Was squabblin' in the dark.

Stagolee told Billy Lyons,
'What do you think of that?
You win all my money, Billy,
Now you spit in my Stetson hat.'

Stagolee, he went a-walkin'
In the red-hot, broilin' sun—
Says, 'Bring me my six-shooter,
Lawd, I wants my forty-one.'

Stagolee, he went a-walkin'
Through the mud and through the sand.
Says, 'I feel mistreated this mornin',
I could kill most any man.'

Billy Lyons told Stagolee,
Please don't take my life,
I've got three little helpless chillun
And one poor, pitiful wife.'

'Don't care nothin' about your chillun,
And nothin' about your wife,
You done mistreated me, Billy,
And I'm bound to take your life.'

He shot him three times in the shoulder,
Lawd, and three times in the side,
Well, the last time he shot him
Cause Billy Lyons to die.

Stagolee told Mrs Billy,
'You don't believe yo' man is dead;

Come into the bar-room,
See the hole I shot in his head.'

The high sheriff told the deputies,
Get your pistols and come with me.
We got to go 'rest that
Bad man Stagolee.'

The deputies took their pistols
And they laid them on the shelf—
If you want that bad man Stagolee,
Go 'rest him by yourself.'

High sheriff ask the bartender,
'Who can that bad man be?'

'Speak softly,' said the bartender,
It's that bad man Stagolee.'

He touch Stack on the shoulder,
Say, 'Stack, why don't you run?'

'I don't run, white folks,
When I got my forty-one.'

The hangman put the mask on,
Tied his hands behind his back,
Sprung the trap on Stagolee
But his neck refuse to crack.

Hangman, he got frightened,
Said, 'Chief, you see how it be—
I can't hang this man,
Better set him free.'

Three hundred dollar funeral,
Thousand dollar hearse,
Satisfaction undertaker
Put Stack six feet in the earth.

Stagolee, he told the Devil,
Says, 'Come on and have some Fun—
You stick me with your pitchfork,
I'll shoot you with my forty-one.'

Stagolee took the pitchfork,
And he laid it on the shelf.
Says, 'Stand back, Tom Devil,
I'm gonna rule Hell by myself.'

Version B.

O Mr Police Officer,
How can it be,
You arrest everybody
But cruel Staggerlee,

That bad man,
O Cruel Staggerlee.

Billy Lyons told Staggerlee
Please don't take my life
Says I gotten two little babes
And a darling loving wife.
He's a bad man
O Cruel Staggerlee

What I care about your two babes
And darling loving wife
Said you done stole my stetson hat
I bound to take your life.
He's a bad man
O Cruel Staggerlee

Oh Ho O Home
With a forty-four
With his eyes wide open
He's lying down on the floor
That bad man
O Cruel Staggerlee

Gentlemen of the jury,
What do you think of that?
Said Staggerlee killed Billy Lyons
For a five-dollar Stetson hat.
He's a bad man
O Cruel Staggerlee

Standing on the gallows
Staggerlee he cursed
The judge said Let's kill him
'fore he kills some of us
He's a bad man
O Cruel Staggerlee

Standing on the gallows
Hanging up high
At 12 o'clock they killed him
We was all glad to see him die.
He's a bad man
O Cruel Staggerlee

O Mr Officer,
How can it be,
You can arrest everybody
But cruel Staggerlee,
That bad man,
O Cruel Staggerlee.

The Shepherd Swaine Anonymous

. . . I got hold of a book of selections from the writings of John Aubrey and reread a pastoral poem which must have been written some time in the first half of the seventeenth century, and which was inspired by a certain Mrs Overall. . .

Mrs Overall was the wife of a Dean and was extensively unfaithful to him. According to Aubrey she "could scarcely denie any one", and she had "the loveliest Eies that were ever seen, but wondrous wanton". The poem (the "shepherd swaine" seems to have been somebody called Sir John Selby) . . . ends with [an] exquisite stanza.

. . . Mrs Overall was no more an exemplary character than the Vicar of Bray, though a more attractive one. Yet in the end all that remains of her is a poem which still gives pleasure to many people, though for some reason it never gets into the anthologies. The suffering which she presumably caused, and the misery and futility in which her own life must have ended, have been transformed into a sort of lingering fragrance like the smell of tobacco-plants on a summer evening. -- George Orwell

Orwell only quoted a couple of verses. Here is the compete poem:

Downe lay the shepherd swaine
So sober and demure,
Wishing for his wench againe
So bonny and so pure,
With his head on hillock lowe
And his armes akimbo;
And all was for the losse of his
Hye nonny nonny noe.

His teares fell as thinne
As water from the still,
His haire upon his chinne
Grew like thyme upon a hill,
His cherry cheekes pale as snowe
Did testifie his mickle woe,
And all was for the losse of his
Hye nonny nonny noe.

Sweet she was, as kind a love
As ever fetter'd swayne;
Never such a daynty one
Shall man enjoy again.
Sett a thousand on a rowe
I forbid that any shewe
Ever the like of her
Hye nonny nonny noe.

Face she had of filberd hue,
And bosom'd like a swan;

Back she had of bended ewe,
And waisted by a span.
Haire she had as black as crowe
From the head unto the toe
Downe, downe, all over her
Hye nonny nonny noe.

With her mantle tuck't-up high
She foddered her flock
So bucksome and alluringly,
Her knee upheld her smock
So nimblly did she use to goe,
So smooth she danc't on tip-toe,
That all men were fond of her
Hye nonny nonny noe.

She smiled like a Holy-day
And simpred like the Spring,
She pranck't it like a popingaie
And like a swallow sing,
She trip't it like a barren doe,
She strutted like a gor-crowe,
Which made the men so fond of her
Hye nonny nonny noe.

To sport it on the merry downe
To daunce the lively Haye
To wrastle for a green gowne
In heate of all the daye
Never would she say me no
Yet me thought I had thô
Never enough of her
Hye nonny nonny noe.

But gonue she is, the prettiest lasse
That ever trod on plaine.
What ever hath betide of her
Blame not the shepherd swayne
For why? she was her owne foe
And gave her selfe the over throwe
By being so franke of her
Hye nonny nonny noe.

The Vicar of Bray

Anonymous

In good King Charles's golden days,
When loyalty no harm meant;
A furious High-Church man I was,
And so I gain'd Preferment.
Unto my flock I daily preach'd,
Kings are by God appointed,
And damn'd are those who dare resist,
Or touch the Lord's Anointed.

Chorus:

And this is law, I will maintain
Unto my dying day, sir.
That whatsoever King may reign,
I will be the Vicar of Bray, sir!

When Royal James possessed the crown,
And popery grew in fashion;
The Penal Law I shouted down,
And read the Declaration:
The Church of Rome I found would fit
Full well my constitution,
And I had been a Jesuit,
But for the Revolution.

Chorus

When William our deliverer came,
To heal the nation's grievance,
I turn'd the cat in pan again,
And swore to him allegiance:
Old principles I did revoke,
Set conscience at a distance,
Passive obedience is a joke,
A jest is non-resistance.

Chorus

When Royal Ann became our Queen,
The Church of England's glory,
Another face of things was seen,
And I became a Tory:
Occasional Conformists base
I damn'd, and Moderation,
And thought the Church in danger was,
From such prevarication.

Chorus

When George in pudding time came o'er,
And moderate men looked big, sir,

Book of Ballads

My principles I chang'd once more,
And so became a Whig, Sir.
And thus preferment I procur'd,
From our faith's great defender,
And almost every day abjur'd
The Pope, and the Pretender.

Chorus

The illustrious House of Hanover,
And Protestant succession,
To these I lustily will swear,
Whilst they can keep possession:
For in my faith, and loyalty,
I never once will falter,
But George, my lawful king shall be,
Except the times should alter.

Chorus

Christmas day in the Workhouse
George R Sims

It is Christmas Day in the workhouse,
And the cold, bare walls are bright
With garlands of green and holly,
Ad the place is a pleasant sight;
For with clean-washed hands and faces,
In a long and hungry line
The paupers sit at the table,
For this is the hour they dine.

And the guardians and their ladies,
Although the wind is east,
Have come in their furs and wrappers,
To watch their charges feast;
To smile and be condescending,
Put pudding on pauper plates.
To be hosts at the workhouse banquet
They've paid for -- with the rates.

Oh, the paupers are meek and lowly
With their "Thank'ee kindly, mum's!"
So long as they fill their stomachs,
What matter it whence it comes!
But one of the old men mutters,
And pushes his plate aside:
"Great God!" he cries, "but it chokes me!
For this is the day *she* died!"

The guardians gazed in horror,
The master's face went white;
"Did a pauper refuse the pudding?"
"Could their ears believe aright?"
Then the ladies clutched their husbands,
Thinking the man would die,
Struck by a bolt, or something,
By the outraged One on high.

But the pauper sat for a moment,
Then rose 'mid silence grim,
For the others had ceased to chatter
And trembled in every limb.
He looked at the guardians' ladies,
Then, eyeing their lords, he said,
"I eat not the food of villains
Whose hands are foul and red:

"Whose victims cry for vengeance
From their dark, unhallowed graves."

"He's drunk!" said the workhouse master,
"Or else he's mad and raves."
"Not drunk or mad," cried the pauper,
"But only a haunted beast,
Who, torn by the hounds and mangled,
Declines the vulture's feast.

"I care not a curse for the guardians,
And I won't be dragged away;
Just let me have the fit out,
It's only on Christmas Day
That the black past comes to goad me,
And prey on my burning brain;
I'll tell you the rest in a whisper --
I swear I won't shout again.

"Keep your hands off me, curse you!
Hear me right out to the end.
You come here to see how paupers
The season of Christmas spend;
You come here to watch us feeding,
As they watched the captured beast.
Here's why a penniless pauper
Spits on your paltry feast.

"Do you think I will take your bounty,
And let you smile and think
You're doing a noble action
With the parish's meat and drink?
Where is my wife, you traitors --
The poor old wife you slew?
Yes, by the God above me,
My Nance was killed by you!

'Last winter my wife lay dying,
Starved in a filthy den;
I had never been to the parish --
I came to the parish then.
I swallowed my pride in coming,
For ere the ruin came,
I held up my head as a trader,
And I bore a spotless name.

"I came to the parish, craving
Bread for a starving wife,
Bread for the woman who'd loved me
Through fifty years of life;
And what do you think they told me,
Mocking my awful grief,
That 'the House' was open to us,
But they wouldn't give 'out relief.

"I slunk to the filthy alley --
'Twas a cold, raw Christmas Eve --
And the bakers' shops were open,
Tempting a man to thieve;
But I clenched my fists together,
Holding my head awry,
So I came to her empty-handed
And mournfully told her why.

"Then I told her the house was open;
She had heard of the ways of *that*,
For her bloodless cheeks went crimson,
and up in her rags she sat,
Crying, 'Bide the Christmas here, John,
We've never had one apart;
I think I can bear the hunger --
The other would break my heart.'

"All through that eve I watched her,
Holding her hand in mine,
Praying the Lord and weeping,
Till my lips were salt as brine;
I asked her once if she hungered,
And as she answered 'No',
The moon shone in at the window,
Set in a wreath of snow.

"Then the room was bathed in glory,
And I saw in my darling's eyes
The faraway look of wonder
That comes when the spirit flies;
And her lips were parched and parted,
And her reason came and went.
For she raved of our home in Devon,
Where our happiest years were spent.

"And the accents, long forgotten,
Came back to the tongue once more.
For she talked like the country lassie
I woo'd by the Devon shore;
Then she rose to her feet and trembled,
And fell on the rags and moaned,
And, 'Give me a crust -- I'm famished --
For the love of God!' she groaned.

"I rushed from the room like a madman
And flew to the workhouse gate,
Crying, 'Food for a dying woman!'
And the answer came, 'Too late.'
They drove me away with curses;
Then I fought with a dog in the street

And tore from the mongrel's clutches
A crust he was trying to eat.

"Back through the filthy byways!
Back through the trampled slush!
Up to the crazy garret,
Wrapped in an awful hush;
My heart sank down at the threshold,
And I paused with a sudden thrill.
For there, in the silv'ry moonlight,
My Nance lay, cold and still.

"Up to the blackened ceiling,
The sunken eyes were cast --
I knew on those lips, all bloodless,
My name had been the last;
She called for her absent husband --
O God! had I but known! --
Had called in vain, and, in anguish,
Had died in that den -- *alone*.

"Yes, there, in a land of plenty,
Lay a loving woman dead,
Cruelly starved and murdered
for a loaf of the parish bread;
At yonder gate, last Christmas,
I craved for a human life,
You, who would feed us paupers,
What of my murdered wife!"

'There, get ye gone to your dinners,
Don't mind me in the least,
Think of the happy paupers
Eating your Christmas feast;
And when you recount their blessings
In your smug parochial way,
Say what you did for *me*, too,
Only last Christmas Day."

THE END