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Two Ballads

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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK KING HACON'S DEATH, AND BRAN AND
THE BLACK DOG: TWO BALLADS ***

Transcribed from the 1913 Thomas J. Wise pamphlet by David Price, email ccx074@pglaf.org

KING HACON'S DEATH AND BRAN AND THE BLACK DOG

TWO BALLADS

BY
GEORGE BORROW

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1913

KING HACON'S DEATH

p. 5

And now has happened in our day
What was in ancient time foretold:
Beneath his hand all Norroway's land
Has Hacon brought, the wise and bold.

Full many a warrior summons he
From all the country far and near;
To Scotland's realm, with shield and helm,
Across the sea the King will steer.

As many as sword and helm can bear
With him must sail across the foam;
All of fit age must follow their liege,
Those who are not may tarry at home.

It was Hacon, Norroway's King,
Survey'd the gallant band with pride:
"I'm missing one—my Andfindson,
O where does Olaf the stripling bide?"

Then answer'd him the little footboy,
Not far that stood from the Monarch's knee:
"Olaf, my Lord, will come on board
As soon as weigh'd the anchors be."

Then out they stood from Bergen town,

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And out from Bergen's mole, I trow;
Silk is the sail they spread in the gale,
Painted with blue is the deck below.

"Now Magnus hear, my son so dear,
At home I tell thee thou must stay:
Aarhus to ward and Bergen to guard,
For the keys of Norroway's land are they."

"Listen all dearest father mine,
Recall thy word I entreat of thee;
To rule rough earls and Norroway churls
Too ignorant far and too young I be."

"Then clothe thee straight and clothe thee well,
Since thou wilt follow me, my child:
But much I fear thou can'st not bear
The toss of the sea and its billows wild."

So out they stood from Bergen town,
And 'twas at fall of evening grey;
The folk on the shore they griev'd full sore
As that brave armament sail'd away.

And when they came to Lindenness,
And the mounting billow the sail bespray'd,
In the breeze so fair the ship stood there
As though to the bottom it fast were made.

Then said the King as he lean'd upon
His trusty faulchion's hilt of gold:
"I'm here in the dark, is there any clerk
Or layman here can this thing unfold?"

Then out spoke Nilaus Noderness,
As a glance he flung upon the deep:
"Doom'd men on board, have we my Lord,
The truth from thee I cannot keep."

It was our Norroway Hacon then
Thereat so sorely troubled grew:
"I'm missing one, my Andfindson,
Why meets not Olaf his father's view?"

Then answer'd him the little footboy,
As apart he stood from the Norway King:
"Beneath the deck lies Olaf sick,
And much I fear he's suffering."

It was Hacon the Norway King
To visit Olaf with speed he goes:
"What cheer, what cheer, my Olaf dear?
Thy state to thy father straight disclose."

"I feel no rest within my breast,
Methinks my very heart will rend:
Would God, the King of all, would bring
This horrible night to a speedy end."

They watched o'er Olaf Andfindson,
They watched o'er Olaf long nights twain;
And Hacon I say, of Norroway,
By watching thus his death did gain.

It was Olaf Andfindson,
He yielded up his gentle sprite;
'Twas Hacon grey of Norroway
Before him held the big wax light.

O then King Hacon distrest he grew,
The stripling's corse he would not leave:
He pin'd away and sick he lay,
His hoary Counsellors how they grieve.

"Cheer up," they said. "We've fought and bled,
And almost won these foreign shores;
But if thou now from us should'st go
A sad and dreary fate were ours."

"My time is come, I can't survive;

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Write ye my testament, I pray,
When I am gone do ye see done
What with my dying breath I say:

“My son, King Magnus, I advise
Ever the law of God to heed;
Justice above all things to love,
And well, full well, with him 'twill speed.

“Priests and widows let him defend,
And his reign, I trow, will not be brief;
The outlaw crew let him pursue,
And hang unpitying every thief.

“These are the first things I request,
And now I'll crave another thing;
Ye'll bury me with my ancestry
In our Lady's Church as beseems your King.”

To Bergen's shore came tidings o'er
Which made the hearts of the dauntless faint:
“Hacon is dead, our regal head,
Relation near to Olaf Saint.”

In Orkney isle expir'd the King,
On a Thursday morning that befell;
'Twas Pentecost when the King they lost,
The mighty King whom they lov'd so well.

From high Kirkwall now sail'd they all,
And to Bergen o'er their course they ply;
They laid in grave the Monarch brave,
In the spot where the Monarch wish'd to lie.

A braver heart ne'er play'd a part,
And never shone in Minstrel's lay;
No King on earth can vie in worth
With Hacon the Good of Norroway.

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BRAN AND THE BLACK DOG

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The day we went to the hills to chase
Of dogs we had a brave company;
There heard we the songs of the feather'd race,
The blare of the elk, and the roebuck's cry.

In the hills we had no common sport,
With our dogs and our arms many deer we slew;
When at noon we return'd to our silvan court,
We were a well-pleas'd, laughing crew.

That night the house of the Fenian king
With a band of joyous guests was fill'd;
The manner we sang, whilst we plied the string,
In which the buck and the elk we kill'd.

The valiant Finn arose next day,
Just as the sun rose above the foam;
And he beheld up the Lairgo way,
A man clad in red with a black dog come.

I'll tell ye what was the stranger's mien:
His complexion was that of the strawberrie;
White as the canach was his skin,
Though black his hair, as black could be.

He came up with a lofty gait,
Said not for shelter he sought our doors;
And wanted neither drink nor meat,
But would match his dog 'gainst the best of ours.

We brought 'gainst that of the stranger youth
The very best dogs within our bounds;
But the stranger dog had a desperate tooth,
And quickly despatch'd for us fifty hounds.

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A strange fight this, the great Finn said,
As he turn'd his face towards his clan;
Then his face with rage grey fiery red,
And he struck with his fist his good dog Bran.

Bran look'd at his master with much surprise,
That his master should strike him surprise he felt—
"I could hew from the shoulder the hand," Finn cries,
"With which my dog that blow I dealt."

Then Bran he shook his collar of gold,
The mountains echoed with his bay;
His terrible eyes like fire-balls roll'd,
And his mind was bent upon canine fray.

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"Take off from his neck the collar of gold,
Not right for him now such a thing to bear;
And a free good fight we shall behold
Betwixt my dog and his black compeer."

Now a likeness I'll draw of my good dog Bran:
His head was cover'd with shaggy hair,
His breast was broad and its colour tan,
His houghs were crook'd, his quarters square.

Four yellow feet had he I ween,
His sides were black but his belly fair;
A tinge of green on his back was seen,
Of blood-red ears he'd a pointed pair.

The dogs their noses together placed,
Then their blood was scatter'd on every side;
Desperate the fight, and the fight did last
'Till the brave black dog in Bran's gripe died.

"O sure was I," did Ossian cry,
From the pillar of the dogs with stern delight,
"There was no dog in the Finn country
Could inflict upon Bran the mortal bite.

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"O Bran was a stag-hound Morong bred,
And possess'd each canine guile and sleight;
There was no dog in leash e'er led
Could consign our dog to the Western height.

"There's many a damsel, heavenly bright,
With azure eye and yellow hair,
In the land of the son of King Torc this night
Would be proud with my dog her supper to share."

A grave the valiant hero made
For his good black dog in the field's green breast;
Full fifty dogs the Fenians laid
To the pibroch's blast in the hill to the west.

We went to the dwelling of high MacCuol,
With the king to drink, and dice, and throw;
The king was joyous, his hall was full,
Though empty and dark this night I trow.

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