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Title: Marsk Stig: a ballad

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Release date: October 7, 2008 [eBook #26831]

Most recently updated: June 28, 2020

Language: English

*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK MARSK STIG: A BALLAD ***

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

MARSK STIG

A BALLAD

BY
GEORGE BORROW

LONDON:
PRINTED FOR PRIVATE CIRCULATION

1913

MARSK STIG

A BALLAD

p. 5

PART I.

Marsk Stig he out of the country rode
To win him fame with his good bright sword;
At home meantime the King will bide
In hope to lure his heart's ador'd.

The King sends word to the Marshal Stig
That he to the fields of war should fare;
Himself will deign at home to remain
And take the charge of his Lady fair.

In came the Marshal's serving man,
And a kirtle of green that man he wore:
"Of our good liege the little foot-page
Is standing out the gate before."

Up stood the young Sir Marshal Stig,
By the side of his bed his clothes put on;
And to speak the boy, the King's envoy,
Down to the gate is the Marshal gone.

"Now hear thou, Marsk Stig Andersen,
'Tis truth and sooth what I say to thee;
Thou must away to the King's palay,
Then mount thy horse and follow with me.

"Oh, I know nought of my Lord King's thought

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That I to thee can now declare,
Except that thou to the war must go
And there thy sovereign's banner bear."

Then in at the door Sir Marsk Stig trode,
And a wrathful man I trow was he:
"By the Saints I swear, my Lady dear,
Fulfill'd my dreary dream will be.

"For of late I dream'd that my noble horse
To chase the wild mare ran away;
And that must mean that I shall be slain,
And that my steed will tramp on my life-less clay."

"Now hold thy tongue, my noble Lord,
And do not talk thus foolishly,
For Christ can protect thy life, reflect,
The blessed Christ who dwells on high."

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It was the young and bold Marsk Stig
Came riding into the Castle yard,
Abroad did stand the King of the land
So fair array'd in sable and mard.

"Now lend an ear, young Marshal Stig,
I have for thee a fair emprise,
Ride thou this year to the war, and bear
My flag amongst my enemies."

"And if I shall fare to the war this year,
And risk my life among thy foes,
Do thou take care of my Lady dear,
Of Ingeborg that beauteous rose."

Then answer'd Erik, the youthful King,
With a laugh in his sleeve thus answer'd he:
"No more I swear has thy lady to fear
Than if my sister dear were she.

"Full well I'll watch Dame Ingeborg,
And guard and cherish her night and day;
As little I swear has thy Lady to fear
As if thou, dear Marshal, at home didst stay."

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It was then the bold Sir Marshal Stig,
From out of the country he did depart.
In her castle sate his lonely mate,
Fair Ingeborg, with grief at heart.

"Now saddle my steed," cried Eric the King,
"Now saddle my steed," King Eric cried,
"To visit the Dame of beauteous fame
Your King will into the country ride."

"Hail, hail to thee, Dame Ingeborg,
If thou wilt not be coy and cold,
A shirt, I trow, for me thou'lt sew,
And array that shirt so fair with gold."

"Sew'd I for thee a shirt, Sir King,
And worked that shirt, Sir King, with gold,
Should Marsk Stig hear of that he'd ne'er
With favour again his wife behold."

"Now list, now list, Dame Ingeborg,
Thou art, I swear, a beauteous star,
Live thou with me in love and glee,
Whilst Marshal Stig is engag'd in war."

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Then up and spake Dame Ingeborg,
For nought was she but a virtuous wife:
"Rather, I say, than Stig betray,
Sir King, I'd gladly lose my life."

"Give ear, thou proud Dame Ingeborg,
If thou my leman and love will be,
Each finger fair of thy hand shall bear
A ring of gold so red of blee."

"Marsk Stig has given gold rings to me,

And pearls around my neck to string;
By the Saints above I never will prove
Untrue to the Marshal's couch, Sir King.

"And when Sir Marsk Stig left the land
Thou unto him, Sir King, didst swear
Thou wouldst tend me and defend me
E'en as if I your sister were."

It was the fair Dame Ingeborg,
So great, so great was her vexation;
Early and late, sunshine and wet,
The King he sought her habitation.

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It was Erik the Danish King,
A damnable deed the King he wrought;
He forc'd with might that Lady bright,
Whilst her good Lord his battles fought.

It was the young Sir Marshal Stig
Came home again from the battle field.
To him then sped such tidings dread,
His very blood those tidings chill'd.

And when he came to his country home,
Away to his castle Sir Stig he rode;
Then Ingeborg Dame for very shame
No word of welcome on him bestow'd.

It was the young and bold Marsk Stig,
So swiftly in at the door he hies;
His beauteous dame for very shame
To welcome the Marshal could not rise.

And long stood he, the young Marsk Stig,
And thus within himself thought he;
"Now wherefore shows my beauteous spouse
No more respect or love for me?"

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Then answer'd fair Dame Ingeborg,
Whilst tears adown her features pour'd:
"Welcome, I say, from the battle fray,
Marsk Stig my bosom's dearest lord.

"Now do thou hear, young Marshal Stig,
Of a dreadful wrong I must complain,
The King accurst has my body forc'd
And my matron honour from me has ta'en.

"When thou didst leave the land, I was
The honour'd Dame of a simple knight;
Now am I Queen in Denmark green,
With a stain that makes me hate the light.

"The time that thou from the land didst go,
I was but the wife of a Noble brave;
Now am I Queen in Denmark green,
Longing to hide me in the grave."

It was then the young Marsk Stig
He grasp'd amain his dagger knife:
"If truth it be that thou tellest me,
'Twill cost the traitor King his life.

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"Never will I sweet sleep enjoy,
Lock'd in thy snowy arms, my fair,
Till ruin I bring on the traitor King
Who laid for us this deadly snare.

"And never, never, O Ingeborg,
By thy snowy side again I'll lie,
Till I out-pour the reeking gore
Of him who has wrought this injury."

Long, long stood the bold Marsk Stig,
Musing with look so stern and grave:
"If on the King I'd avenge this thing,
Notice from me he must quickly have."

Marsk Stig he arms his courtiers good,

Arms them in hauberks glittering,
And he rides on the morrow to Skanderborough
To summon King Erik to the Ting.

It was the Danish Queen so fine
From the window high a glance she cast:
"Across the wold comes Marsk Stig bold,
Why rides the Marshal Stig so fast?"

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"And yonder prances the Marshal Stig,
And hither from Sonderbrook rides he;
Each plummy swain in his galloping train
Is like a bonny grey dow to see."

It was the young and bold Marsk Stig,
So stately stepped the threshold o'er;
The Danish Queen so sharp and keen
She straight began to scoff him sore.

"Thrice welcome, thrice welcome, Dus Van Hus,
Welcome, thrice welcome again, I cry;
Thou bear'st the brow like a King, I trow,
Yet little good thou wilt gain thereby."

"Madam! my name is not Dus Van Hus,
How dar'st thou beard me in this strain,
When I know one, Black Haddingson,
Who oft, full oft, on thy breast has lain?"

"Gain I no other recompense here
Than scoff and scorn from a thing like thee,
Before the crowd I'll complain aloud
Of the wrong and injury done to me.

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"First I will state my injuries great,
Which man nor woman cannot deny;
And unless I'm given amends, by heaven
Another game will the Marshal try."

PART II.

p. 15

Marsk Stig he woke at black midnight,
And loudly cried to his Lady dear:
"O dreamed have I so wondrously,
God read what I've been dreaming here!"

"I dream'd my ship, my tall, tall ship,
To a boat did dwindle suddenly;
Its mast was gone, its helm had none,
Full soon it sank in the briny sea.

"I dream'd that each of my little pups
Was become at once a savage boar;
Through my garden wall they broke, and all
My pleasant herbs and roots uptore.

"And I dream'd as I and my courtiers good
Were riding over the bridge so wide,
My trusty horse with sudden force
Flung me, and into the forest hied."

Then answer'd proud Dame Ingeborg,
Straight answer'd she her dear lord thus:
"To God alone in heaven is known,
My Lord, how it will fare with us.

p. 16

"Lie thou and rest, my noble Lord,
And from thy thought the vision fling;
It means no doubt our vassals stout
Their rent and tribute soon will bring."

"Not so, not so, it means, I trow,
Although thou tell'st me that, my love,
It means the King at our country's Ting,
Too much for me and my cause will prove."

Marsk Stig he arms seven hundred men,
Each one in iron panoply;
And away he scowers to Viborg's towers
The traitor monarch to defy.

And at their head young Marsk Stig sped,
And in his heart he felt so bold;
Behind him rode his courtiers proud,
Their breast-plates beaming bright with gold.

It was the young Sir Marshal Stig
Stepp'd proudly in at the lofty door;
And bold knights then, and bold knights' men,
Stood up the Marshal Stig before.

p. 17

So up to the Ting of the land he goes,
And straight to make his plaint began;
Then murmured loud the assembled crowd,
And clench'd his fist each honest man.

"Ye good men hear a tale of fear,
A tale of horror, a tale of hell;
A rape upon my wife's been done,
With frantic grief the tale I tell."

Then up did spring the Danish King,
And proffer'd to Stig his fair white hand:
"I joy thou art come, Sir Marsk Stig, home
Safe from the fray in the foreign land."

Then answer'd him the Marshal Stig,
His heart was fill'd with grief and rage:
"And trouble and cost I more than lost
When forth I went the fight to wage.

"To the field of war I went afar,
And for thy realm I risk'd my life;
But thou didst stay and, welladay,
Didst foully force my virtuous wife."

p. 18

Then answer'd him the youthful King,
As sly he laughed his cap below:
"The Lady's yes and willingness
Were ready as mine own I trow."

Then answer made the young Marsk Stig,
With a darkling brow and kindling eye:
"'Tis a saying true and an old one too
That insult follows injury.

"Thou'st forc'd my housewife, and hast brought
Distress and shame upon our head;
But know one thing, my gracious King,
Thy life to Stig is forfeited."

Then as he turn'd him from the Ting
He doff'd his hat with knightly pride;
"Ye good men here in memory bear
I have the traitor King defied."

"Now do thou hear, Sir Marsk Stig dear,
Cease, cease such frantic talk to hold;
And I'll bestow on thee enow
Of castles, land, and ruddy gold.

p. 19

"Eight castles fair, the best that are
In all the land where dwells the Dane,
May well atone for what is done,
Receive them and my friend remain."

"I do not care for your castles fair,
Castles enow I have already,
I wish undone the deed upon
The body of my virtuous Lady."

"Marsk Stig! Marsk Stig! ride not so high,
I hope to guard myself, proud Earl!
Although thou be my enemy,
I trust I run no mighty peril."

"However high, Sir King, I ride,
Thou lov'st to play a higher part;
Hast thou ne'er heard the olden word
That power must often yield to art?"

"I'm not so mighty nor so strong
That I can hope to bar thy way,
But oft I've seen a greyhound keen
Alone the antler'd monarch slay.

"I'm not at the head of so many swords,
That I can check thee when thou wouldst pass;
But a little lever, if us'd but clever,
Can overturn a weighty mass."

Then away rode he the young Marsk Stig,
To Ingeborga's bower repairing:
"Now welcome thrice, Marsk Stig," she cries,
"I've heard of Marsk Stig's manly bearing.

"Fear not the King nor all his might,
Of courage high he has no spark;
Throughout the state he's won the hate
Of every layman, priest, and clerk.

"I have a loving nephew got
Who waits the traitor King upon;
He'll be our spy, and privily
Will send us word when the King's alone.

"And when ye've slain the brutal pard
Who in drink and slumber finds delight,
By ye will stand of Norway land
The King so bold with his men of might.

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"If thou on Helm a fortress build
It ne'er can be won by human hands,
From its brow so high you may Sealand spy,
Jutland, and other lesser lands.

"Whilst thou dost live thou a knight shalt be,
But my grief for me is far too strong;
So blythe my breath I'll yield to death
When Marshal Stig has aveng'd my wrong.

"I ne'er have peace nor gladness known
Since tyrant Glepping's deed of force;
May Jesus bless with good success
My gallant Stig in his gallant course.

"And bless our daughters' youthful blood,
Oft, full oft on their fate I ponder;
Much I fear when I'm gone from here,
Far and wide they'll have to wander.

"An action high shall never die,
Whatever dastard lips may say;
'Twill wake up bold from out the mould
And boldly speak on the judgment day.

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"Then speed thee, knight, with thee is right,
Avenge the heart which loves thee dear;
On earthly shore though we meet no more,
We shall meet again in the sky so clear."

PART III.

p. 23

There's many I ween in Denmark green
Who all to be masters now desire;
To Ribe old their course they hold,
And there they buy them strange attire.

There they prepare such clothes as wear
The holy Monks of orders grey,
And this they've done in the hope alone
Their liege and sovereign to betray.

They watch'd him sly, they watch'd him nigh,
Whether the King went down or up;
But best they sped, in the hour so dread,
When the King would ride to Tinderup.

The cause of the same was an injur'd Dame,
Bold Stig the Marshal's lovely wife;
With Ranild a plot she up has got

Which cost King Erik his youthful life.

Ranild the loon, her sister's son,
Ranild who serv'd King Erik near,
Tells him with art of hind and hart,
And of silvan game to the hunter dear.

"To thee I can show both buck and doe
Within the bonny green wood that play;
With greyhounds tried we forth will ride,
Sir King, not distant is the way."

Then Erik he bade his serving lad
To saddle him straight his good grey steed;
"To Jutland's Ting will ride your King,
And see how things in Jutland speed."

And he order gave to his courtiers brave
That they should before to Viborg hie;
No thought he had that Ranild the lad
Was brooding a subtle treachery.

But Ranild rode by a secret road,
And he bade the Monks themselves prepare;
I tell to ye for a verity
That Ranild practis'd cunning rare.

Now after the hart and hind they start,
And after the nimble roe as well;
The long day's space endur'd the chase,
Till murky night upon them fell.

Then in faltering guise the King he cries,
For his heart I ween was full of dread:
"God help us now, and Saint Gertrude thou,
We fairly out of the path have sped."

Then about he spied and about he pried,
Amid the bushes so dark and drear,
Till sight he got of a little cot
Where fire and light were burning clear.

And into that house King Erik goes,
His luck the Monarch there will try;
And he was aware of a damsel fair,
No fairer ever had met his eye.

And her to his breast the King he press'd,
And kiss'd her oft with fond delight:
"My lovely may, I beg and pray
That thou wilt sleep with me this night."

Then answer'd and said the woodland maid,
With a burst of laughter wild and loud:
"In mind I keep how thou didst sleep
With Ingeborga fair and proud.

"Answer, I pray, and fairly say,
How many maids hast thou, Sir King,
Deserted and left of fame bereft?
For that will death upon thee bring."

"If that thou know, fair maid, I trow
That thou canst tell much more to me;
Now tiding give how long I shall live,
And say how many my foemen be."

With solemn air said the maiden fair,
"Hark thou to me and believe my word;
For life thou must look to the little crook,
Whereon doth hang thy trusty sword.

"The knobs on thy belt of tough, tough felt,
The foeman's number will tell I ween;
Beware, I say, of Monk hoods grey
Concealing warriors stern and keen."

To catch the maid the King essay'd,
His heart was bent yet more on learning;
Then slipped away the woodland fay,

Suddenly into vapour turning.

As long as stay'd with him the maid
Both light and fire his sight did cheer,
But as soon, as soon as she was gone
With Ranild he stood in the bush so drear.

Then the King for advice to Ranild cries,
And Ranild the traitor answer'd thus:
"From out this place our way we'll trace,
For here no moon can shine on us.

"If I be right, a hamlet hight
Grey Tinderup not far doth lie;
This night we'd best in Tinderup rest,
My liege, I think for a certainty.

"And thither we'll ride, and there we'll bide,
Until the moon has risen on high;
By Mary's might no mortal wight
Will do thee any injury."

So they ride away to Tinderup grey,
And loud for lodging, lodging shout;
But they came so late that every gate
Was lock'd, and fires and lights put out.

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Then their steeds they turn to Tinderup barn,
No mortal knew that they were there;
To the King I wot the thought came not
That he was now to his end so near.

But Erik's breast was not at rest,
And thus to Ranild the lad he cried:
"O make the door both fast and sure,
I fast and sure in thee confide.

"Do thou the door with a stake secure,
I've ever found thee faithful yet;
In mind I hold that Stig is bold,
And oft I think upon his threat."

"I've driven a pin the floor within,
And plac'd a balk against the door;
By Mary bright no mortal wight
To move that mighty balk has power.

"Marsk Stig is hot, I deny it not,
And wondrous words he thunders out;
But be of good cheer my master dear,
He o'er his table sits no doubt.

p. 29

"The lapwing bird each spot can guard
Upon the face of the verdant field,
Except alone the knoll whereon
Its nest the bird is wont to build."

No pin or stake did Ranild take,
He was I wean a lying cheat;
I tell to ye, for a verity,
He only took two straws of wheat.

And for all his talk 'twas no thick balk
He plac'd for the door's security,
But a wheat-sheaf light which the gust of night
From the door removed instantly.

Scarce on the groun' had they laid them down,
On the groun' of the barn so cold and hard,
When of Ingeborg Dame the avengers came,
Spurring amain to the peasant's gard.

Into the yard came riding hard
The fatal monks of orders grey;
No pause they made, to the place they sped
Where well they knew that the Monarch lay.

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Upon the door their blows they shower,
With faulchion struck they and with spear;
"Come out, come out, Sir King," they shout,

"The Dame has sent to greet thee here."

To them in reply did Ranild cry,
And thus the Ranild youth began:
"No King is here, no King is near,
No King nor any such a man."

Then swift and fast Sir Ranild cast
Over his Lord both straw and hay,
But points with his hand to the in-rushing band
The spot where the hapless Monarch lay.

They extinguish'd straight the wax light great
That burn'd the head of the Monarch o'er;
Then round the King they stood in a ring,
With blades athirst for his dearest gore.

"O Ranild hear, my servant dear,
If thou wilt only fight for me,
My sister bright to thee I'll plight,
And she thy wedded wife shall be."

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Then he hew'd for his Lord on the broad, broad board,
And on the balk he hew'd so brave;
He hew'd hither, and he hew'd thither—
He fought for his master like a knave.

Full in the breast their stabs they address'd,
As near to the heart as well might be;
With wounds so sore, forty and more,
Miserably murder'd the King was he.

At him they bored with spear and sword,
No rest to him the Monks allow'd;
When done was the deed each took his steed,
And away with frantic fury rode.

This happ'd on the night of Cecily bright,
The season it was so bright and holy.
The King is dead, his blood is shed,
But Ingeborg still is melancholy.

"Now who will bear to Viborg fair
The corpse of the King across the green?
And who will go with the tale of woe
To Skanderborough where sits the Queen?"

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Then ride would none to Viborg town,
And attend the corse across the green;
But rose up amain a little swain,
And he would ride to the Danish Queen.

Uprose amain the little swain,
And not long idle I ween he stay'd;
He tore from the grey the saddle away,
And that on the back of the white he laid.

"Hail gracious Queen so fair of mien,
Who sittest clad in scarlet red;
A traitorous train the King have slain,
In Tinderup barn he lieth dead.

"They stabbed him with might in his bosom white,
Their points came out of his royal side;
Take thou good care of the youthful heir,
Who Denmark's realm is doomed to guide.

"Take heed, take heed of the land I rede,
And of this royal Castelaye;
'Bove every thing of the youthful King,
Who in after time shall Denmark sway."

p. 33

"Thou little lad thy tale is sad,
And it fills my heart with grief and pain;
But thee I'll prize for thy advice,
And clothe and feed thee whilst I reign."

It happ'd on the night of Cecily bright,
In that sweet season blest and holy,
Vengeance has sped, the King is dead—

But Ingeborg still is melancholy.

PART IV.

p. 34

There were seven and seven times twenty
That met upon the verdant wold:
"Say, what emprise shall we devise
Now Denmark's Lord is stark and cold?"

"Our Lord we've slain, a corse he lies,
The band of peace we thus have riven;
Within the land we can make no stand,
From land and friends we now are driven.

"But we will ride to Skanderborg,
And a visit to the Queen will pay,
We'll see how fares amid her cares
The Dame ere we depart for aye.

"It was her wont to jeer and scoff,
But now therewith she must have done;
The fire is come to the scorner's home,
And pity her I ween can none."

Marsk Stig he into the saddle sprang,
For his daring deed he felt no sorrow;
He spurr'd his horse and bent his course,
With his armed host to Skanderborough.

p. 35

It was the Danish Queen so fine,
She look'd from out the window high:
"O there doth ride Marsk Stig," she cried,
"With his knight in iron panoply.

"Ha, welcome, Stig, thou self-made King,
May'st quickly meet the guerdon due;
If God doth spare the youthful heir,
Full bitter fruit he'll make thee chew."

"Lady, I am no self-made King,
Although it please thee so to say;
But I can name the knight of fame
Who last with thee, fair lady, lay.

"Little thou mind'st King Erik's death,
But briny tears thou soon wouldst shed,
If thou hadst lost the gallant Drost,
Who's wont at night to share thy bed."

"O shame upon the murderers foul
Who basely slew my lord and joy;
And shame befall both thee and all
My Queenly honour would destroy."

p. 36

Then up spoke Erik Erikson,
The little King who was standing by:
"When I'm up-grown and bear the crown
Full quickly thou shalt Denmark fly."

Then up stood little Christopher,
And courage sparkled in his eye:
"To hang them all were vengeance small
For my dear father's injury."

"And if the land I'm forc'd to quit,
And upon the chilly billows lie,
I'll work revenge and havoc strange,
And mostly 'mong the great and high.

"And if from hence I'm forc'd to go,
And outlaw'd live in cave and wood,
From Denmark's land with spear and brand
Summer and Yule I'll fetch me food."

Then away from Skanderborg he rode,
And his fist he shook against the towers;
And with his troop to Molderup,
To seek his Ingeborg, he scours.

p. 37

It was the young Sir Marshal Stig,

He took his wife in his embrace;
"Now lieth slain the cursed bane
Of all our love and happiness.

"Now wilt thou brave stern poverty,
And follow bold a man exil'd?
Or wilt thou stay, and every day
Be harlot, Erik's harlot, styl'd?"

"O could I even Queen become
The hated name I would not bear;
My thanks, the best of this poor breast,
For slaying him the ravisher.

"But we are allied to Counts and Knights,
And mighty men of high degree,
So do not fear the little heir,
Nor for a child the country flee.

"Count Jacob of Halland, and Peter Pors,
Bluefod and Kagg, at any hour
Will back our cause, and sturdy Claus,
The Halland'sfar, and many more.

"There's Erik King of Norroway,
To him your knightly hand extend,
For he a host and fleet can boast,
And host and fleet he'll gladly lend.

"If thou upon the peak of Helm
But build a castle strong and fast,
Thou need'st not quail for arrowy hail,
Nor dread the engine's deadly cast.

"And now for long, long winters nine
I've hid my care within my breast;
A worm gnaws sore my bosom's core,
Good night, my Lord! I sink to rest."

Marsk Stig he took her in his arm,
"The high God lengthen yet thy day!
Our best advice is now to prize
The hoary rocks of Norroway."

Marsk Stig he speeds, to Helm proceeds,
And soon inclos'd a fitting space;
I tell to ye for verity,
Before him palen'd many a face.

Marsk Stig he builds on Helm a keep,
With massive walls and towers high;
His raging foes besiege it close,
Germans and Danes, but vainly try.

Out into the field the peasant goes,
And there the peasant sows his corn:
"O God of might, what wondrous sight
The Helm, the Helm has got a horn!

"O welladay on the poor boors grey,
When Stig the Marshal's bed was stain'd;
For us I ween it had better been
If Glepping had unborn remain'd.

"Whene'er within the good green wood
The oaks so mighty chance to fall,
They crush to the ground the hazels round,
And all the other trees so small.

"The sins of Kings and noblemen
Upon the poor fall heavily;
God look with grace on the peasant's case,
And relieve him from his misery!"

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LONDON:
Printed for THOMAS J. WISE, Hampstead, N.W.

Edition limited to Thirty Copies.

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