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**Author:** George Borrow

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\*\*\* START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE SERPENT KNIGHT, AND OTHER  
BALLADS \*\*\*

Transcribed from the 1913 Thomas Wise pamphlet by David Price, email [ccx074@pglaf.org](mailto:ccx074@pglaf.org).

## THE SERPENT KNIGHT AND OTHER BALLADS

BY  
GEORGE BORROW

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### THE SERPENT KNIGHT

p. 7

Signelil sits in her bower alone,

Of her golden harp she waked the tone.

Beneath her mantle her harp she played,  
Then in came striding the worm so laid.

“Proud Signelil, if thou me wilt wed,  
I’ll give thee store of gold so red.”

“Forbid the heavenly God so great  
That I should become the Lindworm’s mate.”

“Since thee I may not for a wife acquire,  
Kiss me only and I’ll retire.”

The linen so white betwixt she placed,  
And the laidly worm she kissed in haste.

With his tail of serpent up strook he,  
From beneath her dress the blood ran free.

p. 8

The Lindworm down from the chamber strode,  
Wringing her hands behind she trode.

And when she came out upon the stair  
Her seven bold brothers met her there.

“Welcome our sister, whither dost hie?  
Keep’st thou the Lindworm company?”

“Ah, yes! with the laidly worm I go,  
Because hard fate will have it so.”

The Lindworm into the mountain strode,  
Wringing her hands behind she trode.

She fell on her knee, and her prayer she made,  
“Now son of Mary deign to aid.”

And when he had come to the mountain in,  
Off he cast his serpent’s skin.

His snake’s appearance off he shook,  
And the form of a stately knight he took.

“Thanks for thy trouble, proud Signelil,  
Now live and die with thee I will.”

p. 9

Now is proud Signild free from fright,  
In a prince’s arm she sleeps each night.

## SIR OLAF

p. 10

Sir Olaf rides on his courser tall,  
Guests to bid to his bridal hall.

*Gaily they dance in the greenwood.*

In fours and fives the elfins dance,  
The elf-king’s daughter I see advance.

*Gaily they dance in the greenwood.*

“Sir Olaf, cease so fierce to ride,  
And dance with me for a little tide.”

*Gaily they dance in the greenwood.*

“I may not dance, I may not stay,  
To-morrow is my bridal day.”

*Gaily they dance in the greenwood.*

“Sir Olaf, if thou wilt dance with me,  
Two buckskin boots I’ll give to thee.”

*Gaily they dance in the greenwood.*

“I dare not dance, I dare not stay,  
To-morrow is my bridal day.”

*Gaily they dance in the greenwood.*

p. 11

“Sir Olaf, if thou wilt dance with me,  
A silken shirt I’ll give to thee.”

*Gaily they dance in the greenwood.*

"A silken shirt so fair and fine,  
Which my mother bleach'd in the pale moon-shine."  
*Gaily they dance in the greenwood.*

"I dare not dance, I must away,  
To-morrow is my bridal day."  
*Gaily they dance in the greenwood.*

"Sir Olaf, if thou wilt dance with me,  
A helm of gold I'll give to thee."  
*Gaily they dance in the greenwood.*

"A helm of gold is a bonny thing,  
But I dare not tread the elfin ring."  
*Gaily they dance in the greenwood.*

"And if thou wilt not dance with me,  
Disease and death shall follow thee."  
*Gaily they dance in the greenwood.*

p. 12

She struck him on the shoulder bone,  
Fiercer pain he ne'er had known.  
*Gaily they dance in the greenwood.*

Upon his steed she lifts the knight,  
"Now hie thee home to thy heart's delight."  
*Gaily they dance in the greenwood.*

And when he came to his home so late,  
His mother stood at the castle gate.  
*Gaily they dance in the greenwood.*

"Now tell to me, my dearest son,  
Why look'st so pale and woe-begone?"  
*Gaily they dance in the greenwood.*

"O well may he look pale, I ween,  
Who has felt the stroke of the Elfin Queen."  
*Gaily they dance in the greenwood.*

"Sir Olaf, list, my joy and pride,  
What shall I say to thy youthful bride?"  
*Gaily they dance in the greenwood.*

p. 13

"Thou'lt tell my bride the wood I rove,  
My courser and my hounds to prove."  
*Gaily they dance in the greenwood.*

The next, next morn at break of day  
The bride arrives with her friends so gay.  
*Gaily they dance in the greenwood.*

They skinkéd mead, they skinkéd wine:  
"Where is Sir Olaf, bridegroom mine?"  
*Gaily they dance in the greenwood.*

"Sir Olaf's gone the woods to rove,  
His courser and his hounds to prove."  
*Gaily they dance in the greenwood.*

She lifted up the mantle red,  
There lay Sir Olaf stark and dead.  
*Gaily they dance in the greenwood.*

The next, next day at early morn,  
Corses three from the gate are borne.  
*Gaily they dance in the greenwood.*

p. 14

Olaf the knight, and his youthful bride,  
And his mother dear, who of care had died.  
*Gaily they dance in the greenwood.*

## THE TREACHEROUS MERMAN

p. 15

"Now rede me, mother," the merman cried,  
"How Marsk Stig's daughter may be my bride."

She made him of water a noble steed,

Of sands a saddle, and reins of reed.

To a young knight chang'd she then her son,  
And to Mary's church at speed he's gone.

To the church's ring his steed he bound,  
And three times backward the church pac'd round.

When in he strode so proud and tall  
Away the images turned them all.

The priest was standing with open book:  
"O who is yon knight of stately look?"

Then laughed the maiden within her sleeve:  
"If he were my husband I should not grieve."

p. 16

He step'd over benches one and two:  
"O Marsk Stig's daughter I doat on you."

He stepped over benches three and four:  
"Give me thy troth I thee implore."

She gave him her hand with an air so free:  
"Here take thy troth, I will go with thee."

A bridal train from church they go,  
They danc'd so lightly and free from woe.

And when they came to the salt sea strand,  
The little boats turn'd away from the land.

"Now Marsk Stig's daughter hold my steed,  
To cross the water a boat we need."

To a little boat he chang'd his steed,  
And over the waves away they speed.

And when in the midst of the sound they were,  
Dissolv'd the boat into water fair.

Up the land far was heard the cry  
Of Marsk Stig's maid in her agony.

p. 17

Now will I caution each maiden bright,  
To dance not away with an unknown knight.

*Note.*—The above Ballad is a later, and greatly improved, version of one which appeared under the title *The Mermaid* only, in the *Romantic Ballads* of 1826. The introduction of the incident of the changing by magic of the horse into a boat, furnishes a reason for the catastrophe which was lacking in the earlier version.

## **THE KNIGHT IN THE DEER'S SHAPE OR THE DECEIVER DECEIVED**

p. 18

It was the Knight Sir Peter,  
He dwelleth down by Oe;  
Nothing, nothing, will he do  
But sail about and row.

Sail about and row about  
Is all that he will do,  
So many a maiden he allures  
And proves to them untrue.

To servants two addressed him,  
Sir Peter of the isle:  
"With wily speeches win me  
The Damsel Usalile."

The gallant swains then riding  
To Usalile's home,  
A message sent inquiring  
If they to her might come.

In then came the gallants,

p. 19

Before the board they stood—  
O, they were nimble at the tongue,  
Could speak in wily mode!

“Thy brothers seven from Skaane  
Thee lovingly do greet,  
On board this ship to meet them  
Their sister they entreat.”

“O if with me for parlance  
My brothers are inclined,  
Here at her table sitting  
Their sister they will find.

“No lovely maid on shipboard  
Is ever wont to go,  
But sharp reproofs pursue her,  
And taunting words, I trow.”

Away then ride the gallants  
And to their lord repair:  
“We cannot win the damsel  
By means of speeches fair.”

“O I will have the damsel,  
And she shall yet be won;  
I vow me to deceive her  
By force of magic Rune.”

Then o'er his broider'd trousers,  
And jacket flower'd fair,  
The skin of a hart he donneth  
The maiden to ensnare.

Now sported the wild little hart  
The damsel's house before,  
Glitter'd like the ruddy gold  
Each hair the creature bore.

Open stood the castle gate,  
The hart therein has stray'd;  
And lo with little puppies  
The merry maiden play'd.

Up and down he sported,  
To the green wood he sped;  
Behind the Damsel hasting  
In a leash the puppies led.

He sported up, he sported down,  
Towards the mead he hied;  
The Damsel speeding after  
With hand to lure him tried.

The Damsel speeding after  
With hand to lure him strove:  
“That yonder lovely hart were tame  
O would to God above!

“O would to God in heaven,  
That yonder hart were mine!  
Nothing should he ever drink  
Except the rosy wine.

“Nothing should he ever drink  
Except the rosy wine,  
And nowhere should he slumber  
Save in these arms of mine.”

The knight he off has shaken  
The deer shape from his frame;  
In verity fair damsel,  
The hart he now is tame!

Long stood she, the Damsel,  
So deep reflected she:  
“O for some cunning artifice  
To rid me quick of thee!”

“Sir Peter, if what now I know

I had but known before,  
The children I shall bear thee  
They ne'er should have been poor.

"Within my father's castle  
A little girl I strayed,  
When in the earth a treasure  
Of ruddy gold they laid.

"Down by the strand 'tis buried,  
Beneath a mighty stone."  
Thither to fetch the treasure  
In haste Sir Peter's gone.

He has broken up the flinty rock,  
So deep a hole he's made—  
But none shall ever gold dig up  
Where gold was never laid!

One shall never gold dig up  
Where gold was never laid;  
Never came together more  
The knight and lovely maid.

p. 23

## THE STALWART MONK

p. 24

Above the wood a cloister towers,  
Gilt window it displays;  
There lie before it Kempions twelve,  
The cloister they will raze.

There lie before it Kempions twelve,  
The cloister down will tear;  
The oxen and the cows they slew  
The monks should have for fare.

The monk he out of the window looked,  
Then shook both beam and wall:  
"And be the Kemps no more than twelve,  
I'll easily tame them all."

The monk he called to his serving lad:  
"My club go fetch me in,  
For I will out to the forest straight  
And make them cease their din."

It took fifteen to bring the club,  
And they strain'd all their might;  
The monk took it up with fingers two  
And swung it round so light.

p. 25

He takes the club upon his back  
And into the wood he's gone,  
And there met him the Kempions twelve  
Would fain set him upon.

They drew a circle on the ground,  
And each one troll'd a song;  
I tell to ye for verity  
He silenced them all ere long.

First slew he four, then slew he five,  
At length he all has slain;  
It was the monk of the shaven crown  
Would gladly fight again.

It was the monk of the shaven crown  
Would seek for another fray,  
So out of the wood across the wold  
He blythely took his way.

So blythely out of the good green wood  
He sped across the hill,  
And there met him a hoary Troid  
Whose name was Sivord Gill.

p. 26

"If thou art the monk of the shaven crown  
Who scath'd the warrior band,  
Thou either from me shalt shamefully flee  
Or manfully 'gainst me stand."

"I am the monk of the shaven crown  
Who slew the warrior band,  
And never from thee will I shamefully flee  
But like a man will stand."

The first blow gave the Troid, it fell  
Upon the monk's shoulder down,  
'Midst of his shoulder broke the skin,  
Bebloodied was his gown.

The next blow gave the monk, it struck  
The Troid to the verdant sword:  
"Now shame befall thee, shaven Monk,  
The blows of thy club are hard.

"Now hold thy hand, thou shaven Monk,  
And do not strike me more,  
And I will give thee silver and gold,  
And of coin a plenteous store."

The Monk he ran, the Troid he crept,  
Still equal was their height;  
Then shewed he him a little house  
With doors of gold so bright.

Then shewed he him a little house  
With golden doors fifteen;  
There got the Monk of silver and gold  
All he could wish I ween.

Seven lasts of silver, seven of gold,  
To the cloisters he caus'd convey;  
He bade them find a monk could wield  
A club in as brave a way.

'Twas drawing fast to an evening hour  
And the sun went down to rest,  
Still fifteen Roman miles the monk  
To the cloister had at least.

'Twas tending fast to the evening tide  
And the sun to the earth did haste,  
Yet he seized the first dish at the supper board  
Ere the Abbot could get a taste.

Full fifteen monks he knock'd down when  
No pottage he espied,  
And up he hung fifteen because  
The herrings were not fried.

Then out and spoke the little boy  
Who waited at the meal:  
"Each time the monk to the cloister comes  
He thus with us will deal."

And it was getting late at night  
And folks to bed should hie,  
Then because the Abbot sat too long  
He struck him out an eye.

The Abbot hurried off to bed,  
No longer dared remain;  
I say to ye for verity  
He felt both shame and pain.

'Twas early in the morning tide,  
The bells began to ring;  
It was the monk of the shaven crown  
Would neither read nor sing.

So stately strode he up the choir  
Where the monks and nuns they stand,  
Not one of them dared read or sing  
For fear of his stalwart hand.

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p. 29

So they the Abbot pious and good  
To a simple monk debased,  
And they the Monk of the shaven crown  
As Abbot o'er them placed.

And he the cloister held with might  
Till thirty years were flown;  
Then died as Abbot in mighty fame,  
The Monk of the shaven crown.

## THE CRUEL STEP-DAME

p. 30

My father up of the country rode,  
He thought to wed a lovely rose;  
And there he met a laidly wife,  
The source was she of all my woes.

The first night they together slept  
She seemed to me a mother mild,  
But ere a second night was past  
She prov'd a step-dame fierce and wild.

I sat beside my father's board,  
I sported there with hound and pup,  
And then to blast my blissful lot  
My step-dame wild came striding up.

That God should make my lot so blest  
My wicked step-dame could not bear;  
She changed me to a sword so keen,  
And bade me far and wide to fare.

By day I grac'd the side of the knight,  
I hung the hero's heart so near;  
At night I lay beneath his head,  
For his good sword he loved so dear.

p. 31

That God had made my lot so blest  
My wicked step-dame could not bear;  
She changed me to a little knife,  
And bade me far and wide to fare.

By day I was in the Lady's hand,  
The linen white with me she cut;  
At night within her bower I slept,  
All in her golden casket put.

That God had made my lot so blest,  
My wicked step-dame could not bear;  
She changed me to a little hind,  
And bade me wander far and near.

She changed me to a little hind,  
And bade me wander far and near;  
My seven maids to wolves she changed,  
And fiercely urged them me to tear.

My seven maidens were so kind,  
They all refus'd the hind to tear;  
Then vexed was my step-mother wild  
That God had made my lot so fair.

p. 32

The young Sir Henrik serves at court,  
He is a knight of handsome mien;  
For me he sorrowed day and night,  
But would not let his grief be seen.

Sir Henrik roves with bow in hand  
The good green wood at morning tide;  
Then up there came a little hind,  
And fondly she the warrior eyed.

Then up there came a little hind  
Before the young knight as he rang'd;  
Then off she cast her bestial shape,  
And to a lovely damsel changed.



He took her tenderly in his arm,  
He called her oft his bosom's dear:  
"Thrice praised be God in heav'n that dwells  
That I have found my damsel here.

"I have not any servant, love,  
Nor hast thou any maid, my fair,  
So we'll pull down the linden leaves,  
And thus our bridal bed prepare."

It was then the damsel fair,  
Within the bed herself she placed;  
It was the brave Sir Henrik then  
Sweet sank to sleep by her embraced.

Full sorely wept the damsel fair,  
As sleep began his eyes to find;  
Assuming then her bestial shape,  
She went away—a hapless hind.

p. 33

## THE CUCKOO

p. 34

*From the Danish.*

Yonder the cuckoo flutters,  
*Cuckoo, Cuckoo!* he utters,  
And lights the beech upon;  
Many a voice is sweeter,  
But do not mock the creature,  
Let each enjoy his own.

He knows no notes of passion,  
A new song cannot fashion;  
True to the ancient rule,  
What his good sires respected  
By him is not neglected,—  
Is he for that a fool?

O thou, my human brother,  
Who scorning every other  
With self-conceit dost swell,  
We cannot all be gallants,  
Not equal are our talents—  
Thou art no nightingale!

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