



CLASSIC LIVING BOOK

HISTORIC  
POEMS AND BALLADS

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Rupert S. Holland

COMPLETE AND UNABRIDGED

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# Historic Poems and Ballads

*by*

RUPERT S. HOLLAND





CHARGE OF THE SCOTCH GREYS AT WATERLOO

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## Note

The object of this book is to tell the story of many of the stirring scenes of history through famous poems and ballads and short descriptions of each event. A glossary of the more unusual words used in the poems, and an explanation of the names of persons and places, are included at the end of the volume.

The selections from J. G. Whittier, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Bret Harte are used by permission of Houghton-Mifflin Company, authorized publishers of their works, to whom thanks are hereby extended. Thanks are also due to Harper and Brothers for permission to use "The Little Black-Eyed Rebel," by Will Carleton, and "The Battle of New Orleans," by Thomas Dunn English, to Mr. Will Henry Thompson and the Century Company for the use of the former's poem, "High Tide at Gettysburg," and to David McKay for permission to use the poem entitled "O Captain! My Captain!" by Walt Whitman. "The Battle of Lexington," by Sidney Lanier, appears by special arrangement with Messrs. Charles Scribner's



I.

## **The Destruction of Sennacherib**

SENNACHERIB was King of Assyria from 705 B.C. to 681 B.C. He was a very proud and warlike ruler, but also a great builder, and during his reign, Assyria became famous for her art and architecture. He seized and destroyed Babylon, conquered Chaldea, and marched into Egypt. City after city of Judah fell before his arms, and Hezekiah, Prince of Judah, was forced to retreat into Jerusalem. The Assyrian king pursued, wasting the land with fire and sword, and taking the people for slaves. As Sennacherib swept up to Jerusalem, the Prince of Judah tried to ransom his city with gold, but the invader would not listen to his offer and prepared to attack the walls. Then suddenly, a plague fell upon the great Assyrian host. It is said that 185,000 men died in a single night. The rest, terrified at what seemed retribution for their destruction of Babylon, fled in a panic, pursued by their enemies. The king himself escaped but was killed in 681 B.C. in the temple at Nineveh by two of his sons.

Byron wrote a number of poems dealing with Hebrew history, and this is one of the most spirited of them. It describes how the great Assyrian army, flushed with scores of victories, came to Jerusalem, ready to conquer on the morrow. That night came the plague, and the army melted away before its breath. The widows of Ashur, which means Assyria, bewailed the lost soldiers, and the priests who tended the altars of the god Baal broke the idols in despair, for the Gentiles, or heathens, who had

been so powerful before, had fallen, not by men's swords, but at the will of the God of Jerusalem.

### THE DESTRUCTION OF SENNACHERIB

*By George Gordon Noel, Lord Byron*

The Assyrian came down like the wolf on the fold,  
And his cohorts were gleaming in purple and gold;  
And the sheen of their spears was like stars on the  
sea,  
When the blue wave rolls nightly on deep Galilee.

Like the leaves of the forest when summer is green,  
That host with their banners at sunset were seen;  
Like the leaves of the forest when autumn hath flown,  
That host on the morrow lay withered and strown.

For the angel of death spread his wings on the blast,  
And breathed in the face of the foe as he passed;  
And the eyes of the sleepers waxed deadly and chill,  
And their hearts but once heaved, and forever grew  
still!

And there lay the steed with his nostril all wide,  
But through it there rolled not the breath of his pride;  
And the foam of his gasping lay white on the turf,  
And cold as the spray of the rock-beating surf.

And there lay the rider distorted and pale,  
With the dew on his brow and the rust on his mail;  
And the tents were all silent, the banners alone,  
The lances unlifted, the trumpet unblown.

And the widows of Ashur are loud in their wail;  
And the idols are broke in the temple of Baal;  
And the might of the Gentile, unsmote by the sword,  
Hath melted like snow in the glance of the Lord!

## II.

# Horatius

THIS poem gives such a true picture of the patriotic spirit of a citizen of early Rome and follows the meter of many Latin poets so closely that it might well have been what Macaulay pretended it was — a lay actually written about three hundred and sixty years after the founding of Rome, or in 393 B.C.

At that time, the most powerful chief in Italy was Lars Porsena, of Etruria, whose capital city was Clusium, which was some ninety miles to the northwest of Rome. Etruria was the home of the twelve Etruscan tribes and lay to the north and west of Rome, separated from that city by the river Tiber. Among the Etruscans, the word *Lars* meant *lord or chief*. Like the Romans, the Etruscans had a number of gods, to each of whom they ascribed different attributes, as the Romans did to Jupiter, Minerva, Mars, and their other deities.

Rome had been a kingdom at one time, and its kings had come from the house of Tarquin. But Tarquin the Proud had ruled so tyrannously, and his son, “false Sextus,” had committed so vile a crime that the people had overthrown his power and driven Tarquin from the city in 505 B.C. He had sought aid from Lars Porsena, and that chief, already jealous of Rome’s prosperity, determined to raise a great army and replace Tarquin on his throne.

The Etruscan chieftain sent out his messengers and soon had gathered allies from the twelve tribes. They came from all central Italy, from the fastnesses of the Apennine Mountains, from the

city of Volaterrae, whose citadel was made of huge uncemented boulders, from Populonia, opposite the island of Sardinia, from the busy city of Pisa, in whose harbor were triremes, or ships with triple-banks of oars, belonging to the colony of Massilia in Gaul, from the country watered by the river Clanis, and from the many-towered city of Cortona. The woodmen left the forests that lay along the river Auser, the hunters deserted the stags of the Ciminian hill in Etruria, and the herdsmen forsook the milk-white cattle that browsed on the banks of the stream Clitumnus. The Volsinian lake was left in peace to its waterfowl, old men reaped the harvests in Arretium, young boys cared for the sheep-shearing along the Umbro, and in the city of Luna, girls pressed the grapes in the wine-vats while their fathers joined the march to Rome.

Meantime, Lars Porsena took counsel with his soothsayers, and they consulted the books, in which was supposed to be written, from right to left, according to the Etruscan fashion, the future of that nation. The thirty wise men assured him that he would conquer and bring back to his own capital the shields of Rome.

The great army of Etruscans, 80,000 footmen and 10,000 horsemen, gathered before the gates of Sutrium. Enemies of Rome, men who had been banished from that city, and Mamilius, Prince of Latium, a country south of Rome, came to join the soldiers of Etruria.

In Rome, there was great dismay. The farmers who lived in the open country drove their cattle and carried their household goods inside the city walls. From the high Tarpeian Rock, the people could see the blazing towns fired by Lars Porsena on his march. The Senate of the city sat night and day, and every hour new messengers arrived with word of the enemy's advance. As they advanced, the Etruscans destroyed all hostile settlements; they leveled Crustumerium, a town in the Sabine country that belonged to Rome; Verbenna, one of their generals, swept across



HORATIUS AT THE BRIDGE.

to the port of Ostia, at the mouth of the Tiber; and Astur, another leader, captured the fortified hill of Janiculum that lay across the Tiber to the west of Rome. That hill commanded the only bridge that spanned the river, and if the Etruscans should seize it, they would probably soon break a way into the city.

The Consul, who was one of the chief officers of Rome, ordered the bridge destroyed, but at the same moment, a messenger brought word that Lars Porsena was in sight. The Consul looked and saw the glittering line of spears and helmets, the banners of the twelve chief cities of Etruria, and the leaders themselves.

The Consul saw that the enemy was so close that their vanguard would prevent the Romans from destroying the bridge in time. But even as he said this, Horatius, the Captain of the Gate, stepped forward and volunteered to hold the enemy in check if two others would fight beside him. Instantly, two brave men offered to go forth, one Spurius Lartius and the other Herminius.

The three Romans armed themselves and stepped forward to the other bank of the Tiber, while the Consul, the City Fathers, and citizens seized hatchets and crowbars and began to loosen the supports of the bridge.

The Etruscan army saw the three Romans standing at the head of the bridge and thought it would be a simple matter to overcome them. Three chiefs rushed forward, only to fall before the swords of Horatius and his allies. More tried it, and more, but each in turn met the same fate before the Romans. At last, the great Etruscan army stood at bay.

Time had been gained for the people to destroy the props of the bridge. As it began to fall, the Romans called to their three defenders. Spurius Lartius and Herminius dashed back, but Horatius was left on the other shore when the bridge crashed into the river.

Horatius would not yield, but with a prayer to Father Tiber, plunged into the stream. While all eyes watched him, he swam to

the Roman bank. There the people raised him on their shoulders and carried him in triumph through the city gates.

Rome gave its hero a section of the public lands and built a statue of him in the Forum. The story of how Horatius held the bridge became one of the great chronicles of Rome.

Macaulay's greatest work was his "History of England." His poems were written as recreation from heavier work, but in "Horatius" he composed one of the most vivid and stirring historical poems in the English language. It is a remarkable example of the power of direct narrative and gains much of its force from the short, simple words and plain recital of events as if seen by the narrator.

## HORATIUS

*By Thomas Babington, Lord Macaulay*  
(A Lay made about the Year of the City CCCLX.)

### I

Lars Porsena of Clusium,  
By the Nine Gods, he swore  
That the great house of Tarquin  
Should suffer wrong no more.  
By the Nine Gods, he swore it,  
And named a trysting day,  
And bade his messengers ride forth,  
East and west and south and north,  
To summon his array.

### II

East and west and south and north,  
The messengers ride fast,  
And tower and town and cottage  
Have heard the trumpet's blast.  
Shame on the false Etruscan  
Who lingers in his home  
When Porsena of Clusium  
Is on the march for Rome.

## III

The horsemen and the footmen  
 Are pouring in amain,  
 From many a stately marketplace,  
 From many a fruitful plain;  
 From many a lonely hamlet,  
 Which, hid by beech and pine,  
 Like an eagle's nest, hangs on the crest  
 Of purple Apennine.

## IV

From lordly Volaterrae,  
 Where scowls the far-famed hold  
 Piled by the hands of giants  
 For godlike kings of old;  
 From sea-girt Populonia,  
 Whose sentinels descry  
 Sardinia's snowy mountaintops  
 Fringing the southern sky;

## V

From the proud mart of Pisae,  
 Queen of the western waves,  
 Where ride Massilia's triremes,  
 Heavy with fair-haired slaves;  
 From where sweet Clanis wanders  
 Through corn and vines and flowers;  
 From where Cortona lifts to heaven  
 Her diadem of towers.

## VI

Tall are the oaks whose acorns  
 Drop in dark Auser's rill;  
 Fat are the stags that champ the boughs  
 Of the Ciminian hill;  
 Beyond all streams Clitumnus  
 Is to the herdsman dear;  
 Best of all pools, the fowler loves  
 The great Volsinian mere.

## VII

But now no stroke of woodman  
Is heard by Auser's rill;  
No hunter tracks the stag's green path  
Up the Ciminian hill;  
Unwatched along Clitumnus  
Grazes the milk-white steer;  
Unharm'd, the waterfowl may dip  
In the Volsinian mere.

## VIII

The harvests of Arretium,  
This year, old men shall reap;  
This year, young boys in Umbro  
Shall plunge the struggling sheep;  
And in the vats of Luna,  
This year, the must shall foam  
Round the white feet of laughing girls  
Whose sires have marched to Rome.

## IX

There be thirty chosen prophets,  
The wisest of the land,  
Who alway by Lars Porsena  
Both morn and evening stand:  
Evening and morn, the Thirty  
Have turned the verses o'er,  
Traced from the right on linen white  
By mighty seers of yore.

## X

And with one voice, the Thirty  
Have their glad answer given:  
"Go forth, go forth, Lars Porsena;  
Go forth, beloved of Heaven;  
Go, and return in glory  
To Clusium's royal dome;  
And hang round Nurscia's altars  
The golden shields of Rome."

## XI

And now hath every city  
Sent up her tale of men:  
The foot are fourscore thousand,  
The horse are thousands ten.  
Before the gates of Sutrium  
Is met the great array.  
A proud man was Lars Porsena  
Upon the trysting day.

## XII

For all the Etruscan armies  
Were ranged beneath his eye,  
And many a banished Roman,  
And many a stout ally;  
And with a mighty following  
To join the muster came  
The Tusculan Mamilius,  
Prince of the Latian name.

## XIII

But by the yellow Tiber  
Was tumult and affright:  
From all the spacious campaign  
To Rome, men took their flight.  
A mile around the city,  
The throng stopped up the ways;  
A fearful sight it was to see,  
Through two long nights and days.

## XIV

For aged folks on crutches,  
And women great with child,  
And mothers sobbing over babes  
That clung to them and smiled,  
And sick men borne in litters  
High on the necks of slaves,  
And troops of sun-burned husbandmen  
With reaping-hooks and staves,

## XV

For droves of mules and asses  
Laden with skins of wine,  
And endless flocks of goats and sheep,  
And endless herds of kine,  
And endless trains of wagons  
That creaked beneath the weight  
Of corn-sacks and of household goods,  
Choked every roaring gate.

## XVI

Now, from the rock Tarpeian,  
Could the wan burghers spy  
The line of blazing villages  
Red in the midnight sky.  
The Fathers of the City,  
They sat all night and day,  
For every hour some horseman came  
With tidings of dismay.

## XVII

To eastward and to westward  
Have spread the Tuscan bands;  
Nor house, nor fence, nor dovecote  
In Crustumarium stands.  
Verbenna down to Ostia  
Hath wasted all the plain;  
Astur hath stormed Janiculum,  
And the stout guards are slain.

## XVIII

I wis, in all the Senate,  
There was no heart so bold,  
But sore it ached, and fast it beat,  
When that ill news was told.  
Forthwith up rose the Consul,  
Up rose the Fathers all;  
In haste they girded up their gowns,  
And hied them to the wall.

## XIX

They held a council standing  
    Before the River-Gate;  
Short time was there, ye well may guess,  
    For musing or debate.  
Out spake the Consul roundly:  
    “The bridge must straight go down;  
For, since Janiculum is lost,  
    Naught else can save the town.”

## XX

Just then a scout came flying,  
    All wild with haste and fear:  
“To arms! to arms! Sir Consul:  
    Lars Porsena is here.”  
On the low hills to westward,  
    The Consul fixed his eye,  
And saw the swarthy storm of dust  
    Rise fast along the sky.

## XXI

And nearer fast and nearer  
    Doth the red whirlwind come;  
And louder still and still more loud,  
From underneath that rolling cloud,  
Is heard the trumpet's war-note proud,  
    The trampling and the hum.  
And plainly and more plainly,  
    Now through the gloom appears,  
Far to left and far to right,  
In broken gleams of dark-blue light,  
The long array of helmets bright,  
    The long array of spears.

## XXII

And plainly and more plainly,  
    Above that glimmering line,  
Now might ye see the banners  
    Of twelve fair cities shine;

But the banner of proud Clusium  
Was highest of them all,  
The terror of the Umbrian,  
The terror of the Gaul.

## XXIII

And plainly and more plainly,  
Now might the burghers know,  
By port and vest, by horse and crest,  
Each warlike Lucumo.  
There, Cilnius of Arretium  
On his fleet roan was seen;  
And Astur of the fourfold shield,  
Girt with the brand none else may wield,  
Tolumnius with the belt of gold,  
And dark Verbenna from the hold  
By reedy Thrasymene.

## XXIV

Fast by the royal standard,  
O'erlooking all the war,  
Lars Porsena of Clusium  
Sat in his ivory car.  
By the right wheel rode Mamilius,  
Prince of the Latian name;  
And by the left false Sextus,  
That wrought the deed of shame.

## XXV

But when the face of Sextus  
Was seen among the foes,  
A yell that rent the firmament  
From all the town arose.  
On the housetops was no woman  
But spat towards him and hissed,  
No child but screamed out curses,  
And shook its little fist.

## XXVI

But the Consul's brow was sad,  
 And the Consul's speech was low,  
 And darkly looked he at the wall,  
 And darkly at the foe.  
 Their van will be upon us  
 Before the bridge goes down;  
 And if they once may win the bridge,  
 What hope to save the town?

## XXVII

Then out spake brave Horatius,  
 The Captain of the Gate:  
 To every man upon this earth  
 Death cometh soon or late.  
 And how can man die better  
 Than facing fearful odds,  
 For the ashes of his fathers,  
 And the temples of his Gods,

## XXVIII

“ And for the tender mother  
 Who dandled him to rest,  
 And for the wife who nurses  
 His baby at her breast,  
 And for the holy maidens  
 Who feed the eternal flame,  
 To save them from false Sextus  
 That wrought the deed of shame?”

## XXIX

“ Hew down the bridge, Sir Consul,  
 With all the speed ye may;  
 I, with two more to help me,  
 Will hold the foe in play.  
 In yon strait path a thousand  
 May well be stopped by three.  
 Now who will stand on either hand,  
 And keep the bridge with me?”

## XXX

Then out spake Spurius Lartius;  
A Ramnian proud was he:  
“Lo, I will stand at thy right hand,  
And keep the bridge with thee.”  
And out spake strong Herminius;  
Of Titian blood was he:  
“I will abide on thy left side,  
And keep the bridge with thee.”

## XXXI

“Horatius,” quoth the Consul,  
“As thou sayest, so let it be.”  
And straight against that great array  
Forth went the dauntless Three.  
For Romans in Rome’s quarrel  
Spared neither land nor gold,  
Nor son nor wife, nor limb nor life,  
In the brave days of old.

## XXXII

Then none was for a party;  
Then all were for the state;  
Then the great man helped the poor,  
And the poor man loved the great:  
Then lands were fairly portioned;  
Then spoils were fairly sold:  
The Romans were like brothers  
In the brave days of old.

## XXXIII

Now Roman is to Roman  
More hateful than a foe,  
And the Tribunes beard the high,  
And the Fathers grind the low.  
As we wax hot in faction,  
In battle we wax cold:  
Wherefore men fight not as they fought  
In the brave days of old.

## XXXIV

Now while the Three were tightening  
 Their harness on their backs,  
 The Consul was the foremost man  
 To take in hand an axe  
 And Fathers mixed with Commons,  
 Seized hatchet, bar, and crow,  
 And smote upon the planks above,  
 And loosed the props below.

## XXXV

Meanwhile the Tuscan army,  
 Right glorious to behold,  
 Came flashing back the noonday light,  
 Rank behind rank, like surges bright  
 Of a broad sea of gold.  
 Four hundred trumpets sounded  
 A peal of warlike glee,  
 As that great host, with measured tread,  
 And spears advanced, and ensigns spread,  
 Rolled slowly towards the bridge's head,  
 Where stood the dauntless Three.

## XXXVI

The Three stood calm and silent,  
 And looked upon the foes,  
 And a great shout of laughter  
 From all the vanguard rose:  
 And forth three chiefs came spurring  
 Before that deep array;  
 To earth they sprang, their swords they drew  
 And lifted high their shields, and flew  
 To win the narrow way;

## XXXVII

Aunus from green Tifernum,  
 Lord of the Hill of Vines;  
 And Seius, whose eight hundred slaves  
 Sicken in Ilva's mines;  
 And Picus, long to Clusium

Vassal in peace and war,  
 Who led to fight his Umbrian powers  
 From that gray crag where, girt with towers,  
 The fortress of Nequinum lowers  
 O'er the pale waves of Nar.

## XXXVIII

Stout Lartius hurled down Aunus  
 Into the stream beneath:  
 Herminius struck at Seius,  
 And clove him to the teeth:  
 At Picus brave Horatius  
 Darted one fiery thrust;  
 And the proud Umbrian's gilded arms  
 Clashed in the bloody dust.

## XXXIX

Then Ocnus of Falerii  
 Rushed on the Roman Three;  
 And Lausulus of Urgo,  
 The Rover of the sea  
 And Aruns of Volsinium,  
 Who slew the great wild boar,  
 The great wild boar that had his den  
 Amidst the reeds of Cosa's fen,  
 And wasted fields, and slaughtered men,  
 Along Albinia's shore.

## XL

Herminius smote down Aruns:  
 Lartius laid Ocnus low:  
 Right to the heart of Lausulus  
 Horatius sent a blow.  
 Lie there," he cried, "fell pirate!  
 No more, aghast and pale,  
 From Ostia's walls the crowd shall mark  
 The track of thy destroying bark.  
 No more Campania's hinds shall fly  
 To woods and caverns when they spy  
 Thy thrice accursed sail."