

Thomas Chatterton (1752-70)

1 *Bristowe Tragedie:
or the Dethe of Syr Charles Bawdin*

The featherd songster chaunticleer

Han wounde hys bugle horne,
And tolde the earlie villager
The commynge of the morne:

Kynge EDWARDE sawe the ruddie streakes 5
Of lyghte eclipse the greie;
And herde the raven's crokyng throte
Proclayme the fated daie.

"Thou'rt ryght," quod hee, "for, by the Godde
"That syttes enthron'd on hyghe! 10
"CHARLES BAWDIN, and hys fellowes twaine,
"To-daie shall surelie die."

Thenne wythe a jugge of nappy ale
Hys Knyghtes dydd onne hymm waite;
"Goe tell the traytour, thatt to-daie 15
"Hee leaves thys mortall state."

Syr CANTERLONE thenne bendedd lowe,
Wythe harte brymm-fulle of woe;
Hee journey'd to the castle-gate,
And to Syr CHARLES dydd goe. 20

Butt whenne hee came, hys children twaine,
And eke hys lovyng wyfe,
Wythe brinie tears dydd wett the floore,
For goode Syr CHARLESES lyfe.

"O goode Syr CHARLES!" sayd CANTERLONE, 25

“Badde tydyngs I doe brynge.”
“Speke boldlie, manne,” sayd brave Syr CHARLES,
“Whatte says thie traytor kynge?”

“I greeve to telle, before yonne sonne
“Does fromme the welkinn flye, 30
“Hee hath uponne hys honour sworne,
“Thatt thou shalt surelie die.”

“Wee all must die,” quod brave Syr CHARLES;
“Of thatte I’m not affearde;
“Whatte bootes to lyve a little space? 35
“Thanke JESU, I’m prepar’d:

“Butt telle thye kynge, for myne hee’s not,
“I’de sooner die to-daie
“Thanne lyve hys slave, as manie are,
“Tho’ I shoulde lyve for aie.” 40

Thenne CANTERLONE hee dydd goe out,
To telle the maior straitte
To gett all thynges ynne reddyngess
For goode Syr CHARLESES fate.

Thenne Maisterr CANYNGE saughte the kynge, 45
And felle down onne hys knee;
“I’m come,” quod hee, “unto your grace
“To move your clemencye.”

Thenne quod the kynge, “Youre tale speke out,
“You have been much oure friende; 50
“Whatever youre request may bee,
“Wee wyllle to ytte attende.”

“My nobile leige! alle my request
“Ys for a nobile knyghte,
“Who, tho’ may hap hee has donne wronge, 55

“He thoghte ytte stylle was ryghte:

“Hee has a spouse and children twaine,

“Alle rewyn’d are for aie;

“Yff thatt you are resolv’d to lett

“CHARLES BAWDIN die to-daie.”

60

“Speke nott of such a traytour vile,”

The kynge ynne furie sayde;

“Before the evening starre doth sheene,

“BAWDIN shall loose hys hedde:

“Justice does loudlie for hym calle,

65

“And hee shalle have hys meede:

“Speke, Maister CANYNGE! Whatte thyng else

“Att present doe you neede?”

“My nobile leige!” goode CANYNGE sayde,

“Leave justice to our Godde,

70

“And laye the yronne rule asyde;

“Be thyne the olyve rodde.

“Was Godde to serche our hertes and reines,

“The best were synners grete;

“CHRIST’S vycarr only knowes ne synne,

75

“Ynne alle thys mortall state.

“Lett mercie rule thyne infante reigne,

“Twyllle faste thye crowne fulle sure;

“From race to race thy familie

“Alle sov’reigns shall endure:

80

“But yff wythe bloode and slaughter thou

“Beginne thy infante reigne,

“Thy crowne uponne thy childrennes brows

“Wyllle never long remayne.”

“CANYNGE, awaie! thys traytour vile 85
“Has scorn’d my power and mee;
“Howe canst thou thenne for such a manne
“Intreate my clemencye?”

“My nobile leige! the trulie brave
“Wylle val’rous actions prize, 90
“Respect a brave and nobile mynde,
“Altho’ ynne enemies.”

“CANYNGE, awaie! By Godde ynne Heav’n
“Thatt dydd mee beinge gyve,
“I wylle nott taste a bitt of breade 95
“Whilst thys Syr CHARLES dothe lyve.

“By MARIE, and alle Seinctes ynne Heav’n,
“Thys sunne shall be hys laste.”
Thenne CANYNGE dropt a brinie teare,
And from the presence paste. 100

Wyth herte brymm-fulle of gnawynge grief,
Hee to Syr CHARLES dydd goe,
And satt hymm downe uponne a stoole,
And teares beganne to flowe.

“Wee all must die,” quod brave Syr CHARLES; 105
“Whatte bootes ytte howe or whenne;
“Dethe ys the sure, the certaine fate
“Of all wee mortall menne.

“Saye why, my friend, thie honest soul
“Runns overr att thyne eye; 110
“Is ytte for my most welcome doome
“Thatt thou dost child-lyke crye?”

Quod godlie CANYNGE, “I doe weepe,
“Thatt thou so soone must dye,

“And leave thy sonnes and helpless wyfe; 115
“Tys thys thatt wettes myne eye.”

“Thenne drie the tears thatt out thyne eye
“From godlie fountaines sprynge;
“Dethe I despise, and alle the power
“Of EDWARDE, traytor kynge. 120

“Whan through the tyrant’s welcom means
“I shall resigne my lyfe,
“The Godde I serve wylle soone provyde
“For bothe mye sonnes and wyfe.

“Before I sawe the lyghtsome sunne, 125
“Thys was appointed mee;
“Shall mortal manne repyne or grudge
“Whatt Godde ordeynes to bee?

“Howe oft ynne battaile have I stoode,
“Whan thousands dy’d arounde; 130
“Whan smokyng streemes of crimson bloode
“Imbrew’d the fatten’d grounde:

“How dydd I knowe thatt ev’ry darte,
“Thatt cutte the airie waie,
“Myghte nott fynde passage toe my harte, 135
“And close myne eyes for aie?

“And shall I nowe, forr feere of dethe,
“Looke wanne and bee dysmayde?
“Ne! fromm my herte flie childyshe feere,
“Bee alle the manne display’d. 140

“Ah, goddelyke HENRIE! Godde forefende,
“And garde thee and thye sonne,
“Yff ’tis hys wylle; but yff ’tis nott,
“Why thenne hys wylle bee donne.

“My honest friende, my faulte has beene 145
 “To serve Godde and mye prynce;
“And thatt I no tyme-server am,
 “My dethe wylle soone convynce.

“Ynne Londonne citye was I borne,
 “Of parents of grete note; 150
“My fadre dydd a nobile armes
 “Emblazon onne hys cote:

“I make ne doubtte butt hee ys gone
 “Where soone I hope to goe;
“Where wee for ever shall bee blest, 155
 “From oute the reech of woe:

“Hee taughte mee justice and the laws
 “Wyth pitie to unite;
“And eke hee taughte mee howe to knowe
 “The wronge cause fromm the ryghte: 160

“Hee taughte mee wythe a prudent hande
 “To feede the hungrie poore,
“Ne lett mye sarvants dryve awaie
 “The hungrie fromme my doore:

“And none can saye, butt alle mye lyfe 165
 “I have hys wordyes kept;
“And summ’d the actyonns of the daie
 “Eche nyghte before I slept.

“I have a spouse, goe aske of her,
 “Yff I defyl’d her bedde? 170
“I have a kynge, and none can laie
 “Blacke treason onne my hedde.

“Ynne Lent, and onne the holie eve,

“Fromm fleshe I dydd refrayne;
“Whie should I thenne appeare dismay’d 175
“To leave thys worlde of payne?

“Ne! hapless HENRIE! I rejoyce,
“I shalle ne see thye dethe;
“Moste willynglie ynne thye just cause
“Doe I resign my brethe. 180

“Oh, fickle people! rewyn’d londe!
“Thou wylt kenne peace ne moe;
“Whyle RICHARD’S sonnes exalt themselves,
“Thye brookes wythe bloude wylle flowe.

“Saie, were ye tyr’d of godlie peace, 185
“And godlie HENRIE’S reigne,
“Thatt you dydd choppe youre easie daies
“For those of bloude and peyne?

“Whatte tho’ I onne a sledde bee drawne,
“And mangled by a hynde, 190
“I doe defye the traytor’s pow’r,
“Hee can ne harm my mynde;

“Whatte tho’, uphoisted onne a pole,
“Mye lymbes shall rotte ynne ayre,
“And ne ryche monument of brasse 195
“CHARLES BAWDIN’S name shall bear;

“Yett ynne the holie booke above,
“Whyche tyme can’t eate awaie,
“There wythe the sarvants of the Lorde
“Mye name shall lyve for aie. 200

“Thenne welcome dethe! for lyfe eterne
“I leave thys mortall lyfe:
“Farewell, vayne worlde, and alle that’s deare,

“Mye sonnes and lovyng wyfe!

“Nowe dethe as welcome to mee comes, 205
“As e’er the moneth of Maie;
“Nor woulde I even wyshe to lyve,
“Wyth my dere wyfe to staie.”

Quod CANYNGE, “Tys a goodlie thyng
“To bee prepar’d to die; 210
“And from thys world of peyne and grefe
“To Godde ynne Heav’n to flie.”

And nowe the bell beganne to tolle,
And claryonnes to sounde;
Syr CHARLES hee herde the horses feete 215
A prauncyng onne the grounde:

And just before the officers,
His lovyng wyfe came ynne,
Weepyng unfeigned teeres of woe,
Wythe loude and dysmalle dynne. 220

“Sweet FLORENCE! nowe I praie forbere,
“Ynne quiet lett mee die;
“Praie Godde, thatt ev’ry Christian soule
“Maye looke onne dethe as I.

“Sweet FLORENCE! why these brinie teeres? 225
“Theye washe my soule awaie,
“And almost make mee wyshe for lyfe,
“Wyth thee, sweete dame, to staie.

“Tys butt a journie I shalle goe
“Untoe the lande of blysse; 230
“Nowe, as a prooffe of husbände’s love,
“Receive thys holie kysse.”

Thenne FLORENCE, fault'ring ynne her saie,
Tremblynge these wordyes spoke,
"Ah, cruele EDWARDE! bloudie kynge! 235
"My herte ys welle nyghe broke:

"Ah, sweete Syr CHARLES! why wylt thou goe,
"Wythoute thye lovyng wyfe?
"The cruelle axe thatt cuttes thye necke,
"Ytte eke shall ende mye lyfe." 240

And nowe the officers came ynne
To bryng Syr CHARLES awaie,
Whoe turnedd toe his lovyng wyfe,
And thus toe her dydd saie:

"I goe to lyfe, and nott to dethe; 245
"Truste thou ynne Godde above,
"And teache thye sonnes to feare the Lorde,
"And ynne theyre hertes hym love:

"Teache them to runne the nobile race
"Thatt I theyre fader runne: 250
"FLORENCE! shou'd dethe thee take — adieu!
"Yee officers, leade onne."

Thenne FLORENCE rav'd as anie madde,
And dydd her tresses tere;
"Oh! staie, mye husbände! lorde! and lyfe!" — 255
Syr CHARLES thenne dropt a teare.

"Tyll tyredd oute wythe ravyng loud,
Shee fellen onne the flore;
Syr CHARLES exerted alle hys myghte,
And march'd fromm oute the dore. 260

Uponne a sledde hee mounted thenne,
Wythe lookes fulle brave and swete;

Lookes, thatt enshone ne moe concern
Thanne anie ynne the strete.

Before hym went the council-menne, 265
Ynne scarlett robes and golde,
And tassils spanglynge ynne the sunne,
Muche glorious to beholde:

The Freers of Seincte AUGUSTYNE next
Appeared to the syghte, 270
Alle cladd ynne homelie russett weedes,
Of godlie monkysh plyghte:

Ynne diffraunt partes a godlie psaume
Moste sweetlie theye dydd chaunt;
Behynde theyre backes syx mynstrelles came, 275
Who tun'd the strunge bataunt.

Thenne fyve-and-twentye archers came;
Echone the bowe dydd bende,
From rescue of kynge HENRIES friends
Syr CHARLES forr to defend. 280

Bolde as a lyon came Syr CHARLES,
Drawne onne a clothe-layde sledde,
Bye two blacke stedes ynne trappynges white,
Wyth plumes uponne theyre hedde:

Behynde hym fyve-and-twentye moe 285
Of archers stronge and stoute,
Wyth bended bowe echone ynne hande,
Marched ynne goodlie route:

Seincte JAMESES Freers marched next,
Echone hys parte dyd chaunt; 290
Behynde theyre backs syx mynstrelles came,
Who tun'd the strunge bataunt:

Thenne came the maior and eldermenne,
Ynne clothe of scarlett deck't;
And theyre attendyng menne echone, 295
Lyke Easterne princes trickt:

And after them, a multitude
Of citizenns dydd thronge;
The wyndowes were alle fulle of heddes,
As hee dydd passe alonge. 300

And whenne hee came to the hyghe crosse,
Syr CHARLES dydd turne and saie,
"O Thou, thatt savest manne fromme synne,
"Washe mye soule clean thys daie!"

Att the grete mynsterr wyndowe sat 305
The kynge ynne myckle state,
To see CHARLES BAWDIN goe alonge
To hys most welcom fate.

Soone as the sledde drewe nyghe enowe,
Thatt EDWARDE hee myghte heare, 310
The brave Syr CHARLES hee dydd stande uppe,
And thus hys wordes declare:

"Thou seest mee, EDWARDE! traytour vile!
"Expos'd to infamie;
"Butt bee assur'd, disloyall manne! 315
"I'm greaterr nowe thanne thee.

"Bye foule procedyngs, murdre, bloude,
"Thou wearest nowe a crowne;
"And hast appoynted mee to dye,
"By power nott thyne owne. 320

"Thou thynkest I shall dye to-daie;

“I have beene dede ’till nowe,
“And soone shall lyve to weare a crowne
“For aie uponne my browe:

“Whylst thou, perhaps, for som few yeares, 325
“Shalt rule thys fickle lande,
“To lett them knowe howe wyde the rule
“Twixt kynge and tyrant hande:

“Thye pow’r unjust, thou traytour slave!
“Shall falle onne thye owne hedde”— 330
Fromm out of hearyng of the kynge
Departed thenne the sledde.

Kynge EDWARDE’S soule rush’d to hys face,
Hee turn’d hys hedde awaie,
And to hys broder GLOUCESTER 335
Hee thus dydd speke and saie:

“To hym that soe-much-dreaded dethe
“Ne ghastlie terrors brynge,
“Beholde the manne! hee spake the truthe,
“Hee’s greater thanne a kynge!” 340

“Soe lett hym die!” Duke RICHARD sayde;
“And maye echone oure foes
“Bende downe theyre neckes to bloudie axe,
“And feede the carryon crowes.”

And nowe the horses gentlie drewe 345
Syr CHARLES uppe the hyghe hylle;
The axe dydd glysterr ynne the sunne,
Hys pretious bloude to spylle.

Syrr CHARLES dydd uppe the scaffold goe,
As uppe a gilded carre 350
Of victorye, bye val’rous chiefs

Gayn'd ynne the bloudie warre:

And to the people hee dydd saie,
"Beholde you see mee dye,
"For servynge loyally mye kynge, 355
"Mye kynge most rightfullie.

"As longe as EDWARDE rules thys lande,
"Ne quiet you wylle knowe;
"Youre sonnes and husbandes shalle bee slayne,
"And brookes wythe bloude shalle flowe. 360

"You leave youre goode and lawfullie kynge,
"Whenne ynne adversitye;
"Lyke mee, untoe the true cause stycke,
"And for the true cause dye."

Thenne hee, wyth preestes, uponne hys knees, 365
A pray'r to Godde dydd make,
Beseechyng hym unto hymselfe
Hys partyng soule to take.

Thenne, kneelyng downe, hee layd hys hedde
Most seemlie onne the blocke; 370
Whyche fromme hys bodie fayre at once
The able heddeshanne stroke:

And oute the bloude beganne to flowe,
And rounde the scaffolde twyne;
And teares, enow to washe't awaie, 375
Dydd flowe fromme each mann's eyne.

The bloudie axe hys bodie fayre
Ynnto foure parties cutte;
And ev'rye parte, and eke hys hedde,
Uponne a pole was putte. 380

One parte dydd rotte onne Kynwulph-hylle,
One onne the mynster-tower,
And one from off the castle-gate
The crowen dydd devoure:

The other onne Seyncte Powle's goode gate, 385
A dreery spectacle;
Hys hedde was plac'd onne the hyghe crosse,
Ynne hyghe-streete most nobile.

Thus was the ende of BAWDIN'S fate:
Godde prosper longe oure kynge, 390
And grante hee maye, wyth BAWDIN'S soule,
Ynne heav'n Godd's mercie synge!

1768

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