

Jean Ingelow (1820-97)

1 *The High Tide on the Coast of Lincolnshire, 1571*

The old mayor climbed the belfry tower,  
The ringers ran by two, by three;  
“Pull, if ye never pulled before;  
Good ringers, pull your best,” quoth he.  
“Play uppe, play uppe, O Boston bells! 5  
Ply all your changes, all your swells,  
Play uppe, “The Brides of Enderby!”

Men say it was a stolen tyde —  
The Lord that sent it, He knows all;  
But in myne ears doth still abide 10  
The message that the bells let fall:  
And there was naught of strange, beside  
The flights of mews and peewits pied,  
By millions crouched on the old sea-wall.

I sat and spun within the doore, 15  
My thread brake off, I raised myne eyes!  
The level sun, like ruddy ore,  
Lay sinking in the barren skies;  
And dark against day’s golden death  
She moved where Lindis wandereth — 20  
My sonne’s faire wife, Elizabeth.

“Cusha! Cusha! Cusha!” calling,  
Ere the early dews were falling,  
Farre away I heard her song.  
“Cusha! Cusha!” all along, 25  
Where the reedy Lindis floweth,  
Floweth, floweth,  
From the meads where melick groweth,  
Faintly came her milking-song.

“Cusha! Cusha! Cusha!” calling, 30  
“For the dews will soon be falling;  
Leave your meadow grasses mellow,

Mellow, mellow;  
 Quit your cowslips, cowslips yellow;  
 Come uppe, Whitefoot; come uppe, Lightfoot; 35  
 Quit the stalks of parsley hollow,  
 Hollow, hollow;  
 Come uppe, Jetty, rise and follow,  
 From the clovers lift your head;  
 Come uppe, Whitefoot; come uppe, Lightfoot; 40  
 Come uppe, Jetty, rise and follow,  
 Jetty, to the milking-shed.”

If it be long, aye, long ago,  
 When I beginne to think howe long,  
 Againe I hear the Lindis flow, 45  
 Swift as an arrowe, sharpe and strong;  
 And all the aire it seemeth mee  
 Bin full of floating bells (sayth shee),  
 That ring the tune of Enderby.

Alle fresh the level pasture lay, 50  
 And not a shadowe mote be seene,  
 Save where full fyve good miles away  
 The steeple towered from out the greene;  
 And lo! the great bell farre and wide  
 Was heard in all the country side 55  
 That Saturday at eventide.

The swannerds where their sedges are  
 Moved on in sunset’s golden breath,  
 The shepherde lads I heard afarre,  
 And my sonne’s wife Elizabeth; 60  
 Till floating o’er the grassy sea  
 Came downe that kyndly message free,  
 “The Brides of Mavis Enderby.”

Then some looked uppe into the sky,  
 And all along where Lindis flows, 65  
 To where the goodly vessels lie,  
 And where the lordly steeple shows.  
 They sayde, “And why should this thing be,  
 What danger lowers by land or sea?  
 They ring the tune of Enderby! 70

“For evil news from Mablethorpe,  
Of pyrate galleys warping downe;  
For shippes ashore beyond the Scorpe,  
They have not spared to wake the towne;  
But while the west bin red to see, 75  
And storms be none, and pyrates flee,  
Why ring “The Brides of Enderby?”

I looked without, and lo! my sonne  
Came riding downe with might and main,  
He raised a shout as he drew on, 80  
Till all the welkin rang again,  
“Elizabeth! Elizabeth!”  
(A sweeter woman ne’er drew breath  
Than my sonne’s wife Elizabeth.)

“The old sea-wall (he cried) is downe, 85  
The rising tide comes on apace,  
And boats adrift in yonder towne  
Go sailing up the market-place.”  
He shook as one that looks in death:  
“God save you, mother!” straight he saith; 90  
“Where is my wife Elizabeth?”

“Good sonne, where Lindis winds away,  
With her two bairns I marked her long;  
And ere yon bells beganne to play,  
Afar I heard her milking-song.” 95  
He looked across the grassy sea,  
To right, to left, “Ho, Enderby!”  
They rang “The Brides of Enderby!”

With that he cried and beat his breast;  
For lo! along the river’s bed 100  
A mighty eygre reared his crest,  
And uppe the Lindis raging sped.  
It swept with thunderous noises loud;  
Shaped like a curling, snow-white cloud,  
Or like a demon in a shroud. 105

And rearing Lindis backward pressed,

Shook all her trembling bankes amaine;  
Then madly at the eygre's breast  
Flung uppe her weltering walls again.  
Then bankes came down with ruin and rout — 110  
Then beaten foam flew round about —  
Then all the mighty floods were out.

So farre, so fast the eygre drave,  
The heart had hardly time to beat  
Before a shallow, seething wave 115  
Sobbed in the grasses at our feet:  
The feet had hardly time to flee  
Before it brake against the knee,  
And all the world was in the sea.

Upon the rooffe we sat that night, 120  
The noise of bells went sweeping by;  
I marked the lofty beacon light  
Stream from the church-tower, red and high —  
A lurid mark and dread to see;  
And awsome bells they were to mee, 125  
That in the dark rang "Enderby."

They rang the sailor lads to guide  
From rooffe to rooffe who fearless rowed;  
And I — my son was at my side,  
And yet the ruddy beacon glowed: 130  
And yet he moaned beneath his breath,  
"O come in life, or come in death!  
O lost! my love Elizabeth."

And didst thou visit him no more?  
Thou didst, thou didst, my daughter deare! 135  
The waters laid thee at his doore,  
Ere yet the early dawn was cleare.  
Thy pretty bairns in fast embrace,  
The lifted sun shone on thy face,  
Downe drifted to thy dwelling-place. 140

That flow strewed wrecks about the grass;  
That ebbe swept out the flocks to sea;  
A fatal ebbe and flow, alas!

To manye more than myne and mee:  
But each will mourn his own (shee sayth), 145  
And sweeter woman ne'er drew breath  
Than my sonne's wife Elizabeth.

I shall never hear her more  
By the reedy Lindis shore,  
"Cusha! Cusha! Cusha!" calling, 150  
Ere the early dewes be falling;  
I shall never hear her song,  
"Cusha! Cusha!" all along,  
Where the sunny Lindis floweth,  
Floweth, floweth; 155

From the meads where melick groweth,  
When the water, winding down,  
Onward floweth to the town.

I shall never see her more  
Where the reeds and rushes quiver, 160  
Shiver, quiver;  
Stand beside the sobbing river,  
Sobbing, throbbing in its falling,  
To the sandy, lonesome shore;  
I shall never hear her calling, 165  
"Leave your meadow grasses mellow,  
Mellow, mellow;  
Quit your cowslips, cowslips yellow;  
Come uppe, Whitefoot; come uppe, Lightfoot;  
Quit your pipes of parsley hollow, 170  
Hollow, hollow:  
Come uppe, Lightfoot, rise and follow:  
Lightfoot, Whitefoot,  
From your clovers lift the head;  
Come uppe, Jetty, follow, follow, 175  
Jetty, to the milking-shed."

1863

(From G. B. Smith, ed. *Illustrated British Ballads, Old and New*. Vol. 1. London, 1881)