

Thomas Osborne Davis (1814-45)

2 *The Sack of Baltimore*

I.

The summer sun is falling soft on Carbery's hundred isles —  
The summer's sun is gleaming still through Gabriel's rough defiles —  
Old Inisherkin's crumbled fane looks like a moulting bird;  
And in a calm and sleepy swell the ocean tide is heard;  
The hookers lie upon the beach; the children cease their play; 5  
The gossips leave the little inn; the households kneel to pray —  
And full of love, and peace, and rest — its daily labour o'er —  
Upon that cosy creek there lay the town of Baltimore.

II.

A deeper rest, a starry trance, has come with midnight there;  
No sound, except that throbbing wave, in earth, or sea, or air. 10  
The massive capes, and ruined towers, seem conscious of the calm;  
The fibrous sod and stunted trees are breathing heavy balm.  
So still the night, these two long barques, round Dunashad that glide,  
Must trust their oars — methinks not few — against the ebbing tide —  
Oh! some sweet mission of true love must urge them to the shore — 15  
They bring some lover to his bride, who sighs in Baltimore!

III.

All, all asleep within each roof along that rocky street,  
And these must be the lover's friends, with gentle gliding feet —  
A stifled gasp! a dreamy noise! "the roof is in a flame!"  
From out their beds, and to their doors, rush maid, and sire, and dame — 20  
And meet, upon the threshold stone, the gleaming sabre's fall,  
And o'er each black and bearded face the white or crimson shawl —  
The yell of "Allah" breaks above the prayer, and shriek, and roar —  
Oh, blessed God! the Algerine is lord of Baltimore!

IV.

Then flung the youth his naked hand against the shearing sword; 25  
 Then sprung the mother on the brand with which her son was gored;  
 Then sunk the grandsire on the floor, his grand-babes clutching wild;  
 Then fled the maiden moaning faint, and nestled with the child;  
 But see, yon pirate strangled lies, and crushed with splashing heel,  
 While o'er him in an Irish hand there sweeps his Syrian steel — 30  
 Though virtue sink, and courage fail, and misers yield their store,  
 There's *one* hearth well avengéd in the sack of Baltimore!

V.

Mid-summer morn, in woodland nigh, the birds began to sing —  
 They see not now the milking maids — deserted is the spring!  
 Mid-summer day — this gallant rides from distant Bandon's town — 35  
 These hookers crossed from stormy Skull, that skiff from Affadown;  
 They only found the smoking walls, with neighbours' blood besprent,  
 And on the strewed and trampled beach awhile they wildly went —  
 Then dashed to sea, and passed Cape Cléire, and saw five leagues before  
 The pirate galleys vanishing that ravaged Baltimore. 40

VI.

Oh! some must tug the galley's oar, and some must tend the steed —  
 This boy will bear a Scheik's chibouk, and that a Bey's jerreed.  
 Oh! some are for the arsenals, by beauteous Dardanelles;  
 And some are in the caravan to Mecca's sandy dells.  
 The maid that Bandon gallant sought is chosen for the Dey — 45  
 She's safe — she's dead — she stabbed him in the midst of his Serai;  
 And, when to die a death of fire, that noble maid they bore,  
 She only smiled — O'Driscoll's child — she thought of Baltimore.

VII.

'Tis two long years since sunk the town beneath that bloody band,  
 And all around its trampled hearths a larger concourse stand, 50  
 Where, high upon a gallows tree, a yelling wretch is seen —  
 'Tis Hackett of Dungarvan — he, who steered the Algerine!  
 He fell amid a sullen shout, with scarce a passing prayer,  
 For he had slain the kith and kin of many a hundred there —  
 Some muttered of MacMurchadh, who brought the Norman o'er — 55

Some cursed him with Iscariot, that day in Baltirnore.

(From *The Poems of Thomas Davis*. With Notes, Historical Illustrations, etc, and an Introduction by John Mitchel. New York, 1854)