





He showed him his ships with their hundred oars,  
 And their sides like a castle wall,  
 That fetch home the plunder of all the world,  
 At the Kaiser's beck and call.

He showed him all nations of every tongue 65  
 That are bred beneath the sun,  
 How they flowed together in Micklegard street  
 As the brooks flow all into one.

He showed him the shops of the china ware,  
 And of silk and sendal also, 70  
 And he showed him the baths and the waterpipes  
 On arches aloft that go.

He showed him ostrich and unicorn,  
 Ape, lion, and tiger keen;  
 And elephants wise roared 'Hail Kaiser!' 75  
 As though they had Christians been.

He showed him the hoards of the dragons and trolls,  
 Rare jewels and heaps of gold ——  
 'Hast thou seen, in all thy hundred years,  
 Such as these, thou king so old?' 80

Now that cunning Kaiser was a scholar wise,  
 And could of gramarye,  
 And he cast a spell on that old old Balt,  
 Till lowly and meek spake he.

'Oh oft have I heard of the Micklegard, 85  
 What I held for chapmen's lies;  
 But now do I know of the Micklegard,  
 By the sight of mine own eyes.

'Woden in Valhalla,  
 But thou on earth art God; 90  
 And he that dare withstand thee, Kaiser,  
 On his own head lies his blood.'

Then out and spake that little Baltung,

Rode at the king's right knee,  
 Quoth 'Fridigern slew false Kaiser Valens,  
 And he died like you or me.' 95

'And who art thou, thou pretty bold boy,  
 Rides at the king's right knee?'  
 'Oh I am the Baltung, boy Alaric,  
 And as good a man as thee.' 100

'As good as me, thou pretty bold boy,  
 With down upon thy chin?'  
 'Oh a spae-wife laid a doom on me,  
 The best of thy realm to win.'

'If thou be so fierce, thou little wolf cub 105  
 Or ever thy teeth be grown;  
 Then I must guard my two young sons  
 Lest they should lose their own.'

'Oh, it's I will guard your two lither lads,  
 In their burgh beside the sea, 110  
 And it's I will prove true man to them  
 If they will prove true to me.

'But it's you must warn your two lither lads,  
 And warn them bitterly,  
 That if I shall find them two false Kaisers, 115  
 High hanged they both shall be.'

Now they are gone into the Kaiser's palace  
 To eat the peacock fine,  
 And they are gone into the Kaiser's palace  
 To drink the good Greek wine. 120

The Kaiser alone, and the old old Balt,  
 They sat at the cedar board;  
 And round them served on the bended knee  
 Full many a Roman lord.

'What ails thee, what ails thee, friend Athanarich? 125  
 What makes thee look so pale?'

'I fear I am poisoned, thou cunning Kaiser,  
For I feel my heart-strings fail.

'Oh would I had kept that great great oath  
I swore by the horse's head, 130  
I would never set foot on Roman ground  
Till the day that I lay dead.

'Oh would I were home in Caucaland,  
To hear my harpers play,  
And to drink my last of the nut-brown ale, 135  
While I gave the gold rings away.

'Oh would I were home in Caucaland,  
To hear the Gothmen's horn,  
And watch the waggons, and brown brood mares  
And the tents where I was born. 140

'But now I must die between four stone walls  
In Byzant beside the sea:  
And as thou shalt deal with my little Baltung,  
So God shall deal with thee.'

The Kaiser he purged himself with oaths, 145  
And he buried him royally,  
And he set on his barrow an idol of gold,  
Where all Romans must bow the knee.

And now the Goths are the Kaiser's men,  
And guard him with lance and sword, 150  
And the little Baltung is his sworn son-at-arms,  
And eats at the Kaiser's board.

And the Kaiser's two sons are two false white lads  
That a clerk may beat with cane.  
The clerk that should beat that little Baltung 155  
Would never sing mass again.

Oh the gates of Rome they are steel without,  
And beaten gold within:  
But they shall fly wide to the little Baltung

With the down upon his chin. 160

Oh the fairest flower in the Kaiser's garden  
Is Rome and Italian land:  
But it all shall fall to the little Baltung  
When he shall take lance in hand.

And when he is parting the plunder of Rome, 165  
He shall pay for this song of mine,  
Neither maiden nor land, neither jewel nor gold,  
But one cup of Italian wine.

*1864*

(From *Poems*. London: Macmillan, 1889)