

Gerald Massey (1828-1907)

2 *Sir Richard Grenville's Last Fight*

Our second Richard Lion-Heart,
In days of great Queen Bess,
He did this deed of righteous rage,
And true old nobleness;
With wrath heroic that was nurst 5
To bear the fieriest battle-burst,
When willing foes should wreak their worst.

Signalled the English Admiral,
"Weigh or cut anchors." For
A Spanish fleet bore down in all 10
The majesty of war,
Athwart our tack for many a mile;
As there we lay off Florez Isle,
Our crews half sick; all tired of toil.

Eleven of our twelve ships escaped, 15
Sir Richard stood alone!
Though they were three-and-fifty-sail —
A hundred men to one,
The old Sea-Rover would not run,
So long as he had man or gun; 20
But he could die when all was done.

"The devil has broken loose, my lads,
In shape of Popish Spain;
And we must sink him in the sea,
Or hound him home again; 25
Now, you old sea-dogs, show your paws!
Have at them, tooth, and nail, and claws."
And then his long bright blade he draws.

The deck was cleared; the boatswain blew;
The grim sea-lions stand, 30
The death-fires lit in every eye:

The burning match in hand;
With mail of glorious intent
All hearts were clad; and in they went,
A force that cut through where 'twas sent. 35

“Push home, my hardy pikemen!
For we play a desperate part;
To-day, my gunners, let them feel
The pulse of England's heart!
They shall remember long that we 40
Once lived; and think how shamefully
We shook them! one to fifty-three.”

With face of one who cheerly goes
To meet his doom, that day,
Sir Richard sprang upon his foes: 45
The foremost gave him way;
His round shot smasht them through and through;
The great white splinters fiercely flew:
And madder grew his fighting few.

They clasp the little ship “Revenge,” 50
As in the arms of fire;
They run aboard her, six at once;
Hearts beat and guns leap higher:
Through bloody gaps the boarders swarm;
But still our British stay the storm; 55
The bulwark in their breast is firm.

Ship after ship, like broken waves
That wash upon a rock,
Those mighty galleons fall back foiled,
And shattered from the shock: 60
With fire she answers all their blows;
Again, again in pieces strows
The burning girdle of her foes.

Through all the night the great white storm
Of worlds in silence rolled; 65
Sirius with his sapphire sparkle;
Mars in ruddy gold;

Heaven lookt, with stillness terrible,
Down on a fight most fierce and fell:
A sea transfigured into hell. 70

Some know not they are wounded
Till 'tis slippery where they stand;
Some with their own good blood make fast
The pike-staff to their hand;
Wild faces glow through lurid night, 75
With sweat of spirit shining bright:
Only the dead on deck turn white.

At daybreak the flame-picture fades,
In blackness and in blood;
There! after fifteen hours of fight, 80
The unconquered Sea-King stood,
Defying all the powers of Spain:
Fifteen Armadas hurled in vain;
And fifteen hundred foemen slain.

Around that little bark "Revenge," 85
The baffled Spaniards ride
At distance. Two of their good ships
Were sunken at her side,
The rest lie round her in a ring,
As round the dying lion-king, 90
The dogs, afraid of his death-spring.

Our pikes all broken; powder spent;
Sails, masts to shreds were blown;
And with her dead and wounded crew
The ship was going down! 95
Sir Richard's wounds were hot and deep;
Then cried he, with a proud pale lip,
"Ho! gunner, split and sink the ship;

"Make ready now, my mariners,
To go aloft with me: 100
That nothing to the Spaniard
May remain of victory.
They cannot take us, nor we yield;

So let us leave our battle-field
Under the shelter of God's shield." 105

They had not heart to dare fulfil
The stern commander's word;
With bloody hands, and weeping eyes,
They carried him aboard
The Spaniard's ship; and round him stand 110
The warriors of his wasted band.
Then said he, feeling death at hand,

"Here die I, Richard Grenville,
With a joyful and quiet mind;
I reach a soldier's end: I leave 115
A soldier's fame behind;
Who for his queen and country fought,
For honour and religion wrought,
And died as a true soldier ought."

Earth never returned a worthier trust 120
For hand of Heaven to take,
Since Arthur's sword, Excalibur,
Was cast into the lake,
And the king's grievous wounds were dressed
And healed by weeping queens who blessed, 125
And bore him to a valley of rest.

Old heroes who could grandly do
As they could greatly dare,
A vesture very glorious
Their shining spirits wear, 130
Of noble deeds. God give us grace,
That we may see such face to face,
In our great day that comes apace.

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