

**BALLADS OF BLUE
WATER AND
OTHER POEMS**

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Ballads of Blue Water and Other Poems by James Jeffrey Roche

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E. L.

BALLADS OF BLUE WATER
AND OTHER POEMS

THE FIGHT OF THE "ARMSTRONG"
PRIVATEER

TELL the story to your sons
Of the gallant days of yore,
When the brig of seven guns
Fought the fleet of seven score,
From the set of sun till morn, through the long
September night —
Ninety men against two thousand, and the ninety
won the fight
In the harbor of Fayal the Azore.

Three lofty British ships came a-sailing to Fayal :
One was a line-of-battle ship, and two were frigates
tall ;
Nelson's valiant men of war, brave as Britons ever
are,
Manned the guns they served so well at Aboukir
and Trafalgar.

2 *THE FIGHT OF THE "ARMSTRONG"*

Lord Dundonald and his fleet at Jamaica far
away

Waited eager for their coming, fretted sore at their
delay.

There was loot for British valor on the Mississippi
coast

In the beauty and the booty that the Creole cities
boast ;

There were rebel knaves to swing, there were pris-
oners to bring

Home in fetters to old England for the glory of the
King !

At the setting of the sun and the ebbing of the
tide

Came the great ships one by one, with their portals
opened wide,

And their cannon frowning down on the castle and
the town

And the privateer that lay close inside ;

Came the eighteen gun *Carnation*, and the *Rota*,
forty-four,

And the triple-decked *Plantagenet* an admiral's
pennon bore ;

And the privateer grew smaller as their topmasts
towered taller,

And she bent her springs and anchored by the
castle on the shore.

Spake the noble Portuguese to the stranger :

 " Have no fear ;

They are neutral waters these, and your ship is
 sacred here

As if fifty stout armadas stood to shelter you from
 harm,

For the honor of the Briton will defend you from
 his arm."

But the privateersman said, " Well we know the
 Englishmen,

And their faith is written red in the Dartmoor
 slaughter pen.

Come what fortune God may send, we will fight
 them to the end,

And the mercy of the sharks may spare us then."

" Seize the pirate where she lies ! " cried the Eng-
 lish admiral :

" If the Portuguese protect her, all the worse for
 Portugal ! "

And four launches at his bidding leaped impa-
 tient for the fray,

Speeding shoreward where the Armstrong, grim
 and dark and ready, lay.

Twice she hailed and gave them warning ; but the
 feeble menace scorning,

On they came in splendid silence, till a cable's
 length away —

4 *THE FIGHT OF THE "ARMSTRONG"*

Then the Yankee pivot spoke ; Pico's thousand
 echoes woke ;
And four baffled, beaten launches drifted helpless
 on the bay.

Then the wrath of Lloyd arose till the lion roared
 again,
And he called out all his launches and he called
 five hundred men ;
And he gave the word " No quarter ! " and he sent
 them forth to smite.
Heaven help the foe before him when the Briton
 comes in might !
Heaven helped the little Armstrong in her hour of
 bitter need ;
God Almighty nerved the heart and guided well
 the arm of Reid.

Launches to port and starboard, launches forward
 and aft,
Fourteen launches together striking the little craft.
They hacked at the boarding - nettings, they
 swarmed above the rail ;
But the Long Tom roared from his pivot and the
 grape-shot fell like hail :
Pike and pistol and cutlass, and hearts that knew
 not fear,

Bulwarks of brawn and mettle, guarded the privateer.

And ever where fight was fiercest, the form of Reid
was seen ;

Ever where foes drew nearest, his quick sword fell
between.

Once in the deadly strife
The boarders' leader pressed
Forward of all the rest
Challenging life for life ;
But ere their blades had crossed,
A dying sailor tossed
His pistol to Reid, and cried,
" Now riddle the lubber's hide ! "

But the privateersman laughed, and flung the
weapon aside,

And he drove his blade to the hilt, and the foeman
gaped and died.

Then the boarders took to their launches laden
with hurt and dead,

But little with glory burdened, and out of the bat-
tle fled.

Now the tide was at flood again, and the night was
almost done,

When the sloop-of-war came up with her odds of
two to one,

6 *THE FIGHT OF THE "ARMSTRONG"*

And she opened fire ; but the Armstrong answered
her, gun for gun,
And the gay Carnation wilted in half an hour of sun.

Then the Armstrong, looking seaward, saw the
mighty seventy-four,
With her triple tier of cannon, drawing slowly to
the shore.

And the dauntless captain said : " Take our
wounded and our dead,

Bear them tenderly to land, for the Armstrong's
days are o'er ;

But no foe shall tread her deck, and no flag above
it wave —

To the ship that saved our honor we will give a
shipman's grave."

So they did as he commanded, and they bore their
mates to land

With the figurehead of Armstrong and the good
sword in his hand.

Then they turned the Long Tom downward, and
they pierced her oaken side,

And they cheered her, and they blessed her, and
they sunk her in the tide.

Tell the story to your sons,
When the haughty stranger boasts