

**BALLADES OF OLDE
FRANCE, ALSACE,
AND OLDE HOLLAND**

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Ballades of Olde France, Alsace, and Olde Holland by Frank Horridge

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Library of
CALIFORNIA

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PREFACE

FEW pursuits are more interesting than that of delving amongst the mouldering ruins of the past, and examining with care and close scrutiny the disappearing data, fading evidence, half-obliterated texts and awe-inspiring relics of ever receding ages, over which the ocean of oblivion is slowly, gradually, silently advancing. It is the vocation of some and the hobby of others. To build up again after the work of rescue, from fragments and faint indications, bygone eras of civilisation on which the haze of distance in time has descended like a great enveloping curtain is for many a life's work and a source of infinite enjoyment. The archæologist, the historian, the lexicographer each has his province. The narrator of legendary tales follows in their wake as a gleaner in that wide field that they have made their own, and it is but natural that he should borrow for his purpose a little here and a little there from the treasures they have gathered together. Their task is to collect, order, co-ordinate; his to spin a web of fancy round some object in their treasure-houses and to throw upon it such a variegated light as shall cause it to radiate forth in many coloured scintillations. Their paths lead them amongst a multitude of realities embedded in the circumjacent obscurity, but which the lamp of research enables them to lay bare and define; he in his wanderings rambles along byways and mazy lanes, through dark woodland glades into the mystery-laden

air of cloister or castle. There the spirits of the past still lurk and it is their whisperings that he has to chronicle.

It is to the lexicographer that he is most indebted. Whoever has turned the pages of that monument of literary labour, the *New English Dictionary*, must have been struck by the frequent recurrence of the tombstone-mark of obsolete expressions, and each volume must have appeared to him to be in a very large measure a cemetery of words. And yet how much lies in this common burial-ground of our forefathers' expressions that might with infinite advantage be recalled from the past to enrich the literary portion of our language and to give pith and point in some degree to that which we use in our daily life. There are apt expressions like 'to bite the law by the nose,' *i.e.*, to offend the law, 'to be a dog at a catch,' or to be skilful, 'to bar one bye and main,' or to close all issues to one, and many others which are full of raciness; there are words like avow and reclaim, both substantives, which are much to be preferred to the modern words avowal and reclamation, because they are shorter, clearer, more sonorous. And in returning to the idiom of the past we should be drawing nearer to that of Shakespeare. It is for these reasons and because old words and archaic expressions are in their right place in a ballad that free use has been made of them in the text, a course which had already been followed by Tom Taylor in his exquisite version of the

ballads of Brittany, and by others. It has not been possible to include in this edition many literary notes prepared to illustrate the use by great writers of the archaic expressions employed, which, wherever it was possible, have been verified in the *New English Dictionary*, and twelve of the series or collection of ballads have also been temporarily omitted. Owing to the nature of the subject slight errors are likely to occur, and for these, if after repeated revision there are any, I must ask for the leniency of the reader or critic.

F. H.

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