

The Ballad of Sir Patrick Spens



In the reign of Alexander III of Scotland, his daughter Margaret was escorted by a large party of nobles to Norway for her marriage to King Eric; on the return journey many of them were drowned. Twenty years later, after Alexander's death, his grand-daughter Margaret, the Maid of Norway, was heiress to the Scottish throne, and on the voyage to Scotland she died.

The ballad; which exists in several versions, combines these two incidents.

Sir Patrick Spens

The King sits in Dunfermline town,
Drinking the blood-red wine;
"O where shall I get a skeely skipper
To sail this ship or mine?"

Then up and spake an eldern knight,
Sat at the King's right knee:
"Sir Patrick Spens is the best sailor
That ever sailed the sea."

The King has written a broad letter,
And sealed it with his hand,
And sent it to Sir Patrick Spens,
Was walking on the strand.

"To Noroway, to Noroway,
To Noroway o'er the foam;
The King's daughter of Noroway,
'Tis thou must fetch her home."

The first line that Sir Patrick read,
A loud laugh laughed he;
The next line that Sir Patrick read,
The tear blinded his ee.

"O who is this has done this deed,
Has told the King of me,

To send us out at this time of the year,
To sail upon the sea?

"Be it wind, be it wet, be it hail, be it sleet,
Our ship must sail the foam;
The king's daughter of Noroway,
'Tis we must fetch her home."

They hoisted their sails on Monenday morn,
With all the speed they may;
And they have landed in Noroway
Upon a Wodensday

They had not been a week, a week,
In Noroway but twae,
When that the lords of Noroway
Began aloud to say, -

"Ye Scottishmen spend all our King's gowd,
And all our Queenis fee."
"Ye lie, ye lie, ye liars loud!
So loud I hear ye lie.

"For I brought as much of the white monie
As gane my men and me,
And a half-fou of the good red gowd
Out o'er the sea with me.

"Make ready, make ready, my merry men all,
Our good ship sails the morn."
"Now, ever alack, my master dear
I fear a deadly storm.

"I saw the new moon late yestreen
With the old moon in her arm;
And if we go to sea, master,
I fear we'll come to harm."

They had not sailed a league, a league,
A league but barely three,
When the lift grew dark, and the wind blew loud,
And gurlly grew the sea.

The ankers brake and the top-masts lap,
It was such a deadly storm;

And the waves came o'er the broken ship
Till all her sides were torn.

"O where will I get a good sailor
Will take my helm in hand,
Till I get up to the tall top-mast
To see if I can spy land?"

"O here am I, a sailor good,
Will take the helm in hand,
Till you go up to the tall top-mast,
But I fear you'll ne'er spy land."

He had not gone a step, a step,
A step but barely ane,
When a bolt flew out of the good ship's side,
And the salt sea came in.

"Go fetch a web of the silken cloth,
Another of the twine,
And wap them into our good ship's side,
And let not the sea come in."

They fetched a web of the silken cloth,
Another of the twine,
And they wapp'd them into the good ship's side,
But still the sea came in.

O loth, both, were our good Scots lords
To wet their cork-heel'd shoon,
But long ere all the play was play'd
They wet their hats aboon.

And many was the feather-bed
That fluttered on the foam;
And many was the good lord's son
That never more came home.

The ladies wrang their fingers white,
The maidens tore their hair,
All for the sake of their true loves,
For them they'll see nae mair.

O lang, lang may the maidens sit
With their gold combs in their hair,

All waiting for their own dear loves,
For them they'll see nae mair.

O forty miles of Aberdeen,
'Tis fifty fathoms deep;
And there lies good Sir Patrick Spens,
With the Scots lords at his feet.