

Horatius At The Bridge - song lyrics

American Old-time song lyrics from www.traditionalmusic.co.uk

HORATIUS AT THE BRIDGE.

By T. B. Macaulay.

The Consul's brow was sad, and the Consul's speech was low,
And darkly looked he at the wall, And darkly at the foe.
" Their van will be upon us before the bridge goes down,
And if they once may win the bridge, what hope to save the town?"

Then out spoke brave Horatius, the Captain of the gate:
"To every man upon this earth death Cometh, soon or late.
Hew down the bridge, Sir Consul, with all the speed ye may;
I, with two more to help me, will hold the foe in play.

In yon straight path a thousand may well be stopped by three.
Now who will stand on either hand, and keep the bridge with me?"
Then out spake Spurius Lartius-a Ramnian proud was he-
"Lo, I will stand at thy right hand, And keep the bridge with thee."

And out spake strong Herminius-of Titian blood was he-
"I will abide on thy left side, and keep the bridge with thee."
"Horatius," quoth the Consul, "as thou sayest, so let it be."
And straight against that great array, forth went the dauntless three.

Soon all Etruria's noblest felt their hearts sink to see
On the earth the bloody corpses, in the path the dauntless three.
And from the ghastly entrance, where those bold Romans stood,
The bravest shrank like boys who rouse an old bear in the wood.

But meanwhile axe and lever have manfully been plied.
And now the bridge hangs tottering above the boiling tide.
"Come back, come back, Horatius!" loud cries the fathers all,
"Back, Lartius! back, Herminius! back, ere the ruin fall!"

Back darted Spurius Lartius; Herminius darted back;
And, as they passed, beneath their feet they felt the timbers crack;
But when they turned their faces, And on the further shore
Saw brave Horatius stand alone, they would have crossed once more.

But, with a crash like thunder, fell every loosened beam,
And, like a dam, the mighty wreck lay right athwart the stream;
And a long shout of triumph rose from the walls of Rome,
As to the highest turret-tops was splashed the yellow foam.

And, like a horse unbroken when first he feels the rein.
The furious river struggled hard, and tossed his tawny inane,
And burst the curb, and bounded, rejoicing to be free,
And battlement and plank And pier whirled headlong to the sea.

Alone stood brave Horatius, but constant still In mind;
Thrice thirty thousand foes before, And the broad flood behind.
"Down with him!" cried false Sextus, with a smile on his pale face.
"Now yield thee," cried Lars Porsena, "now yield thee to our grace."

Round turned he, as not deigning those craven ranks to see;
Naught spake he to Lars Porsena, to Sextus naught spake he;
But he saw on Palatinus the white porch of his home,
And he spake to the noble river that rolls by the towers of Rome.

"O, Tiber! father Tiber! to whom the Romans pray,
A Roman's life, a Roman's arms, take thou in charge this day! "
So he spake, and, speaking, sheathed the good sword by his side,
And, with his harness on his back, plunged headlong in the tide.

No sound of Joy or sorrow was heard from either bank;
But friends And foes, in dumb surprise, stood gazing where he sank.
And when above the surges they saw his crest appear,
Rome shouted, and e'en Tuscany could scarce forbear to cheer.
From the music archive at www.traditionalmusic.co.uk

But fiercely ran the current, swollen high by months of rain;
And fast his blood was flowing; And he was sore with pain.
And heavy with his armor, and spent with changing blows
And oft they thought him sinking-but still again he rose.

Never, I ween, did swimmer, in such an evil case.
Struggle through such a raging flood safe to the landing place;
But his limbs were borne up bravely by the brave heart within,
And our good father Tiber bore bravely up his chin.

"Curse on him!" quoth false Sextus;" will not the villain drown?
But for this stay, ere close of day we should have sacked the town!"
"Heaven help him! "quoth Lars Porsena," And bring him safe to shore;
For such a gallant feat of arms was never seen before."

And now he feels the bottom-now on dry earth he stands;
Now round him throng the fathers to press his gory bands,
And, now with shouts and clapping, and noise of weeping loud,
He enters through the River Gate, borne by the joyous crowd.