

Montrose

Steeleye Span

When James the King ruled by sceptered crown
With bishops and pen from London town
And the sword could ne'er bring Scotland down
Where the cold North wind creeps through the dawn
At old Montrose on a winter's morn
The fourth Earl's only son was born

And he grew strong and he grew stern
Of books and knowledge he would learn
And so to Glasgow he must turn
For truth and valour he was named
For bowmanship he was acclaimed
And the silver arrow he did gain

First through France then to London town
This noble youth did proudly ride
With his good bow strapped in behind
Then his king's favour he has sought
But slander brought it all to nought
To Scotland he sped back from court

But new king Charles, so ill advised
By Hamilton and Laud likewise
Scotland they betrayed by lies
With papacy and bad intent
A new prayer-book to Scotland sent
To control the kirk was his intent
Paupers raged around Saint Giles against the king's churchmen
But Montrose spoke above them all, the people's love to win
So Jamie joined the Covenant, for war they did prepare
And he rode north to Huntly's house but found no welcome there
So the gay red Gordon ribbons were chased around the land
Until at Inverurie Lord Huntly signed his hand

So Montrose rode to Aberdeen where the Covenant held sway
To speak the king at Berwick, a truce was signed that day
But the grim Geneva Ministers put Montrose in a cell
And there he thought to serve Scotland and serve his king as well
Meanwhile down south in England the civil war began
So Montrose rode to London town to parley with the king
For a thousand men he pleaded to save his fair Scotland
But he returned a general without a single man

The giant MacDonald Alastair with sixteen hundred men
From Ireland sailed to join Montrose and plunder Campbell's glen
Montrose the small united force of gaelic men did lure
Against seven thousand covenant on the field of Tippermuir

I'll serve thee in such noble ways was never heard before
I'll crown and deck thee with all bays and love thee more and more

With stones and bows, the screaming clans put covenant to flight
That sabbath day at Tippermuir was such a bloody sight
Then marching north to Aberdeen where treasure could be found
The soldiers fought for bounty there while James fought for the crown
I'll serve thee in such noble ways was never heard before
I'll crown and deck thee with all bays and love thee more and more

His army now three thousand strong, he was resolved to go
To meet the Campbell in his lair through all the winter snow
King Campbell sailed from his castle strong as Montrose' pipes drew near
No refuge from the lord on earth, no pity for Campbell's fear

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With Campbell lands all wasted, Montrose was forced to guess
To fight Argyll or Lord Seaforth on the road to Inverness
It came to pass that Campbell's might was smashed on Loch Eil's shore
And the terror of Clan Diarmaid will hold the glens no more

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At Auldearn, Alford and Kilsyth, the royal standard shone
As Alexander he did reign and he did reign alone
Then Montrose entered Glasgow with Scotland at his feet
But the power could not be broken of the minister-elite

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Soon the year of miracles, like the slowly setting sun
Was melting now before his eyes, all he could do was done
At Pphiliphaugh and Carbisdale warm fortune did turn cold
MacLeod, the devil's advocate, sold James for oats and gold

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The judges passed their cruel sentence, traitors laughed and jeered
He stood unmoved in stately calm and spoke quite unafraid
"Nail my head on yonder tower, give every town a limb
And god who made shall gather them, I go from you to him"

As he turned from out the hall, clouds left the sky
To battle he has never walked more proudly than to die
They set him high upon a cart, the hangman rode below
There stood the whig and west country lords in balcony and bow

They brought him to the water gate, he looked so great and high
So noble was his manly frame, so clear his steadfast eye
The rebel rout forbore to shout and each man held his breath
For well they knew a hero's soul was face to face with death
Loving Scotland and his king, he went to death that morn
A shudder ran across the sky, the work of death was done