

Robert Southey (1774-1843)

1 *The Battle of Blenheim*

1.

It was a summer evening,  
Old Kaspar's work was done,  
And he before his cottage door  
Was sitting in the sun,  
And by him sported on the green 5  
His little grandchild Wilhelmine.

2.

She saw her brother Peterkin  
Roll something large and round,  
Which he beside the rivulet  
In playing there had found; 10  
He came to ask what he had found,  
That was so large, and smooth, and round.

3.

Old Kaspar took it from the boy,  
Who stood expectant by;  
And then the old man shook his head, 15  
And with a natural sigh,  
"Tis some poor fellow's skull," said he,  
"Who fell in the great victory.

4.

"I find them in the garden,  
For there's many here about; 20  
And often when I go to plough,  
The ploughshare turns them out!  
For many thousand men," said he,  
"Were slain in the great victory."

5.

“Now tell us what ’t was all about,” 25  
Young Peterkin, he cries;  
And little Wilhelmine looks up  
With wonder-waiting eyes;  
“Now tell us all about the war,  
And what they fought each other for.” 30

6.

“It was the English,” Kaspar cried,  
“Who put the French to rout;  
But what they fought each other for,  
I could not well make out;  
But everybody said,” quoth he, 35  
“That ’t was a famous victory.

7.

“My father lived at Blenheim then,  
Yon little stream hard by;  
They burnt his dwelling to the ground,  
And he was forced to fly; 40  
So with his wife and child he fled,  
Nor had he where to rest his head.

8.

“With fire and sword the country round  
Was wasted far and wide,  
And many a childing mother then, 45  
And new-born baby died;  
But things like that, you know, must be  
At every famous victory.

9.

“They say it was a shocking sight  
After the field was won; 50  
For many thousand bodies here  
Lay rotting in the sun;

But things like that, you know, must be  
After a famous victory.

10.

“Great praise the Duke of Marlbro’ won,           55  
And our good Prince Eugene.”

“Why, ’t was a very wicked thing!”  
Said little Wilhelmine.

“Nay . . nay . . my little girl,” quoth he,  
“It was a famous victory.                               60

11.

“And everybody praised the Duke  
Who this great fight did win.”

“But what good came of it at last?”  
Quoth little Peterkin.

“Why that I cannot tell,” said he,                       65  
“But ’t was a famous victory.”

1798

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6. Collected by Himself. 10 vols. London, 1838)