

# LANG ANDREW

XXXII BALLADES IN BLUE  
CHINA [1885]

Andrew Lang

**XXXII Ballades in Blue China [1885]**

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# Andrew Lang

## XXXII Ballades in Blue China [1885]

### A BALLADE OF XXXII BALLADES

Friend, when you bear a care-dulled eye,  
And brow perplexed with things of weight,  
And fain would bid some charm untie  
The bonds that hold you all too strait,  
Behold a solace to your fate,  
Wrapped in this cover's china blue;  
These ballades fresh and delicate,  
This dainty troop of Thirty-two!

The mind, unwearied, longs to fly  
And commune with the wise and great;  
But that same ether, rare and high,  
Which glorifies its worthy mate,  
To breath forspent is disparate:  
Laughing and light and airy-new  
These come to tickle the dull pate,  
This dainty troop of Thirty-two.

Most welcome then, when you and I,  
Forestalling days for mirth too late,  
To quips and cranks and fantasy  
Some choice half-hour dedicate,  
They weave their dance with measured rate  
Of rhymes enlinked in order due,  
Till frowns relax and cares abate,  
This dainty troop of Thirty-two.

### Envoy

*Princes, of toys that please your state  
Quainter are surely none to view  
Than these which pass with tripping gait,  
This dainty troop of Thirty-two.*

*F. P.*

## BALLADE TO THEOCRITUS, IN WINTER

ἔσορῶν τὰν Σικελᾶν ἐς ἄλα

*Id. viii. 56.*

Ah! leave the smoke, the wealth, the roar  
Of London, and the bustling street,  
For still, by the Sicilian shore,  
The murmur of the Muse is sweet.  
Still, still, the suns of summer greet  
The mountain-grave of Helikê,  
And shepherds still their songs repeat  
Where breaks the blue Sicilian sea.

What though they worship Pan no more,  
That guarded once the shepherd's seat,  
They chatter of their rustic lore,  
They watch the wind among the wheat:  
Cicalas chirp, the young lambs bleat,  
Where whispers pine to cypress tree;  
They count the waves that idly beat  
Where breaks the blue Sicilian sea.

Theocritus! thou canst restore  
The pleasant years, and over-fleet;  
With thee we live as men of yore,  
We rest where running waters meet:  
And then we turn unwilling feet  
And seek the world – so must it be —  
We may not linger in the heat  
Where breaks the blue Sicilian sea!

### ENVOY

Master, – when rain, and snow, and sleet  
And northern winds are wild, to thee  
We come, we rest in thy retreat,  
Where breaks the blue Sicilian sea!

## BALLADE OF CLEOPATRA'S NEEDLE

Ye giant shades of Ra and Tum,  
Ye ghosts of gods Egyptian,  
If murmurs of our planet come  
To exiles in the precincts wan  
Where, fetish or Olympian,  
To help or harm no more ye list,  
Look down, if look ye may, and scan  
This monument in London mist!

Behold, the hieroglyphs are dumb  
That once were read of him that ran  
When seistron, cymbal, trump, and drum  
Wild music of the Bull began;  
When through the chanting priestly clan  
Walk'd Ramses, and the high sun kiss'd  
This stone, with blessing scored and ban —  
This monument in London mist.

The stone endures though gods be numb;  
Though human effort, plot, and plan  
Be sifted, drifted, like the sum  
Of sands in wastes Arabian.  
What king may deem him more than man,  
What priest says Faith can Time resist  
While *this* endures to mark their span —  
This monument in London mist?

### ENVOY

Prince, the stone's shade on your divan  
Falls; it is longer than ye wist:  
It preaches, as Time's gnomon can,  
This monument in London mist!

## BALLADE OF ROULETTE

### TO R. R

This life – one was thinking to-day,  
In the midst of a medley of fancies —  
Is a game, and the board where we play  
Green earth with her poppies and pansies.  
Let *manque* be faded romances,  
Be *passee* remorse and regret;  
Hearts dance with the wheel as it dances —  
The wheel of Dame Fortune's roulette.

The lover will stake as he may  
His heart on his Peggies and Nancies;  
The girl has her beauty to lay;  
The saint has his prayers and his trances;  
The poet bets endless expanses  
In Dreamland; the scamp has his debt:  
How they gaze at the wheel as it glances —  
The wheel of Dame Fortune's roulette!

The Kaiser will stake his array  
Of sabres, of Krupps, and of lances;  
An Englishman punts with his pay,  
And glory the *jeton* of France is;  
Your artists, or Whistlers or Vances,  
Have voices or colours to bet;  
Will you moan that its motion askance is —  
The wheel of Dame Fortune's roulette?

### ENVOY

The prize that the pleasure enhances?  
The prize is – at last to forget  
The changes, the chops, and the chances —  
The wheel of Dame Fortune's roulette.

## BALLADE OF SLEEP

The hours are passing slow,  
I hear their weary tread  
Clang from the tower, and go  
Back to their kinsfolk dead.  
Sleep! death's twin brother dread!  
Why dost thou scorn me so?  
The wind's voice overhead  
Long wakeful here I know,  
And music from the steep  
Where waters fall and flow.  
Wilt thou not hear me, Sleep?

All sounds that might bestow  
Rest on the fever'd bed,  
All slumb'rous sounds and low  
Are mingled here and wed,  
And bring no drowsihed.  
Shy dreams flit to and fro  
With shadowy hair dispread;  
With wistful eyes that glow,  
And silent robes that sweep.  
Thou wilt not hear me; no?  
Wilt thou not hear me, Sleep?

What cause hast thou to show  
Of sacrifice unsped?  
Of all thy slaves below  
I most have labourèd  
With service sung and said;  
Have cull'd such buds as blow,  
Soft poppies white and red,  
Where thy still gardens grow,  
And Lethe's waters weep.  
Why, then, art thou my foe?  
Wilt thou not hear me, Sleep?

## ENVOY

Prince, ere the dark be shred  
By golden shafts, ere low  
And long the shadows creep:  
Lord of the wand of lead,

Soft-footed as the snow,  
Wilt thou not hear me, Sleep!

## BALLADE OF THE MIDNIGHT FOREST

### AFTER THÉODORE DE BANVILLE

Still sing the mocking fairies, as of old,  
Beneath the shade of thorn and holly-tree;  
The west wind breathes upon them, pure and cold,  
And wolves still dread Diana roaming free  
In secret woodland with her company.  
'Tis thought the peasants' hovels know her rite  
When now the wolds are bathed in silver light,  
And first the moonrise breaks the dusky grey,  
Then down the dells, with blown soft hair and bright,  
And through the dim wood Dian threads her way.

With water-weeds twined in their locks of gold  
The strange cold forest-fairies dance in glee,  
Sylphs over-timorous and over-bold  
Haunt the dark hollows where the dwarf may be,  
The wild red dwarf, the nixies' enemy;  
Then 'mid their mirth, and laughter, and affright,  
The sudden Goddess enters, tall and white,  
With one long sigh for summers pass'd away;  
The swift feet tear the ivy nets outright  
And through the dim wood Dian threads her way.

She gleans her silvan trophies; down the wold  
She hears the sobbing of the stags that flee  
Mixed with the music of the hunting roll'd,  
But her delight is all in archery,  
And naught of ruth and pity wotteth she  
More than her hounds that follow on the flight;  
The goddess draws a golden bow of might  
And thick she rains the gentle shafts that slay.  
She tosses loose her locks upon the night,  
And through the dim wood Dian threads her way.

### ENVOY

Prince, let us leave the din, the dust, the spite,  
The gloom and glare of towns, the plague, the blight:  
Amid the forest leaves and fountain spray  
There is the mystic home of our delight,

And through the dim wood Dian threads her way.

## BALLADE OF THE TWEED

(LOWLAND SCOTCH.)

TO T. W. LANG

The ferox rins in rough Loch Awe,  
A weary cry frae ony toun;  
The Spey, that louns o'er linn and fa',  
They praise a' ither streams aboon;  
They boast their braes o' bonny Doon:  
Gie *me* to hear the ringing reel,  
Where shilfas sing, and cushats croon  
By fair Tweed-side, at Ashiesteel!

There's Etrick, Meggat, Ail, and a',  
Where trout swim thick in May and June;  
Ye'll see them take in showers o' snaw  
Some blinking, cauldribe April noon:  
Rax ower the palmer and march-broun,  
And syne we'll show a bonny creel,  
In spring or simmer, late or soon,  
By fair Tweed-side, at Ashiesteel!

There's mony a water, great or sma',  
Gaes singing in his siller tune,  
Through glen and heugh, and hope and shaw,  
Beneath the sun-licht or the moon:  
But set us in our fishing-shoon  
Between the Caddon-burn and Peel,  
And syne we'll cross the heather broun  
By fair Tweed-side at Ashiesteel!

ENVOY

Deil take the dirty, trading loon  
Wad gar the water ca' his wheel,  
And drift his dyes and poisons down  
By fair Tweed-side at Ashiesteel!

## BALLADE OF THE BOOK-HUNTER

In torrid heats of late July,  
In March, beneath the bitter *bise*,  
He book-hunts while the loungers fly, —  
He book-hunts, though December freeze;  
In breeches baggy at the knees,  
And heedless of the public jeers,  
For these, for these, he hoards his fees, —  
Aldines, Bodonis, Elzevirs.

No dismal stall escapes his eye,  
He turns o'er tomes of low degrees,  
There soiled romanticists may lie,  
Or Restoration comedies;  
Each tract that flutters in the breeze  
For him is charged with hopes and fears,  
In mouldy novels fancy sees  
Aldines, Bodonis, Elzevirs.

With restless eyes that peer and spy,  
Sad eyes that heed not skies nor trees,  
In dismal nooks he loves to pry,  
Whose motto evermore is *Spes!*  
But ah! the fabled treasure flees;  
Grown rarer with the fleeting years,  
In rich men's shelves they take their ease, —  
Aldines, Bodonis, Elzevirs!

### ENVOY

Prince, all the things that tease and please, —  
Fame, hope, wealth, kisses, cheers, and tears,  
What are they but such toys as these —  
Aldines, Bodonis, Elzevirs?

## BALLADE OF THE VOYAGE TO CYTHERA

### AFTER THÉODORE DE BANVILLE

I know Cythera long is desolate;  
I know the winds have stripp'd the gardens green.  
Alas, my friends! beneath the fierce sun's weight  
A barren reef lies where Love's flowers have been,  
Nor ever lover on that coast is seen!  
So be it, but we seek a fabled shore,  
To lull our vague desires with mystic lore,  
To wander where Love's labyrinths beguile;  
There let us land, there dream for evermore:  
"It may be we shall touch the happy isle."

The sea may be our sepulchre. If Fate,  
If tempests wreak their wrath on us, serene  
We watch the bolt of heaven, and scorn the hate  
Of angry gods that smite us in their spleen.  
Perchance the jealous mists are but the screen  
That veils the fairy coast we would explore.  
Come, though the sea be vex'd, and breakers roar,  
Come, for the air of this old world is vile,  
Haste we, and toil, and faint not at the oar;  
"It may be we shall touch the happy isle."

Grey serpents trail in temples desecrate  
Where Cypris smiled, the golden maid, the queen,  
And ruined is the palace of our state;  
But happy Loves flit round the mast, and keen  
The shrill wind sings the silken cords between.  
Heroes are we, with wearied hearts and sore,  
Whose flower is faded and whose locks are hoar,  
Yet haste, light skiffs, where myrtle thickets smile;  
Love's panthers sleep 'mid roses, as of yore:  
"It may be we shall touch the happy isle!"

### ENVOY

Sad eyes! the blue sea laughs, as heretofore.  
Ah, singing birds your happy music pour!  
Ah, poets, leave the sordid earth awhile;  
Flit to these ancient gods we still adore:

“It may be we shall touch the happy isle!”

## BALLADE OF THE SUMMER TERM

**(Being a Petition, in the form of a Ballade, praying the University Commissioners to spare the Summer Term.)**

When Lent and Responsions are ended,  
When May with fritillaries waits,  
When the flower of the chestnut is splendid,  
When drags are at all of the gates  
(Those drags the philosopher “slates”  
With a scorn that is truly sublime),<sup>1</sup>  
Life wins from the grasp of the Fates  
Sweet hours and the fleetest of time!

When wickets are bowl'd and defended,  
When Isis is glad with “the Eights,”  
When music and sunset are blended,  
When Youth and the summer are mates,  
When Freshmen are heedless of “Greats,”  
And when note-books are cover'd with rhyme,  
Ah, these are the hours that one rates —  
Sweet hours and the fleetest of time!

When the brow of the Dean is unbended  
At luncheons and mild tête-à-têtes,  
When the Tutor's in love, nor offended  
By blunders in tenses or dates;  
When bouquets are purchased of Bates,  
When the bells in their melody chime,  
When unheeded the Lecturer prates —  
Sweet hours and the fleetest of time!

### ENVOY

Reformers of Schools and of States,  
Is mirth so tremendous a crime?  
Ah! spare what grim pedantry hates —  
Sweet hours and the fleetest of time!

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. “Suggestions for Academic Reorganization.”

## BALLADE OF THE MUSE

### Quem tu, Melpomene, semel

The man whom once, Melpomene,  
Thou look'st on with benignant sight,  
Shall never at the Isthmus be  
A boxer eminent in fight,  
Nor fares he foremost in the flight  
Of Grecian cars to victory,  
Nor goes with Delian laurels dight,  
The man thou lov'st, Melpomene!

Not him the Capitol shall see,  
As who hath crush'd the threats and might  
Of monarchs, march triumphantly;  
But Fame shall crown him, in his right  
Of all the Roman lyre that smite  
The first; so woods of Tivoli  
Proclaim him, so her waters bright,  
The man thou lov'st, Melpomene!

The sons of queenly Rome count *me*,  
Me too, with them whose chants delight, —  
The poets' kindly company;  
Now broken is the tooth of spite,  
But thou, that temperest aright  
The golden lyre, all, all to thee  
He owes — life, fame, and fortune's height —  
The man thou lov'st, Melpomene!

### ENVOY

Queen, that to mute lips could'st unite  
The wild swan's dying melody!  
Thy gifts, ah! how shall he requite —  
The man thou lov'st, Melpomene?

## **BALLADE AGAINST THE JESUITS**

### **AFTER LA FONTAINE**

Rome does right well to censure all the vain  
Talk of Jansenius, and of them who preach  
That earthly joys are damnable! 'Tis plain  
We need not charge at Heaven as at a breach;

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