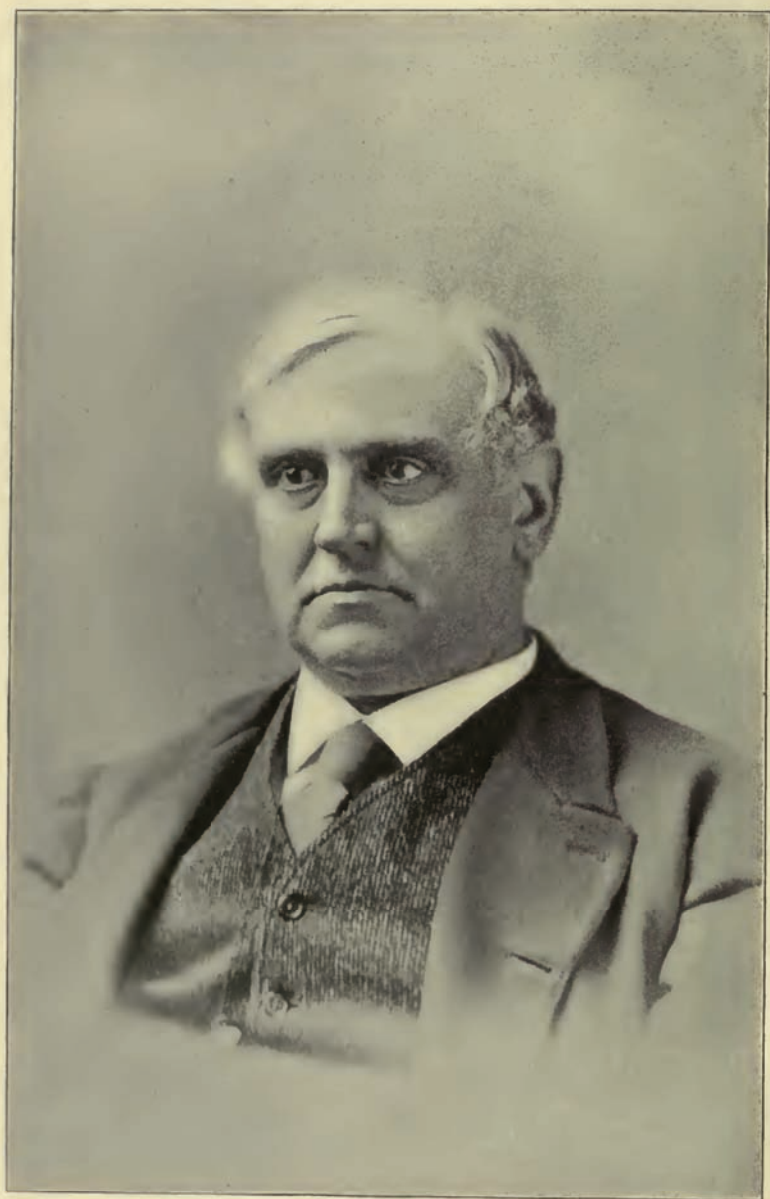




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PHILLIPS BROOKS

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MASTERPIECES OF THE WORLD'S LITERATURE ANCIENT AND MODERN

THE GREAT AUTHORS OF
THE WORLD WITH THEIR
MASTER PRODUCTIONS

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INTRODUCTION BY
JOHN RUSSELL YOUNG
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OVER FIVE HUNDRED FULL-PAGE ILLUSTRATIONS

VOLUME IV

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BY HARRY THURSTON PECK

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GOTTFRIED AUGUST BÜRGER.

GOTTFRIED AUGUST BÜRGER, a famous German lyric poet, son of a Lutheran clergyman, was born at Wolmerswende, Jan. 1, 1748; died at Göttingen, June 8, 1794. He was educated at Aschersleben and at Halle, and was twice married. He studied theology at Halle, and law at Göttingen, but neglected both for poetry. Through the influence of his friend, Boje, who was one of the members of a famous literary association to which Bürger had been admitted, he obtained a collectorship at Altengleichen. It was here that he wrote his celebrated ballad of "Lenore," which was inspired by hearing a peasant girl singing some snatches of a ghost-story song by moonlight. This ballad immediately established his reputation as a poet. Bürger essayed the dramatic style which Goethe created. He reveled in mystery and gloom, and it was his delight to conjure up ghosts and depict the terror their appearance caused. Two editions of his works were published before his death (1778-1779), a third was brought out (1796).

LENORE.

LENORE starts at daybreak's shine
 From troubled dreams: "Oh say,
 Art dead or faithless, Wilhelm, mine?
 How long wilt thou delay?"
 He'd gone with Frederic's host to wield
 His sword on Prague's dread battle-field,
 Nor had he sent to tell
 If he were safe and well.

The monarch and the empress, tired
 Of bickering brawl and feud,
 To bend their stubborn wills conspired,
 And peace at length conclude;
 Each host with song and shouting rang,
 With trumpet blast and clash and clang;
 Decked with a verdant spray,
 Each homeward wends his way.

And everywhere, aye, everywhere,
In road and lane and street,
Went forth the old, the young, the fair,
The shouting host to meet.
"Thank Heaven!" child and mother cried,
"O welcome!" many a promised bride.
Alas! kiss and salute
Were for Lenore mute.

To glean intelligence she sought,
Of all she asked the name,
But there was none could tell her aught,
'Mong all the host that came.
When all were passed, in dark despair,
She wildly tore her raven hair;
In rage and grief profound,
She sank upon the ground.

Her mother hastened to her side, —
"God, banish these alarms!
What is the matter, child?" she cried,
And clasped her in her arms.
"O mother, mother, all is o'er!
O world, farewell for evermore!
No mercy God doth know.
Unhappy me, O woe!"

"Have mercy, God! in thee we trust.
Child, pray a *Pater Noster*!
What God decrees is right and just,
God us with care will foster." —
"O mother, this illusion flee!
Unjust, unjust is God to me!
Availed my prayers before?
Now need I pray no more."

"Help, God! who knows the Father knows
He hears his children's prayer;
The sacrament will soothe thy woes,
And soften thy despair." —
"O mother, mother, naught will tame,
No sacrament will quench this flame,
No sacrament avails,
When death our flesh assails."

"My child, what if the faithless youth,
In Hungary's far plains,

Have cast aside his faith and truth
For other nuptial chains ?
Look on his heart, my child, as dead,
'Twill bring no blessings on his head.
When soul and body part,
Flames will consume his heart." —

"O mother, mother, all is o'er !
Forever lost, forlorn !
Death, death is all that I implore,
O would I'd ne'er been born !
Go out, go out, thou life, thou spark !
Die 'midst these horrors drear and dark !
No mercy God doth know.
Unhappy me, O woe!"

"Help, God, do not thy vengeance wreak
Here on thy sickly child !
She knows not what her tongue doth speak ;
O be thy judgment mild !
All earthly cares, my child, forswear,
For God and thy salvation care !
Then for thy soul's avail
A bridegroom will not fail." —

"What is salvation, mother ? say !
O mother, what is hell ?
Salvation is with Wilhelm, yea,
Without him is but hell.
Go out, go out, thou light, thou spark !
Die 'midst these horrors drear and dark !
Nor there, nor here on earth
Hath bliss without him worth."

Thus raged with dread omnipotence
Despair in every vein.
Blaspheming, she of Providence
Continued to complain ;
She wrung her hands, she beat her breast,
Until the sun sank down to rest,
Till o'er the vaulted sphere
The golden stars appear.

Hark ! tramp, tramp, tramp, without is heard
A charger in full speed !
And at the gate a rider, spurred,
Dismounts his reeking steed.

And hark ! O hark ! the portal's ring,
So soft, so gentle, ting-ling-ling !
Then came unto her ear
These words, distinct and clear :

"Holla ! my child, come, ope the door !
Dost wake, my love, or sleep ?
Lov'st thou me now as heretofore ?
And dost thou laugh or weep ?"
"Ah, Wilhelm, thou, so late by night ?
I've wept and watched till dimmed my sight.
My grief, alas, how great !
Whence comest thou so late ?"

"We saddle but at dead of night ;
I from Bohemia come,
'Twas late ere I began my flight,
Now will I bear thee home."
"Ah, Wilhelm, quick, come in to me !
The wind howls through the hawthorn-tree !
Come in, my fondest, best,
And warm thee on my breast !"

"O let it howl and whistle round
The hawthorn-tree, my sweet !
The charger paws, the spurs resound,
To linger 'tis not meet.
Come, bind thy dress, spring up to me,
Behind me, for to-day I thee
A hundred leagues must bear,
My nuptial couch to share."

"Unto her bridal bed will bear
A hundred leagues thy bride ?
O hark ! the clock rings through the air
Its tongue eleven cried." —
"Come, dearest, come, the moon is bright,
The dead and we ride quick by night.
To-day thou shalt, I vouch,
Lie on thy nuptial couch." —

"Where is thy little chamber ? where
Thy nuptial bed ? relate !"
"Cool, small, and quiet, far from here,
Eight boards — two small, six great !" —
"There's room for me ?" — "For me and thee.
Come, bind thy dress, spring up to me !

The guests await, and hope
Our chamber door will ope."

She tied her dress, and with a bound
Upon the charger sprung ;
Her arms of lily white around
The faithful rider slung ;
And tramp, tramp, tramp, they flew anon
In furious gallop, on, on, on !
Steed snorted, rider, too ;
The sparks and pebbles flew.

On sinister and dexter hand,
Before their eyes in sunder,
How swiftly fly mead, heath, and land !
The bridges, how they thunder !
"Love, fear'st thou aught? The moon shines bright.
Hurrah ! the dead ride quick by night !
Dost fear the dead ? " — " Ah no,
But love, O speak not so ! "

What tones are they which sweep along ?
The flapping ravens hurry.
Hark, tolling bells ! Hark, wailing song !
"The body we will bury."
A mourning train came on before,
A coffin and a bier they bore.
Their song — so croaks the frog,
Ill boding in the bog.

"At midnight bury in the tomb
The corpse with song and wail !
I bear my youthful spouse now home,
Come to the bride's regale !
Come, Sexton, bring the choir along,
And chant to me our nuptial song !
Speak, priest, thy blessing, ere
We to our couch repair ! "

The song was hushed, the bier was gone
Obedient to his call.
Whoop ! whoop ! behind the charger on
They scoured, one and all.
And tramp, tramp, tramp, they flew anon,
In furious gallop on, on, on !
Steed snorted, rider, too ;
The sparks and pebbles flew.

How flew unto the right and left
Hedge, tree, and mountain fast!
How swiftly flew, both right and left,
Town, village, hamlet, past! —
“Love, fear’st thou aught? The moon shines bright.
Hurrah! the dead ride quick by night!
Dost fear, my love, the dead?”
“Ah, leave in peace the dead!”

See there! see there! Ha! dimly seen,
How dance around the wheel,
Crown’d by the moonbeam’s pallid sheen,
The spectral dead their reel.
“So ho! ye rout, come here to me!
Ye rabble rout, come follow me!
And dance our wedding reel
Ere we to slumber steal.”

Whoop! whoop! ho, ho! the spirits flee
Behind with din and noise;
So with the withered hazel-tree
The rustling whirlwind toys.
And further, further, flew they on,
In furious gallop on, on, on!
Steed snorted, rider, too;
The sparks and pebbles flew.

How all beneath the moonbeam flew,
How flew it far and fast!
How o’er their head the heavens blue,
And stars flew swiftly past!
“Love, fear’st thou aught? The moon shines bright.
Hurrah! the dead ride quick by night!
Dost fear, my love, the dead?”
“Ah speak not of the dead!”

“Steed, steed! methinks the cock I hear;
Nigh is the sand-glass spent.
Steed, steed! up, up! away from here!
The morning air I scent.
At length, at length, our race is run,
The nuptial bed at length is won,
The dead ride quick by night,
Now, now will we alight.”

Unto an iron gate anon
In wild career they flew,

With slender twig one blow thereon
Burst lock and bolt in two.
Wide open creaked the folding door,
And grave on grave they hurried o'er,
And tombstones gleamed around
Upon the moonlit ground.
Ha! look! see there! within a trice,
Wheugh! wheugh! a horrid wonder!
The rider's jerkin, piece by piece,
Like tinder falls asunder.
Upon his head no lock of hair,
A naked skull all grisly bare;
A skeleton, alas!
With scythe and hour-glass.
The snorting charger pranced and neighed,
Fire from his nostrils came,
Ho, ho! at once beneath the maid
He vanished in the flame.
And howl on howl ran through the sky,
From out the pit a whining cry;
Lenore's heart was wrung,
'Twixt life and death she hung.
Now in the moonlight danced the train
Of phantom spirits round,
In giddy circles, in a chain;
Thus did their howl resound:
"Forbear! forbear! though hearts should break,
Blaspheme not, lest God's wrath thou wake!
Thy body's knell we toll.
May God preserve thy soul!"

THE WIVES OF WEINSBERG.¹

WHICH way to Weinsberg? neighbor, say!
'Tis sure a famous city:
It must have cradled, in its day,
Full many a maid of noble clay,
And matrons wise and witty;
And if ever marriage should happen to me,
A Weinsberg dame my wife shall be.

¹ Translated by C. T. Brooks: Reprinted from "Representative German Poems" by the courtesy of Mrs. Charles T. Brooks.

King Conrad once, historians say,
Fell out with this good city;
So down he came, one luckless day, —
Horse, foot, dragoons, — in stern array, —
And cannon, — more's the pity!
Around the walls the artillery roared,
And bursting bombs their fury poured.
But naught the little town could scare;
Then, red with indignation,
He bade the herald straight repair
Up to the gates, and thunder there
The following proclamation: —
"Rascals! when I your town do take,
No living thing shall save its neck!"
Now, when the herald's trumpet sent
These tidings through the city,
To every house a death knell went;
Such murder-cries the hot air rent
Might move the stones to pity.
Then bread grew dear, but good advice
Could not be had for any price.
Then, "Woe is me!" "O misery!"
What shrieks of lamentation!
And "Kyrie Eleison!" cried
The pastors, and the flock replied,
"Lord! save us from starvation!"
"Oh, woe is me, poor Corydon —
My neck, — my neck! I'm gone, — I'm gone!"
Yet oft, when counsel, deed, and prayer
Had all proved unavailing,
When hope hung trembling on a hair,
How oft has woman's wit been there!
A refuge never failing;
For woman's wit and Papal fraud,
Of olden time, were famed abroad.
A youthful dame, praised be her name! —
Last night had seen her plighted, —
Whether in waking hour or dream,
Conceived a rare and novel scheme,
Which all the town delighted;
Which you, if you think otherwise,
Have leave to laugh at and despise.

At midnight hour, when culverin
And gun and bomb were sleeping,
Before the camp with mournful mien
The loveliest embassy were seen,
All kneeling low and weeping.

So sweetly, plaintively they prayed,
But no reply save this was made:—

“The women have free leave to go,
Each with her choicest treasure;
But let the knaves their husbands know
That unto them the King will show
The weight of his displeasure.”
With these sad terms the lovely train
Stole weeping from the camp again.

And when the morning gilt the sky,
What happened? Give attention:—
The city gates wide open fly,
And all the wives come trudging by,
Each bearing—need I mention?—
Her own dear husband on her back,
All snugly seated in a sack!

Full many a sprig of court, the joke
Not relishing, protested,
And urged the King; but Conrad spoke:—
“A monarch’s word must not be broke!”

And here the matter rested.
“Bravo!” he cried, “Ha, ha! Bravo!
Our lady guessed it would be so.”

He pardoned all, and gave a ball
That night at royal quarters.
The fiddles squeaked, the trumpets blew,
And up and down the dancers flew,
Court sprigs with city daughters.
The mayor’s wife—O rarest sight!—
Danced with the shoemaker that night!

Ah, where is Weinsberg, sir, I pray?

’Tis sure a famous city:
It must have cradled in its day
Full many a maid of noble clay,
And matrons wise and witty;
And if ever marriage should happen to me,
A Weinsberg dame my wife shall be.