

THE STORY OF ILL MAY-DAY IN THE TIME OF KING HENRY THE
EIGHTH, AND WHY IT WAS SO CALLED: AND HOW QUEEN
KATHERINE BEGGED THE LIVES OF TWO THOUSAND
LONDON 'PRENTICES.

To the tune of "Essex's good night."

PERUSE the stories of this land,
And with advisement mark the same;
And you shall justly understand
How ill May-day first got the name.
For when King Henry Eighth did reign,
And rul'd our famous kingdom here;
His royal queen he had from Spain,
With whom he liv'd full many a year.

Queen Katherine named, as stories tell,
Sometime his elder brother's wife,
By which unlawful marriage fell
An endless trouble during life.
But such kind love he still conceiv'd
Of his fair queen, and of her friends,
Which being by Spain and France perceiv'd,
Their journeys fast for England bends.

And with good leave were suffered
Within our kingdom here to stay;
Which multitudes made victuals dear,
And all things else, from day to day.

For strangers then did so increase,
By reason of King Henry's queen;
And privilege in many a place
To dwell, as was in London seen.

Poor tradesmen had small dealing then,
And who but strangers bore the bell?
Which was a grief to Englishmen,
To see them here in London dwell.
Wherefore, God wot, upon May eve,
As prentices on maying went,
Who made the magistrates believe
At all to have no other intent.

But such a May-game it was known,
As like in London never were,
For by the same full many a one
With loss of life did pay full dear.
For thousands came with Bilboa blade,
As with an army they could meet;
And such a bloody slaughter made
Of foreign strangers in the street,

That all the channels ran down with blood
In every street where they remain'd;
Yea, every one in danger stood,
That any of their part maintain'd.
The rich, the poor, the old, the young,
Beyond the seas though born and bred,

By prentices there suffered wrong,
When armed thus they gathered head.

Such multitudes together went,
No warlike troops could them withstand;
Nor yet by policy them prevent,
What they by force thus took in hand:
Till at the last King Henry's power
This multitude encompass'd round,
Where with the strength of London's tower,
They were by force suppress'd and bound.

And hundreds hang'd, by martial law,
On sign-posts at their masters' doors,
By which the rest were kept in awe,
And frightened from such loud uproars.
And others which the fact repented,
(Two thousand prentices at least),
Were all unto the king presented,
As mayors and magistrates thought best.

With two and two together tied,
Through Temple-bar and Strand they go,
To Westminster, there to be tried,
With ropes about their necks also.
But such a cry in every street
Till then was never heard nor known,
By mothers for their children sweet,
Unhappily thus overthrown.

Whose bitter moans and sad laments
Possess the court with trembling fear;
Whereat the queen herself relents,
Though it concern'd her country dear.
What if, quoth she, by Spanish blood
Have London's stately streets been wet,
Yet will I seek this country's good,
And pardon for these young men get.

Or else the world will speak of me,
And say Queen Katherine was unkind;
And judge me still the cause to be,
These young men did these fortunes find.
And so, disrob'd from rich attires,
With hair hang'd down, she sadly hies,
And of her gracious lord requires
A boon, which hardly he denies.

"The lives," (quoth she), "of all the blooms
Yet budding green, these youths I crave;
O, let them not have timeless tombs,
For nature longer limits gave!"
In saying so, the pearled tears
Fell trickling from her princely eyes,
Whereat his gentle queen he cheers,
And says, "Stand up, sweet lady, rise!

The lives of them I freely give,
No means this kindness shall debar,
Thou hast thy boon, and they may live
To serve me in my Boulogne war."

No sooner was this pardon given,
But peals of joy rung through the hall,
As though it thunder'd down from heaven,
The queen's renown amongst them all.

For which, (kind queen), with joyful heart,
She gave to them both thanks and praise,
And so from them did gently part,
And liv'd beloved all her days:
And when King Henry stood in need
Of trusty soldiers at command,
These prentices prov'd men indeed,
And fear'd no foes of warlike band.

For at the seige of Tours, in France,
They showed themselves brave Englishmen:
At Boulogne too they did advance
Saint George's lusty standard then.
Let Tourenne, Tournay, and those towns
That good King Henry nobly won,
Tell London's prentices' renowns,
And of their deeds by them there done.

For ill May-day, and ill May-games,
Perform'd in young and tender days,
Can be no hind'rance to their fames,
Or strains of manhood, any ways.
But now it is ordain'd by law,
We see on May-day's eve at night,
To keep unruly youths in awe,
By London's watch in armour bright.

Still to prevent the like misdeed, [came;
Which once through head-strong young men
And that's the cause that I do read
May-day doth get so ill a name.

THE LIFE AND DEATH OF THE TWO LADIES OF FINSBURY
THAT GAVE MOOR-FIELDS TO THE CITY, FOR THE
MAIDENS OF LONDON TO DRY CLOTHES IN.

To the tune of "Where is my true Love?"

You gallant London damsels,
Awhile to me give ear,
And be you well contented
With that you now shall hear:
The deeds of two kind ladies
Before you shall appear,
O maidens of London, so fair!

At Finsbury there dwelled
A gallant noble knight,
That for the love of Jesus Christ
Desired for to fight;
And so unto Jerusalem
He went, in armour bright.
O maidens of London, so fair!