When Britain Really Ruled the Waves

When Britain really ruled the waves
(In good Queen Bess's time)—
The House of Peers made no pretense
To intellectual eminence,
Or scholarship sublime;
Yet Britain won her proudest bays
In good Queen Bess's glorious days!

chorus

Yes, Britain won, etc.

When Wellington thrashed Bonaparte,
As every child can tell,
The House of Peers, throughout the war,
Did nothing in particular,
And did it very well:
Yet Britain set the world ablaze
In good King George's glorious days!

chorus

Yes, Britain set, etc.

And while the House of Peers withholds
Its legislative hand,
And noble statesmen do not itch
To interfere with matters which
They do not understand,
As bright will shine Great Britain's rays
As in King George's glorious days!

chorus

As bright will shine, etc.

1882

1. From Iolanthe (act 2), sung by Lord Mountararat, following a discussion about whether or not members of the House of Lords should obtain their titles by competitive examination instead of by inheritance. His Lordship prefaces his song by affirming "that if there is any institution in Great Britain which is not susceptible of any improvement at all, it is the House of Peers!"

2. At the time of the Battle of Waterloo (1815), Britain's king was George III (1760–1820).