

## LORD JOHN OF THE EAST,

A Ballad.

THE fires blazed bright till deep midnight,

And the guests sat in the hall,

And the Lord of the feast, Lord John of the East,

Was the merriest of them all.

His dark-grey eye, that wont, so sly,

Beneath his helm to scowl,

Flashed keenly bright, like a new-waked sprite,

As passed the circling bowl.

In laughter light, or jocund lay,

That voice was heard, whose sound,

Stern, loud and deep in battle-fray,

Did foe-men fierce astound ;

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And stretched so balm, like lady's palm,  
 To every jester near,  
 That hand which through a prostrate foe  
 Oft thrust a ruthless spear.

The gallants sang and the goblets rang,  
 And they revelled in careless state,  
 Till a thundering sound that shook the ground  
 Was heard at the castle gate.

“ Who knocks without, so loud and stout? —  
 Some wandering knight, I ween,  
 Who from afar, like a guiding star,  
 Our blazing hall hath seen.

“ If a stranger it be of high degree,  
 (No churl durst make such din,)  
 Step forth amain, my pages twain,  
 And soothly ask him in.

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“ Tell him our cheer is the forest deer,

Our bowl is mantling high,

And the Lord of the feast is John of the East,

Who welcomes him courteously.”

The pages twain returned again,

And a wild scared look had they.

“ Why look ye so? — Is it friend or foe?”

Did the angry Baron say.

“ A stately knight without doth wait,

But further he will not come,

Till the Baron himself shall stand at the gate

And ask him to his home.”

“ By my mother’s shroud, he is full proud!

What earthly man is he?”

“ I know not in truth,” quoth the trembling youth,

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" In reveller's plight he is bedight,  
With a vest of the crim'sy meet;  
But his mantle behind, that streams on the wind,  
Is a corse's bloody sheet."

" Out! paltry child! thy wits are wild,  
Thy comrade will tell me true:—  
Say plainly then what thou hast seen,  
Or dearly shalt thou rue."

Then spoke the second page with fear,  
And bent him on his knee,  
" Were I on your father's sword to swear,  
The same it appeared to me."

" And is there ne'er of my vassals here,  
Of low or high degree,  
That will unto this stranger go,—  
Will go for the love of me?"

Then spoke and said fierce Donald the Red,

(A fearless man was he,)

“ Yes; I will straight to the castle gate,

Lord John, for the love of thee.”

With heart full stout he hied him out,

While silent all remain :

Nor moved a tongue those gallants among,

Till Donald returned again.

“ Speak,” said his Lord, “ by thy hopes of grace !

What stranger must we hail ?”

But the haggard looks of Donald’s face

Made his faltering words to fail.

“ It is a knight in some foreign guise, —

His like did I never behold,

For the stony look of his beamless eyes

Made my very life-blood cold.

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“ I did him greet in fashion meet,  
And bade him your feast to partake ;  
But the voice that spoke when he silence broke  
Made the earth beneath me quake.

“ O, such a tone did tongue ne'er own,  
That moved in mortal head;  
It is like a sound from the hollow ground, —  
Like the voice of the coffined dead!

“ I bade him to your social board,  
But in he will not hie,  
Until at the gate this castle's Lord  
Shall entreat him courteously.

“ And a ghastly smile o'er his visage past,  
As he sternly bade me say,  
' It was no vassal who lured your guest  
To that feast of the woody Bay.' ”

Pale grew the Baron, and faintly said,  
 As he heaved his breath with pain,  
 "From such a feast, as there was spread,  
 Do any return again?"

"I bade my guest to a bloody feast,  
 Where the death's-wound was his fare,  
 And the Isle's bright Maid who my love betrayed,  
 She tore her raven hair.

"The sea-fowl screams and the watch-tower gleams,  
 And the deafening billows roar,  
 Where he, unblest, was put to rest  
 On a wild and distant shore.

"Do the hollow grave and the whelming wave  
 Give up their dead again?  
 Doth the surgy waste waft o'er its breast  
 The spirits of the slain?"

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But the Baron's limbs shook fast, and poured  
The big drops from his brow,  
As louder still the third time roared  
The thundering gate below.

“O rouse thee, Baron, for manhood's worth!  
Let good or ill befall,  
Thou must to the stranger knight go forth,  
And ask him to your hall.”

“Rouse thy bold breast,” said each eager guest,  
“What boots it shrinking so?  
Be it fiend or sprite, or murdered knight,  
In God's name thou must go.

“Why should'st thou fear? dost thou not wear  
A gift from the great Glendower,—  
Sandals blest by a holy Priest,  
O'er which nought ill hath power?”



All ghastly pale Lord John did quail,

As he turned him to the door,

And his sandals blest by a holy Priest

Sound feebly on the floor.

Then back to the hall and his merry mates all

A parting look he sent;—

“God send thee, amain, safe back again!”

His head he sadly bent.

Then listened they on the lengthened way

To his faint and lessening tread,

And, when that was past, to the wailing blast,

That wailed as for the dead.

But wilder it grew, and stronger it blew,

And it rose with an elrich sound,

Till the lofty Keep on its rocky steep

Fell hurling to the ground.

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Each fearful eye then glanced on high  
To the lofty windowed wall,  
When a fiery trace of the Baron's face  
Through the casements shone on all.

But the visioned glare passed through the air,  
And the raging tempest ceased,  
And never more, on sea or shore,  
Was seen Lord John of the East.

The sandals blest by a holy Priest  
Lay unscathed on the swarded green ;  
But never again, on land or main,  
Lord John of the East was seen.