

Matthew Gregory Lewis (1775-1818)

11 *The Fire King*

“The war-cymbals clatter’d, the trumpets replied,  
The lances were couch’d, and they closed on each side;  
And horsemen and horses Count Albert o’erthrew,  
Till he pierced the thick tumult King Baldwin unto.

Against the charm’d blade which Count Albert did wield,           5  
The fence had been vain of the king’s red-cross shield;  
But a page thrust him forward, the monarch before,  
And cleft the proud turban the renegade wore.

So fell was the dint, that Count Albert stoop’d low  
Before the cross’d shield to his steel saddle-bow;           10  
And scarce had he bent to the red cross his head,  
‘*Bonne grâce notre dame!*’ he unwillingly said.

Sore sigh’d the charm’d sword, for its virtue was o’er,  
It sprung from his grasp, and was never seen more;  
But true men have said that the lighting’s red wing           15  
Did waft back the brand to the dread Fire King.

He clench’d his set teeth and his gauntleted hand,  
He stretch’d with one buffet that page on the strand,  
As back from the stripling the broken casque roll’d,  
You might see the blue eyes and the ringlets of gold.           20

Short time had Count Albert in horror to stare  
On those death-swimming eyeballs and blood-clotted hair;  
For down came the Templars, like Cedron in flood,  
And dyed their long lances in Saracen blood.”

(From *The Life and Correspondence of M. G. Lewis: with many pieces in prose and verse never before published.* Vol. 2. London: Henry Colburn, 1839)