

John Leyden (1775-1811)

1 *The Cout of Keilder*

The eiry blood-hound howl'd by night,  
The streamers flaunted red,  
Till broken streaks of flaky light  
O'er Keilder's mountains spread.

The lady sigh'd as Keilder rose: 5  
"Come tell me, dear love mine,  
Go you to hunt where Keilder flows,  
Or on the banks of Tyne?" —

"The heath-bell blows, where Keilder flows,  
By Tyne the primrose pale; 10  
But now we ride on the Scottish side,  
To hunt in Liddesdale." —

"Gin you will ride on the Scottish side,  
Sore must thy Margaret mourn;  
For Soulis abhorr'd is Lyddall's lord, 15  
And I fear you'll ne'er return.

"The axe he bears, it hacks and tears;  
'Tis form'd of an earth-fast flint;  
No armour of knight, tho' ever so wight,  
Can bear its deadly dint. 20

"No danger he fears, for a charm'd sword he wears,  
Of adderstone the hilt;  
No Tynedale knight had ever such might,  
But his heart-blood was spilt." —

"In my plume is seen the holly green, 25

With the leaves of the rowan-tree;  
And my casque of sand, by a mermaid's hand,  
Was formed beneath the sea.

“Then, Margaret dear, have thou no fear!  
That bodes no ill to me, 30  
Though never a knight, by mortal might,  
Could match his gramarye.”

Then forward bound both horse and hound,  
And rattle o'er the vale;  
As the wintry breeze through leafless trees 35  
Drives on the pattering hail.

Behind their course the English fells  
In deepening blue retire;  
Till soon before them boldly swells  
The muir of dun Redswire. 40

And when they reach'd the Redswire high,  
Soft beam'd the rising sun;  
But formless shadows seem'd to fly  
Along the muir-land dun.

And when he reach'd the Redswire high, 45  
His bugle Keilder blew;  
And round did float, with clamorous note  
And scream, the hoarse curlew.

The next blast that young Keilder blew,  
The wind grew deadly still; 50  
But the sleek fern, with fingery leaves,  
Waved wildly o'er the hill.

The third blast that young Keilder blew,  
Still stood the limber fern;  
And a Wee Man, of swarthy hue, 55

Upstarted by a cairn.

His russet weeds were brown as heath,  
That clothes the upland fell;  
And the hair of his head was frizzly red,  
As the purple heather-bell. 60

An urchin, clad in prickles red,  
Clung cowering to his arm;  
The hounds they howl'd, and backward fled,  
As struck by Fairy charm.

“Why rises high the stag-hound’s cry, 65  
Where stag-hound ne’er should be?  
Why wakes that horn the silent morn,  
Without the leave of me?” —

“Brown Dwarf, that o’er the muirland strays,  
Thy name to Keilder tell!” — 70  
“The Brown Man of the Muirs, who stays  
Beneath the heather-bell.

“Tis sweet, beneath the heather-bell,  
To live in autumn brown;  
And sweet to hear the lav’rocks swell 75  
Far far from tower and town.

“But woe betide the shrilling horn,  
The chase’s surly cheer!  
And ever that hunter is forlorn,  
Whom first at morn I hear.” — 80

Says, “Weal nor woe, nor friend nor foe,  
In thee we hope nor dread.”  
But, ere the bugles green could blow,  
The Wee Brown Man had fled.

And onward, onward, hound and horse, 85  
    Young Keilder's band have gone;  
And soon they wheel, in rapid course,  
    Around the Keilder Stone.

Green vervain round its base did creep,  
    A powerful seed that bore; 90  
And oft, of yore, its channels deep  
    Were stain'd with human gore.

And still when blood-drops, clotted thin,  
    Hang the gray moss upon,  
The spirit murmurs from within, 95  
    And shakes the rocking stone.

Around, around, young Keilder wound,  
    And call'd, in scornful tone,  
With him to pass the barrier ground,  
    The Spirit of the Stone. 100

The rude crag rock'd; "I come for death,  
    I come to work thy woe!" —  
And 'twas the Brown Man of the Heath,  
    That murmur'd from below.

But onward, onward, Keilder past, 105  
    Swift as the winter wind,  
When, hovering on the driving blast,  
    The snow-flakes fall behind.

They pass'd the muir of berries blae,  
    The stone cross on the lee; 110  
They reach'd the green, the bonny brae,  
    Beneath the birchen tree.

This is the bonny brae, the green,  
    Yet sacred to the brave,

Where still, of ancient size, is seen, 115  
Gigantic Keilder's grave.

The lonely shepherd loves to mark  
The daisy springing fair,  
Where weeps the birch of silver bark,  
With long dishevell'd hair. 120

The grave is green, and round is spread  
The curling lady-fern;  
That fatal day the mould was red,  
No moss was on the cairn.

And next they pass'd the chapel there; 125  
The holy ground was by,  
Where many a stone is sculptured fair,  
To mark where warriors lie.

And here, beside the mountain flood,  
A massy castle frown'd, 130  
Since first the Pictish race in blood  
The haunted pile did found.

The restless stream its rocky base  
Assails with ceaseless din;  
And many a troubled spirit strays 135  
The dungeons dark within.

Soon from the lofty tower there hied  
A knight across the vale;  
"I greet your master well," he cried,  
"From Soulis of Liddesdale. 140

"He heard your bugle's echoning call,  
In his green garden bower;  
And bids you to his festive hall,  
Within his ancient tower." —

Young Keilder call'd his hunter train; — 145

“For doubtful cheer prepare!  
And, as you open force disdain,  
Of secret guile beware.

“’Twas here for Mangerton’s brave lord  
A bloody feast was set, 150

Who, weetless, at the festal board,  
The bull’s broad frontlet met.

“Then ever, at uncourteous feast,  
Keep every man his brand;  
And, as you ’mid his friends are placed, 155  
Range on the better hand.

“And, if the bull’s ill-omen’d head  
Appear to grace the feast,  
Your whingers, with unerring sped,  
Plunge in each neighbour’s breast.” 160

In Hermitage they sat at dine,  
In pomp and proud array;  
And oft they fill’d the blood-red wine,  
While merry minstrels play.

And many a hunting song they sung, 165  
And song of game and glee;  
Then tuned to plaintive strains their tongue,  
“Of Scotland’s luv and lee.” —

To wilder measures next they turn:  
“The Black Black Bull of Noroway!” — 170  
Sudden the tapers cease to burn,  
The minstrels cease to play.

Each hunter bold, of Keilder’s train,

Sat an enchanted man;  
For cold as ice, through every vein, 175  
The freezing life-blood ran.

Each rigid hand the whinger rung,  
Each gazed with glaring eye;  
But Keilder from the table sprung,  
Unharm'd by gramarye. 180

He burst the doors; the roofs resound;  
With yells the castle rung;  
Before him, with a sudden bound,  
His favourite blood-hound sprung.

Ere he could pass, the door was barr'd; 185  
And, grating harsh from under,  
With creaking, jarring noise, was heard  
A sound like distant thunder.

The iron clash, the grinding sound,  
Announce the dire sword-mill; 190  
The piteous howlings of the hound  
The dreadful dungeon fill.

With breath drawn in, the murderous crew  
Stood listening to the yell;  
And greater still their wonder grew, 195  
As on their ear it fell.

They listen'd for a human shriek  
Amid the jarring sound;  
They only heard, in echoes weak,  
The murmurs of the hound. 200

The death-bell rung, and wide were flung  
The castle gates amain;  
While hurry out the armed rout,

And marshal on the plain.

Ah! ne'er before in Border feud 205  
Was seen so dire a fray!  
Through glittering lances Keilder hew'd  
A red corse-paven way.

His helmet, formed of mermaid sand,  
No lethal brand could dint; 210  
No other arms could e'er withstand  
The axe of earth-fast flint.

In Keilder's plume the holly green,  
And rowan leaves, nod on,  
And vain Lord Soulis's sword was seen, 215  
Though the hilt was adderstone.

Then up the Wee Brown Man he rose,  
By Soulis of Liddesdale;  
"In vain," he said, "a thousand blows  
Assail the charmed mail. 220

"In vain by land your arrows glide,  
In vain your falchions gleam —  
No spell can stay the living tide,  
Or charm the rushing stream."

And now young Keilder reach'd the stream, 225  
Above the foamy linn;  
And Border lances round him gleam,  
And force the warrior in.

The holly floated to the side,  
And the leaf of the rowan pale; 230  
Alas! no spell could charm the tide,  
Nor the lance of Liddesdale.

Swift was the Cout o' Keilder's course  
Along the lily lee;  
But home came never hound nor horse, 235  
And never home came he.

Where weeps the birch with branches green,  
Without the holy ground,  
Between two old gray stones is seen  
The warrior's ridgy mound. 240

And the hunters bold, of Keilder's train,  
Within yon castle's wall,  
In a deadly sleep must aye remain,  
Till the ruin'd towers down fall.

Each in his hunter's garb array'd, 245  
Each holds his bugle horn;  
Their keen hounds at their feet are laid,  
That ne'er shall wake the morn.

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