

John Leyden (1775-1811)

4 *Lord Soulis*

Lord Soulis he sat in Hermitage castle,  
And beside him Old Redcap sly; —  
“Now, tell me, thou sprite, who art meikle of might,  
The death that I must die!” —

“While thou shalt bear a charmed life, 5  
And hold that life of me,  
'Gainst lance and arrow, sword and knife,  
I shall thy warrant be.

“Nor forged steel, nor hempen band, 10  
Shall e'er thy limbs confine,  
Till threefold ropes of sifted sand  
Around thy body twine.

“If danger press fast, knock thrice on the chest,  
With rusty padlocks bound;  
Turn away your eyes when the lid shall rise, 15  
And listen to the sound.”

Lord Soulis he sat in Hermitage castle,  
And Redcap was not by;  
And he call'd on a page, who was witty and sage,  
To go to the barmkin high. 20

“And look thou east, and look thou west,  
And quickly come tell to me,  
What troopers haste along the waste,  
And what may their livery be.”

He look'd o'er fell, and he look'd o'er flat, 25

But nothing, I wist, he saw,  
Save a pyot on a turret that sat  
Beside a corby crow.

The page he look'd at the skrieh of day,  
But nothing, I wist, he saw, 30  
Till a horseman gray, in the royal array,  
Rode down the Hazel-shaw.

“Say, why do you cross o'er moor and moss?”  
So loudly cried the page;  
“I tidings bring, from Scotland's king, 35  
To Soulis of Hermitage.

“He bids me tell the bloody warden,  
Oppressor of low and high,  
If ever again his lieges complain,  
The cruel Soulis shall die.” 40

By traitorous sleight they seized the knight,  
Before he rode or ran,  
And through the key-stone of the vault  
They plunged him, horse and man.

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O May she came, and May she gaed, 45  
By Goranberry green;  
And May she was the fairest maid  
That ever yet was seen.

O May she came, an May she gaed,  
By Goranberry tower; 50  
And who was it but cruel Lord Soulis,  
That carried her from her bower?

He brought her to his castle gray,

By Hermitage's side;  
Says — "Be content, my lovely May, 55  
For thou shalt be my bride."

With her yellow hair, that glittered fair,  
She dried the trickling tear;  
She sigh'd the name of Branhholm's heir,  
The youth that loved her dear. 60

"Now, be content, my bonnie May,  
And take it for your hame;  
Or ever and aye shall ye rue the day  
You heard young Branhholm's name.

"O'er Branhholm tower, ere the morning hour, 65  
When the lift is like lead sae blue,  
The smoke shall roll white on the weary night,  
And the flame shall shine dimly through."

Syne he's ca'd on him Ringan Red;  
A sturdy kemp was he, 70  
From friend, or foe, in border feid,  
Who never a foot would flee.

Red Ringan sped, and the spearmen led  
Up Goranberry slack;  
Ay, many a wight, unmatch'd in fight, 75  
Who never more came back.

And bloody set the westering sun,  
And bloody rose he up;  
But little thought young Branhholm's heir  
Where he that night should sup. 80

He shot the roe-buck on the lee,  
The dun-deer on the law;  
The glamour sure was in his e'e

When Ringan nigh did draw.

O'er heathy edge, through rustling sedge, 85  
He sped till day was set;  
And he thought it was his merry-men true,  
When he the spearmen met.

Far from relief, they seized the chief;  
His men were far away; 90  
Through Hermitage slack they sent him back,  
To Soulis's castle gray;  
Syne onward fure for Branxholm tower,  
Where all his merry-men lay.

"Now, welcome, noble Branxholm's heir! 95  
Thrice welcome," quoth Soulis, "to me!  
Say, dost thou repair to my castle fair,  
My wedding guest to be?  
And lovely May deserves, per fay,  
A brideman such as thee!" 100

And broad and bloody rose the sun,  
And on the barmkin shone;  
When the page was aware of Red Ringan there,  
Who came riding all alone.

To the gate of the tower Lord Soulis he speeds, 105  
As he lighted at the wall,  
Says — "Where did ye stable my stalwart steeds,  
And where do they tarry all?" —

"We stabled them sure, on the Tarras muir  
We stabled them sure," quoth he: 110  
"Before we could cross the quaking moss,  
They all were lost but me."

He clench'd his fist, and he knock'd on the chest,

And he heard a stifled groan;  
And at the third knock each rusty lock 115  
Did open one by one.

He turn'd away his eyes, as the lid did rise,  
And he listen'd silentlie;  
And he heard breathed slow, in murmurs low,  
"Beware of a coming tree!" 120

In muttering sound the rest was drown'd;  
No other word heard he;  
But slow as it rose, the lid did close,  
With the rusty padlocks three.

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Now rose with Branxholm's ae brother 125  
The Teviot, high and low;  
Bauld Walter by name, of meikle fame,  
For none could bend his bow.

O'er glen and glade, to Soulis there sped  
The fame of his array, 130  
And that Teviotdale would soon assail  
His towers and castle gray.

With clenched fist, he knock'd on the chest,  
And again he heard a groan;  
And he raised his eyes as the lid did rise, 135  
But answer heard he none.

The charm was broke, when the spirit spoke,  
And it murmur'd sullenlie, —  
"Shut fast the door, and for evermore  
Commit to me the key. 140

"Alas! that ever thou raised'st thine eyes,

Thine eyes to look on me!  
Till seven years are o'er, return no more,  
For here thou must not be."

Think not but Soulis was wae to yield 145  
His warlock chamber o'er;  
He took the keys from the rusty lock,  
That never were ta'en before.

He threw them o'er his left shoulder,  
With meikle care and pain: 150  
And he bade it keep them fathoms deep,  
Till he return'd again.

And still, when seven years are o'er,  
Is heard the jarring sound;  
When slowly opes the charmed door 155  
Of the chamber under ground.

And some within the chamber door  
Have cast a curious eye:  
But none dare tell, for the spirits in hell,  
The fearful sights they spy. 160

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When Soulis thought on his merry-men now,  
A woeful wight was he;  
Says — "Vengeance is mine, and I will not repine,  
But Branxholm's heir shall die."

Says — "What would you do, young Branxholm, 165  
Gin ye had me, as I have thee?" —  
"I would take you to the good greenwood,  
And gar your ain hand wale the tree." —

"Now shall thine ain hand wale the tree,

For all thy mirth and meikle pride; 170  
And May shall choose, if my love she refuse,  
A scrog bush thee beside.”

They carried him to the good greenwood,  
Where the green pines grew in a row;  
And they heard the cry, from the branches high, 175  
Of the hungry carrion crow.

They carried him on from tree to tree,  
The spiry boughs below.  
“Say, shall it be thine, on the tapering pine,  
To feed the hooded crow?” — 180

“The fir-tops fall by Branxholm wall,  
When the night-blast stirs the tree;  
And it shall not be mine to die on the pine,  
I loved in infancie.”

Young Branxholm turn’d him, and oft look’d back, 185  
And aye he pass’d from tree to tree;  
Young Branxholm peep’d, and puirly spake,  
“O sic a death is no for me!”

And next they pass’d the aspin gray,  
Its leaves were rustling mournfullie; 190  
“Now, choose thee, choose thee, Branxholm gay!  
Say, wilt thou never choose the tree?” —

“More dear to me is the aspin gray,  
More dear than any other tree;  
For beneath the shade that its branches made 195  
Have pass’d the vows of my love and me.”

Young Branxholm peep’d, and puirly spake,  
Until he did his ain men see,  
With witches’ hazel in each steel cap,

In scorn of Soulis' gramarye; 200  
Then shoulder-height for glee he lap,  
"Methinks I spye a coming tree!" —

"Ay, many may come, but few return,"  
Quo' Soulis, the lord of gramarye;  
"No warrior's hand in fair Scotland 205  
Shall ever dint a wound on me!" —

"Now, by my sooth," quo' bauld Walter,  
"If that be true we soon shall see."  
His bent bow he drew, and his arrow was true,  
But never a wound or scar had he. 210

Then up bespake him true Thomas,  
He was the lord of Ersyltoun:  
"The wizard's spell no steel can quell,  
Till once your lances bear him down."

They bore him down with lances bright, 215  
But never a wound or scar had he;  
With hempen bands they bound him tight,  
Both hands and feet, on the Nine-stane lee.

That wizard accurst, the bands he burst;  
They moulder'd at his magic spell; 220  
And, neck and heel, in the forged steel  
They bound him against the charms of hell.

That wizard accurst, the bands he burst;  
No forged steel his charms could bide;  
Then up bespake true Thomas, 225  
"We'll bind him yet, whate'er betide."

The black spae-book from his breast he took,  
Impress'd with many a warlock spell:  
And the book it was wrote by Michael Scott,

Who held in awe the fiends of hell. 230

They buried it deep, where his bones they sleep,  
That mortal man might never it see;  
But Thomas did save it from the grave,  
When he return'd from Faërie.

The black spae-book from his breast he took, 235  
And turned the leaves with curious hand;  
No ropes, did he find, the wizard could bind,  
But threefold ropes of sifted sand.

They sifted the sand from the Nine-stane burn,  
And shaped the ropes so curiouslie; 240  
But the ropes would neither twist nor twine,  
For Thomas true and his gramarye.

The black spae-book from his breast he took,  
And again he turn'd, it with his hand;  
And he bade each lad of Teviot add 245  
The barley chaff to the sifted sand.

The barley chaff to the sifted sand.  
They added still by handfulls nine;  
But Redcap sly unseen was by,  
And the ropes would neither twist nor twine. 250

And still beside the Nine-stane burn,  
Ribb'd like the sand at mark of sea,  
The ropes that would not twist nor turn,  
Shaped of the sifted sand you see.

The black spae-book true Thomas he took; 255  
Again its magic leaves he spread;  
And he found that to quell the powerful spell,  
The wizard must be boil'd in lead.

