

Sir Walter Scott (1771-1832)

10 *The Fire-King*

This ballad was written at the request of Mr. Lewis, to be interested in his "Tales of Wonder." It is the third in a series of four ballads, on the subjects of Elementary Spirits. The story is, however, partly historical; for it is recorded, that, during the struggles of the Latin kingdom of Jerusalem, a Knight-Templar, called Saint-Alban, deserted to the Saracens, and defeated the Christians in many combats, till he was finally routed and slain, in a conflict with King Baldwin, under the walls of Jerusalem.

Bold knights and fair dames, to my harp give an ear,
Of love, and of war, and of wonder to hear;
And you haply may sigh, in the midst of your glee,
At the tale of Count Albert, and fair Rosalie.

O see you that castle, so strong and so high? 5
And see you that lady, the tear in her eye?
And see you that palmer, from Palestine's land,
The shell on his hat, and the staff in his hand? —

"Now palmer, grey palmer, O tell unto me,
What news bring you home from the Holy Countrie? 10
And how goes the warfare by Galilee's strand?
And how fare our nobles, the flower of the land?" —

"O well goes the warfare by Galilee's wave,
For Gilead, and Nablous, and Ramah we have;
And well fare our nobles by Mount Lebanon, 15
For the Heathen have lost, and the Christians have won."

A fair chain of gold 'mid her ringlets there hung;
O'er the palmer's grey locks the fair chain has she flung:
"O palmer, grey palmer, this chain be thy fee,

For the news thou hast brought from the Holy Countrie. 20

“And, palmer, good palmer, by Galilee’s wave,
O saw ye Count Albert, the gentle and brave?
When the Crescent went back, and the Red-cross rush’d on,
O saw ye him foremost on Mount Lebanon?” —

“O lady, fair lady, the tree green it grows; 25
O lady, fair lady, the stream pure it flows;
Your castle stands strong, and your hopes soar on high;
But, lady, fair lady, all blossoms to die.

“The green boughs they wither, the thunderbolt falls,
It leaves of your castle but levin-scorch’d walls; 30
The pure stream runs muddy; the gay hope is gone;
Count Albert is prisoner on Mount Lebanon.”

O she’s ta’en a horse, should be fleet at her speed;
And she’s ta’en a sword, should be sharp at her need;
And she has ta’en shipping for Palestine’s land, 35
To ransom Count Albert from Soldanrie’s hand.

Small thought had Count Albert on fair Rosalie,
Small thought on his faith, or his knighthood, had he;
A heathenish damsel his light heart had won,
The Soldan’s fair daughter of Mount Lebanon. 40

“O Christian, brave Christian, my love wouldst thou be,
Three things must thou do ere I hearken to thee:
Our laws and our worship on thee shalt thou take;
And this thou shalt first do for Zulema’s sake.

“And, next, in the cavern, where burns evermore 45
The mystical flame which the Curdmans adore,
Alone, and in silence, three nights shalt thou wake;
And this thou shalt next do for Zulema’s sake.

“And, last, thou shalt aid us with counsel and hand,
To drive the Frank robber from Palestine’s land; 50
For my lord and my love then Count Albert I’ll take,
When all this is accomplish’d for Zulema’s sake.”

He has thrown by his helmet, and cross-handled sword,
Renouncing his knighthood, denying his Lord;
He has ta’en the green caftan, and turban put on, 55
For the love of the maiden of fair Lebanon.

And in the dread cavern, deep deep under ground,
Which fifty steel gates and steel portals surround,
He has watch’d until daybreak, but sight saw he none,
Save the flame burning bright on its altar of stone. 60

Amazed was the Princess, the Soldan amazed,
Sore murmur’d the priests as on Albert they gazed;
They search’d all his garments, and, under his weeds,
They found, and took from him, his rosary beads.

Again in the cavern, deep deep under ground, 65
He watch’d the lone night, while the winds whistled round;
Far off was their murmur, it came not more nigh,
The flame burn’d unmoved, and nought else did he spy.

Loud murmur’d the priests, and amazed was the King,
While many dark spells of their witchcraft they sing; 70
They search’d Albert’s body, and, lo! on his breast
Was the sign of the Cross, by his father impress’d.

The priests they erase it with care and with pain,
And the recreant return’d to the cavern again;
But, as he descended, a whisper there fell: 75
It was his good angel, who bade him farewell!

High bristled his hair, his heart flutter’d and beat,
And he turn’d him five steps, half resolved to retreat;

But his heart it was harden'd, his purpose was gone,
When he thought of the Maiden of fair Lebanon. 80

Scarce pass'd he the archway, the threshold scarce trode,
When the winds from the four points of heaven were abroad,
They made each steel portal to rattle and ring,
And, borne on the blast, came the dread Fire-King.

Full sore rock'd the cavern whene'er he drew nigh, 85
The fire on the altar blazed bickering and high;
In volcanic explosions the mountains proclaim
The dreadful approach of the Monarch of Flame.

Unmeasured in height, undistinguish'd in form,
His breath it was lightning, his voice it was storm; 90
I ween the stout heart of Count Albert was tame,
When he saw in his terrors the Monarch of Flame.

In his hand a broad falchion blue-glimmer'd through smoke,
And Mount Lebanon shook as the monarch he spoke:
"With this brand shalt thou conquer, thus long, and no more, 95
Till thou bend to the Cross, and the Virgin adore."

The cloud-shrouded Arm gives the weapon; and see!
The recreant receives the charm'd gift on his knee:
The thunders growl distant, and faint gleam the fires,
As, borne on the whirlwind, the phantom retires. 100

Count Albert has arm'd him the Paynim among,
Though his heart it was false, yet his arm it was strong;
And the Red-cross wax'd faint, and the Crescent came on,
From the day he commanded on Mount Lebanon.

From Lebanon's forests to Galilee's wave, 105
The sands of Samaar drank the blood of the brave;
Till the Knights of the Temple, and Knights of Saint John,
With Salem's King Baldwin, against him came on.

The war-cymbals clatter'd, the trumpets replied,
The lances were couch'd, and they closed on each side; 110
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,
The fence had been vain of the King's Red-cross shield;
But a Page thrust him forward the monarch before, 115
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 saddlebow;
And scarce had he bent to the Red-cross his head, —
“*Bonne Grace, Notre Dame!*” he unwittingly said. 120

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 lightning's red wing
Did waft back the brand to the dread Fire-King.

He clench'd his set teeth, and his gauntleted hand; 125
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.

Short time had Count Albert in horror to stare
On those death-swimming eyeballs, and blood-clotted hair; 130
For down came the Templars, like Cedron in flood,
And dyed their long lances in Saracen blood.

The Saracens, Curdmans, and Ishmaelites yield
To the scallop, the saltier, and crossleted shield;
And the eagles were gorged with the infidel dead, 135
From Bethsaida's fountains to Naphthali's head.

The battle is over on Bethsaida's plain. —

Oh, who is yon Paynim lies stretch'd 'mid the slain?
And who is yon Page lying cold at his knee? —
Oh, who but Count Albert and fair Rosalie! 140

The Lady was buried in Salem's bless'd bound,
The Count he was left to the vulture and hound:
Her soul to high mercy Our Lady did bring;
His went on the blast to the dread Fire-King.

Yet many a minstrel, in harping, can tell, 145
How the Red-cross it conquer'd, the Crescent it fell:
And lords and gay ladies have sigh'd, 'mid their glee,
At the tale of Count Albert and fair Rosalie.

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