

Sir Walter Scott (1771-1832)

5 *The Castle of the Seven Shields*

The Druid Urien had daughters seven,
Their skill could call the moon from heaven;
So fair their forms and so high their fame,
That seven proud kings for their suitors came.

King Mador and Rhys came from Powis and Wales, 5
Unshorn was their hair, and unpruned were their nails;
From Strath-Clwyde was Ewain, and Ewain was lame,
And the red-bearded Donald from Galloway came.

Lot, King of Lodon, was hunchback'd from youth;
Dunmail of Cumbria had never a tooth; 10
But Adolf of Bambrough, Northumberland's heir,
Was gay and was gallant, was young and was fair.

There was strife 'mongst the sisters, for each one would have
For husband King Adolf, the gallant and brave;
And envy bred hate, and hate urged them to blows, 15
When the firm earth was cleft, and the Arch-fiend arose!

He swore to the maidens their wish to fulfil —
They swore to the foe they would work by his will.
A spindle and distaff to each hath he given,
“Now hearken my spell,” said the Outcast of heaven. 20

“Ye shall ply these spindles at midnight hour,
And for every spindle shall rise a tower,
Where the right shall be feeble, the wrong shall have power,
And there shall ye dwell with your paramour.”

Beneath the pale moonlight they sate on the wold, 25

And the rhymes which they chanted must never be told;
And as the black wool from the distaff they sped,
With blood from their bosom they moisten'd the thread.

As light danced the spindles beneath the cold gleam,
The castle arose like the birth of a dream — 30
The seven towers ascended like mist from the ground,
Seven portals defend them, seven ditches surround.

Within that dread castle seven monarchs were wed,
But six of the seven ere the morning lay dead;
With their eyes all on fire, and their daggers all red, 35
Seven damsels surround the Northumbrian's bed.

“Six kingly bridegrooms to death we have done,
Six gallant kingdoms King Adolf hath won,
Six lovely brides all his pleasure to do,
Or the bed of the seventh shall be husbandless too.” 40

Well chanced it that Adolf the night when he wed
Had confess'd and had sain'd him ere boune to his bed;
He sprung from the couch and his broadsword he drew,
And there the seven daughters of Urien he slew.

The gate of the castle he bolted and seal'd, 45
And hung o'er each arch-stone a crown and a shield;
To the cells of Saint Dunstan then wended his way,
And died in his cloister an anchorite grey.

Seven monarchs' wealth in that castle lies stow'd,
The foul fiends brood o'er them like raven and toad. 50
Whoever shall guesten these chambers within,
From curfew till matins, that treasure shall win.

But manhood grows faint as the world waxes old!
There lives not in Britain a champion so bold,
So dauntless of heart, and so prudent of brain, 55

As to dare the adventure that treasure to gain.

The waste ridge of Cheviot shall wave with the rye,
Before the rude Scots shall Northumberland fly,
And the flint cliffs of Bambro' shall melt in the sun,
Before that adventure be peril'd and won.

60

1817

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