

J. H. Wiffen (1792-1836)

1 *The Luck of Eden-Hall*

It is currently believed in Scotland, and on the Borders, that he who has courage to rash upon a fairy festival, and snatch away the drinking-cup, shall find it prove to him a cornucopia of good fortune, if he can bear it in safety across a running stream. A goblet is still carefully preserved in Eden-hall, Cumberland, which is supposed to have been seized, at such a banquet, by one of the ancient family of Musgrave. The fairy train vanished, crying aloud,

“If that glass either break or fall,  
Farewell the luck of Eden-hall!”

From this prophecy the goblet took the name it bears --- the *Luck of Eden-hall*.

*Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border.*

On Eden’s wild, romantic bowers  
The summer moonbeams sweetly fall,  
And tint with yellow light the towers,  
The stately towers of Eden-hall.

There, lonely in the deepening night, 5  
A lady at her lattice sits,  
And trims her taper’s wavering light,  
And tunes her idle lute by fits.

But little can her idle lute 10  
Beguile the weary moments now;  
And little seems the lay to suit  
Her wistful eye, and anxious brow:

For, as the chord her finger sweeps, 15  
Ofttimes she checks her simple song,  
To chide the froward chance that keeps  
Lord Musgrave from her arms so long:

And listens, as the wind sweeps by,  
His steed’s familiar step to hear: —  
Peace, beating heart! ’twas but the cry

And foot-fall of the distant deer. 20

In, lady, to thy bower! fast weep  
The chill dews on thy cheek so pale;  
Thy cherished hero lies asleep,  
Asleep in distant Russendale!

The noon was sultry, long the chace, 25  
And when the wild stag stood at bay,  
BURBEK reflected from its face  
The purple lights of dying day.

Through many a dale must Musgrave hie,  
Up many a hill his courser strain, 30  
Ere he behold, with gladsome eye,  
His verdant bowers, and halls again:

But twilight deepens, — o'er the wolds  
The yellow moonbeam rising plays,  
And now the haunted forest holds 35  
The wanderer in its bosky maze.

No ready vassal rides in sight;  
He blows his bugle, but the call  
Roused echo mocks; farewell, to-night,  
The homefelt joys of Eden-hall! 40

His steed he to an alder ties,  
His limbs he on the green-sward flings,  
And, tired and languid, to his eyes  
Woos sorceress slumber's balmy wings.

A prayer, a sigh, in murmurs faint, 45  
He whispers to the passing air; —  
The Ave to his patron saint,  
The sigh was to his lady fair.

'Twas well that in that Elfin wood  
He breathed the supplicating charm, 50  
Which binds the Guardians of the good  
To shield from all unearthly harm:

Scarce had the night's pale lady stayed  
Her chariot o'er the' accustomed oak,  
Than murmurs in the mystic shade 55  
The slumberer from his trance awoke.

Stiff stood his courser's mane with dread,  
His crouching greyhound whined with fear;  
And quaked the wild fern 'round his head,  
As though some passing ghost were near. 60

Yet calmly shone the moonshine pale  
On glade and hillock, flower and tree,  
And sweet the gurgling nightingale  
Poured forth her music wild and free.

Sudden her notes fall hushed; and near 65  
Flutes breathe, horns warble, bridles ring,  
And, in gay cavalcade, appear  
The Fairies round their Fairy king.

Twelve hundred Elfin knights and more  
Were there, in silk and steel arrayed; 70  
And each a ruby helmet wore,  
And each a diamond lance displayed.

And pursuivants with wands of gold,  
And minstrels scarfed and laurelled fair,  
Heralds with blazoned flags unrolled, 75  
And trumpet-tuning dwarfs were there.

Behind, twelve hundred ladies coy,  
On milk-white steeds, brought up their queen,  
Their kerchiefs of the crimson soy,  
Their kirtles all of Lincoln green. 80

Some wore, in fanciful costume,  
A sapphire or a topaz crown;  
And some a hern's or peacock's plume,  
Which their own tercel-gents struck down.

And some wore masks, and some wore hoods, 85  
Some turbans rich, some ouches rare;  
And some sweet woodbine from the woods,  
To bind their undulating hair.

With all gay tints the darksome shade  
Grew florid as they passed along, 90  
And not a sound their bridles made  
But tuned itself to Elfin song.

Their steeds they quit, — the knights advance,  
And in quaint order, one by one,  
Each leads his lady forth to dance, — 95  
The timbrels sound — the charm 's begun.

Where'er they trip, where'er they tread,  
A daisy or a bluebell springs,  
And not a dew-drop shines o'erhead,  
But falls within their charmed rings. 100

“The dance lead up, the dance lead down,  
The dance lead round our favourite tree;  
If now one lady wears a frown,  
A false and froward shrew is she!

“There 's not a smile we Fays let fall 105  
But swells the tide of human bliss;  
And if good luck attends our call,  
’Tis due on such sweet night as this:

“The dance lead up, the dance lead down,  
The dance lead round our favourite tree; 110  
If now even Oberon wears a frown,  
A false and froward churl is he!”

Thus sing the Fays; — Lord Musgrave hears  
Their shrill sweet song, and eager eyes  
The radiant show, despite the fears 115  
That to his bounding bosom rise.

But soft! the minstrelsy declines;

The morrice ceases, sound the shaums;  
And quick, whilst many a taper shines,  
The heralds rank their airy swarms. 120

Titania waves her crystal wand, —  
And underneath the greenwood bower,  
Tables, and urns, and goblets stand,  
Metheglin, nectar, fruit, and flower.

“To banquet, ho!” the seneschals 125  
Bid the brisk tribes, that, thick as bees  
At sound of cymbals, to their calls  
Consort beneath the leafy trees:

Titania by her king, each knight 130  
Beside his ladye love; the page  
Behind his scutcheoned lord, — a bright  
Equipment on a brilliant stage.

The monarch sits; — all helms are doffed,  
Plumes, scarfs, and mantles cast aside,  
And, to the sound of music soft, 135  
They ply their cups with mickle pride.

Or sparkling mead, or spangling dew,  
Or livelier hippocras they sip;  
And strawberries red, and mulberries blue,  
Refresh each elf’s luxurious lip. 140

With “nod, and beck, and wreathed smile,”  
They heap their jewelled patines high;  
Nor want there mirthful airs the while  
To crown the festive revelry.

A minstrel dwarf, in silk arrayed, 145  
Lay on a mossy bank, o’er which  
The wild thyme wove its fragrant braid,  
The violet spread its perfume rich;

And whilst a page at Oberon’s knee  
Presented high the wassail-cup, 150

This lay the little bard with glee  
From harp of ivory offered up:

“Health to our Sovereign; fill, brave boy,  
Yon glorious goblet to the brim!  
There ’s joy — in every drop there ’s joy 155  
That laughs within its charmed rim!

“’Twas wrought within a wizard’s mould,  
When signs and spells had happiest power; —  
Health to our king by wood and wold!  
Health to our queen in hall and bower! 160

They rise — the myriads rise, and shrill  
The wild wood echoes to their brawl, —  
“Health to our king by wold and rill!  
Health to our queen in bower and hall!”

A sudden thought fires Musgrave’s brain, — 165  
So help him all the Powers of Light, —  
He rushes to the festal train,  
And snatches up that goblet bright!

With three brave bounds the lawn he crossed,  
The fourth it seats him on his steed; 170  
“Now, Luath! or thy lord is lost —  
Stretch to the stream with lightning speed!”

’Tis uproar all around, behind, —  
Leaps to his selle each screaming Fay;  
“The charmed cup is fairly tined, 175  
Stretch to the strife, — away! away!”

As in a whirlwind forth they swept,  
The green turf trembling as they passed;  
But, forward still good Musgrave kept,  
The shallow stream approaching fast. 180

A thousand quivers round him rained  
Their shafts ere he reached the shore;  
But when the farther bank was gained,

This song the passing whirlwind bore:

“Joy to thy banner, bold Sir Knight; 185  
But if yon goblet break or fall,  
Farewell thy vantage in the fight,  
Farewell the luck of Eden-hall!”

The forest cleared, he winds his horn —  
Rock, wood, and wave return the din; 190  
And soon, as though by Echo borne,  
His gallant squires come pricking in. —

’Tis dusk of day; — in Eden towers  
A mother o’er her infant bends,  
And lists, amid the whispering bowers, 195  
The sound that from the stream ascends.

It comes in murmurs up the stairs,  
A low, a sweet, a mellow voice,  
And charms away the lady’s cares,  
And bids the mother’s heart rejoice. 200

“Sleep sweetly, babe!” ’twas heard to say,  
“But if the goblet break or fall,  
Farewell thy vantage in the fray,  
Farewell the luck of Eden-hall!” —

Though years on years have taken flight, 205  
Good-fortune ’s still the Musgrave’s thrall;  
Hail to his vantage in the fight!  
All hail the LUCK OF EDEN-HALL!

(From *The Literary Souvenir; or, Cabinet of Poetry and Romance*. Ed. Alaric A. Watts. London, 1826)