

William Wordsworth (1770-1850)

7 *The Horn of Egremont Castle*

When the Brothers reached the gateway,
Eustace pointed with his lance
To the Horn which there was hanging;
Horn of the Inheritance.
Horn it was which none could sound, 5
No one upon living ground,
Save He who came as rightful Heir
To Egremont's Domains and Castle fair.

Heirs from ages without record
Had the House of Lucie born, 10
Who of right had claimed the Lordship
By the proof upon the Horn:
Each at the appointed hour
Tried the Horn, — it owned his power;
He was acknowledged: and the blast, 15
Which good Sir Eustace sounded, was the last.

With his lance Sir Eustace pointed,
And to Hubert thus said he:
“What I speak this Horn shall witness
For thy better memory. 20
Hear, then, and neglect me not!
At this time, and on this spot,
The words are uttered from my heart,
As my last earnest prayer ere we depart.

“On good service we are going, 25
Life to risk by sea and land;
In which course if Christ our Saviour
Do my sinful soul demand,
Hither come thou back straightway,
Hubert, if alive that day; 30
Return, and sound the Horn, that we

May have a living House still left in thee!”

“Fear not,” quickly answered Hubert;
“As I am thy Father’s son,
What thou askest, noble Brother, 35
With God’s favour shall be done.”
So were both right well content:
From the castle forth they went;
And at the head of their Array
To Palestine the Brothers took their way. 40

Side by side they fought (the Lucies
Were a line for valour famed),
And where’er their strokes alighted,
There the Saracens were tamed.
Whence, then, could it come — the thought — 45
By what evil spirit brought?
Oh! can a brave man wish to take
His Brother’s life, for Land’s and Castle’s sake?

“Sir!” the Ruffians said to Hubert,
“Deep he lies in Jordan’s flood.” 50
Stricken by this ill assurance,
Pale and trembling Hubert stood.
“Take your earnings. — Oh! that I
Could have *seen* my Brother die!”
It was a pang that vexed him then; 55
And oft returned, again, and yet again.

Months passed on, and no Sir Eustace!
Nor of him were tidings heard.
Wherefore, bold as day, the Murderer
Back again to England steered. 60
To his Castle Hubert sped,
He has nothing now to dread.
But silent and by stealth he came,
And at an hour which nobody could name.

None could tell if it were night-time, 65

Night or day, at even or morn;
For the sound was heard by no one
Of the proclamation Horn.
But bold Hubert lives in glee:
Months and years went smilingly; 70
With plenty was his table spread;
And bright the Lady is who shares his bed.

Likewise he had sons and daughters;
And, as good men do, he sate
At his board by these surrounded, 75
Flourishing in fair estate.
And while thus in open day
Once he sate, as old books say,
A blast was uttered from the Horn,
Where by the Castle-gate it hung forlorn. 80

'Tis the breath of good Sir Eustace!
He is come to claim his right:
Ancient Castle, woods, and mountains
Hear the challenge with delight.
Hubert! though the blast be blown, 85
He is helpless and alone:
Thou hast a dungeon, speak the word!
And there he may be lodged, and thou be Lord.

Speak! — astounded Hubert cannot;
And, if power to speak he had, 90
All are daunted, all the household
Smitten to the heart, and sad.
'Tis Sir Eustace; if it be
Living man, it must be he!
Thus Hubert thought in his dismay, 95
And by a postern-gate he slunk away.

Long, and long was he unheard of:
To his Brother then he came,
Made confession, asked forgiveness,
Asked it by a brother's name, 100

And by all the saints in heaven;
And of Eustace was forgiven:
Then in a convent went to hide
His melancholy head, and there he died.

But Sir Eustace, whom good Angels 105
Had preserved from murderers' hands,
And from pagan chains had rescued,
Lived with honour on his lands.
Sons he had, saw sons of theirs:
And through ages, heirs of heirs, 110
A long posterity renowned,
Sounded the Horn which they alone could sound.

1806

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