

Sir Walter Scott (1771-1832)

11 *Frederick and Alice*

This tale is imitated, rather than translated, from a fragment introduced in Goethe's "Claudina von Villa Bella," where it is sung by a member of a gang of banditti, to engage the attention of the family, while his companions break into the castle. It owes any little merit it may possess to my friend MR. LEWIS, to whom it was sent in an extremely rude state; and who, after some material improvements, published it in his "Tales of Wonder."

Frederick leaves the land of France,
Homeward hastes his steps to measure,
Careless casts the parting glance
On the scene of former pleasure.

Joying in his prancing steed, 5
Keen to prove his untried blade,
Hope's gay dreams the soldier lead
Over mountain, moor, and glade.

Helpless, ruin'd, left forlorn,
Lovely Alice wept alone; 10
Mourn'd o'er love's fond contract torn,
Hope, and peace, and honour flown.

Mark her breast's convulsive throbs!
See, the tear of anguish flows! —
Mingling soon with bursting sobs, 15
Loud the laugh of frenzy rose.

Wild she cursed, and wild she pray'd;
Seven long days and nights are o'er;
Death in pity brought his aid,
As the village bell struck four. 20

Far from her, and far from France,
Faithless Frederick onward rides;
Marking, blithe, the morning's glance
Mantling o'er the mountain's sides.

Heard ye not the boding sound, 25
As the tongue of yonder tower,
Slowly, to the hills around,
Told the fourth, the fated hour?

Starts the steed, and snuffs the air,
Yet no cause of dread appears; 30
Bristles high the rider's hair,
Struck with strange mysterious fears.

Desperate, as his terrors rise,
In the steed the spur he hides;
From himself in vain he flies; 35
Anxious, restless, on he rides.

Seven long days, and seven long nights,
Wild he wander'd, woe the while!
Ceaseless care, and causeless fright,
Urge his footsteps many a mile. 40

Dark the seventh sad night descends;
Rivers swell, and rain-streams pour;
While the deafening thunder lends
All the terrors of its roar.

Weary, wet, and spent with toil, 45
Where his head shall Frederick hide?
Where, but in yon ruin'd aisle,
By the lightning's flash descried.

To the portal, dank and low,
Fast his steed the wanderer bound: 50

Down a ruin'd staircase slow,
Next his darkling way he wound.

Long drear vaults before him lie!
Glimmering lights are seen to glide! —
"Blessed Mary, hear my cry! 55
Deign a sinner's steps to guide!"

Often lost their quivering beam,
Still the lights move slow before,
Till they rest their ghastly gleam
Right against an iron door. 60

Thundering voices from within,
Mix'd with peals of laughter, rose;
As they fell, a solemn strain
Lent its wild and wondrous close!

Midst the din, he seem'd to hear 65
Voice of friends, by death removed; —
Well he knew that solemn air,
'Twas the lay that Alice loved. —

Hark! for now a solemn knell
Four times on the still night broke; 70
Four times, at its deaden'd swell,
Echoes from the ruins spoke.

As the lengthen'd clangours die,
Slowly opes the iron door!
Straight a banquet met his eye, 75
But a funeral's form it wore!

Coffins for the seats extend;
All with black the board was spread;
Girt by parent, brother, friend,
Long since number'd with the dead! 80

Alice, in her grave-clothes bound,
 Ghastly smiling, points a seat;
All arose, with thundering sound;
 All the expected stranger greet.

High their meagre arms they wave, 85
 Wild their notes of welcome swell; —
“Welcome, traitor, to the grave!
 Perjured, bid the light farewell!”

1801

(From *The Poetical Works of Sir Walter Scott*. Ed. J. G. Lockhart. Edinburgh: Robert Cadell, 1841)