

Sir Walter Scott (1771-1832)

1 Alice Brand

Merry it is in the good greenwood,
When the mavis and merle are singing,
When the deer sweeps by, and the hounds are in cry,
And the hunter's horn is ringing.

“O Alice Brand, my native land 5
Is lost for love of you;
And we must hold by wood and wold,
As outlaws wont to do.

“O Alice, 'twas all for thy locks so bright, 10
And 'twas all for thine eyes so blue,
That on the night of our luckless flight,
Thy brother bold I slew.

“Now must I teach to hew the beech 15
The hand that held the glaive,
For leaves to spread our lowly bed,
And stakes to fence our cave.

“And for vest of pall, thy fingers small, 20
That wont on harp to stray,
A cloak must sheer from the slaughter'd deer,
To keep the cold away.” —

“O Richard! if my brother died,
'Twas but a fatal chance;
For darkling was the battle tried,
And fortune sped the lance.

“If pall and vair no more I wear, 25
Nor thou the crimson sheen,

As warm, we'll say, is the russet grey,
As gay the forest-green.

“And, Richard, if our lot be hard,
And lost thy native land, 30
Still Alice has her own Richard,
And he his Alice Brand.”

'Tis merry, 'tis merry, in good greenwood,
So blithe Lady Alice is singing;
On the beech's pride, and oak's brown side, 35
Lord Richard's axe is ringing.

Up spoke the moody Elfin King,
Who won'd within the hill, —
Like wind in the porch of a ruin'd church,
His voice was ghostly shrill. 40

“Why sounds yon stroke on beach and oak,
Our moonlight circle's screen?
Or who comes here to chase the deer,
Beloved of our Elfin Queen?
Or who may dare on wold to wear 45
The fairies fatal green?”

“Up, Urgan, up! to yon mortal hie,
For thou wert christen'd man;
For cross or sign thou wilt not fly,
For mutter'd word or ban. 50

“Lay on him the curse of the wither'd heart,
The curse of the sleepless eye;
Till he wish and pray that his life would part,
Nor yet find leave to die.”

'Tis merry, 'tis merry, in good greenwood, 55
Though the birds have still'd their singing;
The evening blaze doth Alice raise,

And Richard is fagots bringing.

Up Urgan starts, that hideous dwarf,
Before Lord Richard stands, 60
And, as he cross'd and bless'd himself,
"I fear not sign," quoth the grisly elf,
"That is made with bloody hands."

But out then spake she, Alice Brand,
That woman, void of fear, — 65
"And if there's blood upon his hand,
'Tis but the blood of deer." —

"Now loud thou liest, thou bold of mood!
It cleaves unto his hand,
The stain of thine own kindly blood, 70
The blood of Ethert Brand."

Then forward stepp'd she, Alice Brand,
And made the holy sign, —
"And if there's blood on Richard's hand,
A spotless hand is mine. 75

"And I conjure thee, Demon elf,
By Him whom Demons fear,
To show us whence thou art thyself,
And what thine errand here?" —

" 'Tis merry, 'tis merry, in Fairy-land, 80
When fairy birds are singing,
When the court doth ride by their monarch's side,
With bit and bridle ringing:

"And gaily shines the Fairy-land —
But all is glistening show, 85
Like the idle gleam that December's beam
Can dart on ice and snow.

“And fading, like that varied gleam,
Is our inconstant shape,
Who now like knight and lady seem, 90
And now like dwarf and ape.

“It was between the night and day,
When the Fairy King has power,
That I sunk down in a sinful fray,
And, ’twixt life and death, was snatch’d away 95
To the joyless Elfin bower.

“But wist I of a woman bold,
Who thrice my brow durst sign,
I might regain my mortal mold,
As fair a form as thine.” 100

She cross’d him once — she cross’d him twice —
That lady was so brave;
The fouler grew his goblin hue,
The darker grew the cave.

She cross’d him thrice, that lady bold; 105
He rose beneath her hand
The fairest knight on Scottish mold,
Her brother, Ethert Brand!

Merry it is in good greenwood,
When the mavis and merle are singing, 110
But merrier were they in Dunfermline grey,
When all the bells were ringing.

1810

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