

And lack the Heather Ale.

It fortune'd that his vassals,
Riding free on the heath,
Came on a stone that was fallen 35
And vermin hid beneath.
Rudely plucked from their hiding,
Never a word they spoke:
A son and his aged father —
Last of the dwarfish folk. 40

The king sat high on his charger,
He looked on the little men;
And the dwarfish and swarthy couple
Looked at the king again.
Down by the shore he had them; 45
And there on the giddy brink —
“I will give you life, ye vermin,
For the secret of the drink.”

There stood the son and father
And they looked high and low; 50
The heather was red around them,
The sea rumbled below.
And up and spoke the father,
Shrill was his voice to hear:
“I have a word in private, 55
A word for the royal ear.

“Life is dear to the aged,
And honour a little thing;
I would gladly sell the secret,”
Quoth the Pict to the King. 60
His voice was small as a sparrow's,
And shrill and wonderful clear:
“I would gladly sell my secret,
Only my son I fear.

“For life is a little matter, 65
And death is nought to the young;
And I dare not sell my honour

Under the eye of my son.
Take *him*, O king, and bind him,
And cast him far in the deep; 70
And it's I will tell the secret
That I have sworn to keep."

They took the son and bound him,
Neck and heels in a thong,
And a lad took him and swung him, 75
And flung him far and strong,
And the sea swallowed his body,
Like that of a child of ten; —
And there on the cliff stood the father,
Last of the dwarfish men. 80

"True was the word I told you:
Only my son I feared;
For I doubt the sapling courage
That goes without the beard.
But now in vain is the torture, 85
Fire shall never avail:
Here dies in my bosom
The secret of Heather Ale."

1890

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