

And an uncertain warbling made, 85
 And oft he shook his hoary head.
 But when he caught the measure wild,
 The old man raised his face, and smiled;
 And lighten'd up his faded eye,
 With all a poet's ecstasy! 90
 In varying cadence, soft or strong,
 He swept the sounding chords along:
 The present scene, the future lot,
 His toils, his wants, were all forgot:
 Cold diffidence, and age's frost, 95
 In the full tide of song were lost;
 Each blank, in faithless memory void,
 The poet's glowing thought supplied;
 And while his harp responsive rung,
 'Twas thus the LATEST MINSTREL sung. 100

CANTO FIRST

Miss I dubb

The feast was over in Branksome tower,
 And the Ladye had gone to her secret bower;
 Her bower that was guarded by word and by
 spell,
 Deadly to hear, and deadly to tell—
 5 Jesu Maria, shield us well!
 No living wight, save the Ladye alone,
 Had dared to cross the threshold stone.

II

The tables were drawn, it was idlesse all;
 Knight, and page, and household squire,
 Loiter'd through the lofty hall,
 Or crowded round the ample fire:
 5 The stag-hounds, weary with the chase,
 Lay stretch'd upon the rushy floor,
 And urged, in dreams, the forest race,
 From Teviot-stone to Eskdale-moor.

Mary

III

Nine-and-twenty knights of fame
 Hung their shields in Branksome-Hall;
 Nine-and-twenty squires of name
 Brought them their steeds to bower from stall;

Nine-and-twenty yeomen tall 5
 Waited, duteous, on them all:
 They were all knights of metal true,
 Kinsmen to the bold Buceleuch.

IV

Ten of them were sheath'd in steel,
 With belted sword, and spur on heel:
 They quitted not their harness bright,
 Neither by day, not yet by night:
 They lay down to rest, 5
 With corslet laced,
 Pillow'd on buckler cold and hard;
 They carved at the meal
 With gloves of steel,
 And they drank the red wine through the hel- 10
 met barr'd.

V

Ten squires, ten yeomen, mail-clad men,
 Waited the beck of the warders ten;
 Thirty steeds, both fleet and wight,
 Stood saddled in stable day and night,
 Barbed with frontlet of steel, I trow, 5
 And with Jedwood-axe at saddle-bow;
 A hundred more fed free in stall:—
 Such was the custom of Branksome-Hall.

VI

Why do these steeds stand ready dight?
 Why watch these warriors, arm'd by night?—

They watch, to hear the blood-hound baying:
 They watch, to hear the war-horn braying;
 5 To see St. George's red cross streaming,
 To see the midnight beacon gleaming:
 They watch, against Southern force and guile,
 Lest Scroop, or Howard, or Percy's powers,
 Threaten Branksome's lordly towers,
 10 From Warkworth, or Naworth, or merry Carlisle.

VII

Such is the custom of Branksome-Hall.—
 Many a valiant knight is here;
 But He, the Chieftain of them all,
 His sword hangs rusting on the wall,
 5 Beside his broken spear.
 Bards long shall tell
 How Lord Walter fell!
 When startled burghers fled, afar,
 The furies of the Border war;
 10 When the streets of high Dunedin
 Saw lances gleam, and falchions redden,
 And heard the slogan's deadly yell—
 Then the Chief of Branksome fell.

VIII

Can piety the discord heal,
 Or stanch the death-feud's enmity?
 Can Christian lore, can patriot zeal,
 Can love of blessed charity?
 5 No! vainly to each holy shrine,

In mutual pilgrimage, they drew;
 Implored, in vain, the grace divine
 For chiefs, their own red falchions slew:
 While Cessford owns the rule of Carr,
 While Ettrick boasts the line of Scott, 10
 The slaughter'd chiefs, the mortal jar,
 The havoc of the feudal war,
 Shall never, never be forgot!

IX

In sorrow o'er Lord Walter's bier
 The warlike foresters had bent;
 And many a flower, and many a tear,
 Old Teviot's maids and matrons lent:
 But o'er her warrior's bloody bier 5
 The Ladye dropp'd nor flower nor tear!
 Vengeance, deep-brooding o'er the slain,
 Had lock'd the source of softer woe;
 And burning pride, and high disdain,
 Forbade the rising tear to flow: 10
 Until, amid his sorrowing clan,
 Her son lisp'd from the nurse's knee—
 "And if I live to be a man,
 My father's death revenged shall be!"
 Then fast the mother's tears did seek 15
 To dew the infant's kindling cheek.

X

All loose her negligent attire,
 All loose her golden hair,

Hung Margaret o'er her slaughter'd sire,
 And wept in wild despair,
 5 But not alone the bitter tear
 Had filial grief supplied;
 For hopeless love, and anxious fear,
 Had lent their mingled tide:
 Nor in her mother's alter'd eye
 10 Dared she to look for sympathy.
 Her lover, 'gainst her father's clan,
 With Carr in arms had stood,
 When Mathouse-burn to Melrose ran,
 All purple with their blood;
 15 And well she knew, her mother dread,
 Before Lord Cranstoun she should wed,
 Would see her on her dying bed.

XI

Of noble race the Ladye came,
 Her father was a clerk of fame,
 Of Bethune's line of Picardie:
 He learned the art that none may name,
 5 In Padua, far beyond the sea.
 Men said, he changed his mortal frame
 By feat of magic mystery;
 For when, in studious mood, he paced
 St. Andrew's cloister'd hall,
 10 His form no darkening shadow traced
 Upon the sunny wall!

XII

And of his skill, as bards avow,
 He taught that Ladye fair,
 Till to her bidding she could bow
 The viewless forms of air.
 And now she sits in secret bower, 5
 In old Lord David's western tower,
 And listens to a heavy sound,
 That moans the mossy turrets round.
 Is it the roar of Teviot's tide,
 That chafes against the scaur's red side? 10
 Is it the wind that swings the oaks?
 Is it the echo from the rocks?
 What may it be, the heavy sound,
 That moans old Branksome's turrets round?

XIII

At the sullen, moaning sound,
 The ban-dogs bay and howl;
 And from the turrets round,
 Loud whoops the startled owl.
 In the hall, both squire and knight 5
 Swore that a storm was near,
 And looked forth to view the night;
 But the night was still and clear!

XIV

From the sound of Teviot's tide,
 Chafing with the mountain's side,
 From the groan of the wind-swung oak,

From the sullen echo of the rock,
 5 From the voice of the coming storm,
 The Ladye knew it well!
 It was the Spirit of the Flood that spoke,
 And he called on the Spirit of the Fell.

XV

RIVER SPIRIT

"Sleep'st thou, brother?"—

MOUNTAIN SPIRIT

—"Brother, nay—

On my hills the moonbeams play.
 From Craik-cross to Skelfhill-pen,
 By every rill, in every glen,
 5 Merry elves their morris pacing,
 To aerial minstrelsy,
 Emerald rings on brown heath tracing,
 Trip it deft and merrily.
 Up, and mark their nimble feet!
 10 Up, and list their music sweet!"

XVI

RIVER SPIRIT

"Tears of an imprisoned maiden
 Mix with my polluted stream;
 Margaret of Branksome, sorrow-laden,
 Mourns beneath the moon's pale beam.
 5 Tell me, thou, who view'st the stars,
 When shall cease these feudal jars?"

What shall be the maiden's fate?
Who shall be the maiden's mate?"

XVII

MOUNTAIN SPIRIT

"Arthur's slow wain his course doth roll,
In utter darkness round the pole;
The Northern Bear lowers black and grim;
Orion's studded belt is dim;
Twinkling faint, and distant far, 5
Shimmers through mist each planet star;
Ill may I read their high decree!
But no kind influence deign they shower
On Teviot's tide, and Branksome's tower,
Till pride be quell'd, and love be free." 10

XVIII

The unearthly voices ceast,
And the heavy sound was still;
It died on the river's breast,
It died on the side of the hill.
But round Lord David's tower 5
The sound still floated near;
For it rung in the Ladye's bower,
And it rung in the Ladye's ear.
She raised her stately head,
And her heart throbb'd high with pride:— 10
"Your mountains shall bend,
And your streams ascend,
Ere Margaret be our foeman's bride!"

XIX

The Ladye sought the lofty hall,
Where many a bold retainer lay,
And, with jocund din, among them all,
Her son pursued his infant play.
5 A fancied moss-trooper, the boy
The truncheon of a spear bestrode,
And round the hall, right merrily,
In mimic foray rode.
Even bearded knights, in arms grown old,
10 Share in his frolic gambols bore,
Albeit their hearts of rugged mould,
Were stubborn as the steel they wore.
For the grey warriors prophesied,
How the brave boy in future war,
15 Should tame the Unicorn's pride,
Exalt the Crescent and the Star.

XX

The Ladye forgot her purpose high,
One moment, and no more;
One moment gazed with a mother's eye,
As she paused at the arched door:
5 Then from amid the armed train,
She call'd to her William of Deloraine.

XXI

A stark, moss-trooping Scott was he,
As e'er couch'd Border lance by knee;
Through Solway sands, through Tarras moss,

Blindfold, he knew the paths to cross;
 By wily turns, by desperate bounds,
 Had baffled Percy's best blood-hounds;
 In Eske, or Liddel, fords were none,
 But he would ride them, one by one;
 Alike to him was time or tide,
 December's snow, or July's pride:
 Alike to him was tide or time,
 Moonless midnight or matin prime;
 Steady of heart and stout of hand,
 As ever drove prey from Cumberland;
 Five times outlawed had he been,
 By England's King, and Scotland's Queen.

XXII

"Sir William of Deloraine, good at need,
 Mount thee on the wightest steed;
 Spare not to spur, nor stint to ride,
 Until thou come to fair Tweedside;
 And in Melrose's holy pile
 Seek thou the Monk of St. Mary's aisle.
 Greet the father well from me;
 Say that the fated hour is come,
 And to-night he shall watch with thee,
 To win the treasure of the tomb:
 For this will be St. Michael's night,
 And, though stars be dim, the moon is bright;
 And the Cross, of bloody red,
 Will point to the grave of the mighty dead.

XXIII

"What he gives thee, see thou keep;
 Stay not thou for food or sleep:
 Be it scroll, or be it book,
 Into it, Knight, thou must not look;
 If thou readest, thou art lorn!
 Better hadst thou ne'er been born."—

XXIV

"O swiftly can speed my dapple-grey steed,
 Which drinks of the Teviot clear;
 Ere break of day," the Warrior 'gan say,
 "Again will I be here:
 And safer by none may thy errand be done,
 Than, noble dame, by me,
 Letter nor line know I never a one,
 Wer't my neck-verse at Hairibee."

XXV

Soon in his saddle sate he fast,
 And soon the steep descent he past,
 Soon cross'd the sounding barbican,
 And soon the Teviot side he won.
 Eastward the wooded path he rode,
 Green hazels o'er his basnet nod;
 He pass'd the Peel of Goldiland,
 And cross'd old Borthwick's roaring strand;
 Dimly he view'd the Moat-hill's mound,
 Where Druid shades still flitted round;
 In Hawick twinkled many a light;

Behind him soon they set in night;
And soon he spurred his courser keen
Beneath the tower of Hazeldean.

XXVI

The clattering hoofs the watchmen mark;—
“Stand, ho! thou courier of the dark.”—
“For Branksome, ho!” the knight rejoin’d
And left the friendly tower behind
He turn’d him now from Teviotside, 5
And guided by the tinkling rill,
Northward the dark ascent did ride,
And gain’d the moor at Horsliehill;
Broad on the left before him lay,
For many a mile, the Roman way. 10

XXVII

A moment now he slack’d his speed,
A moment breathed his panting steed;
Drew saddle-girth and corslet-band,
And loosen’d in the sheath his brand.
On Minto-crags the moonbeams glint, 5
Where Barnhill hew’d his bed of flint;
Who flung his outlaw’d limbs to rest,
Where falcons hang their giddy nest,
Mid cliffs, from whence his eagle eye
For many a league his prey could spy; 10
Cliffs, doubling, on their echoes borne,
The terrors of the robber’s horn;
Cliffs, which, for many a later year,

The warbling Doric reed shall hear,
15 When some sad swain shall teach the grove,
Ambition is no cure for love!

XXVIII

Unchallenged, thence pass’d Deloraine,
To ancient Riddel’s fair domain,
Where Aill, from mountains freed,
Down from the lakes did raving come;
5 Each wave was crested with tawny foam,
Like the mane of a chestnut steed.
In vain! no torrent, deep or broad,
Might bar the bold moss-trooper’s road.

XXIX

At the first plunge the horse sunk low,
And the water broke o’er the saddle-bow;
Above the foaming tide, I ween,
Scarce half the charger’s neck was seen;
5 For he was barded from counter to tail,
And the rider was armed complete in mail;
Never heavier man and horse
Stemm’d a midnight torrent’s force.
The warrior’s very plume, I say,
10 Was daggl’d by the dashing spray;
Yet, through good heart, and Our Ladye’s
grace,
At length he gained the landing-place.

XXX

Now Bowden Moor the march-man won,
 And sternly shook his plumed head,
 As glanced his eye o'er Halidon;
 For on his soul the slaughter red
 Of that unhallow'd morn arose 5
 When first the Scott and Carr were foes;
 When Royal James beheld the fray,
 Prize to the victor of the day;
 When Home and Douglas, in the van,
 Bore down Buccleuch's retiring clan, 10
 Till gallant Cessford's heart-blood dear
 Reek'd on dark Elliot's Border spear.

XXXI

In bitter mood he spurred fast,
 And soon the hated heath was past;
 And far beneath in lustre wan,
 Old Melros' rose, and fair Tweed ran:
 Like some tall rock with lichens grey, 5
 Seem'd dimly huge, the dark Abbaye.
 When Hawick he pass'd, had curfew rung,
 Now midnight lauds were in Melrose sung.
 The sound, upon the fitful gale,
 In solemn wise did rise and fail, 10
 Like that wild harp, whose magic tone
 Is waken'd by the winds alone.
 But when Melrose he reach'd 'twas silence
 all;

He meetly stabled his steed in stall,
 15 And sought the convent's lonely wall.

(Interlude)

Here paused the harp; and with its swell
 The Master's fire and courage fell:
 Dejectedly, and low, he bow'd,
 And, gazing timid on the crowd,
 5 He seem'd to seek, in every eye,
 If they approved his minstrelsy;
 And, diffident of present praise,
 Somewhat he spoke of former days,
 And how old age, and wand'ring long,
 10 Had done his hand and harp some wrong.
 The Duchess, and her daughters fair,
 And every gentle lady there,
 Each after each, in due degree,
 Gave praises to his melody;
 15 His hand was true, his voice was clear,
 And much they long'd the rest to hear.
 Encouraged thus, the Aged Man,
 After meet rest, again began.